

From the POUGHKEEPSIE (State of New-York) JOURNAL.

Mr. POWER, I send you a copy of a letter I have lately received from one of my correspondents abroad—If you will give it a place in your paper, you will oblige A Customer.

May 21, 1791.

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE just now received yours of the 10th instant. I thank you for your remarks on the work you have lately read. It appears to answer in your mind the recommendations I gave of it in a former letter. Nothing gives me more pleasure in my time of life, than to be imparting the little fruits of my knowledge and experience to the generation that is coming after me.—Tho' I have but a few moments leisure, I shall endeavor, tho' imperfectly, to comply with your request, and give you my thoughts on the writings of Mr. Adams, the Vice-President, on which you tell me you are about to enter.

As you are on a course of political studies, which I hope may hereafter render you a wife, a useful, and above all, an honest patriot, I would have you always bear it in mind, that you cannot imbibe too deep an acquaintance, nor cultivate too high an attachment to the general and local constitutions of the United States.

The Federalist, tho' written in haste, and on the spur of the occasion, is, as I have observed to you before, one of the best publications on the former. It is full of correct method, sound sense, and luminous principles of liberty from beginning to end; and I have no doubt but the commentary will be coeval in point of time with the text. But the writings of Mr. Adams, must be read with some grains of allowance. There is a great deal of learning, and a great number of useful and wise principles of government brought into view; but it appears to me that he is attached to aristocratical and monarchical principles. My belief is founded on an attentive examination of his writings. This great master of politics is frequently, and pretty directly, inculcating a scepticism as to the goodness of republican governments, and a belief of the utility of hereditary monarchy, in terms which cannot but excite in the breast of those who are attached to the one, and who despise the other, a painful regret, and a lively indignation. I wish to make a firm stand against such pernicious tenets. They are as directly in the face of our institutions and manners, as they are repugnant to our feelings and happiness. Besides, it is against moral fitness, no less than political duty, to be constantly infusing distrust and diffidence as to the constitution of our country.—An unshaken confidence, a reverential attachment to our established systems, ought rather to be the lesson of the schools.

In vol. 1. letter 20, of his Defence of the American Constitutions, he observes, "The Americans have not made their first magistrate hereditary, nor their senators: here they differ from the English constitution, and with great propriety: Land is so equally divided among the people, that they would not endure an hereditary King and Nobility; or at least, if created, they would be entirely subservient to the Commons, in whom nineteen twentieths of the property would reside.—In future ages, if the States become great nations, rich, powerful, and luxurious, their own feelings and good sense will dictate to them what to do; they may make transitions to a nearer resemblance of the British constitution, by a fresh convention, without the smallest interruption to liberty. But they will never become necessary until great quantities of property get into few hands."

Here Mr. Adams speaks of hereditary monarchy and aristocracy as not advisable in this country as yet—we are not quite ripe for them, because of the too great equality of property. Hereafter the natural progress of things will render them necessary, and they may exist without the smallest interruption to liberty.

If this change should be thought proper, Mr. Adams informs us, we have an Aristocracy already formed for our purpose, by the kind hand of nature.—In letter 25 of the same vol. he observes, "There are sources of inequality in every society, and in Massachusetts as well as in others.—1. Inequality of Wealth. 2. Of birth. 3. of merits. And, 4. All these advantages of birth, fortune, and fame united. These sources of inequality can never be altered by any people, because they are founded in the constitution of nature. This natural aristocracy among mankind, is a body of men which contains the greatest collection of virtues and abilities in a free government."

Fame and fortune may be, and frequently are hereditary; but this is the first time I ever heard a grave philosopher pronounce virtue and abilities to be so.

