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THE TABLET.

No. CVI.

The suffrage of those who are shy and backward in giving praise, is attended with an additional relish and enjoyment.

MY last number offered some remarks on the caution that should be used in the choice of confidential friends. It is of no less importance to be slow and diffident in bestowing commendations on persons or actions. There is no species of indiscretion that men oftener have occasion to repent of, than passing too hastily a judgement on the characters and incidents that are presented to their view. One inconvenience of falling into an habit of judging prematurely is, that it renders an opinion suspicious, even in those instances, where it may be well-founded. Applause, conferred by a person who speaks much and thinks little, affords no delight to a man of a sound understanding. We cannot reasonably be pleased with approbation, unless we are conscious of deserving it; and when it comes from a man who is rash and unguarded in his expressions, it does not brighten our reputation, and should not gratify our feelings. When men are cautious of giving praise, if they are likewise modest in their censures, we must ascribe it to prudence and delicacy. This kind of reserve may sometimes result from a cold heart, but whatever may be the cause of it, the person who possesses it, will command attention and respect. Prudence, by no means, requires a forbidding aspect in our manners; but it prohibits a forward, impudent one. A stern demeanor is better than a frivolous one, but both should be avoided. That mildness of behavior that makes men amiable is not incompatible with the strictest propriety of conduct, or with a most cautious reserve in giving opinions. Mirth and gaiety may be indulged; but there can be no weight of character without reflection and sobriety.

Those thoughtless men who condemn where there is no fault, and praise where there is no merit, will gain little confidence in the world. Censure as well as applause, to have any effect, must not appear to be indiscriminate. It should aim at a particular point, and be directed by just views. If to avoid a charge of ill nature a man becomes insincere, he betrays weakness; and if a desire to shew an independent spirit makes him censorious, it is perverseness. No man will wish the applause, or fear the censure of him, who is accustomed to bestow extravagant encomiums on indifferent actions, or to heap reproaches on innocent ones. Modest men are those whose praise has a charm, and whose reproof has a sting. Bold, assuming characters are never highly esteemed by any; and people only treat them with civilities to avoid the trouble of a quarrel.

I once knew a noisy, impertinent coxcomb run into extravagant applause, at the performance of a fiddler. A discreet bystander, observing such profuse compliments thrown away on so trifling a character, said, "what encomiums might not a man of real excellence expect, when a low musician is praised so lavishly?"

CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

MONDAY, MARCH 22.

Report of the Committee on the Memorials of the people called Quakers, under consideration.

MR. BOUDINOT said, altho' he most heartily approved of many of the arguments and doctrines of his hon. friend from Pennsylvania, yet he could not go all lengths with him.—He thought with him, that our time had been taken up, and great labor had been used in arguments that no wise related to the merits of the question before the committee, but he could not agree that the clause in the constitution relating to the want of power in Congress, "to prohibit the importation of such persons, as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, prior to the year 1808, and authorizing a tax or duty on such importation, not exceeding 10 dollars for each person," did not extend to negro slaves.—Candor required that he should acknowledge, that this was the express design of the constitution, and therefore Congress could not interfere in prohibiting the importation or promoting the emancipation of them prior to that period.

Mr. Boudinot observed, that he was well informed that the tax or duty of 10 dollars, was provided instead of the 5 per cent. ad valorem, and was so expressly understood by all parties in the convention. That therefore it was the interest and duty of Congress to impose this tax, or it would not be doing justice to the States, or equalizing the duties throughout the Union. If this was not done merchants might bring their whole capitals into this branch of trade, and save paying any duties whatever. Mr. Boudinot had read, and saw paying any duties whatever. Mr. Boudinot had read, and saw paying any duties whatever. Mr. Boudinot had read, and saw paying any duties whatever.

gives so different a construction to it, from what the gentlemen from the southward think right. Is it not advantageous to the southern States to have an explicit declaration calming their fears, and preventing unnecessary jealousies on this subject. Can there be any foundation for alarm, when Congress expressly declares, that they have no power of interference prior to the year 1808. But gentlemen say that they have been charged with impropriety of conduct, in discovering so much warmth and earnestness, on a subject with which their dearest interests are so intimately connected.—That all men are led by interest and they are justified in pursuing the same line of conduct.

Mr. Boudinot declared for his own part, he never blamed them for standing forth for what they conceived the true interests of their constituents—but it was the manner in which this had been done, that he complained of.

