

Capt. John Rogers

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## THE TABLET.

No. CVIII.

THE Editor accidentally met with the following Essay, and thinks the remarks are of such a nature as deserve publication.

### FOR THE TABLET.

"There are certain situations where supposed evils are productive of much good."

A National debt attaches many citizens to the government, who, by their numbers, wealth and influence, contribute more perhaps to its preservation than a body of soldiers. This observation has been made by every one. A national debt not only prolongs the existence of the form of government; but it has a direct tendency to produce a wise and just administration of it: This effect is not equally obvious. Every measure tending to public good adds something to the security of the debt. It is for the advantage of the creditors to have that public, which is their debtor, become rich. The same reason applies to the revenue laws. The creditors will wish to bring into the treasury the most money with the least possible burden, or even disgust to the people. This is equally true of the public expences. This body of men will see the public money squandered with pain and apprehension. Their influence will be exerted in support of a system of frugality. It seems to be manifest that the creditors will desire to see the public good promoted, and of course will dread an oppressive and prodigal administration. It only remains to calculate the influence that this body of men will have, first, upon the public opinion, and next upon the government itself. In this country, they are powerful by their numbers; by their property; by their patriotism; for it was that which made great numbers of them public creditors. They are justly denominated by the Secretary "enlightened men." Their dispersed situation enables them to give a strong impulse to the public mind in different parts of the country at the same instant. Interest will wake when patriotism sleeps. As these persons have a common interest, and that corresponds with the general interest of the society, self love is combined with the love of our country. They become watchmen, and continue such, when other citizens, less interested, relax their attention to public affairs for the sake of their private concerns. Much has been said in favour of republican jealousy. The creditors can never have an interest against liberty—for tyranny and public credit cannot exist together. Heaven grant that the union and the public liberty may last forever. If any expedient within the reach of human wisdom can preserve those blessings, it is the unchanging interest, which a powerful body of the best and wisest citizens will have in their safe keeping—who cannot neglect, and who will not betray the trust—whom government cannot do without, and who cannot do without government.

Rome fell, an almost unresisting pray to a despot—why? Roman liberty, as it was misnamed, was a burden to every body, except to a few who called their right to oppress all others, liberty—being made alternately the instrument and victim of tyranny, the weary world found even despotism, a pillow of repose. But if the best citizens in Rome and in the provinces had really enjoyed freedom, and their property had depended on the security of the government, they would have abhorred any change, and most of all a change from liberty to tyranny. Cæsar would have been watched and obliged to seek fame in the Senate, or in the field, under their orders.

### FOR THE GAZETTE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MR. FENNO,

BY examples we are constantly taught, that of all the subjects which engross any share of our attention, there are few on which we can reason with so little certainty as on the contingent events involved in every political system; or in the whole train of human affairs, any, in which we are found to deduce such wrong conclusions, or where we meet with greater disappointments in the expectations we may have formed. In the common occurrences of life, our judgment assisted by experience is generally a competent guide in conducting us to the objects we have in view; but the politician finds himself in a great measure without this advantage, and is often obliged to consider in measures warranted only by presumption, while he is frequently mortified in perceiving the

result of such plans as he thought were conceived in wisdom and executed with prudence, prove the reverse of all he had proposed to himself.

I was led to these reflections by a view of the present state of public affairs in this country, which appear so essentially to contradict the pleasing reveries of the Philosopher, and the sanguine hopes of the well-meaning politician. I will not attempt to delineate the dark picture which we a short time since presented to the view of the world—the painful traces of that situation are not yet effaced from the reflecting mind—I will only revert to the dawn of that day when America appeared ushering with majestic splendor thro the dark clouds which had so long enveloped her political hemisphere—I will just recal to memory that æra so honorable in the annals of mankind which gave to her a form of government, not the offspring of violence, but the result of calm and mature deliberation, directed by a view to the general good—and to that still more glorious epoch when the hand which had so ably guided us thro a long and perilous war, was called forth to distribute the blessings of Peace, Liberty, and Independence—Enchanting Prospect! The irradiating beams of pleasure broke on us with a lustre almost too dazzling—the Western wilds of America resounded in echoing her future glory—and the peaceful waters of the lakes arose into billows swelled by the general joy.

