

THE RIGHT CONSTITUTION OF A COMMONWEALTH EXAMINED.

(CONTINUATION.)

NEDHAM talks of "senate and people's feeling the burthens of the fury of the kings;" but as we cannot accuse this writer of ignorance, this must have been either artifice or inadvertence. There is not in the whole Roman history so happy a period as this under their kings. The whole line were excellent characters, and fathers of their people, notwithstanding the continual cabals of the nobles against them. The nation was formed, their morality, their religion, the maxims of their government, were all established under these kings: The nation was defended against innumerable and warlike nations of enemies; in short, Rome was never so well governed or so happy. As soon as the monarchy was abolished, and an ambitious republic of haughty aspiring aristocracies was erected, they were seized with the ambition of conquest, and became a torment to themselves and the world. Our author confesses, that "being freed from the kingly yoke, and having secured all power within the hands of themselves and their posterity, they fell into the same absurdities that had been before committed by their kings, so that this new yoke became more intolerable than the former." It would be more conformable to the truth of history to say, that they continued to behave exactly as they had done; but having no kings to murder, they had only people to destroy. The sovereign power was in them under the kings, and their greatest animosity against their kings, next to the ambitious desire of getting into their places, was their too frequent patronage of the people. The only change made by the revolution was to take off a little awe which the name of king inspired. The office, with all its dignities, authorities, and powers, was in fact continued under the title of consul: it was made annually elective it is true, and became accordingly a mere tool of the senate, wholly destitute of any power or will to protect plebeians, a disposition which the hereditary kings always discovered more or less, and thereby became odious to the senate; for there is no sin or crime so heinous in the judgment of patricians, as for any one of their own rank to court plebeians, or become their patron, protector, or friend.

It is very true that "the new yoke was more intolerable than the old, nor could the people find any remedy until they procured that necessary office of the tribunes." This was some remedy, but a very feeble and ineffectual one: Nor, if the people had instituted an annual assembly of 500 representatives, would that have been an effectual remedy, without a plenary executive power in the consul; the senate and assembly would have been soon at war, and the leader of the victorious army master of the state. If "the tribunes, by being vested with a temporary authority by the people's election, remained the more sensible of their condition," the American governors and senators, vested as they are with a temporary authority by the people's election, will remain sensible of their condition too. If they do not become so sensible of it, and discover that flattery, and bribery, and partiality, are better calculated to procure renovations of their authority, than honesty, liberty, and equality, happy indeed shall we all be!

"What more excellent patriot could there be than Manlius, till he became corrupted by time and power?" Is it a clear case that Manlius was corrupted? To me he appears the best patriot in Roman history: The most humane, the most equitable; the greatest friend of liberty, and the most desirous of a constitution truly free; the real friend of the people, and the enemy of tyranny in every shape, as well as the greatest hero and warrior of his age—a much greater character than Camillus. Our author's expression implies, that "there was no greater patriot," until he saw the necessity of new modelling the constitution, and was concerting measures upon the true principles of liberty, the authority of the people, to place checks upon the senate. But Manlius is an unfortunate instance for our author. It was not time and power that inspired him with his designs; the jealousy and envy of the senate had removed him from power; he was neither consul, dictator, nor general. Aristocratical envy had set up Camillus, and continued him in power, both as consul and dictator, on purpose to rival and mortify Manlius. It was discontinuance of power then that corrupted him, if he was corrupted; and this generally happens, disappointed candidates for popular elections are as often corrupted by their fall from power, as hereditary aristocracies by their continuance in it.

"Who more noble, courteous, and well affected to the common good than Appius Claudius at first? But afterwards, having obtained a continuation of the government in his own hands, he soon lost his primitive innocence and integrity, and devoted himself to all the practices of an absolute tyrant." This is very true, but it was not barely continuation of power, it was absolute power, that did the mischief. If the power had been properly limited in degree, it might have been continued, without limitation of time, without corrupting him; though it might be better to limit it, both in degree and in time; and it must never be forgotten that it was the people, not the senate, that continued him in power.

The senate acted an arbitrary and reprehensible part, when they thought to continue Lucius Quintus in the consulship longer than the time limited by law; by violating the law they became tyrants, and their acts void. That gallant man acted only the part of a good citizen in refusing to set a precedent so prejudicial to the Roman constitution; his magnanimity merits praise: but perhaps he was the only senator who would have refused, and we cannot safely reckon upon such self-denial in forming any constitution of government. But it may be depended on, that when the whole power is in one assembly, whether of patricians or plebeians, or any mixture of both, a favourite will be continued in power whenever the majority wishes it, and every conceivable fundamental law, or even both, against it will be dispensed with.

