

EXTRACT FROM "AMERICAN ESSAYS."

A LETTER, addressed to the justly celebrated and humane Dr. JOHN HOWARD, of Great-Britain, with the

STORY of HONESTUS and CONSTANTIA.

WORTHY SIR,

THE pure, liberal, and philanthropic motives, that excited you to quit your tranquil retreat, and to travel through foreign countries, have justly distinguished you, as the Friend, or rather guardian-angel of mankind: With a well-grounded confidence you have bid defiance to every species of contagion, and calmly confronted Death, in every horrid form, to explore the dreary receptacles of miserable man, to pour the healing balm of consolation into his ulcered wounds: You have with more than Herculean labor, patience, and fortitude, devoted your time, endeavors, and interest, to the glorious cause of Humanity: You have traced and deplored the infernal paths, that mark the wanton power of tyrants; and you have wept over the helpless victims of superstition and oppression: You have seen virtue in chains—and vice triumphant: It is your peculiar glory to have passed by gaudy Palaces with neglect; and to have sought out the dwellings of distress, with the god-like purposes of consolation and relief: You have soared above human, and gloriously illustrated some of the bright emanations of the divine nature; and, happily for mankind, you are still preserved, and once more returned to your native country, with the greatest, and best rewards, SELF-APPROBATION, and the sincere plaudits of a grateful world. And now, most worthy Sir! permit an American, to congratulate you on your safe return, and to present you with a FAMILY PICTURE, TAKEN FROM REAL LIFE IN LONDON; however monstrous, and shocking to humanity, the features may appear, be assured they belong to your own country; where, I have reason to think, from my own observation, and the most authentic information, you may find an ample field for the exercise of all those virtues, which led you at the risk of liberty and life, into foreign dungeons: Victims of oppression, and other objects of compassion, abound in England: In some of the abodes of misery in London, you will possibly find new species of oppression and torture, unknown in any other country, however absolute, and such as might almost make AN HASTINGS blush, for the depravity of mankind.

Bribery, corruption and oppression, have been suffered to take large strides in the British dominions; they have contaminated the streams, and if not speedily checked, will poison the source of that national Justice, Generosity, Humanity, and Liberty, which have so long been the boast of Britons.

Should your sympathetic heart prompt you to analyze those modern engines of cruelty, THE PRIVATE MAD-HOUSES in London, and its vicinity, let no pretences of the callous keepers, however plausible, induce you to pass by those gloomy chambers, where the wretched inhabitants are buried from the sight of friends, and light of day: Those INFERNAL CELLS are said to be new-invented substitutes for the grave; where the wealthy parent, or other relation, is intombed alive, to gratify a ravenous, hungry heir, who could no longer brook the tardiness of Death.

You, Sir! who have made it the business of your life to seek the means of doing good, will, I hope, pardon my freedom, in presuming to dictate, or direct your enquiries, when I assure you, that I am actuated solely by those humane motives, that influence and direct all your actions.

With the highest esteem, and admiration, of your many signal virtues, and exalted character,

I am, with great respect,

Worthy Sir,

Your most humble, and most obedient Servant,

AN AMERICAN.

(Story of Honestus and Constantia in our next.)

PROCEEDINGS of CONGRESS.

In the HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES of the UNITED STATES.

[Substance of Friday's Debate, on the motion for annexing to the Impost Bill a clause, limiting its duration.]

FRIDAY, MAY 15, 1789.

MR. MADISON observed, that it was incompatible with the spirit of the Constitution and the principles of republicanism, to pass a revenue law unlimited in its duration; especially when the objects for which the income was intended were not defined, and from the circumstances of the Union, appropriations could not be conveniently made—that it would justly alarm the apprehensions of the people, should Congress pass a law which might exist perpetually for raising taxes, subject to the adventitious controul and direction of future administrations, without appropriations, and which might be continued after the ostensible motives for their assent should cease:—That the House of Representatives was vested with the sole power of originally applying to the pockets of the people—that on the retaining this power, inviolate, depended their most essential rights—that on this account principally, the democratic branch of the Legislature consisted of the greater number, chosen for a shorter period than the other, and consequently reverted more frequently to the mass of the citizens—that if there was no limitation specified, however oppressive and unequal the operation of the law, it might become perpetual, for it would not be in the power of the representatives to effect an alteration, as The President, with one third of the Senate, at any time might prevent a repeal or alteration of the act—this would render the funds so far independent of the people—and they might become a convenience in the hands of some future administration, for the purposes of oppression. That the act in its present form, had been complained of as imperfect—that experience alone could ascertain its intrinsic qualities, and that experience might forcibly suggest the necessity and importance of alterations, and amendments—but without this clause it may never be in the power of the House to remedy any defects—and the people would be divested of one of their dearest and most essential rights, of which the House of Representatives were the only safe and adequate guardians.