The happy unanimity and liberal policy which marked the proceedings of the first session of Congress were calculated to confirm the most flattering anticipation. The second was opened by a speech from the head of the nation, pure as the fountain from which it issued, and urging in the most expressive language an early and earnest attention to such measures as would tend to establish public credit on an immovable basis, and restore to this country that respectability she had lost in her former weak and confused councils—To this end and in conformity to a prior vote of government, the Secretary of the Treasury reported a funding system, stamped with the capacity of its author, and constructed on those great national principles which will alone lead us to national honor—but alas, every feature of this fair portrait, has been wantonly distorted, or lays in broken pieces at the several shrines of ambition, avarice, and vanity—and the pride of gaining a party at home, or of leading one here, is found paramount to a generous passion for advancing the public good, which is only seen to arise in the smoke of the incense, burnt at the altars of State policies.—Sad defalcations indeed in the aspiring hopes entertained from the late political revolution in this country! The failure of public measures is not only to be attributed to the incapacity of rulers, but to the passions of ambition and resentment, which are seldom under control in men vested with power, and where the degree of responsibility cannot by any human contrivance be made adequate to the confidence reposed.

It is from the misapplication and perversion of great talents we have every thing to fear—those splendid abilities which are founded and intended by providence to exalt national fame and promote public happiness, operate in a contrary direction when abused; and instead of procuring honor, wealth and security to society, they involve in disgrace and entail misery and disorder on future generations.

It is to be hoped that the great NECKER, of America, with all that superiority which belongs to a cool and determined mind, will be found proof against the barbed shafts of envy and interested ambition, and eventually triumph over both, in his noble pursuit of the public welfare.

The free use of the press is the birth-right of an American, which he will not consent to dispose of for a mefs of pottage; it is the fan which kindled that spark of liberty in this country, which is fast spreading over all Europe, and bids fair to illuminate the whole world.

AMERICANUS.

## CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

TUESDAY, MARCH 30.

The proposition for assuming the state debts under consideration.

MR. WILLIAMSON observed that on a subject which had been handled by gentlemen of great information and abilities, he could not expect to offer new arguments, but as he had not heard the arguments hitherto advanced, and as he differed very much from the opinion of the late committee, it was a duty he owed to himself, to the State he had the honor to represent, and to the nation at large, to give some reasons why he conceived that the debts of the several States ought not to be assumed.—He observed that the national debt had been stated at 54 millions of dol-

lars, the interest of that sum is 3,240,000 dollars. The debts of the individual States had been stated at 25 millions, he believed a few millions might be added to that amount, for he knew that many citizens of North-Carolina had good claims against the State or the union not hitherto settled, and the State had instructed its delegates to obtain a longer time for exhibiting claims against the United States.—He believed the citizens of Virginia had also many claims to exhibit, and when he considered the present claims of North-Carolina, were 6 or 7 millions of dollars; he thought it not improbable that the amount of the debts might be near 30 millions.—He would call it for the present 25; The interest of that sum is one million and a half. He thought that an annual tax of 3,240,000 dollars, a burthen sufficient for the present abilities of the nation; he did not comprehend the new theory, viz. that a great burthen is more easily carried by making it greater; he heartily wished a safe voyage to the political vessel, but he had some apprehensions that with the proposed cargo she may sink at her anchors—He knew that the proposed tax is small when we consider the number of our fellow-citizens, and compare it with the numbers in several kingdoms and the taxes paid by them; but the facility of raising taxes by imposts and excises, is according to the number of inhabitants in any given space.

In the city of Paris, where a vast body of people are collected within a small space, the inhabitants are supported by one species of tax and another to pay 64 livres per head; in other parts of that kingdom it has been found difficult to collect 19 livres per head from the subjects, though France is well peopled and contains many considerable cities.

If three times as much could be collected in the city of Paris by imposts duties and excises as in the other parts of France, he conceived that very small sums might be expected to arise in America from excises, and our imposts would decrease in proportion as the industry and necessities of the people increase—He admitted that direct taxes, as a land-tax or a poll-tax may be collected with some degree of certainty, but he wished never to see direct taxes imposed by the national government.

