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THE TABLET.—No. CXXVII.

(CONTINUATION.)

“The multitude, in all countries, are patient to a certain point.”

GOVERNMENT can never be so far reduced to a science, as to render it proper for Legislators to act, on all occasions, by general principles. Some particular cases may be involved in such singular circumstances, that natural sagacity becomes a better guide than principles or precedents. And it will frequently be a point of great delicacy with a legislator to determine, how far his conduct should be controlled by the public opinion. It is apt to be supposed that the sentiments of a free, enlightened people, are seldom founded in error. This idea must be a little qualified, before it can be adopted as one of those specific maxims which rest on immutable truth. I will dilate briefly upon the subject, and leave the reader to form such a result as his own reflections may dictate.

The general sense of the community is always too solemn to be trifled with; and it is often too powerful to be resisted. But this solemnity and force can only prevail in situations of a very momentous nature. Most questions that are discussed are not obvious or interesting enough to affect the touch of the great bulk of mankind. If a legislature happen to pass laws contrary to natural justice, or illy accommodated to the adventitious state of the people, they will probably excite uneasiness, and ought to be repealed. In times of great disorder, the current prejudices of the day may be favorable to laws that are capricious or unjust; but the operation of such laws will soon become unpopular. So on the other hand, in a disturbed irregular state of society, a temper of opposition, in the public mind, against a just and honorable mode of procedure, will imperceptibly give way to the progress of justice and good order. There is a right and wrong in the nature of things; and it will be found that popular prejudice will not long support the one, or resist the other. Society must dissolve itself when the people can be drawn into a serious opposition to measures founded in wisdom and rectitude. The complaints therefore of discontented men should never divert public rulers from such pursuits as are in themselves honest and prudent. Though some people may murmur, the great mass of the community will obey.

The multitude, in all countries, are patient to a certain point. They will generally bear, as much as ought to be borne by human nature, before they refuse obedience, and fly to wars and insurrections for relief. There are few or no revolts where the error has been principally on the side of the oppressed. Perhaps some circumstances of disrespect or provocation may attend the opposition, but the fundamental maxims of a revolting people will gain advocates in proportion as they are discussed. Clamors and suspicions may originate in trifles, and often deserve no notice.—But deliberate disaffection among the mass of the people, must be redressed by the government, or it will redress itself.

To cherish the caprice of an individual, or community, is a ready way to incur ill will and contempt. Opinions that have no reasonable foundation will be transitory. They may safely be disputed and moderately opposed. There can never be any danger in bringing them into public examination. Nothing tries the merit of public regulations better than to bring them to the test of an experiment. If they shrink from the trial, it is an evidence that they contain some false materials; but still the clamor excited against a measure under contemplation is no sufficient proof, that it will not turn out favorable in the experiment. There is an essential difference in the sentiments of any people relative to a law, before and after it is put into execution. While a law is in agitation, a thousand feelings and prejudices may give it too bad or too good a coloring; but when it takes effect, it begins to be examined among the people, more upon the ground of its own merit, and will finally stand or fall, as its real character deserves. The chief enquiry a legislator should make, is, what the real interests of the community require of him. Having ascertained this point, he will do well to enquire whether the popular opinion will probably sanction the plans he is about to adopt. If he finds the current of prejudice against him, he will, by degrees, be able to reconcile the feelings of the

people to their true interests. It is a matter of a good deal of discretion to counteract errors that may exist in society, against the public good; but the difficulty of the task will never deter a firm and virtuous legislator from making attempts. Moderation is compatible with firmness, and he will not, if he be a prudent man, defeat his purpose by rashness, any more than he will lose it by delay. Discretion is as much a public virtue as honesty or patriotism; but it can never be direct to flatter people in their prejudices and faults, when it would promote their prosperity to lay them aside.

TRANSLATED
FOR THE GAZETTE OF THE UNITED STATES.

ADDRESS of the NATIONAL ASSEMBLY to the
PEOPLE of FRANCE.

FEBRUARY 11th, 1790.

(CONTINUED.)

SUCH is our work, people of France, or rather such is yours; for we are but your organs, it is you who have enlightened, encouraged and supported us in our labors. What period can be compared with the present? What an honorable inheritance you are about transmitting to posterity! Raised to the rank of citizens, admissible to every employment, enlightened censors of the administration! Although you are not the depositaries, you are certain that every thing is done through you, and for you, who are equal in the sight of the law; free to act, to speak, to write, accountable to no man, but only to the common will. What condition can be fairer? Can there be a citizen, deserving that name, who dares cast a look behind, who would wish to dig up the ruins with which we are surrounded, to rebuild the former edifice?

But what has not been said? What has not been done to weaken in you the impression which so much good ought to produce? *We have destroyed everything, they say: that means, that every thing ought to be reestablished.* And what is there to be regretted? Would you wish to know? of all the objects that have been reformed or destroyed, let such persons be interrogated, as are not interested; let even the candid opinion of such as are interested be required; only except such, as to enhance the afflictions of personal interest, commiserate at this hour, the fate of those who at other times were indifferent to them; and we shall see whether the reform of each of these objects does not comprehend the general wishes of the public.

We have acted with too great precipitation; and many others reproach us with having acted too slowly. With too much precipitation! Are they ignorant that it is only by attacking and overturning abuses all at once, that we may hope to see ourselves effectually delivered; that then and then only, every person finds himself interested in the establishment of order; that slow and partial reforms have always ended in reforming nothing; in short, that the abuses which are preserved, become the prop, and shortly the restorer of such as were supposed to be destroyed?

