

MR. FENNO,

If you and your brother-editors can find room for the following remarks, among your political disquisitions, you may forward the work of improvements in literature, and by shaking the throne of prejudice and false philosophy, you may bring about a revolution in favor of common sense.

THERE is not a subject in literature so generally despised as Grammar; yet there is not a subject of more consequence. The reason why it is so odious to every body but schoolmasters, may perhaps be this. The authors who have treated of this subject, however eminent for erudition, have been wholly ignorant of the origin and construction of the English language; and have, by false arbitrary rules, attempted to discard the idioms of the language, and introduce something different from common practice. Now real Grammar is nothing but common practice; and when a man rises up and tells a nation, they are all blockheads, and their language incorrect, and vulgar, it is but just that they in return should call him a pedant, and despise his rules. This has been the fate of the three most celebrated philologists of the English nation, Johnson, Lowth, and Harris. These writers, great indeed in Greek and Latin, but knowing nothing of the true principles of English, have labored to prove their native language full of errors and defects, and to correct the one and supply the other by foreign rules. The authority of their names has had an unhappy effect upon the language—it has persuaded the learned to resign the true idioms of the language and introduce many corruptions into books; while the body of the nation, governed by habit, retain their former practice. Hence the difference between the language of books and conversation—a difference generally illfounded, and improper. To shew how superficially some of these great men, as they are called, have considered the subject, let me request my readers to attend to the following examples. Lowth tells us, that the phrase *I am mistaken*, means *I am misunderstood*. Strange indeed that so great a man should be so mistaken. Let me ask what is it that constitutes the meaning of a word? Every rational man will reply, the sense which a whole nation annex to it in practice. If I say, *I am mistaken*, does not every man, woman and child understand me to mean, *I am wrong*, or *in an error myself*? This cannot be denied. This common understanding then constitutes the true signification of the phrase, and no man, not even a Right Reverend Father in God, has a right to say it is not the meaning. The truth is, when applied to persons, *mistaken* is always used in this sense, and in no other. It has lost its participial meaning; in the same manner as *fraught* and *drunken*, tho derived from *freight* and *drink* have lost all idea of action and become mere adjectives; so that it is improper to use them in the participial manner; *he has fraught a vessel, a man has drunken*. Yet as adjectives denoting a quality, the one denoting *very full*, the other a *state of intoxication*, they are both correct and expressive; a man *fraught with mischief*, a *drunken man*.

Lowth says likewise adjectives are improperly used for adverbs; as *extreme cold*. Why did the good Bishop overlook the phrases *full sweet*, *very cold*? Will any man deny the latter to be good English? It will be said *very* is an adverb. Not at all: The adverb is *verily*. *Very* is always an adjective, as, *this is the very man*: It is simply the French *vrai*, true; formerly written in English *veray*, and in modern times, *very*. The truth is, it is an idiom of the language, co-eval with its formation, that one adjective may qualify another: and the idiom of the language is not only one, but the only ground of grammatical rules. Yet this idiom has always been overlooked.

Another example. Dr. Samuel Johnson writes "he needs not be very careful;" instead of the common phrase, *he need not*. How surprizing it is that a whole nation should overlook the reason why *need*, in the usual practice of speaking, is correct English, without the personal termination! *Need* when used alone and followed by an object, is regular; *he needs support*. But when followed by another verb, it is considered as a helper; as well as *will*, *can* or *may*; and *he needs not go*, is as bad English as *he wills not go*, or *can not go*. This distinction has been observed in *will*, *he will not go*, *he wills it*, and why it should have been overlooked in *need* and *dare*, when it is strictly observed in practice from the prince to the washer-woman, is really surprizing.

Lowth, with his head full of Latin rules, recommends *averse from* instead of *averse to*; and many American writers have adopted it. *From* is a noun signifying *beginning* and *to*, a noun signifying *end*. "A man goes from New-York to Boston;" That is, "he goes beginning New-York, end Boston." This construction is not more curious than true; as modern discoveries have clearly proved, that rude nations talk first by names only; and that all our particles, are old Gothic nouns and verbs. *I am averse from war*, therefore is simply this, *I am averse beginning war*. This is not the meaning; for *averse* denotes a quality or state of the mind, *beginning* in my own breast, and directed to the object, war. Hence the old phrase *averse to* is correct, and will stand the test of all the criticism in the nation.