They are dangerous because they have been the means of cruel oppression; the Romans had never been completely miserable till one of their emperors had the address to introduce a capitation tax; he observed that his fellow-citizens in North-Carolina were not in general rich, few of them were so provident as to lay up money; for this reason while he was entrusted with their concerns he should oppose every measure that looked towards direct taxation, he wished never to see the day, when to satisfy a land tax, or a capitation tax, a poor man's cow or horse might be taken from him on which he depended for the support of helpless children. Let the State debts be once assumed and you must proceed; if your calculations are bad, and they are nothing more than pure conjecture, if they are bad, and the impost and excise does not come up to your expectations, the national honor must be preserved, the debt is yours and must be paid, let the means be ever so hard. It will doubtless be observed that the interest of the State debts, must be paid either by the several States or by the union, and it is indifferent to the people under what name they make the payments, this argument he alleged was extremely fallacious, for after the national legislature has imposed such taxes as might become general, the State legislatures may with great ease, and in some cases with great advantage to the citizens, impose other taxes. The produce of the states is different; the inhabitants have different modes of living, and there is a difference even in their vices; wherefore different taxes might be proper; such taxes might be useful to correct vices or restrain habits that should not be indulged; it will certainly be granted that the legislature of the state in many cases can best accommodate the burthen to the strength and feelings of the citizens. It had hitherto been considered that the states owed certain duties, and that they had a certain quota of services to perform. From the particular policy of some of the states, their debts had depreciated greatly, certificates had been sold at 2s. 6d. in the pound, people would not readily be reconciled to the new creed, "that all the debts lately paid, are state debts, but all the debts not paid, are national debts," especially as this discovery is made after most of the certificates have changed their original holders, and have passed for a trifle into the hands of moneyed men. Cæsar's wife should not only be chaste, but without suspicion—He conceived that a national legislature should be extremely cautious how they adopted new measures, especially if there was a single hook to which the suspicion of personal interest might be attached.

The situation of North-Carolina he alleged was somewhat different from that of her sister states; commissioners had on sundry occasions issued continental securities to the citizens of the several states, independent of the army certificates, to the amount of 4,892,000 dollars; of this sum about 8,000 dollars had been issued to the citizens of North-Carolina—the citizens of that state have hardly any continental securities, because the state by one accident or another has been obliged to assume the payment of the continental debts; she has assumed debts to the amount of 6 or 7,000,000 dollars. In what manner are the citizens to be rewarded for all their labors and supplies. He prayed the committee would attend to the operation of this new system; other states since the peace have laid taxes to raise money for paying interest, and that interest has been returned into the hands of their own citizens. North-Carolina has imposed heavy taxes for sinking certificates, being part of the principal of the public debt; the citizen has drawn no relief from those taxes, and to crown his misfortunes he is not to get a credit for the certificates sunk. The state has also issued paper money to the amount of 200,000, that is to say, half a million of dollars; some of this money has been applied towards paying the late continental line of the army, and some of it has been employed in buying up public securities; the securities are in the treasury, but the paper money is in circulation; our citizens are to be taxed for sinking this money, and we are not allowed a discount for the certificates which are purchased by the money; will not this be a double tax? we are required to pay our proportion towards the interest of other people's certificates—we must at the same time pay taxes towards sinking our paper money, which is another species of certificates; but we are not to be relieved in the mean time by discounting the interest of the certificates we have taken up. Patience itself would complain of such injustice. Perhaps we shall be told that the double tax may be inconvenient but we shall be repaid on some future occasion; we shall get a credit when the accounts of all the states are settled and the quotas of the several states are fixed; in other words we may expect justice at the day of judgment. He prayed it might be observed that the accounts were not in a train to be settled; that they could not possibly be settled under any existing law, and Congress had not taken a single step from which he could believe that they intended to make any settlement; the original rule for fixing the quotas of the several states, "according to the value of lands and their improvements," had long since been given up as impracticable; Congress had substituted no other rule in its place, if they were seriously disposed to settle the accounts of the several states, and to render some measure of justice to the most deserving, the necessary steps were obvious. In