On resolutions declaring that Congress had not power to prohibit the importation of slaves into any state, or interfering in their emancipation or internal government, long arguments had been used and much precious time had been spent; to prove the lawfulness of the African trade in slaves. This indeed was an arduous task in this day of light and knowledge—an author said to be of reputation, was brought forward to prove the state of that unhappy country, but it turned out to be in the 15th century; this could be of little avail—an hour was taken up in reading the labors of a newspaper writer in the island of Jamaica. This writer appeared wholly misinformed as to historic facts relating to the miserable Africans, and as ignorant of the principal arguments against the slave trade. It was necessary for him to deny the authority of Anthony Benezet, who had published some pointed facts on this subject. Mr. Benezet was a man of the strictest integrity and of the best information—a man that was an honor to his country and an ornament to society. Mr. Boudinot had been well acquainted with him and spoke from personal knowledge; he had examined into the facts from captains of Guineamen, and a person who had lived twelve years in that country, and he could say with confidence, that Mr. Benezet's account had been generally confirmed. Not only the practice of ancient nations, and that of all modern Europe had been brought into view, but even the sacred scriptures had been quoted to justify this iniquitous traffic. It is true that the Egyptians held the Israelites in bondage for 400 years, and Mr. Boudinot doubted not, but much the same arguments as had been used on the present occasion, had been urged with great violence by the king of Egypt, whose heart, it is expressly said, had been extremely hardened, to shew why he should not consent to let the children of Israel go, who had now become absolutely necessary to him—but said he, gentlemen cannot forget the consequences that followed—they were delivered by a strong hand and stretched out arm, and it ought to be remembered that the Almighty power that accomplished their deliverance, is the same yesterday, to-day and forever. The new testament has afforded a number of texts to countenance this doctrine, in the gentleman's opinion: One would have imagined that the uniform tenor of the gospel, that breathes a spirit of love and universal philanthropy to our fellow creatures—that commands our love to our neighbor to be measured by our love to ourselves—that teaches us that whatsoever we would that men should do to us, to do so to them, would have prevented this misapplication.—Surely the hon. gentleman overlooked the prophecy of St. Peter, where he foretells, that among other damnable heresies, "Through covetousness shall they with feigned words, make merchandize of you."

A quotation from a modern author of great note in the philosophical world, has been most ungenerously made use of by the newspaper writer before referred to—I mean from the works of the famous Mr. Paley, whose treatise on moral philosophy does him the greatest credit—a single sentence or two is taken from this work, without regard to the connexion, to brand him with the charge of countenancing slavery. Mr. Boudinot then produced the book and read the passage, wherein it appeared that Mr. Paley laid down "the obligation of slavery to arise from crimes, captivity and debt.—That the slave trade on the coast of Africa is not excused by these principles. That no questions are there asked relative to the justice of the vender's title—but this is the least crime with which this traffic is chargeable.—The natives are excited to war—with this the wickedness begins.—The slaves torn away from parents, wives, children, from their friends and companions, their fields and flocks, their home and country, are transported to the European settlements in America, with no other accommodation on ship-board than what is provided for brutes. This is the 2d stage of cruelty from which they are delivered, only to be placed and that for life in subjection to a dominion and system of laws the most tyrannical that ever were tolerated upon the face of the earth. But necessity is pretended—and after all it has never been proved that it does exist.—Mr. Paley then refers to the present situation of the United States. The great revolution in the western world, says he, may probably conduce (and who knows but what it was designed) to accelerate the fall of this abominable tyranny—and now it is a season for reflecting whether a legislature which had so long lent its assistance to the support of an empire the most extensive that ever obtained in any age or quarter of the world. He then shews that slavery was a part of the civil constitution of most countries when christianity appeared; and the reason that its precepts did not expressly condemn or prohibit slavery was, because soliciting admission into all nations, it abstained from meddling with the civil institutions of any. Then follows the passage quoted by the newspaper writer.—That the discharging of slaves from all obligation to their masters, which is the consequence of pronouncing slavery unlawful, would have no better effect than to let loose one half of mankind on the other. Slaves would have been tempted to embrace a religion, which asserted their right to freedom—masters would hardly have been persuaded to consent to claims founded on such authority: the most calamitous of all contests, a bellum servile might probably have ensued to the reproach, if not the extinction of the christian name. He then asserts that emancipation should be gradual and by the provisions of laws and under the protection of civil government. Christianity can only operate as an alternative. By the mild diffusion of its lights and influence, the minds of men are insensibly prepared to perceive and correct the enormities which folly, wickedness or accident have introduced into their public establishments. Thus, proceeded Mr. Boudinot, justice is done to this worthy philosopher, and my own sentiments are more concisely and explicitly set forth than I could have done without it.

But when gentlemen attempt to justify this unnatural traffic, or to prove the lawfulness of slavery; they should advert to the genius of our government and the principles of the revolution. By the declaration of Congress in 1775, setting forth the causes and the necessity of taking up arms, they say, "If it was possible for men who exercise their reason to believe that the divine author of our existence, intended a part of the human race to hold an absolute property in, and an unbounded power over others, marked out by his infinite goodness and wisdom, as the objects of a legal do-

mination never rightfully resistable however severe and oppressive, the inhabitants of these Colonies, might at least require from the parliament of Great-Britain, some evidence that this dreadful authority over them, had been granted to that body." And by the declaration of Independence in 1776, Congress declare, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator, with certain unalienable rights: that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

This then is the language of America in the day of distress. Mr. Chairman, I would not be understood, to contend the right of Congress at this time to prohibit the importation of slaves, whatever might have been the principles of the revolution or the genius of the government; by the present constitution we are clearly and positively restrained till the year 1808, and I am sure that no gentleman in this committee would have the most distant wish to wound this instrument of our connection.

