

The RIGHT GOVERNMENT of a COMMON-WEALTH EXAMINED.

[Continued from our last.]

But we must not rely upon these general observations alone: let us descend to a particular consideration of our author's examples, in every one of which he is very unfortunate. The retirement of Cincinnatus to the country was not his choice, but his necessity: Cato, his son, had offended the people by an outrageous opposition to their honest struggles for liberty, and had been fined for a crime; the father, rather than let his bondsmen suffer, paid the forfeiture of his recognizance, reduced himself to poverty, and the necessity of retiring to his spade or plough. Did the people intreat and force him back to Rome? No; it was the senate in opposition to the people, who dreaded his high aristocratical principles, his powerful connections, and personal resentments. Nor did he discover the least reluctance to the service ordained him by the senate, but accepted it without hesitation. All this appears in Livy, clearly contradictory to every sentiment of our author.* At another time, when disputes ran so high between the tribunes and the senate, that seditions were apprehended, the senators exerted themselves in the centuries for the election of Cincinnatus, to the great alarm and terror of the people.† Cincinnatus, in short, although his moral character and private life were irreproachable among the plebeians, appears to have owed his appointments to office, not to them, but the Senate; and not for popular qualities, but for aristocratical ones, and the determined opposition of himself and his whole family to the people. He appears to have been forced into service by no party; but to have been as willing, as he was an able, instrument of the senate. In order to see the inaptitude of this example in another point of view, let the question be asked, What would have been the fortune of Cincinnatus, if Nedham's "right constitution" had then been the government of Rome? The answer must be, that he would have lost his election, most probably even in the representative assembly: most certainly he would never have been consul, dictator, or commander of armies, because he was unpopular. This example, then, is no argument in favor of our author, but a strong one against him.

If we recollect the character and actions of Curius, we shall find them equally conclusive in favor of balanced government, and against our author's plan. M. Curius Dentatus, in the year of Rome 462, obtained as consul a double triumph, for forcing the Samnites to sue for peace. This nation, having their country laid waste, sent their principal men as ambassadors, to offer presents to Curius for his credit with the senate, in order to their obtaining favorable terms of peace. They found him sitting on a stool before the fire, in his little house in the country, and eating his dinner out of a wooden dish. They opened their deputation, and offered him the gold and silver. He answered them politely, but refused the presents.‡ He then added somewhat which at this day does not appear so very polished: "I think it glorious to command the owners of gold, not to possess it myself." And which passion do you think is the worst, the love of gold, or this pride and ambition? His whole estate was seven acres of land, and he said once in assembly, "that a man who was not contented with seven acres of land, was a pernicious citizen." As we pass, it may be proper to remark the difference of times and circumstances. How few in America could escape the censure of pernicious citizens, if Curius's rule were established. Is there one of our yeoman contented with seven acres? How many are discontented with seventy times seven! Examples, then, drawn from times of extreme poverty, and a state of a very narrow territory, should be applied to our circumstances with great discretion. As long as the aristocracy lasted, a few of those rigid characters appeared from time to time in the Roman senate. Cato was one to the last, and went expressly to visit the house of Curius, in the country of the Sabines; was never weary of viewing it, contemplating the virtues of its ancient owner, and desiring warmly to imitate them. But, though declamatory writers might call the conduct of Curius "exatissima Romana frugalitatis norma," it was not the general character, even of the senators, at that time: avarice raged like a fiery furnace in the minds of creditors, most of whom were patricians; and equal avarice and injustice in the minds of plebeians, who, instead of aiming at moderating the laws against debtors, would be content with nothing short of a total abolition of debts. Only two years after this, viz. in 465, so tenacious were the patricians and senators of all