“Our Assemblies are tumultuous.” To what purpose this complaint, provided the decrees issued by them are wise? We are however, far from wishing to present to your admiration, the detail of all our debates. We have more than once been afflicted by them ourselves; but we have at the same time perceived that it was too unjust to endeavour to take the advantage of them; and after all, this impetuosity was the almost inevitable effect of the first engagement that ever perhaps took place between principles and errors.

We are accused with having *aspired after a chimerical perfection.* Foolish reproach! Which is plainly but a thin disguised wish to perpetuate abuses.—The National Assembly has never attended to such servile interested & pusillanimous motives: It has had the courage or rather the reason to believe, that useful ideas, necessary to mankind, were not necessarily destined to adorn the pages of a book; and that the supreme Being, by giving *perfectibility* to man, the particular attribute of his nature, did not prohibit him from applying it to SOCIAL ORDER, which has become the most universal of his interests, and almost the first of his wants.

Is it possible, they say to regenerate an old and corrupted nation. Let them learn, that none are corrupted but such as wish to perpetuate corrupt abuses; and that a nation will renovate, the day

it resolves to renew its liberty. Mark the rising generation; whose hearts already palpitate with joy and hope! How pure, noble, and patriotic are its sentiments! With what an enthusiasm do we observe it endeavouring to have the honor of being admitted to take the citizens oath! But why answer such a miserable reproach! Shall the National Assembly be reduced to excuse itself for not having despaired of the French people?

Nothing has yet been done for the people, they have dared to say—And yet it is the people's cause which every where triumphs. Nothing done for the people! And does not every abuse which has been destroyed, prepare or secure consolation for them? They did not complain—because the excess of their misfortunes stifled their complaints. At this time they are unhappy. Say rather they are still unhappy. But they shall not long be so; we pledge our oaths for it.

(To be continued.)

CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.
TUESDAY, JUNE 21.

Mr. GERRY's motion on the assumption of the State debts, which reads inserted in this paper of the 26th, under consideration

Mr. AMES:

I AM obliged to obtrude my sentiments upon the committee, under circumstances which still the hope of procuring for them a welcome reception. The curiosity of the assembly in the first stages of a public debate, will procure some indulgence and administer considerable aid to him who has to support a part in it.—But this subject has been debated till it has become tedious; there is very little remaining to be said which can excite curiosity, or reward attention. The feelings of the committee will procure me belief when I say, that I obey the duty of attempting to obviate the objections which have been urged by the gentleman from Virginia, and which I think is imposed upon me by the nature of some of them, with an unaffected reluctance. I will hope, however, that a candid concession to the necessity of my situation, and a sense of public duty, will overcome, or suspend for a time, the disgust which has attended the revival of this debate.

The zeal of the gentlemen, on both sides, has led them to draw aid to their cause from very remote sources. But all the objections against the assumption may be comprised in these two—that the measure is against justice, and against policy. Both sides of the question have been maintained with an uncommon warmth of conviction—in candor, and probably in strict truth, this ought to be mutually understood as the evidence of a sincere zeal for the public good.

To evince the justice of the assumption, I take, as the ground of my reasoning, a proposition which is admitted on both sides; that the expences of the war ought to be made a common charge upon the United States.

It will illustrate my argument, to observe, that this war was between this country and Britain, and not a war of particular States.—All America, Congress in their resolves, the act appointing commissioners to settle the accounts, the late amendment (Mr. Madison's) to the proposition for assuming the State debts, and the objections to that proposition corroborate the idea that the expences of the war ought to be equalized. Assume the debts, and settle the accounts, and this is effected. There is an end to the inequality as soon as this is done.—This answer is so plain and conclusive, that it is attempted to take off its force by saying, that the accounts will not be settled. If this assertion is true, the non-assumption is plainly unjust.—For the burden is confessedly unequal now, and the only reason for refusing to take this burden off some of the States, is the certain assurance that they will be relieved from so much as shall be found to exceed their share, when the accounts shall be settled. But if the accounts are not to be settled at all, the States, which are now overloaded, have no justice to expect but from the assumption. It cannot be known with certainty which will be a creditor, or which a debtor State, at present. If the accounts should not be adjusted, we must remain in ignorance; we ought therefore to exclude all consideration of the other claims, because it would be useless, and apply the principal of equality to the State debts.—The debts to be assumed are either duly proportioned among the States, or they are not. If they are so proportioned, then it is certainly politic, and not unjust, because it would be equal to assume them. If they are now unduly proportioned, it is even in terms against equality to leave them upon the States.

If the war has made a random distribution of debts upon the States, it is best to make the amount which is to be left unsettled, as little as may be. For the probability is, that as you diminish the unsettled amounts, you make the inequalities less. This will serve as an answer to those also who say, that supposing a settlement to take place two or three years hence, a State may be relieved from a light burden of its own debt, and be obliged to bear, as its proportion of the assumed debt, one more weighty. For it is not certain that it will have in that case more to bear than its part, and if it should turn out to be more, the balance may be known almost as soon as the interest will commence.—The assertion that the accounts will not be settled, has been made with confidence. To judge how far we ought to guide our conduct by it, it is enough to examine what States it comes from. Let the gentlemen who make it ask their own hearts, let them look round and ask one another, whether their States are the more clamorous for their dues, or apprehensive of a settlement, which will expose their delinquency. In this place, where facts are known, this question will be an argument.

But what ground is there for saying that the accounts will not be adjusted? This was positively engaged by the former government. It is improper for Congress to act as if Congress was not to be trusted. Commissioners are employed in the business? A motion to extend their time and powers has met with no opposition, and it is maturing into a law. Who will oppose it? Not New-England! we wish it—we have pledged ourselves to support it; you ought to believe us, when it is so easy to bring us to the test. I have myself moved resolutions—the best I could devise—which I thought would facilitate—would force a settlement. I