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[A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America. By JOHN ADAMS, LL.D. and a Member of the Academy of Arts and Sciences at Boston.]

THE American revolution has produced many theories and speculations on government and politics. Legislators have started up in every part of Europe and America who wished to give laws to the new world, and to change the chaos of American anarchy into a regular and orderly system. It is much to be doubted, however, whether speculative politicians are fit to direct the affairs of men, or the lucubrations of the closet to form the model of public life. The most chimerical systems of legislation have been adopted and recommended by men of uncommon genius and extensive learning. The dreams and visions of Plato and Sir Thomas More, and even of Milton and Locke, are, in many parts, as wild and eccentric as the ravings of Bedlam. A philosopher may make successful experiments on air and electricity, may excel in algebraical calculations, may wander in the mazes of metaphysics, without being bewildered; nay, he may defend the principles of liberty and the rights of mankind with great abilities and much success; and, after all, when called upon to produce a plan of legislation, he may astonish the world with the aberrations of intellect and the vagaries of fancy. Mr. Locke, in 1663, was employed to compose a code of legislation for Carolina; with one stroke of his pen he committed the whole authority, legislative and executive, to the eight proprietors of the province. By this new oligarchical sovereignty he created at once three orders of nobility; barons with twelve thousand acres of land; caciques with twenty-four thousand; and landgraves with eighty thousand. Subjects were wanting to this ill-modelled government, the colony decayed, and the system of the philosopher perished in its absurdity.

Three writers in Europe, of abilities and reputation, M. Turgot, the Abbe de Mably, and Dr. Price, have turned their attention to the political constitutions of the United States of America, and have published to the world their speculations and their criticisms. Notwithstanding the pure intentions of the authors, the experience in public affairs acquired by one of them*, and the ample information concerning the nature of man and the science of government possessed by all, many sentiments occur in their works which it will be difficult to reconcile to reason, experience, the constitution of human nature, and the first principles of policy adopted by all enlightened nations, whether ancient or modern. M. Turgot in his letter to Dr. Price, acknowledges "that he is not satisfied with the constitutions that have hitherto been formed for the different States of America." He observes "that, by most of them, the customs of England have been imitated, without any particular motive. Instead of collecting all authority into one centre, that of the nation, they have established different bodies; a body of representatives, a council, and a governor; because there is in England a house of commons, a house of lords, and a king. They endeavor to balance these different powers, as if this equilibrium, which in England may be a necessary check to the enormous influence of royalty, could be of any use in republics founded upon the equality of all the citizens; and as if establishing different orders of men was not a source of divisions and disputes."

From the commencement of the revolution in America there has been a party in every State which entertained sentiments similar to those of M. Turgot. Two or three of them have established governments upon his principle; and proposals have been made in several States of America to depose the governor and senate as useless and expensive branches of the Constitution. As the opinion of M. Turgot contributed to excite these discontents among the people, Mr. Adams held it a political and moral duty to examine his theory at great length; to call the experience of past ages to enlighten the present; and, from a wide and extended view of human affairs, to mark and ascertain those principles of legislation and government which give order, success, stability, and duration to political establishments and to civil society. The subject is certainly one of the most interesting that can engage the speculation

or prompt the decision of men. What combination of powers in society, or what form of government, is most likely to secure the establishment, and the impartial execution, of good and equal laws, so that the citizens may enjoy the benefit of them, and confide in their perpetuity, is an inquiry that equally concerns the philosopher and the citizen; for, whether the end of man, in this stage of existence, be enjoyment or improvement, or both, it can never be attained so well in a bad government as a good one.

The great and leading idea which runs through the ingenious and learned work of Mr. Adams is, that a mixture of the three powers, the regal, the aristocratical, and the democratical, properly balanced, composes the most perfect form of government, and secures the greatest degree of happiness to the greatest number of individuals.— This policy, indeed, appears to be the institution of nature. Vitruvius discovered the rudiments of architecture in the construction of a rustic cabin; and the historian or philosopher may trace the origin of the three powers in political society, in the rude governments of savage tribes. Every nation in North-America has a king, a senate, and an assembly of the people. The royal office is elective, but it is for life; the sachems form the ordinary council, in which all the national affairs are deliberated and discussed; but, on great occasions, such as declaring war, the king and sachems convoke a national assembly, and, after a solemn sacrifice, communicate their resolution to the people. Those who approve of the war, partake the sacrifice, throw the hatchet into a tree, after the example of the king, and join in the subsequent war-songs and dances, as a mark of their concurrence with the expedition. A similar form of policy prevailed among the ancient Greeks. "It is easy to observe from Homer," says Aristotle, "that the ancient governments of Greece were limited; the king proposed to the assembly of the people what beforehand had been concerted and resolved in the council of the chiefs." The political institutions of our German ancestors were formed on the same principle. "De minoribus rebus," says Tacitus, "principes consultant, de majoribus omnes; ita tamen ut ea quoque, quorum penes plebem arbitrium est, apud principes prætractentur."