MR. AMES in reply, said—to judge rightly we must consider the reasons for the proposed amendment with attention.

It is said, the money which the impost will produce is not appropriated. Are gentlemen afraid, that no appropriation will be made, or that it will be improperly made? If they are, it will be a reason for delaying the passage of the bill; but will not furnish any for limiting its duration—If they are not afraid of this, as he trusted was the case, why urge the objection?

It is said, the act is imperfect: Then let us revise and amend it: A bill which shall pass with acknowledged errors, will be a great evil in the period to which it is proposed to confine it. A perpetual law is said to be needless, because the occasion will not last so long. He thought the public would always have occasion for a revenue, and thinking of the high duties as he did, he believed the revenue would fall short; and if the act was to last until the money raised by it should pay the public debt, it might as well be made perpetual.

But let us attend to substance more than sound; What is meant by temporary and perpetual? No law is really perpetual: A temporary act is made pro hac vice, or by way of experiment: If the act is bad, several years is too long to suffer it to last.

Three different periods have been proposed for its duration: One year—several years, and until the public debts shall be paid.

One year may be proper for an experiment; but is it no evil to go over this ground again? Is it desirable or safe to revive the topics of distinct interests, and partial politics once a year? Will it not protract our session and augment our expenses? If it is limited to several years, will it be possible to re-loan the foreign debt on the credit of such precarious funds? Other nations have mortgaged their taxes for their debts. A part of our foreign debt must be provided for; With a permanent revenue, it is probable it might be re-loaned at a reduced interest. The same advantage might be expected in providing for the other debts; could this government secure the creditor on good ground with a fund which a few years might annihilate? He considered the advantage of credit: It had made Britain powerful and rich: A despotism could not have it, nor could a pure democracy—but a wise republican government ought to have and might have it—and how? An act not limited should be in force until repealed: The revenues, if pledged, could not be taken away, but by a positive act of injustice and fraud, to which the two Houses must assent, and the President would have his voice: It was three to one, therefore, that it would not happen, and the creditor might trust this government as safely as any in the world; But an act which would expire of itself afforded less ground of confidence; for it was a mere neglect or omission of an act, for which the tenth part of the objections made against this bill would furnish a pretext: The mere disagreement of the houses would prevent it; and those who had seen how difficult it was to procure the assent of this House to the bill, would not be sanguine that another should pass at a future period: Had we not suffered from this cause severely already? It is asked, shall we part with the power? If the act is limited, in fact the power is limited—and it is the power to save the public honor and publick money that is limited: We are advised to hold the purse strings carefully, and so we ought: But whose money do we hold? We are told that foreigners will seize our ships for their debts; and if the money is due to them, why should we hold it? What honest reason can we have for withholding it? Limiting the act will carry distrust in the face of it—and we shall be obliged to pay for that distrust, as the act may be repealed or amended, as experience may direct, there seems to be no good reason for limiting its existence—He was against all temporary expedients, and wished to make the act commensurate with the public necessity, which called for it.

MR. PAGE observed, that he thought it inconsistent, that gentlemen, who had opposed the bill in every stage of its progress through the House, should now be strenuous for its being perpetual—for his part he had his doubts, as to the eligibility of some articles, and for that reason, there ought to be a limited period to its existence—he was for a fair experiment of the bill however, as it did not appear that greater harmony of sentiment was attainable at present—but if in the operation it should be found pernicious, he could not conceive the propriety of putting it out of the power of the House to correct the evils it may produce.

MR. AMES replied, that the amendment moved for was he believed totally unexpected to almost every gentleman in the House—for his part he had always supposed that the system was to have been permanent, and commensurate to the object—upon this principle he had combated those parts of the bill with some degree of energy which he conceived unfavorable—because he wished to make the bill as faultless as possible, considering its indefinite existence as the natural result of a desire to make adequate provision for the public exigencies, and support for the government.

Adjourned.

SATURDAY, MAY 16.