In the 3d volume of his Defence, and which contains a very ingenious and useful criticism on Mr. Needham's Theory of a Commonwealth, he observes (letter 6.) that, "We have adopted in America one idea of Needham's, in making a succession in our Senate and Governors. It is still, however, problematical, whether this succession will be the grand preservative against corruption, or the grand inlet to it. There is room to hope, and grounds to fear. The experiment is made, and it will have fair play. If corruption breaks in, a remedy must be provided; and what that remedy must be, is well known to every man that thinks."—"In what manner annual elections of Governors and Senators will operate in America, remains to be ascertained. It should always be remarked, that this is not the first experiment that ever was made in the world, of elections to great offices of State: How they have hitherto operated in every great nation, and what has been their end, is very well known. Mankind have universally discovered that chance was preferable to a corrupt choice, and have trusted Providence rather than themselves. Thank Heaven! Americans understand calling conventions; and if the time should come, as it is very possible it may, when hereditary descent shall become a less evil than annual fraud and violence, such a convention may still prevent the first magistrate from becoming absolute as well as hereditary."—"This hazardous experiment we have tried; and if elections are soberly made, it may answer well—if not, the people must again have recourse to conventions, and find a remedy."

The prevailing bent of Mr. Adams, in favor of hereditary government, seems to have acquired new force, as he proceeded in his writings. In his 1st vol. we have observed, he speaks of it as a thing desirable only at some future period, and not suited to our present condition. Here he declares himself much more emphatically in its favor—considers elective governments as of hazardous experiment, and of doubtful issue; and in a strain of exultation and devotion thanks Heaven that Americans can assume with ease an hereditary monarchy.

Mr. Adams has lately obliged the public with a number of periodical pieces, entitled, Discourses on Davila, and which, like all his other writings, discover extensive learning and superior capacity, and are calculated like his former volumes, to point out the necessity of a balanced government. These discourses, however, are constantly interrupted with his remarks on the natural love for family, and distinctions, and property, and rank, and that aristocracy and monarchy have their foundation in the original constitution of our nature. In No. 12 he observes, "But it shall be left to the contemplation of our state physicians to discover the causes and the remedy of that fever whereof our power is sick. One question shall be respectfully insinuated, whether equal laws, the result only of balanced government, can ever be obtained and preserved, without some signs or other of distinction and degree."—In No. 15, after many arguments on the inextinguishable passion for titles and distinctions, he breaks out into the following apostrophe;—Americans! rejoice that from experience you have learned wisdom; and instead of whimsical and fantastic projects, you have adopted a promising essay towards a well ordered government."

Mr. Adams has now begun, a discourse on Stephen Boetius, which will probably be the same thing as a second edition of his commentary on Needham.

It would be easy for me to proceed with quotations of a similar import; but I trust I have already sufficiently proved the truth of my assertion, and the justness of my belief in the beginning of this letter, that Mr. Adams was attached to monarchical and aristocratical principles. In saying this, I have no desire, if I had the power, to derogate from the general reputation of his works: I only wish that the false doctrines they contain may be separated from the salutary councils with which they are allied. His writings have profoundly developed, and placed in all its variety of attitude to the world, one excellent truth, long before known, recognized, and adopted by his countrymen in their political systems, and that is, the necessity of a division of the legislative, executive, and judiciary powers, and a partition of the former into three independent parts, in order to controul the spirit of rivalry inherent in the mind of man. But his writings have also inculcated, cherished, and propagated one abominable heresy, and that is, that hereditary monarchy and aristocracy are compatible with permanent freedom, and probably essential to a wife, happy, and perfectly balanced constitution.

It is well worth observing, that Mr. Adams has undergone, since his residence in Europe, a very great change in his political principles. In 1776, while he was a member of Congress, he wrote a letter to Mr. Wythe, of Virginia, and which has been recently published. In that letter he says, "There is no good government but what is republican—that the only valuable part of the British constitution is so—that the legislature should be divided into two branches, and the executive should have a negative on both; but that the executive, as well as both branches of the legislative, ought to be annually elective, there not being in the whole circle of the sciences a maxim more infallible than this, Where annual elections end, there tyranny begins. These great men, in this respect, should be once a year,

Like bibles on the sea of matter borne, They rise, they break, and to that sea return.