Among the ancients, the same Tacitus extols the form of government in which there is a chief or leader, a senate, and a popular assembly, tho he doubts of its practicability and duration.— "Cunctas nationes, et urbes, populus aut priores, aut singuli, regunt. Delecta ex his et constituta reipublice forma, laudari facilius quam inveniri; vel si evenit, haud diuturna esse potest." Cicero is decided in giving the same preference: "Statuo esse optime constitutam reipublicam, quae ex tribus generibus illis, regali, optimo et populari, modice confusa." Polybius and Dionysius of Halicarnassus give their testimony to the same doctrine, and affirm that the most perfect form of government is that which consists of an equal mixture of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy.

The observation of M. Turgot, that "the customs of England are imitated in most of the new constitutions in America, without any particular motive," is shewn by Mr. Adams to be without foundation. Supposing that the English customs were merely indifferent, the people by their birth, education, and habits, were familiarly attached to them; and this surely was a particular motive for their preservation, rather than endanger the public tranquility or unanimity by renouncing them. A division of power was adopted by the states, consisting of a body of representatives, a council, and a governor, not because the legislature in England consisted of three branches, a house of commons, a house of lords, and a king, but because their own assemblies had been so constituted from time immemorial; and besides their attachment from habit, the conclusions of reason led them to the conviction that it was founded in nature, and conducive to public good.

* Some citations read "prætractentur," which loses the idea of Tacitus altogether. + Annal. lib. iv. † Cicero. Fragm. de Republica. (To be continued.)

LONDON.

ACCOUNT of the late Mr. JOHN LEDYARD, a CELEBRATED TRAVELLER.

MR. LEDYARD was an American by birth, and seemed from his youth to have felt an invincible desire to make himself acquainted with

unknown or imperfectly discovered regions of the globe. For several years he had lived with the Indians of America, had studied their manners and had practised in their school the means of obtaining their protection, and of recommending himself to the favour of savages. In the humble situation of corporal of marines, to which he submitted rather than relinquish his pursuit, he had made with Captain Cook the voyage round the world, and feeling on his return an anxious desire of penetrating from the North-western coast, which Cook had partly explored, to the eastern coast with which he himself was perfectly familiar, he determined to traverse the vast continent from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean. His first plan for the purpose was that of embarking in a vessel which was prepared to sail on a voyage of commercial adventure to Nootka Sound; on the western coast of America; and in this view he expended in sea stores the greatest part of the money which his chief benefactor Sir Joseph Banks, (whose generous conduct the writer of this narrative has often heard him acknowledge) had liberally supplied. But the scheme being frustrated by the rapacity of a custom house officer, who had seized and detained the vessel for reasons which on legal enquiry, proved to be frivolous, he determined to travel over land to Kamschatka, from whence the passage to the western coast of America is extremely short. With not more than ten guineas in his purse, which was all that he had left, he crossed the British Channel to Ostend, and by that of Denmark and the Sound proceed to the capital of Sweden; from whence as it was winter, he attempted to traverse the Gulph of Bothnia on the ice, in order to reach Kamschatka by the shortest way; but finding when he came to the middle of the sea that the water was not frozen, he returned to Stockholm, and taking his course northward, walked into the Arctic circle, and passing round the head of the Gulph, descended on its eastern side to Petersburg.

There he was soon noticed as an extraordinary man. Without stockings or shoes, and too much poverty to provide himself with either, he received and accepted an invitation to dine with the Portuguese Ambassador. To this invitation it was probably owing that he was able to obtain the sum of twenty guineas for a bill on Sir Joseph Banks, which he confessed he had no authority to draw, but which, in consideration of the business that he had undertaken, and of the progress that he made, Sir Joseph, he believed, would not be unwilling to pay. To the Ambassador's interest it might also be owing that he obtained permission to accompany a detachment of stores which the Empress had ordered to be sent to Yakutz, for the use of Mr. Billings, an Englishman at that time in her service.

Thus accomodated he travelled eastward through Siberia 6000 miles to Yakutz, where he was kindly received by Mr. Billings, whom he remembered on board Capt. Cook's ship in the situation of Astronomer's servant, but to whom the Empress had now entrusted the scheme of northern discovery.

From Yakutz he proceeded to Oczackow, on the coast of the Kamschatka sea; from whence he meant to have passed over to that peninsula, and to have embarked on the eastern side in one of the Russian vessels, that trade to the western shores of America; but finding that the navigation was completely obstructed by the ice, he returned again to Yakutz, in order to wait the conclusion of the winter.

Such was his situation, when, in consequence of suspicions not hitherto explained, or resentments for which no reason is assigned, he was seized in the Empress's name, by two Russian soldiers, who placed him in a sledge, and conveying him in the depth of winter through the deserts of the northern Tartary, left him at last on the frontiers of the Polish dominions. As they parted, they told him that if he returned to Russia he would certainly be hanged; but if he chose to go back to England, they wished him a pleasant journey.

In the midst of poverty, covered with rags, invested with the usual accompaniment of such cloathing, worn with continual hardship, exhausted by disease, without friends, without credit, unknown, and full of misery, he found his way to Konigsburg. There, in the hour of his utmost distress, he resolved once more to have recourse to his old benefactor; and he luckily

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