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THE TABLET.—No. LXIII.

"He must have a bad heart, who complains when good men are praised; and his life probably is bad, whom fear of reproach fills with anxiety."

I ENDEAVORED in my last number to shew, that panegyric might be founded in truth, as well as satire. It may now be well to make a few remarks on the advantages, both are capable of producing. Though many men suffer too severely under the lash of the satirist, still there are many bad actions prevented solely through fear of invective. The sting of ridicule is sharp and piercing. It makes people ashamed of their follies, while reproach makes them fear to be vicious. However disagreeable it may be, that an innocent man should suffer at all, or that a blameable one should meet more chastisement than he deserves, yet both these had better happen, than to take away the restraint over the conduct of men, which is imposed by a dread of satirical animadversions.

Whether more benefit results from satire than panegyric need not be enquired into, while it is evident that much good is produced by both. Perhaps nothing affords a stronger stimulus to worthy and noble actions, than the love as well as the hope of applause. Satire can only restrain men from mean and perverse actions, but encomiums have a positive influence in stimulating to a conduct that is useful and honorable. The dangers and difficulties that are often to be encountered in the execution of public service would deter men from attempting to perform it, were not their spirit of activity and enterprise sharpened by lively expectations of fame and applause. In ascribing to such motive, the most powerful effects, we shall not probably be deceived; for we frequently behold men so situated as to exclude every prospect of other compensation than the good will and praises of their fellow men. It is the more beneficial to society that this kind of recompense should always be given, when it is deserved, because it gives life and motion to many important actions, and yet costs the public little or nothing. Praise is a cheap method of purchasing meritorious and distinguished services. It gratifies those on whom it is conferred, and subjects those who confer it to no great expence or inconvenience.

The practice of shewing respect to eminent characters, by public addresses, is attended with more utility than is commonly imagined. It is not only a reward to which past merit is entitled, but it proves an active spring to a patriotic line of conduct in future. If it should so happen that in the warmth and ardor of an address, a person should have qualities ascribed to him, of which he is destitute, what mischief can result? None at all. More probably it will operate as an inducement to acquire those qualifications and virtues, for if the panegyric should not be deemed just, it reflects no real honor on the person to whom it is addressed. Other conspicuous men would likewise be inspired with an emulation to perform elevated services, that their conduct might deserve and obtain similar encomiums. Men employed in arduous undertakings have frequent occasion to be invigorated to action. The strongest motives are sometimes insufficient to press them into the hazards and hardships, which circumstances throw in their way.

It is true that men are often mistaken in their ideas of praise worthy actions, and feel a pride of character founded on false pretensions. But this is no argument against the general utility of commending such virtues and qualities as really are displayed. Men from a bad education, or from a natural perverseness of disposition may have erroneous notions of character and yet be very solicitous of applause. They deceive themselves as well as others and gain approbation where, in many instances, they deserve censure. There is however no great danger from mistakes of this kind. The public can generally form a just estimation of men, and if they are sometimes deceived, it teaches them caution in future. None of the inconveniences that artful pretenders can occasion, by imposing on the ignorant and unsuspecting, can balance the solid advantages that society derives, in bestowing liberal commendations on great and good characters.

THE CRITIC.—AN EXTRACT.

IN the strictest sense he may be called a MAN OF LETTERS, his study and capacity being nearly confined to a just orthographical disposition of the alphabet—His business is to encounter the outworks of genius, as he has no key to the gates of nature or sentiment—He snuffs faults from far as crows scent carrion, and delights to pick and to prey, and to dwell upon them.—He enters like a wasp upon the garden of literature, not to relish any fragrance, or to sate his sweets, but to pamper his malevolence with every thing that favors of rankness or offence—Happily for him, his sagacity does not tend to the discovery of merit: in such a case, a work of genius would give him the spleen for a month, or possibly deprels his spirits beyond recovery.

The ADDRESS of the Town of PORTSMOUTH, NEW-HAMPSHIRE, To GEORGE WASHINGTON, PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES of AMERICA.

SIR, SENSIBLE of the honor done them by this visit from your Excellency, the inhabitants of Portsmouth improve this first opportunity of bidding you welcome to New-Hampshire; and beg leave to mingle their warmest congratulations with those of their brethren throughout the Union upon your election to the high and important office of President of the United States.

We attempt not to recount the number, variety and merit, of your services to our common country—these are already written in indelible characters on the heart of every true American, which the faithful page of history will transmit to generations yet unborn—but to express our gratitude to him, who with a magnanimity peculiar to himself under the smiles of heaven, defended the rights and gave birth to the empire of America. Permit us to add, the grateful sense we entertain of our high obligations to you, Sir, as a town, for our security from that devastation which was the fate of many other sea port towns in the Union, and would probably have been ours, had not the enemy, by your wise and spirited exertions, been driven from the capital of a neighbouring State, and compelled to seek an asylum, for a while, within their own dominions.

Our happy escape from this calamity, while it demands our devout ascriptions of praise to the great Ruler of all events, consoles us under the many heavy losses we have sustained in our navigation and commerce during the war—the distressing effects of which we still but too sensibly feel. It is with pleasing emotions, we recognize the dispensations of divine providence towards the United States, in placing the Deliverer of his country at the head of the General Government, by the unanimous suffrages of a free and grateful people, at a crisis, when none but the man who has long enjoyed, and richly merited, the confidence of America, and the plaudits of an enlightened world, could be found equal to the arduous task.

