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THE TABLET.—No. LXI.

"When men are certain that the truth of a thing is not to be known, they will always differ, and endeavor to impose on one another."

THOUGH men dispute for the purpose of ascertaining truth, yet there are few men who find less of it, than those who dispute a great deal. The habit of disputation is a dangerous one. It creates such a love of triumph that men acquire a dexterity of handling unintelligible subjects, with a view only to conquest. By this means, eager disputants abandon the plain paths of reason and truth, and wander into the fields of imagination and conjecture. When men confine their investigations to such points as admit of demonstration, he who takes the right side of the question will, with equal abilities, put his adversary to silence. The subject will be stripped of all adventitious glare, and the light of truth will shine conspicuously over error and sophistry. But those, who dispute merely from the love of such a practice, know too well that they should have very little to do with reason and common sense. It should be their main object to elude the arguments of other people by the refinements of art and evasion.

Discussion is no doubt an important medium of investigating truth. It opens a spirit of enquiry in the world, and excites, in cool, disinterested men, a desire of coming at the real knowledge of such things, as are capable of being known. The warm disputants, however, only start the game. The acquisition falls to men of candor and impartiality, who take the right track, and often overtake their object. It is easy to observe that the most violent disputes, that prevail among men, are of such a nature, as cannot be reduced to a certainty. Many points of disputation are enveloped in such unknown or remote contingencies, as elude all the powers of investigation. After all the discussion that can be had on some subjects, truth will keep out of sight, and the point of debate remain undetermined. If men however manage their altercations with good humor and moderation, some benefit will result from them.—Discussion gives scope to the imagination and habituates the reasoning faculty to a dexterity in its processes.

No circumstance reflects more dishonor on human nature, than the ill-will and persecutions, that have been instigated by such disputes, as are not only unimportant in themselves, but utterly incapable of being demonstrated. The periods of ecclesiastical contention draw over the character of man some of its darkest shades. To a person of a liberal mind, it seems an incredible thing that a useless question, unattended with any rational data of solution should throw whole cities, districts and countries into broils, persecutions, and wars.

Though a free spirit of enquiry should at all times be tolerated, I would still recommend it to prudent individuals to have little connection with those, who have the principal management of disputes. They are not the men, from whom truth flows with purity and force. It is easy to perceive, that the originator of any system or question, will be apt to commence his enquiries with an aim to victory. Truth is no further to be regarded in his pursuit, than as it coincides with the favorite doctrine under examination. The system must not yield to the dictates of reason; but whenever they come in competition, reason must be sacrificed to system.

Lovers of altercation are not only to be shunned as bad guides in our researches after truth, but as troublesome associates and dangerous friends. A warm partizan estimates the merit of his acquaintance according as he promotes or defeats the schemes he has in contemplation. As these schemes generally will be wrong, his friend must either quarrel with him or participate in his errors and quarrels.

AGAINST PRIVATEERING:

Or Reasons in support of new proposed articles, in Treaties of Commerce, which may be formed by the United States of America.

By Dr. FRANKLIN.

BY the original law of nations, war and extirpation were the punishment of injury—Humanizing by degrees, it admitted slavery instead of death: A farther step was the exchange of prisoners, instead of slavery: Another, to respect more the property of private persons under conquest, and be content with acquired dominion.—Why should not this law of nations go on improving? Ages have intervened between its several steps—but as knowledge of late increases rapidly, Why should not those steps be quickened? Why should it not be agreed to as the future law of nations

that in any war hereafter the following descriptions of men should be undisturbed—have the protection of both sides, and be permitted to follow their employments in security, viz.

1. Cultivators of the earth, because they labor for the subsistence of mankind.
2. Fishermen, for the same reason.
3. Merchants and Traders, in *un-armed ships*—who accommodate different nations by communicating and exchanging the necessaries and conveniences of life.
4. Artists and mechanics, inhabiting and working in open towns: It is hardly necessary to add, that the hospitals of enemies should be unmolested—they ought to be assisted. It is for the interest of humanity in general, that the occasions of war, and the inducements to it should be diminished. If rapine is abolished, one of the encouragements to war is taken away, and peace therefore more likely to continue and be lasting.

The practice of robbing merchants on the high seas, a remnant of the ancient piracy, tho it may be accidentally beneficial to particular persons, is far from being profitable to all engaged in it, or to the nation that authorizes it: In the beginning of a war some rich ships, not upon their guard, are surprized and taken—This encourages the first adventurers to fit out more armed vessels, and many others to do the same: But the enemy at the same time become more careful—arm their merchant ships better, and render them not so easy to be taken; they go also more under the protection of convoys: Thus, while the privateers to take them are multiplied, the vessels subject to be taken, and the chances of profit, are diminished, so that many cruises are made wherein the expences overgo the gains—and as it is the case in other lotteries, the particulars have got prizes, the mass of adventurers are losers, the whole expence of fitting out all the privateers during a war, being much greater than the whole amount of goods taken.