I will not multiply examples. Horne Tooke has made some valuable discoveries, which will be the basis of the first English Grammar ever published. The philological writers in America, have not the authority of a Right Reverend, a D. D. or a L. L. D. to give weight to their opinions; but their attempts to correct the taste of our youths, by stripping the learning of this country of its pedantry, will finally prevail over prejudice, and call back the student to the principles of common sense.

SKETCH OF PROCEEDINGS OF CONGRESS.

In the HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES of the UNITED STATES.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12, 1789.

THE engrossed bill, providing for the expences which may attend negociations, and treating with the Indian tribes—and for appointing commissioners to superintend the same, was read, when the House proceeded to fill up the blanks.—It was moved that the sum of forty one thousand dollars be inserted in the first blank. This motion was opposed by Mr. SUMPTER, Mr. GERRY, and Mr. LIVERMORE.—It was said, that a previous estimate of the expences necessary to be incurred, ought first to be exhibited to the house—that great frauds and abuses had been complained of in these negociations—that the whole amount of the revenue would fall short of the necessary expences of the current year, and therefore it was incumbent on the House to grant monies with due caution and deliberation.—That it could not be contended that so large a sum was requisite, but on the supposition of a very large number of Indians attending, and presents being provided for them.—It was urged that the treaties would be as efficacious without collecting a whole nation together—and the custom of giving presents was reprobated by some of the members, as a measure fraught with useless expence, much mischief, and inconvenience.

Mr. JACKSON, Mr. HARTLEY, Mr. CLYMER, and Mr. BALDWIN supported the motion.—The latter gentleman produced a statement of the expences which would arise from holding a treaty with the Creek nation only, of which it was expected that 1500 would attend.—It was observed that the sum moved for was to defray the expences of treating with the Indian tribes in general—more particularly with the Wabash nation, and with the tribes to the southward of the Ohio.—That agreeably to the estimate, which was laid on the table, the whole sum moved for would be necessary; but if the house chose to have the treaties conducted upon different principles from what has been customary, they can make such alterations as they may see proper.

The motion for 41000 being put, it passed in the negative. Mr. MADISON then moved that the blank should be filled with 40000—this was likewise opposed—and the ayes and noes called for on the question—which are as follow:

AFFIRMATIVE.

Messrs Baldwin, Benson, Brown, Burke, Cadwallader, Clymer, Cole, Fitzsimons, Gale, Griffin, Hartley, Huntington, Jackson, Laurance, Lee, Madison, Matthews, P. Muhlenberg, Page, Scott, Smith, (S. C.) Stone, Sylvester, Trumbull, Tucker, Vining, Wadsworth, Wynkoop. twenty-eight.

NEGATIVE.

Messrs Ames, Boudinot, Carrol, Floyd, Gerry, Gilman, Grout, Heister, Hathorn, Leonard, Livermore, Moore, Parker, Partridge, Van Ransellaer, Schureman, Sedgwick, Seney, Sherman, Smith, (M.) Sturgis, Sumpter, Thacher.

Majority 5.—So the motion obtained.

The blank in the clause for allowing a compensation to the commissioners was filled with Eight Dollars pr. day, exclusive of their actual expences at the place of holding the treaties.

Upon motion Mr. P. MUHLENBERG, and Mr. WADSWORTH were added to the committee appointed to bring in a bill providing a system of regulations for the militia of the United States.

Adjourned.

[It should have been noticed before, that Messrs FITZSIMONS, LAURANCE, and GRIFFIN, were appointed a committee to bring in a bill, to establish the salaries of the officers in the executive department.

N. B. In the committee of conference on the part of the Senate, mentioned in our last, for "Jackson" read JOHNSON.

THURSDAY, AUG. 13.

The engrossed bill providing for the expences of negociations and treating with the Indians, &c. was read, and passed to be enacted.