MR. SENEY presented an act of the legislature of the State of Maryland, offering to Congress, the exclusive jurisdiction of ten miles square, in any part of that State, for the permanent seat of the Federal Government.

MR. SYLVESTER presented a petition of DONALD CAMPBELL, praying a reimbursement of monies expended by him on account of the United States, during the late war.

MR. AMES presented a petition from JOHN FENNO, soliciting the printing in the Gazette of the United States, the acts, resolutions, &c. of the House.

The consideration of Mr. MADISON's amendment to the impost bill, was then resumed—it being intimated that the YEAS and NAYS would be called for—an animated debate ensued—in which the substance of yesterday's observations was recapitulated, and many new sentiments were added. In support of the amendment it was said, that the establishment of the public credit depended upon a regular and permanent system of honest policy, and the virtue of the government—that we ought not to suppose that a future legislature would be less virtuous than the present—that it was but just to suppose that there will always exist a disposition in the Federal Legislature, to do justice; and if this should be the case, public credit will always be established in whatever manner funds might be provided, and that no assigned period or any act without limitation, would effect this object without this disposition.—That it would not be wise to put too much power in the hands of the Senate; as the time for which they were elected, rendered them almost independent of the people.

It was further observed, that the national debt was already placed on as solid principles, as a legislative act could establish it—that it was in fact better founded than that of any other country; for it had been made part of the national compact; that the general character of a people, and not its particular legislative acts were the objects of attention to foreign creditors—That nothing could justify an immutable law, but extraordinary circumstances.—Circumstances which would render such a law always equally necessary—that every act of a perpetual nature, narrowed the power of the House, and transferred it to the executive and a minority of the Senate.

On the other hand it was contended, that merely not assigning a limited period to an act, did not necessarily make it perpetual—that in order to this an express declaration to that effect, was requisite—that every act must be deficient in proportion as it fell short of being commensurate to its object—that the public credit could be established only by providing funds which in all events, should be fully sufficient to answer the demands of the public creditors—that temporary systems, dependant upon the breath of an Assembly, could not be considered in this point of light—that this clause would defeat all the salutary effects designed by the system.—That notwithstanding allusions had been frequently made to the British parliamentary proceedings, yet it was conceived that no precedents of a limited revenue law could be produced—that it would be transferring the imbecility of the old confederation to the new system—that if we wish to have the evidences of our public debt of any value, it is our duty to establish a permanent adequate provision—that it was necessary in this way, to give evidence of our disposition and ability to pay our debts—that foreigners would be scrupulously attentive to our public acts, and draw their conclusions accordingly—that natives and foreigners had suffered sufficiently by their confidence, and we ought to suppose that they would be more cautious for the future—that it could not rationally be expected that a temporary system would inspire a respect and confidence in the government, or give it the necessary energy and consequence among the people.

The motion was then varied by Mr. MADISON, but after some further observation, the original amendment was put, and carried in the affirmative; and the YEAS and NAYS entered on the journals as follow.—For the motion,

- Mr. Baldwin, Mr. Benson, Mr. Bland, Mr. Burke, Mr. Carroll, Mr. Coles, Mr. Contee, Mr. Fitzsimons, Mr. Floyd, Mr. Gale, Mr. Gerry, Mr. Gilman, Mr. Goodhue, Mr. Griffin, Mr. Grout, Mr. Hathorn, Mr. Hester, Mr. Huntington, Mr. Jackson, Mr. Lee, Mr. Leonard, Mr. Livermore, Mr. Madison, Mr. Moore, Mr. Mulenburgh, Mr. Page, Mr. Parker, Mr. Patridge, Mr. Rensselaer, Mr. Senev, Mr. Scott, Mr. Smith, Maryland, Mr. Smith, South Carolina, Mr. Sturges, Mr. Sylvester, Mr. Trumbull, Mr. Tucker, Mr. Vining, Mr. Wadsworth, Mr. White, Mr. Wynkoop.

- Against the motion, Mr. Ames, Mr. Boudnot, Mr. Cadwalader, Mr. Clymer, Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Sherman, Mr. Sinnichson, Mr. Thatcher.

Ayes 41
Noes 8

Majority 33

The clause for limitation being annexed to the bill, it was agreed that it should continue and be in force from the 15th of June next, till the first of June 1796. The bill then passed the House, and was sent to the Senate for their concurrence.

The House agreed to take up the report of the committee on the memorial of Dr. RAMSAY, on Thursday next.

Mr. Hathorn had leave of absence for a few days.