From the MASSACHUSETTS MAGAZINE.

GENTLEMEN, The depth of philological knowledge, justness of sentiment, and purity of style, which are the characteristics of Mr. WEBSTER'S Dissertations on the English Language, must recommend them to the attention of every American. Perhaps no part of them is deserving more estimation, than those spirited pages, where he has attacked the proud demi Gods of British Literature, and humbled these Deities of History, in the dust of Criticism. As a specimen of his superior abilities, nice discernment, and correct taste, please to insert the following. Your &c. Z. M.

WEBSTER'S CRITICISMS UPON GIBBON'S HISTORY.

IN no particular is the false taste of the English more obvious, than in the promiscuous encomiums they have bestowed on Gibbon, as a historian. His work is not properly a "History of the decline and fall of the Roman empire;" but a "poetical historical description of certain persons and events, embellished with suitable imagery and episodes, designed to show the author's talent in selecting words, as well as to delight the ears of his readers." In short, his history should be entitled, "A display of words;" except some chapters which are excellent commentaries on the history of the Roman empire.

The general fault of this author is, he takes more pains to form his sentences, than to collect, arrange and express the facts in an easy and per-

spicuous manner. In consequence of attending to ornament, he seems to forget that he is writing for the information of his reader, and when he ought to instruct the mind, he is only pleasing the ear. Fully possessed of his subject, he describes things and events in general terms or figurative language, which leave upon the mind a faint evanescent impression of some indeterminate idea; so that the reader, not obtaining a clear precise knowledge of the facts, finds it difficult to understand, and impossible to recollect the author's meaning. Let a man read his volumes with the most laborious attention, and he will find at the close that he can give very little account of the "Roman Empire;" but he will remember perfectly that Gibbon is a most elegant writer.

History is capable of very little embellishment; tropes and figures are the proper instruments of eloquence and declamation; facts only are the subjects of history. Reflections of the author are admitted; but these should not be frequent; for the reader claims a right to his own opinions. The justness of the historian's remarks may be called in question—facts only are incontestable. The plain narrative of the scripture historians, and of Herodotus, with their dialogues and digressions, is as far superior, considered as pure history, to the affected glaring brilliancy of style and manner, which runs through Gibbon's writings, as truth is to fiction; or the vermilion blush of nature and innocence, to the artificial daubings of fashion. The first never fails to affect the heart—the last can only dazzle the senses. Another fault in Gibbon's manner of writing, is, the use of epithets or titles instead of names. "The Caesar, the conqueror of the east, the protector of the church, the country of the Caesars, the son of Leda," and innumerable similar appellations are employed, instead of the real names of the persons and places; and frequently at such a distance from any mention of the name, that the reader is obliged to turn over a leaf and look for an explanation. Many of the epithets are new; custom has not made us familiar with them; they have never been substituted, by common consent, for the true names; the reader is therefore surprised with unexpected appellations, and constantly interrupted to find the persons or things to which they belong.

I am not about to write a lengthy criticism on this author's history; a few passages only will be selected as proofs of what I have advanced. "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," vol. 3, oct. chap. 17: In explaining the motives of the Emperors for removing the seat of government from Rome to the East, the author says,—Rome was insensibly confounded with the dependent kingdoms which had once acknowledged her supremacy; and the country of the Caesars was viewed with cold indifference by a martial prince, born in the neighbourhood of the Danube, educated in the courts and armies of Asia, and invested with the purple by the legions of Britain." By our author's beginning one part of the sentence with Rome, and the other with the country of the Caesars, the reader is led to think two different places are intended, for he has not a suspicion of a tautology; or at least he supposes the author uses the country of the Caesars in a more extensive sense than Rome. He therefore looks back and reads perhaps half a page with closer attention, and finds that the writer is speaking of the seat of empire, and therefore can mean the city of Rome only. After this trouble he is displeased that the author has employed five words to swell and adorn his period. This however is not the only difficulty in understanding the author. Who is the martial prince? In the preceding sentence, Dioclesian is mentioned as withdrawing from Rome; and in the sentence following, Constantine is said to visit Rome but seldom. The reader then is left to collect the author's meaning, by the circumstances of the birth, education and election of this martial prince. If he is possessed of these facts already, he may go on without much trouble.

The author's affectation of using the purple for the crown of imperial dignity, is so obvious by numberless repetitions of the word, as to be perfectly ridiculous.

"In the choice of an advantageous situation, he preferred the confines of Europe and Asia; to curb, with a powerful arm, the barbarians who dwelt between the Danube and Tanais; to watch, with an eye of jealousy, the conduct of the Persian monarch." Here the members of the sentence in Italic, are altogether superfluous; the author wanted to inform his reader, that Dioclesian desired to curb the barbarians and watch the Persian monarch; for which purpose he chose a favorable situation; but it was wholly immaterial to the subject to relate in what manner or degree, the Emperor meant to exert his arm or his jealousy. Nay, more, these are circumstances which are not reducible to any certainty, and of which the writer and the reader can have no precise idea.