This will teach them the great political virtues of humility, patience, and moderation, without which every man in power becomes a ravenous beast of prey."

Mr. Adams ought to shew us whether human nature has altered since the year 1776; and what there is at this day, more than there was at that day, to prevent a man who holds his seat by hereditary right, or (as Mr. Burke says the King of England holds his crown) in contempt of the people, and who is not responsible for his conduct, from becoming a ravenous beast of prey: Whereas, the great leading maxim in all his writing is, that mankind are just as imperfect now as formerly—in America as in Europe—in this century as in ten centuries ago. But it is the fate of Mr. Adams, in many places, to be as inconsistent with himself, as some of his doctrines are inconsistent with the genius of his country.

The English government is that perfect model to which all his observations are directed.—"It is (says he) the most stupendous fabric of human invention, both for the adjustment of the balance, and the prevention of its vibrations."—But the furious wars between the two Roses—the constant tyranny of the Tudors—the constant tyranny and convulsions under the Stuarts—the two rebellions against the house of Hanover, are rather bad precedents in favor of hereditary succession. At present there is not indeed the avowed oppression of former times. But the constitutional tyranny (if I may so express myself) of the hereditary part, has changed its colour, not its nature.—It has laid aside its fierce visage, and assumed the livery of Venus and the Graces. Henry the 8th was a despot, with the iron rod of prerogative.—George the 3d is a despot also, with the courtly sceptre of corruption.—I sincerely believe the English administration to be as much under the influence of corruption, as that of any government in Europe. The House of Commons, chosen once in seven years, is a mere mockery of representation. The English nation would have, if justice was done them, their Commons fairly chosen by upwards of 400,000 electors—and yet a ninth part of the English representation is chosen by 364 votes, and a majority of the representation by 5723 electors, most of whom have no property. The House of Commons, thus wretchedly constituted, has not been able (as we might well suppose) to preserve its equipoise in the system, and has submitted itself implicitly to the corrupt influence of the hereditary department. Nothing but the independence of their judicial, and the pride and honor of their judges, preserves the remains of their liberties. The Roman civilians and judges in like manner preserved their integrity and good sense long after Tiberius, Nero, and Domitian, had infested their government with the most accursed of all tyrannies. Mr. Hume, some years ago, predicted (and he predicted right) that the tide of power in England was running to the monarchical side, and that absolute monarchy was the true euthanasia of the British constitution.—This government, however, is held up to us as a model of wisdom and imitation.

Mr. Adams has devoted the labor of years to point out the evils to which free governments are incident, and to warn mankind against them. I thank him for his learned labors. But I wish he would also warn us against the dangers of the opposite coast, to which he is steering our political vessel; and together with his commentaries on Machiavel, Needham, and Stephen Boetius—would also give us his commentaries on the reign of Tiberius, as delineated by the masterly hand of Tacitus.

His writings have certainly the tendency (whatever may be his intention) to make people weary of republican government, and to sigh for the monarchy of England. To inculcate the doctrine, that men are not fit to chuse their own rulers—that frequent elections are dangerous—that distinctions, not of virtue and talents, but of birth and fortune, are essential to the order of government—that riches and family should be the titles to preferment, and poverty the object of contempt. Such doctrines I deem heresies in American politics.

I am, dear sir, Your's sincerely,

To Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ FROM THE (BOSTON) COLUMBIAN CENTINEL.

MR. RUSSELL,

THE late revolution in France, has opened an extensive field of speculation to the philosopher and to the politician. An event so astonishing and unexpected in its nature, and so important in its consequences, naturally arrested the peculiar attention of the whole civilized world. The friends of liberty and of man, have seen with pleasure, the temples of despotism, levelled with the ground, and the genius of freedom, rising suddenly, in his collected and irresistible strength, and snapping in an instant all the cords with which for centuries he had been bound. Upon the downfall of the arbitrary system of government in France, there appears to have been but one sentiment, and that, a sentiment of exultation; but while the friends of humanity have rejoiced at the emancipation of so many millions of their fellow-creatures, they have waited with an anxious expectation to see upon what foundations they would attempt to establish their newly acquired liberty. The pro-

