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THOMAS PAINE,
TO THE CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES.

Letter the Eighth.

MUCH has been said, and much remains to be said, of that undescribed and undescribable *nothing*, called federalism. It is a word without a meaning, and designates a faction that has no principles. Ask a man who calls himself a federalist, what federalism is? and he cannot tell you. Ask him what are its principles? and he has none to give. Federalism then, with respect to government, is similar to Atheism with respect to religion, a *nominal nothing* without principles. The federal papers, especially those of New-England, have often said, that "*Religion and Federalism must go together.*" But if their religion is related to their federalism; if it is as destitute of morals as their federalism is of principles; and I fear it is; it will do them no good in this world or the next. It will condemn them as impostors and hypocrites in both.

Those who once figured as leaders under the assumed and fraudulent name of federalism, (but who are since gone, not into honorable and peaceable retirement, like John Dickinson and Charles Thompson,* put into obscurity and oblivion, like John Adams and John Jay) had some plans in contemplation which they concealed from their deluded adherents, but those plans can be discovered through the gauzy, but clumsy, veil of conduct those leaders adopted. "*No cover is large enough to hide itself,*" says the Spanish proverb.

It requires more artifice and management to disguise and conceal sinister designs than schemers are aware of. A man never turns a rogue but he turns a fool. He incautiously lets out something by which those he intended to cheat or impose upon begin to find him out. Whereas truth is a straight forward thing, even an ignorant man will not blunder in a true story—nor can an artful man keep a false story straight.

But those leaders, supposing themselves in a higher position than what common observation would reach, presumed on their supposed consequence and the expected credulity of their adherents, to impose on the nation by clamorous and false pretences, for the purpose of raising a standing army of fifty thousand men; and when they had got that army the mask would have been thrown off, and their deluded adherents would have paid the price of their duplicity by being enslaved.

But in the midst of this career of delusion and imposition, those leaders became fools. They did every thing they ought not to have done. They advocated plans which shewed that their intention and cause was not good. They laboured to provoke war. They opposed every thing which lead to peace. They loaded the country with vexatious and unnecessary taxes, and then opposed the reduction of them. They opposed a reduction of their own partizans at the expence of the public. In short, they run themselves aground, first by their extravagance and next by their folly, blinded by their own vanity, and though bewildered in the wilderness of their own projects, they foolishly supposed themselves above detection. They had neither sense enough to know, nor logic enough to perceive, that as we can reason upward from cause to effect, so also can we reason downward from effect to cause, and discover, by the means they make use of, the motives and object of any party; for when the means are had, the motive and the end to be obtained cannot be good.

The manners also, and language of any party is another clue that leads to the discovery of their real characters. When the cause and principles of a party are good, its advocates make use of reason, argument and good language. Truth can derive no advantage from boisterous vulgarity. But when the motives and principles of a party are bad, it is necessary to conceal them, and its abettors having principles they dare not to acknowledge, and cannot defend, avoid every thing of argument, and take refuge in abuse and falsehood.

The federal papers are an instance of the justness of this remark. Their pages are crowded with abuse, but never with argument; for they have no principles to argue from; and as for falsehood, it has become so naturally their mother tongue, especially in New-England, that they seem to have lost the power as well as the disposition to speak the truth. Those papers have been of great aid to the republican cause, not only by the additional disgrace they have brought on their own disgraceful faction, but by serving as a soil to set off, with greater eclat, the decency and well principled argument of the republican papers. I have had some experience, perhaps as much as most men have had, in the various turns of political life, but I never saw a greater set of fools undertake to conduct a party than the leaders of the federalists have been, and the editors of their papers. They

* John Dickinson, the respectable author of the Farmer's Letters before the revolution began, Charles Thompson, the faithful secretary of the old congress during the revolution,

correspond to the story told of a man who was become so proud and famous for lying that he disdained speaking truth, lest he should lose his character.

Cannot these stupid people see, or, according to some dogmas of their own, are their hearts hardened, that they shall not see, that the more vulgar and abusive they are, the more ground they lose in the estimation of the public. Every election, especially in New-England, is wearing them down, till they will be lost even as a faction, and Massachusetts and Connecticut will recover their former character. Every thing this faction does hastens its exit. The abusive vulgarity of Hulbert, a petty fogging attorney of Sheffield, in Massachusetts, and one of its legislators, has contributed to bring forward the funeral. In his late unprincipled speech in the legislature of that state, he has driven another nail in the coffin of the federal faction, and I leave it to the *New-England Palladium* to clinch it. It is a paper worthy of being the buffoon of such a faction, and of such an hypocritical impostor. Thus much for the character of parties and the method of ascertaining their motives and objects. I now proceed to other matters.

When I returned to America in November 1802, (after an absence of more than fourteen years) I found the country in a state of disquietude. The people were divided into two classes, under the names of republicans and federalists, and in point of numbers appeared to be nearly balanced. The republicans were the majority in congress, and all the administration were of that description; but they were assailed with outrageous abuse in all the federal papers, but never by argument. I am enough acquainted with life and the world, to know, that abuse is the evidence of want of argument, and that those who use it, have not right on their side. There is a dignified calmness in conscious rectitude, which descends not to abuse. It can reason, but it cannot rage. It cannot quit the strong fortress of rectitude to skirmish in the fields of vulgarity.