We felicitate you, and these States, on your speedy recovery from your late sickness, and ardently wish your life may be continued a blessing to yourself, and your country, and that at some far distant period—full of years, and the most benevolent and glorious achievements—embalmed with the tears of grateful millions—you may be called to inherit an incorruptible crown in the realms of glory.

JOHN PICKERING,
for the Inhabitants.

PORTSMOUTH, NOVEMBER 2, 1789.

The ANSWER.

To the Inhabitants of the Town of PORTSMOUTH, GENTLEMEN,

I AM sensibly impressed with your friendly welcome to the metropolis of New-Hampshire—and have a grateful heart for your kind and flattering congratulations on my election to the Presidency of the United States.

I fear the fond partiality of my countrymen has too highly appreciated my past exertions, and formed too sanguine anticipations of my future services.—If the former have been successful, much of the success should be ascribed to those who laboured with me in the common cause—and the glory of the event should be given to the great Disposer of events. If an unremitting attention to the duties of my office, and the zeal of an honest heart can promote the public good, my fellow-citizens may be assured that these will not be wanting in my present station.

I can claim no particular merit, Gentlemen, for the preservation of your town from the devastation of the enemy. I am happy, if by any event of the war, your property has been preserved from that destruction which fell but too heavily on your neighbours; and I sincerely condole with you for the loss which you have sustained in navigation and commerce; but I trust that industry and economy, those fruitful and never-failing sources of private and public opulence, will, under our present system of government restore you to your former flourishing state.

The interest which you take in my personal happiness, and the kind felicitations which you express on the recovery of my health, are peculiarly grateful to me; and I earnestly pray that the great Ruler of the Universe may smile upon your honest exertions here, and reward your well-doings with future happiness.

G. WASHINGTON.

Portsmouth, Nov. 2, 1789.

THE OBSERVER.—No. V.

The manner of taxation in a number of the American States is oppressive and distressing to the poor.

IN every State a certain proportion of property must be devoted to public use, to support government and defray the expences of general preservation. The contribution designed for these ends, constitutes the national revenue, and ought to be paid by the people in proportion to their ability. Much depends on the manner of apportioning and collecting this contribution. In a very poor country, by a just system of taxation, sufficient sums to answer the public needs, may be collected without injuring any; in the richest nations on earth, small sums may be demanded in such a way as to produce almost general wretchedness. In most nations, there hath been more oppression in the manner of taxation, than by the greatness of the sums demanded. This subject, therefore deserves attention by a people, who are laying the foundations of government and happiness. The resources of this empire are immense—to call them out in a way that is equal and not oppressive to any class of citizens, is the only difficulty. My last number urged the propriety of including in one general system the whole American debt, part of which now stands charged against the Union, and part against particular States. On this plan, all will see there must be some further means of producing a revenue to the United States. In a number of instances, the manner of State taxation is oppressive to those citizens who have small property. Repeated attempts have been made in most of the States, to amend their respective systems; but with little success. To amend a defective system of finance is next to impossible, and involves more evils than it cures. The present manner of taxation is favorable to a number of opulent members in every Legislature, who, tho' they are not a majority can impede any essential alteration; and this is a serious reason, for a transfer of the State debt to the United States, who in the arrangement of a new system, may avoid the oppressive parts of State taxation. In the States, of Massachusetts and Connecticut, a Poll tax is in use. In Connecticut, considerable more than one quarter of the whole State revenue, arises from polls. I cannot say how great a proportion in Massachusetts, but believe it is not less. Art cannot contrive a more oppressive mode of drawing money from a people, than by a poll tax. The frugal and hardy living of the poor generally renders them prolific—their houses are filled with hungry sons, which with great toil they are educating more for the public, than for themselves. Before these sons are arrived to manhood, the father hath a severe poll tax to pay for them individually. You will often see a poor and industrious family, who earn their bread and their every thing by labouring at a small price per day, or by cultivating the lands of others on shares, pay a greater tax to the State than their neighbor of wealth. This is taxing industry and not property—it is making those who must do the labor, pay the expence of public protection. Were the people who inhabit these States brought together, eighteen out of twenty would vote out a poll tax; but it is so interwoven with the State systems, and so many efforts have been made in vain, that I despair of a remedy, but by a general and national arrangement, which I am certain will be on more just principles.

The poll tax is a discouragement to manufactures, which the true policy of this country ought to promote. It is rare that mechanics arrive at great riches, few of them are able to pay a tax for a large number of apprentices, and this consideration alone prevents many masters, who would otherwise have their shops filled with poor boys learning some art useful to themselves and mankind. This is a discouragement both on manufactures and on the poor.

The taxing of wild and uncultivated lands takes place in a number of the States. To tax this property which is absolutely unproductive, is attended with more evils than will be at first imagined. Few men either think it equitable, or have the means of paying an annual tribute for dead property. The old countries in the United States are so far cleared that there ought to be an encouragement for preserving wood and timber. Many who would be contented to have their interest lie without use in wild lands, not being able to discharge the taxes, have sold them. Even in the agricultural towns our forests are mostly destroyed—the poor unable to pay an advanced price, begin to suffer for fuel, and the dearth of timber and lumber will soon be severely felt by all kinds of people. This piece of State policy, by grasping at a little, for it is only a small sum which any would dare to affix on dead