ceedings of their Representative Assembly, have been contemplated in very different points of view, by men of names equally illustrious, and of characters equally favorable to the cause of liberty. Among the publications which have appeared upon the subject, two pamphlets founded upon very different principles, appear to have been received with the greatest avidity, and seem calculated to leave the deepest impression. The one, written by Mr. BURKE, which is one continued invective upon almost all the proceedings of the National Assembly since the revolution, and which passes a severe and indiscriminating censure upon almost all their transactions: The other, the production of Mr. PAINE, containing a defence of the Assembly, and approving every thing they have done with applause as undistinguishing as is the censure of Mr. BURKE.—We are told, that the copy from which an edition of this work was reprinted at Philadelphia, was furnished by the Secretary of State, and was accompanied by a letter from which the following extract has been published in most of our newspapers. "I am extremely pleased to find, that it is to be reprinted here, and that something is at length to be publicly said, against the political heresies which have sprung up among us. I have no doubt our citizens will rally a second time round the standard of Common Sense."

I confess, sir, I am somewhat at a loss to determine, what this very respectable gentleman means by political heresies. Does he consider this pamphlet of Mr. PAINE's as the canonical book of political scripture? As containing the true doctrine of popular infallibility, from which it would be heretical to depart in one single point. The expressions indeed imply more; they seem like the Arabian prophet to call upon all true believers in the Islam of democracy, to draw their swords, and in the fervour of their devotion to compel all their countrymen to cry out, "There is but one Goddess of Liberty, and Common Sense is her prophet."

I have always understood, sir, that the citizens of these States, were possessed of a full and entire freedom of opinion upon all subjects civil as well as religious; they have not yet established any infallible criterion of orthodoxy, either in church or state: Their principles in theory and their habits in practice, are equally averse to that slavery of the mind, which adopts without examination any sentiment that has the sanction of a venerable name. "Nullius in verba jurare magistri" is their favorite maxim; and the only political tenet, which they would stigmatize with the name of heresy, would be that which should attempt to impose an opinion upon their understandings, upon the single principle of authority.

I believe also, sir, that the citizens of America are not at present disposed to rally round the standard of any man. In the full possession and enjoyment of all the freedom, for which they have gone through so arduous a conflict, they will not for the poor purpose of extinguishing a few supposed political heresies, return to the horrors of a civil contest, from which they could reap no possible benefit, and which would probably terminate in the loss of that liberty, for which they have been so liberal of their treasure and of their blood.

If however, Mr. PAINE is to be adopted as the holy father of our political faith, and this pamphlet is to be considered as his Papal bull of infallible virtue, let us at least examine what it contains. Before we determine to join the standard let us inquire what are the articles of war, to which our General requires our submission.—It is the glorious characteristic of truth, at once to invite and bid defiance to investigation. If any opinions which have sprung up among us, have really led us astray from the standard of truth, let us return to it, at the call of Mr. PAINE, or of any other man, who can shew us our errors. But sir, if upon examination, even this testament of orthodoxy, shall be found to contain many spurious texts, false in their principles and delusive in their inferences, we may be permitted, notwithstanding our reverence for the author, at least to expunge the apocryphal doctrine, and to confine our faith to the genuine tenets of real political inspiration.—It is my intention to submit to the public a few observations which have occurred to me upon the perusal of this pamphlet, which has so clear and valid a title to the public attention.—But I must here observe, that I wish to avoid every appearance of disrespect, either to the real parent of this production, or to the gentleman who has stood its sponsor in this country. Both these gentlemen are entitled to the gratitude of their countrymen; the latter still renders them important services, in a very dignified station. He is a friend to free inquiry upon every subject, and he will not be displeased to see the sentiments which he has made his own, by a public adoption, canvassed with as much freedom as is consistent with the reverence due to his character. PUBLICOLA.