It was not difficult to perceive that this division and agitation arose from some reports spread during the administration of John Adams, and in the latter time of Gen. Washington, which one part of the people believed, and the other did not; and the point to be ascertained was, whether those reports were true or false. If either of those cases could be ascertained effectually, it would unite the people. The chief of those reports, was, the danger of an invasion from France; and this was made a cause for borrowing by loan, five millions of dollars, at the high rate of eight per cent. laying on a land tax of two millions of dollars annually; besides a great number of other taxes; and for raising a standing army of fifty thousand men.

Now, if the danger was real, it ought to have been provided against. If it was a fiction, and the design of raising an army to be employed to accomplish some concealed purpose, the country ought to be informed of it. The party styling themselves federalists appeared to believe the danger, and the republicans to ridicule it as fabulous; and in this state the parties stood. It was, however, equally the interest of both, to know the truth, on which ever side the truth might fall.

Being at Washington in the winter 1802-3, I talked with some members of congress on the subject, particularly with Mr. Breckenridge; senator from Kentucky, the same person who brought in the bill for repealing John Adams' judiciary law, and the midnight appointments made in consequence of it. This repeal saved the country thirty-two thousand dollars annually, besides freeing it from an intended judiciary despotism.

I spoke to him of the propriety of congress appointing a committee, or by some other method as they might think proper, to enquire into the conduct of the former administration, that of John Adams, and to call upon him to produce the information whether official or otherwise, which he went upon, if he had any, for putting the country to such vast expence, under the idea real or pretended, of an invasion from France. This would be giving John Adams a fair chance of clearing himself, if he could, from the suspicion that his administration was a gross imposition on the public; and on the other hand, if the imposition should be proved, it would enlighten the country, and put it on its guard against future impositions.

Mr. Breckenridge agreed with me in the propriety and fitness of the measure. He saw that information was wanted, and that it would be useful, because when the truth should be known, it would compose the people. John Adams had gone away in what may be called a *clandestine manner*, without surrendering into the hands of his successor, as he ought to have done in person, any account of the affairs of the executive department, foreign or domestic. There are no papers or documents that I know of, and I believe there are none, because there can be none in the secretary of state's office, that will justify J. Adams in the expence to which his administration put the country; or even afford ground for suspicion that either France or England intended to invade the United

States. For what purpose then was an army to be raised? The projectors of such a measure must have had some object in view, and as that object has never been explained, it ought to be enquired into. It is bad policy, and also a bad precedent, especially in public affairs, to let imposition slide away without detection.

At the time I talked with Mr. Breckenridge on this subject, I expected that Mr. Skipwith formerly† and at this time American consul at Paris, and Joel Barlow, would soon arrive, and I did not wish the enquiry to be gone into till they came. After the fall of Robespierre and the establishment of the directory constitution, those two gentlemen and myself (Mr. Monroe being recalled) had better opportunities of knowing the sentiments and intention of the French government with respect to America than any others had; and they can be evidence, equally with myself, that no intention existed in the French government to invade America; nor was any preparation made for such an attempt, nor could it be made. The possibility of such a thing did not exist. The French navy was at that time nearly annihilated; her ports blockaded by the British; and she had to fight by land single handed against almost the whole of Europe. She had it not in her power to spare a regiment, much less could she spare an army, to send to America; and if she could have spared one, she had not the means of transporting it, nor a convoy to protect it. All the circumstances as well as the evidence that can be provided, will shew that the administration of John Adams was a fraudulent and expensive imposition on the country; and that the army to be raised was intended for some secret purpose, and not for the purpose of defence. If John Adams was not conscious of something wrong, and apprehensive of some consequences, why did he abscond in the hasty and private manner he did? Or why did his partizans want to put Aaron Burr in the presidency? In the days of the black cockades, John Adams had one so enormous and valiantly large that he appeared to be suspended by it; but when his *midnight hour arrived*, his valor fled and himself also.

The voluntary embassy of Dr. Logan to Paris appears to have disconcerted John's administration, and disconcerted its leaders; because it served to expose and put an end to their project. When Dr. Logan called on Timothy Pickering, secretary of state, with Mr. Skipwith's dispatches from Paris, Timothy, before he knew the contents, though Logan knew the whole, began to talk of invasions and dangers, and the necessity of preparation. "*It may be very well*" said Logan, "*to have the militia always in good order.*" "*The militia, sir!*" said Timothy, "*the militia never did any good and never will.*" "*We must have an army of fifty thousand men.*" When Logan was going away, Timothy said to him at the door, "*Sir, the government don't thank you.*"

When Logan waited on General Washington, † Mr. Skipwith resigned the consulship during the administration of John Adams, I believe on account of an insulting letter he received from Timothy Pickering, then secretary of state. Mr. Jefferson re-appointed Mr. Skipwith.