"With these views, Dioclesian had selected and embellished the residence of Nicomedian."—Is Nicomedian a prince's, whose residence the Emperor selected and embellished? This is the most obvious meaning of the sentence. But Nicomedian we learn from other passages, was a city, the residence itself of the Emperor. Yet the au-

thor could not tell us this in a few plain words, without spoiling the harmony of the phrase; he chose therefore to leave it obscure and ungrammatical.

"—But the memory of Dioclesian was justly abhorred by the protector of the church; and Constantine was not insensible to the ambition of founding a city, which might perpetuate the glory of his own name." Who is the protector of the Church? By Constantine's being mentioned immediately after, one would think he cannot be the person intended; yet on examination, this is found to be the case. But why this separate appellation? It seems the author meant by it to convey this idea; That Dioclesian was a persecutor of the church, therefore his memory was abhorred by Constantine who was its protector; the cause of Constantine's abhorrence is implied, and meant to be unfolded to the reader in a single epithet. Is this history? I must have the liberty to think that such terseness of style, notwithstanding the authorities of Tacitus and Gibbon is a gross corruption and a capital fault.

PROGRESS OF MANUFACTURES.

PROVIDENCE, AUGUST 1789.

A correspondent observes, that there never was such a spirit of industry, and zeal to promote manufactures, in this town and its vicinity as at present prevail. Almost every family seem more or less engaged in this way. There are now also at work a carding machine, with a three feet cylinder, two spinning Jennies of 60 spindles each, and one of 38 spindles, and a mill after Arkwright's construction, which carries 32 spindles by water; from which machines, as well as from large quantities spun by hand, corduroys, jeans, futtians, denims, &c. are making.—There are several other jennies erecting for the cotton, as well as carding and other machines for the wool manufactory, among which the wool picker and flying shuttle are improvements every raiser of sheep and manufacturing family should possess. They are attended with little expence, and greatly facilitate labour. As sheep are the most profitable stock that can be raised, and on their increase depends the increase of our woolen manufactory, every farmer who can raise sheep will shew his love to his country, as well as promote his own interest, by increasing his flock. By this attention, as also an increased care in the raisers of cotton in the southern states to have it picked clean from the pod, kept free from dirt of every kind, properly separated, that which is fully ripe from that which is not, and having it cleaned in jennies that will not maul but separate the seed, we may rest assured that there will be no occasion for sending money out of the country for purchasing clothing. This care, adds our correspondent, must be highly interesting to the southern states, in order to give their cotton its proper value, as for want of this care it is lessened at least 50 per cent. a great discouragement to fall on the raisers, when by proper care they might in time rival the West-India planters in the production of that valuable article, as its quality, when in perfection, needs not to be doubted.

NATIONAL MONITOR.—No. XVI.

"O HAPPY, IF THEY KNEW THEIR HAPPY STATE!"

LIKE mariners escap'd from shipwreck, we stand astonish'd at the dangers that awaited us: When we contemplate our situation and prospects under the auspices of the new Constitution, "we smile at the tempest, and enjoy the storm." Having piloted the ship into a secure harbor, what remains, but that we enjoy the fruits of our labor, and make the best improvement of the favours we have received from Heaven? Enjoying a country which abounds with all that nature can bestow for convenience, enjoyment, and delight—blessed with that best of all earthly blessings, a government of our own choosing, and which every day appreciates in our esteem—and having the administration of it committed to the first and best of our tried patriots and statesmen, what can we want to crown our felicity, but the accordance of our own wills.

Happiness is evidently within our grasp: It invites and allures us to its embraces, by every attraction, which wisdom can suggest, or sound policy would desire: She says to America, be wise, and know, and do the things which belong to your present and future peace: But her pursuit, tho' attainable, are the result of exertion. No acquisitions are without a price: Happiness for our country is offered upon the most moderate terms; but terms are annexed—THEY ARE PATRIOTISM, OBEDIENCE AND SUPPORT TO THE LAWS, AND DILIGENCE AND ACTIVITY IN OUR RESPECTIVE CALLINGS.—These will tranquilize the public mind—give energy, permanency and dignity to the government, and ensure felicity to individuals, families, communities, and States: And can we decline the purchase as a people? HEAVEN FORBID!

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Published by JOHN FENNO, No. 9, MALDEN LANE, near the Oswego-Market, NEW-YORK.—[3d. pr. an.]