But there is a wide difference between justifying this ungenerous traffic and supporting a claim to property, vested at the time of the Constitution, and guaranteed thereby. Besides it would be inhumanity itself to turn these unhappy people loose to murder each other, or to perish for want of the necessaries of life. I never was an advocate for so extravagant a conduct.

Many arguments were pointed against the danger of our emancipating these slaves, or even holding up an idea that we had a power so to do—and much time has been taken up to disprove this right in Congress. As no claim of this kind is contended for, and, the resolutions already passed expressly contradict it. I shall make no farther observations on them.

But the characters of the signers of these memorials are called in question, as an argument against the adoption of the resolution on the table. One of these memorials was signed by the society of people called Quakers; the other by Dr. Franklin, as President of a private Society in Philadelphia. The indiscriminate abuse that has been thrown out against the Quakers without distinction, has not comported with the honor or dignity of this house. Not only their characters, but their very names have been called upon, and private anecdotes relating to individuals mentioned on the floor. Many of the Quakers I have long lived in the habits of friendship with, and can testify to the respectability of their characters and the regularity of their lives. Their conduct in the late war has been arraigned, and they have been condemned in the lump. I have known many of them during the war, and impartial justice requires it from me, to give the committee some official information on the subject; I had the honor of serving the United States at the commencement of the war, as Commissary General of Prisoners. Congress not being able to afford them supplies, those unhappy men in this town, were reduced to the very depths of distress, without food or raiment, without blankets or firing, they suffered every thing that human nature could bear. In this situation many of the Quakers of this city, exercised such humanity towards them, as did honor to human nature. The miserable prisoner, not only felt the happy effects of their exertions in his favor, but participated of their money, their food and cloathing. Nay, such were the jealousies created by this conduct in the British army here, that an armed force entered the house of one of them, seized his books, and though a man of great property and large commercial dealings, on finding that he had loaned large sums of money to our distressed prisoners, he was turned out of their lines, and with his family was a refugee during the whole of the war afterwards, separated from his business and property.

To whom was the care of our prisoners in Philadelphia committed? To a Quaker; and I have been witness to the just tribute of gratitude and thankfulness paid by great numbers of our unhappy fellow-citizens to that gentleman, for his kindness and humanity. And is this indiscriminate charge, without the least respect to characters, a decent or a just return for a conduct like this? Where is the denomination amongst us, that did not furnish offers to our glorious Revolution? Were not hundreds of Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and almost of every other denomination, among our enemies? What denominations formed the thousands of new levies, that endeavored to deluge our country in blood? On the other hand, were not a Greene and a Mifflin furnished from the society of the Quakers?

In short, I rejoice to say that our cause was not carried on by fanaticism or religious zeal, but a generous struggle for the rights of human nature. Then why all this abuse of this particular sect, without discrimination? Can any solid argument against the resolution on the table, arise from a conduct of this kind.—I am at a loss to know what other argument has been used to shew the impropriety of the resolution before you. It goes to declare the power of Congress to prohibit foreigners from fitting out vessels in our ports, to supply foreigners with slaves from Africa. For my part, I think it a prudent a humane and a constitutional resolution. It will render further interference on this subject, perhaps, unnecessary, when it is known that the power of Congress extends to remedy the evil. They will hardly venture to risk a voyage that may be ruined before its being finished.

The gentleman last up (Mr. Smith) said that it was now acknowledged, that one of the memorials had asked something contrary to the Constitution. I have never acknowledged this. The language is, that Congress would go to "the very verge of the Constitution" to accomplish the business; but there is no request to exceed it.

The character of the celebrated signer of the last memorial (Dr. Franklin) has been touched upon. The firmness of his mind has been suspected. An ingenious parable of his, has been read to the committee, but its application totally mistaken.—If the Supreme Being has borne with the unhappy subjects of our confederation, not for one hundred, but for thousands of years, in their own native land—has provided them with climate, soil, and social comforts, in which they rejoice; must we be discontented, and suppose by adding to their misery, we can add to their happiness!

On the whole, sir, I have heard nothing to convince me of the impropriety of the present resolution. I shall therefore vote against striking it out.

Several other ingenious speeches were delivered on the subject of the slave trade; we have given the longest on each side—the publication of the others is suspended for the present, to admit the interesting debates on the assumption of the State debts which have taken place in consequence of the recommitment of that proposition.

TUESDAY, MARCH, 30.

The House resolved itself into a committee of the whole to reconsider the propositions that had been committed.

Mr. Livermore in the chair.

The proposition for assuming the state debts, was then read by the chairman.