† Timothy Pickering's reflection on the militia deserves a rebuff. It was the militia that fought at Bunker's hill, under Warren, a militia general—it was by the aid of numerous reinforcements of militia to join General Gates that Burgoyne was taken.—It was by a volunteer militia under Stark, a volunteer General, that Col. Baum, a Hessian officer, was defeated at Bennington, in Vermont, which was the prelude to the capture of Burgoyne. But perhaps Timothy reasons from himself; and if he makes himself the standard by which to judge of the merits of the militia there is ground for his saying the militia never did any good, and never will. Timothy's first public employment was very harmless, that of a teacher of psalmody.—When the revolution began he learned the manual exercise, and then taught it. He was afterwards appointed Colonel of a regiment of militia, and when the affairs of Lexington and Concord took place, April 19, 1775, and the British were retreating from Concord back to Boston, an order was sent to Timothy, to march with his regiment, and post himself at a certain place to cut off their retreat. Timothy marched, but he stopped short of the place, and drew up his men, and went to prayers, till the British passed it. His prayers saved him from the dangers of that day. I do not know that he sung psalms.—Perhaps not. The enemy might have overheard him.—Had Timothy done his duty on that occasion, and put his trust in God without loitering away his time, the whole party of the British, about two thousand, must have been prisoners, for they could not have got back into Boston; and the slaughter at Bunker's hill, the 17th of June following, could not have taken place. The whole force of the British at Boston at that time, was about four thousand; one half of which were on this expedition.

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ington, who had been then appointed the lieutenant general of the army then raising of which John was commander in chief.—the general received him coldly and sternly and said to him in a haughty tone, "*and pray sir, what right have you that are but a private citizen, to interfere in matters of government?*" Logan very prudently replied, "*I have no answer, sir to make to that,*" and withdrew.—The state of Pennsylvania soon after this elected Dr. Logan one of its senators in Congress.

Circumstances often unriddle and explain themselves, and it happens so in this case; for if the administration, and those leaders connected with it, were sincere in their belief that the danger was real and that the country (as Governor Morris expressed it in his funeral oration on Hamilton) was "*menaced with danger from without,*" and that France intended an invasion; and if, at the same time they had no concealed object in contemplation themselves, they would welcome the messenger that should bring them good tidings that *all was well*. But if, on the contrary, they knew they were acting a fraud and heating the country with falsehoods and false alarms, for the purpose of procuring loans, levying new taxes, and raising an army to accomplish some concealed purpose that could not be accomplished without that treachery, they would be enraged at him; and this accounts for the rude reception Dr. Logan received from that administration.—Thousands who supported that administration from a belief that it was acting right, have since abandoned it from a conviction that it acted deceitfully wrong, and this also accounts for the great majority at the last Presidential election. We have no alarms now, nor should we have had any then, if the present administration had existed at that time.

It requires only a prudent and honest admiration to preserve America always in peace.—Her distance from the European world frees her from its intrigues. But when men get into power, whose heads, like the head of John Adams, are filled with "*streak notions*" & counter revolutionary principles & projects, things will be sure to go wrong. John Adams who was more the *dupe* of a party than the leader of it, entered on the office of president with his head turned by the elevation he was lifted to; and his principles (if he ever had any), corrupted. He turned out to be a counter revolutionist; and if the concealed projects of his administration had succeeded, the federal constitution would have been destroyed, and that by persons under the assumed and fraudulent name of federalists.

As General Washington (said John Adams) has no children, it will be right to make the government hereditary in the family of Lund Washington;—perhaps John intended this as a sly introduction of himself and his hopeful son Quincy, in preference to any of the Washingtons; for this same John Adams was one of the chiefs of a party in congress at York-town in Pennsylvania, in the latter end of the year 1777 and beginning of '78; for dismissing Washington from the command of the army, because they said he was not capable of it and did nothing. Yet under John's administration, the name of Washington was made use of for the purpose of introducing and covering a counter revolutionary system. Such is the inconsistency of faction and of men who have no fixed principles!

The Independence of America would have added but little to her own happiness, and been of no benefit to the world, if her government had been formed on the corrupt models of the old world. It was the opportunity of beginning the world a new, as it were; and of bringing forward a new system of government in which the rights of all men should be preserved, that gave value to independence.—The pamphlet *Common Sense*, the first work I ever published, embraced both those objects. Mere independence might at some future time, have been effected and established by arms without principle, but a just system of government could not. In short, it was the principle, at that time, that produced the independence; for until the principle spread itself abroad among the people, independence was not thought of, and America was fighting without an object. Those who know the circumstances of the times I speak of know this to be true.

I am not persecuting John Adams nor any other man, nor did I ever persecute any; but I see the propriety, and even the necessity of instituting an enquiry into the confused state of affairs during his administration. All the circumstances and the evidence combined with them, justify the suspicion that during that administration the country was grossly imposed upon and put to a great and unnecessary expence, which the present administration has to pay off; and that some concealed and counter revolutionary scheme was in contemplation. The leaders, separately, might hide from each other what his own particular object was. Each of them might have a different one. But all of them agreed in the preliminary project, that of raising an army; and the case would have been that when they had collected that army they would have broken into distinct parties, like the generals of Alexander's army, and