the rigor of their power over debtors, that Verrius, the son of a consul, who had been reduced by poverty to borrow money at an exorbitant interest, was delivered up to his creditor; and that infamous usurer, C. Plotius, exacted from him all the services of a slave, and the senate would grant no relief: and when he attempted to subject his slave to a brutal passion, which the laws did not tolerate, and scourged him with rods because he would not submit, all the punishment which the consuls and senate would impose on Plotius was imprisonment. This anecdote proves, that the indifference to wealth was far from being general, either among patricians or plebeians; and that it was confined to a few patrician families, whose tenaciousness of the maxims and manners of their ancestors proudly transmitted it from age to age. In 477 Curius was consul a second time, when the plague, and a war with Pyrrhus, had lasted so long as to threaten the final ruin of the nation, and obliged the centuries to choose a severe character, not because he was beloved, but because his virtues and abilities alone could save the state. The austere character of the consul was accompanied by corresponding austerities, in this time of calamity, in the censors, who degraded several knights and senators, and among the rest Rufinus, who had been twice consul and once dictator, for extravagance and luxury. Pyrrhus was defeated, and Curius again triumphed: and because a continuance of the war with Pyrrhus was expected, again elected consul, in 478. In 480 he was censor. After all, he was so little beloved, that an accusation was brought against him for having converted the public spoils to his own use; and he was not acquitted till he had sworn that no part of them had entered his house but a wooden bowl, which he used in sacrifice. All these sublime virtues, and magnanimous actions of Curius, make nothing in favor of Nedham. He was a patrician, a senator, and a consul; he had been taught by aristocratical ancestors, formed in an aristocratical school, and was full of aristocratical pride. He does not appear to have been a popular man, either among the senators in general, or the plebeians. Rufinus, his rival, with his plate and luxury, appears to have been more beloved, by his being appointed dictator. Notwithstanding that, the censors, on the prevalence of Curius's party, in a time of distress, were able to disgrace him.

It was in 479 that the senate received an embassy from Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt, and sent four of the principal men in Rome, Q. Fabius Gurgus, C. Fabius Pistor, Numer. Fabius Pistor, and Q. Ogulnius, ambassadors to Egypt, to return the compliment. Q. Fabius, who was at the head of the embassy, was prince of the senate, and on his return reported their commission to the senate: said that the king had received them in the most obliging and honorable manner: that he had sent them magnificent presents on their arrival, which they had desired him to excuse them from accepting: that at a feast, before they took leave, the king had ordered crowns of gold to be given them, which they placed upon his statues the next day: that on the day of their departure, the king had given them presents far more magnificent than the former, reproaching them, in a most obliging manner, for not having accepted them: these they had accepted, with most profound respect, not to offend the king, but that, on their arrival in Rome, they had deposited them in the public treasury: that Ptolemy had received the alliance of the Roman people with joy. The senate were much pleased, and gave thanks to the ambassadors for having rendered the manners of the Romans venerable to foreigners by their sincere disinterestedness: but decreed, that the rich presents deposited in the treasury should be restored to them, and the people expressed their satisfaction in this decree. These presents were undoubtedly immensely rich; but where was the people's care to make the service a burthen? Thanks of the senate are no burthens; immense presents in gold and silver, voted out of the treasury into the hands of the ambassadors, were no "slender advantages" of profit or pleasure, at a time when the nation was extremely poor, and no individual in it very rich. But, moreover, three of these ambassadors were Fabii, of one of those few simple, frugal, aristocratical families, who neither made advantage of the law in favor of creditors, to make great profits out of the people by exorbitant usury on one hand, nor gave largesses to the people to bribe their affection on the other: so that, although they were respected and esteemed by all, they were not hated nor much beloved by any; and such is the fate of men of such simple manners at this day in all countries. Our author's great mistake lies in his quoting examples from a balanced government, as proofs in favor of a government without a balance. The senate and people were at this time checks on each others avarice: the people were the electors into office, but none, till very lately, could be chosen but patricians; none of the senators, who enriched themselves by plundering the public of lands or goods, or by extravagant usury from the people, could expect their votes to be consuls or other magistrates; and there was no commerce or other means of enriching themselves: all, therefore, who were ambitious of serving in magistracies, were obliged to be

poor. To this constant check and balance between the senate and people, the production and the continuance of these frugal and simple patrician characters and families appear to be owing. (To be continued.)

An ESSAY on FREE TRADE and FINANCES; particularly shewing what Supplies of public Revenue may be drawn from Merchandise, without injuring our Trade or burdening our people.

[By a Citizen of Philadelphia in 1788.]