Mr. LEE moved that the House should resolve itself into a committee of the whole on the state of the Union, to take into consideration the report of the committee on amendments to the Constitution.

The immediate adoption of this motion was advocated by Mr. MADISON, Mr. PAGE, and Mr.

HARTLEY—and opposed by Mr. SEDGWICK, Mr. SMITH, (S. C.) Mr. GERRY, Mr. LAURANCE, and Mr. SHERMAN.—The latter gentlemen generally observed, That there was a great variety of business before the house, which it is of the greatest importance should precede the consideration of all other—that it appears absurd to make alteration in a form of government, before it has an operative existence—that it is of the first consequence to compleat the judiciary bill—that without this and several other bills now pending in the house, we cannot carry one of the revenue laws into execution—not a breach of the laws of the United States can be punished—not a vessel can be seized.—The discussion of the subject at this moment will obstruct the wheels of government, and throw every thing into confusion—mean time the United States are without law, and have no authority to punish a single crime. It was further said, that few, if any of the State assemblies are in session, and therefore it will unnecessarily consume the present time, which is so precious—that the people reposing full confidence in the justice, and wisdom of the House that this subject would have seasonable and due attention paid to it, are as anxious and solicitous to see the government in operation, as they are about amendments.

The Speakers against the motion severally expressed themselves in favor of taking up the subject as soon as the judicial, executive, and revenue departments were so far completed that it could with propriety be said that we had a government.

In support of the motion it was observed,—That since the subject had first been introduced, so much time has elapsed, that if it is not now taken up, the people will be led to suppose, that it is the intention of Congress never to do any thing in the business—that the people are extremely anxious upon the subject—and nothing short of a conviction that those rights, which they conceive to be in danger as the Constitution now stands, will be placed in a state of greater security, will quiet their apprehensions—that the number of those in favor of amendments consisted of a large and respectable proportion of the citizens of the States—that the peace and tranquility of the Union depend upon a proper attention to their just expectations—that if those who are anxious for amendments, had been added to those who openly opposed the Constitution, it would have probably met a quite different fate—that except these amendments are made, the government will want the confidence of the people, and that energy which is necessary to its existence—that the same reasons for a postponement have repeatedly been assigned, and there is no prospect that a more convenient opportunity will offer. The question being put on the motion of Mr. LEE, it passed in the affirmative. The House accordingly formed into a committee of the whole.

Mr. BOUDINOT in the chair.

The report of the committee was then read—the first article of which is in these words, viz:

In the introductory paragraph of the Constitution, before the words "We the people," add, "Government being intended for the benefit of the People, and the rightful establishment thereof being derived from their authority alone."

Mr. SHERMAN: I am opposed to this mode of making amendments to the Constitution—and am for striking out from the report of the committee the first article entirely. I conceive that we cannot incorporate these amendments in the body of the Constitution. It would be mixing brass, iron, and clay—it would be as absurd as to incorporate an act in addition to an act, in the body of the act proposed to be amended or explained thereby—which I believe was never heard of before.—I conceive that we have no right to do this, as the Constitution is an act of the people, and ought to remain entire—the several amendments will be the act of the federal legislatures. Mr. Sherman then read a proposition which he moved should be substituted in place of the article in the report.

This being seconded, brought on an interesting debate—Whether the amendments should be incorporated in the body of the Constitution, or be made a distinct supplementary act.

Mr. MADISON supported the former, and said, that he did not coincide with the gentleman from Connecticut: I conceive, said he, that there is a propriety in incorporating the amendments in the Constitution itself, in the several places to which they belong—the system will in that case be uniform and entire—nor is this an uncommon thing to be done.—It is true that acts are generally amended by additional acts; but this I believe may be imputed rather to indolence—this however is not always the case, for where there is a taste for political and legislative propriety it is otherwise.—If these amendments are added to the Constitution by way of supplement, it will embarrass the people.—It will be difficult for them to determine to what parts of the system they particularly refer—and at any rate will create unfavorable comparisons between the two parts of the instrument. If these amendments are adopted agreeably to the plan proposed, they will stand upon as good a foundation as the other parts of the Constitution—and will be sanctioned