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The TABLET.—No. 155.

"A renown, acquired by error, is a phantom of glory, that is driven away by the first rays of truth and reason."

SO strong a passion, as the love of fame, when flowing in a direction, which virtue does not dictate, and which discretion does not control, must become a fruitful source of anxiety, delusion and mischief. To whatever age or country we turn our attention, we find that no small share of the vices and miseries, with which society is disgraced or tormented, owe their origin to a misdirected ambition. And yet without the forcible impulses of this passion, men would sink into insignificance and depravity; the elevated pursuits of life would be suspended; and hardly a glimpse of science or virtue would shine over the face of the earth. As the propensity, of which I am speaking, exists more or less in every human being, and as it cannot be extinguished without eradicating the germe, from which springs an immense variety of useful and noble productions, we should nourish it with care, and shape its windings with vigilance and skill. From a neglect of a proper cultivation, the sprouts take an ill course, are choked with weeds, and bear a fruit that is useless and deformed. Remarks, like these, however common and familiar they may be, can often be repeated with some degree of utility; because the most obvious truths are generally the most interesting; and it is rather to awaken the attention, than to afford instruction, that essays, similar to this, are put into circulation. If any person should complain that the sentiments offered to his perusal are trite or dull, he should be told that this is of itself a reason why they deserve his inspection and regard.—Those maxims, which carry with them the sanction of ages, acquire a solidity and value which are apt to be overlooked, merely because they cease to be new and striking. It is not the novelty of ideas, so much as their intrinsic propriety, that gives them a claim to be embraced and carried into practice. Under this impression, I have ventured to introduce this speculation, tho' at the same time I do not believe the reader will confess he collects one new idea from it.

Perhaps no circumstance has contributed so essentially to the final prosperity of the United States, as the just sentiments our leading characters have entertained on the score of reputation. The ambition of our most distinguished men has, in most instances, been well-directed: It has co-operated with the suitable means to promote the public prosperity. There are some exceptions; but the art and management, requisite to preserve a character made of false materials, prove that it is too difficult a task to meet with general success. Most of those men who have come forward into public view, through any other medium than that of virtue and talents, have been sent back to the shades of obscurity, from which no new stratagem can give them an elevation.

It will be natural to ask, how it has happened that the affairs of the United States have been so generally managed by deserving characters, while in other countries promotion has flowed from favor and intrigue, or some cause extrinsic from the merit of the candidates? The remark in my motto, furnishes a satisfactory solution to the question. In this country the information of the people is competent to investigate the pretensions of those who solicit public honors. There probably never was, nor will be, a race of enlightened men so depraved as to prefer ignorant and vicious magistrates to those of knowledge and probity. When a person becomes conspicuous he exposes himself to a scrutiny; and if he reside among a knowing people, his qualifications are truly estimated, and his destiny properly fixed; but if he take a station where ignorance and stupidity characterize the inhabitants, how are his qualities to be distinguished? The glare of external pomp, the influence of connections, pretences of patriotism, and many other adventitious causes, may palm him upon the world as an extraordinary man, one who deserves to be esteemed and promoted. In such a situation, how can his pretensions be scrutinized and weighed? If the people are too ignorant and debased to perform such a task, they must quietly submit to the caprice and oppression of those who govern them. There can be little inducement for public men to be at the pains of acquiring knowledge,

or cultivating virtuous qualities, where the bulk of the inhabitants are too uninformed to estimate the value of such attainments. Nothing can secure to a community the blessings of a wise and virtuous administration of affairs, but such a degree of information disseminated among all grades of people, as can fairly examine, and rightly calculate the relative qualifications of those, who seek fame and promotion.

The natural indolence of the human mind is roused into virtuous exertions, in proportion as motives of responsibility are heightened by the circumspection and wisdom of a discerning community. But where such attributes do not prevail, it is easy to conjecture that the love of ease and pleasure will prevent public officers from maturing their talents and virtues, since they have no occasion to go through so irksome a trial. Men, in pursuit of fame, will acquire it in that mode which subjects them to the fewest efforts of understanding; and where falsehood or ignorance will attain the object there can be no stimulus to severe application. A celebrated writer asks, "Where is the philosopher, that to promote his own reputation, would not willingly deceive the whole human race. An ingenious falsehood will pass current among a servile, illiterate people, and for a while seem fair to immortalize the name of its inventor;" but adds the writer above quoted, "such a one deceives himself; truth alone can have a durable success." Error can assume no disguise that will not sooner or later be detected; and the air-built hopes of fallacious projectors vanish at the approach of reason and science. These reflections shew the importance of establishing the means of education in all parts of the country. Such an expedient will try the characters of men, and those who have risen into distinction, by impressing false or exaggerated opinions of their talents, will have their career checked. Those gilded bubbles, which dazzle an ignorant multitude, will appear vain and ridiculous when the light of truth beams over society. The world has been too long amused with an idea that the pageantry of courts, and the mysteries of religion were essential to the proper government of mankind. It is no doubt true, that the sanctions of religion, and the dignified stations of public men, contribute to produce subordination and virtue in society; but these may be founded on a rational basis, and are something different from superstition or despotism. A blind attachment and love to an object that does not deserve admiration, does not seem, by the constitution of nature, to be the best method to draw people to their duty. Let truth and reason have a fair chance, and men will be obedient to law without being slaves, and attentive to religion, without being bigots.



CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.
SATURDAY, Feb. 7.

The BANK BILL under consideration.

MR. GERRY,

SAID he should principally confine himself to the objections of the gentleman first up from Virginia, (Mr. Madison) not from a disrespect to the observations of other gentlemen in the opposition, but because he considered their arguments as grafts on the original stock of those urged by the gentleman alluded to, and if the trunk fell, its appendages must fall also.

The objects of the bill, he said, were to render the fiscal administration successful—to give facility to loans on sudden emergencies, and to benefit trade and industry in general—and that these were objects of high importance had not been denied—neither had it been asserted that they ought not if possible to be attained.

It is objected however that the mode proposed by the bill is unconstitutional, and the bill itself defective.

The mode proposed is a national bank—to establish which, he thought Congress were as competent as either house were to adjourn from day to day.

It is said that Congress have no power relating to this subject, except what is contained in the clauses for laying and collecting taxes, imposts, excises, &c.—for borrowing money—and for making all laws necessary and proper for carrying these powers into effect—and that these do not authorize the establishment of a national bank.

To ascertain this, the gentleman from Virginia proposes a candid interpretation of the constitution, which we shall agree to, and he offers to assist us with his rules of interpretation—for his good intentions in doing which, we give him full credit—but as he acknowledges that he has been long decided against the authority of Congress to establish a bank, and is therefore prejudiced against the measure—as his rules being made for the occasion, are the result of his interpretation, and not his interpretation of the rules—as they are not sanctioned by law exposition, or approved by experienced judges of the law, they cannot be considered as a criterion for regulating the judgment of the house—but may, if admitted, prove an *ignis fatuus*, that may lead to destruction.

We wish not however, by establishing our own rules of interpretation, to enjoy the privilege which is denied to the gentleman—but will meet him on fair ground by applying rules which have the sanction mentioned—and as the learned Judge BLACKSTONE has laid down such, it is presumed the gentleman from Virginia will not contend for a preference, or refuse to be tried by this standard.

The Judge observes, "That the fairest and most rational method to interpret the will of the legislator, is by exploring his intentions at the time when the law was made, by signs the most natural and probable—and these signs are either the words, the context, the subject matter, the effect and consequences, or the spirit and reason of the law." With respect to words, the Judge observes, that "they are generally understood in their usual and most ordinary signification, not so much regarding the grammar as their general and popular use."

The gentlemen on different sides of the question do not disagree with respect to the meaning of the terms *taxes, duties, imposts, excises, &c.* or of *borrowing money*, but of the word *necessary*: And the question is, what is the general and popular meaning of this term? Perhaps the answer to the question will be truly this, that in a general and popular one, the word does not admit of a definite meaning, but that this varies, according to the *subject and circumstances*. With respect to the subject for instance—if the people speaking of a garrison besieged by a superior force, and without provisions, or a prospect of relief, should say it was under the *necessity* of surrendering, they would mean a *physical necessity*, for troops cannot subsist long without provisions,—but if speaking of a debtor the people should say, he was frightened by his creditor, and then reduced to the *necessity* of paying his debts, they would mean a *legal*, which is very different from a *physical necessity*—for altho the debtor by refusing payment might be confined, he would be allowed subsistence, and the *necessity* he was under to pay his debts would not extend beyond his confinement. Again, if it should be said that a *client* is under the necessity of giving to his lawyer more than legal fees, the general popular meaning of *necessity* would in this instance be very different from that in the other—the *necessity* would neither be *physical* or *legal*, but *artificial*, or if I may be allowed the expression, a *long robe necessity*.

The meaning of the word "*necessary*," varies also according to circumstances—for altho Congress have power to levy and collect taxes, duties, &c. to borrow money, and to determine the time, quantum, mode and every regulation *necessary* and proper for supplying the treasury, yet the people would apply a different meaning to the word *necessary*, under different circumstances: For instance, without a sufficiency of precious metals for a medium, laws creating an artificial medium would be generally thought *necessary* for carrying into effect the power to levy and collect taxes—but if there was a sufficiency of such metals, those laws would not generally be thought *necessary*. Again, if specie was scarce, and the credit of the government low, collateral measures would be by the people thought *necessary*, for obtaining public loans—but not so, if