Having lately published a dissertation on the political union and constitution, which is necessary for the preservation and happiness of the Thirteen United States of North-America, I now go on to consider some of the great departments of business, which must fall under the management of the great council of the union, and their officers.

The first thing which naturally offers itself to consideration, is the expence of government; this is a sine qua non of the whole, and all its parts. No kind of administration can be carried on without expence, and the scale or degree of plan and execution must ever be limited by it. Two grand considerations offer themselves here. (1.) The estimate of the expences which government requires; and (2.) Such ways and means of raising sufficient money to defray them, as will be most easy, and least hurtful and oppressive to the subject.

The first is not my present principal object: I shall therefore only observe upon it, that the wants of government, like the wants of nature, are few, and easily supplied; 'tis luxury which incurs the most expence, and drinks up the largest fountains of supply, and what is most to be lamented, the same luxury which drinks up the greatest supplies, does at the same time corrupt the body, enervate its strength, and waste those powers which are designed for use, ornament or delight. The ways and means of supply are the object of my principal attention at present. I will premise a few propositions which appear to me to deserve great consideration here.

I. When a sum of money is wanted, one way of raising it may be much easier than another. This is equally true in states as in individuals. A man must always depend for supply on those articles which he can best spare, or which he can diminish with least inconvenience: He should first sell such articles as he has purposely provided for market; if these are not enough, then such articles of his estate as he can best spare, always sacrificing luxuries first, and necessities last of all.

II. Any interest or thing whatever, on which the burden of tax is laid, is diminished either in quantity or neat value, e. g. if money is taxed, part of the sum goes to pay the tax; if lands, part of the produce or price goes to pay it; if goods, part of the price which the goods will sell for, goes to pay it, &c.

III. The consumption of any thing, on which the burthen of tax is laid, will always be thereby lessened, because such tax will raise the price of the articles taxed, and fewer people will be able or willing to pay such advance of price, then would purchase, if the price was not raised: And consequently.

IV. The burden of tax ought to lie heaviest on such articles, the use and consumption of which are least necessary to the community, and lightest on those articles, the use and consumption of which are most necessary to the community. I think this so plain, that it cannot need any thing said on it either by way of illustration or proof.

V. The staples of any country are both the source and measure of its wealth, and therefore ought to be encouraged and increased as far as possible. No country can enjoy or consume more than they can raise, make or purchase. No country can purchase more than they can pay for; and no country can make payment beyond the amount of the surplus which remains of their staples, after their consumption is subtracted. If they go beyond this, they must run in debt, i. e. eat the calf in the cow's belly, or consume this year the proceeds of the next, which is a direct step to ruin, and must if (continued,) end in destruction.

VI. The great staples of the United States, are our HUSBANDRY, FISHERIES, AND MANUFACTURES. Trade comes in as the hand-maid of them all—the servant that tends upon them—the nurse that takes away their redundancies and supplies all their wants. These we may consider as the great sources of our wealth; and our trade, as the great conduit through which it flows. All these we ought in sound policy to guard, encourage and increase as far as possible, and to load them with burdens and embarrassments as little as possible.

THE PRESIDENT'S HOUSEHOLD.

WHEREAS, all Servants and others, employed to procure provisions, or supplies, for the Household, of THE PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES, will be furnished with monies for those purposes. Notice is therefore given, That no accounts, for the payment of which the Public might be considered as responsible, are to be opened with any of them.

SAMUEL FRAUNCES, Steward of the Household. MAY 4th, 1789.

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NOTES. * Plebis concursus ingens fuit: sed ea, nequaquam, tam laeta Quintium vidit; et imperii munitum, et virum, in ipso imperio vehementiorem rata. Liv. lib. iii. c. 26. † Summo patrum studio, L. Quintius Cincinnatus, pater Celsus, consul creator, qui magistratum statim acciperet, percussa erat plebs consulem habitura, iratum, potentem favore patrum, virtute sua, tribus liberis, &c. ‡ Val. Max. iv. 1. Cic. de Senec. 55. Senec. Epist. v. Cic. pro Placco, 28. Plin. Nat. xviii. 2.