Then there is the national loss of all the labor of so many men, during the time they have been employed in robbing—who besides spend what they get in riot, drunkenness and debauchery—lose their habits of industry—are rarely fit for any sober business after a peace, and serve only to increase the number of highwaymen and house-breakers.—Even the undertakers who have been fortunate, are by sudden wealth led into expensive living, the habit of which continues, when the means of supporting it cease, and finally ruins them.—A just punishment for their having wantonly and unfeelingly ruined many honest, innocent traders and their families, whose substance was employed in serving the common interest of mankind.

B. F.

THE OBSERVER.—No. IV.

The people have suffered an immense sum by the deranged state of the national debt.

AFTER all that the public have suffered by the confusion of finance in the union and several states, it is not strange that their patience is nearly exhausted. The want of a general government hath cost millions to the people, which are now very happily shared and enjoyed among a set of people who have been very scrupulous about liberty, the collectors of the taxes you have paid, and speculators in your disordered funds.

It is time the truth should be fairly spoken to the people at large, and the Observer will do it whatever may be the consequence. Some of the same scrupulous people now wish to play over the old game, and fill you with jealousies that they may have a second harvest; but their day is past. For our own preservation it is necessary we should attend to the sources of past confusion. By the national debt I mean all those sums which the union at large, and the particular States stand obligated to pay. These sums were incurred in one common cause, our defence in the general war—it was chance and not option which fixed men's names to the list of Continental or State creditors.

The general idea is a true one, that the whole must stand or fall together, and most people had little preference to either kind of security. There is not at present any reason in equity why one class of creditors should be preferred to the other—the whole ought to stand on the same funds, and have equal justice. Soon after the war a new constitution of government was found necessary to set things right, but at that juncture the country was not sufficiently enlightened to obtain it. The consequence was, the continent without any power of creating funds, began in a desultory manner to arrange their own finances. The several States finding the weakness of the union, began to make partial arrangements for that very debt, which on every principle of justice ought

to be sustained by the whole nation. Such remedies as these, adopted by different bodies of men, and at distant places and very different times, must in their nature be different and confused.

From this source you have seen more than fifty kinds of paper securities; at one time, within the United States, differing but a small matter in value, but enough to spread confusion over the whole, and betray the honest into the hands of designing men. The people have paid enough to make the creditors contented, had it come to their hands in a regular and equal method; but in the midst of this darkness nothing has been effected. The members of the old Congress, and of your assemblies, were men of wisdom, but what could wisdom do in such different and distant bodies, which had no constitutional connection, and of course could have no general system. Matters of this kind cannot be planned in a numerous body of men, be they ever so wise. A treasury board of proper compass, systematically arranged, and furnished with information, must concert; and the legislature after proper discussions must give the authority to execute.

The first step towards order and light is to reduce the whole national debt to one kind, and one set of regulations, and unless something of this nature takes place, you have millions more to pay without coming any nearer to the desired end. It is impossible that a plain man, who is an industrious and good subject, should distinguish between so many kinds of taxes of different values. Let the whole sum of this debt be brought together—placed on common and similar funds, and regularity introduced to the business—the public will then know their situation—thirty men will do that business for the whole union which now employs thro' the several States two hundred and fifty, all of whom are supported by the people.—The creditors will understand a plain and honest plan, and be saved from a thousand impositions—taxes will be of one kind, and the man who purchases to pay them will know the price he ought to give. I can foresee there will be objections to what I advance, and some very cunning men will cry danger! danger! but I never yet saw any evil from simplifying money matters, where all the people have to pay. It is the rolling up together of a number of half made systems, which endangers the people; for they cannot see thro' them, and the man that must borrow his neighbours wits to manage his own affairs, must soon borrow money to pay his debts. The present is a fortunate moment for this country, and the only one they will ever have to simplify their treasury matters. Let one great and inclusive system for the whole be adopted, and your finances may soon be reduced to perfect order. Should the present opportunity be past and the federal system not take in the whole of your national debt, another opportunity must not be expected—confusion will continue—the poor and unsuspecting will be cheated—jealousy will pervade all orders of citizens—there will be no public faith, and your monied men will hide their property—a stable medium for business will be severely wanted—and your future agriculture, manufactures and commerce, be denied that spring which might now be given them.

P. S. In the second number of this paper, some observations were made, on the compensation, the gentlemen of Congress have voted themselves—I think the public mind must be easy on this subject, when it is understood that the pay they have taken, is not greater than was allowed by the State assemblies to the members of the old Congress—take the State of Connecticut for an example—The assembly of this State until May 1787, allowed their delegates three dollars per diem and their expences—the expences of the delegates were different and from two to four dollars per diem—probably the average of expences was three dollars, which added to the compensation for services, makes the sum now given to the Representatives. Since May 1787, the assembly of Connecticut have allowed five dollars per diem for service and expences. The allowance given by Connecticut, was much smaller than in most of the other States—I am informed that the average allowance made, by the assemblies of the thirteen States to their delegates, used to be eight dollars per diem, nearly, one fourth more than the gentlemen have allowed themselves—the members might then if they pleased, take a seat and continue under pay the whole year; now it will be but a small part of the year—then they might leave Congress when private business called them; now they are constrained by authority to be present, let their own concerns be ever so urgent—then they might and actually did hold offices of profit under their own States; now it is the popular sense they should not, and many in consequence have made a great sacrifice. These facts must justify the present compensation.

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