

absolute; which would be contrary to this hypothesis. They say that an absolute sovereign possesses completely all the political authority of the society, in which no body can oppose him; if he abuses it, he does ill indeed, and wounds his conscience; but that his commands are not the less obligatory, as being founded on a lawful right to command; that the nation by giving him absolute authority, had reserved nothing to itself, and had submitted to his discretion, &c. We might satisfy ourselves with answering, that in this light there is not any sovereign who is completely and fully absolute. But in order to remove all these vain subtilities, let us remember the essential end of civil society; is it not to labour in concert for the common happiness of all? Is it not with this view that every citizen strips himself of his rights and resigns his liberty? Was it in the power of the society to make such use of its authority, as to deliver up itself, and all its members without relief, to the discretion of a cruel tyrant? No, certainly. since it had no right itself, if it was disposed to it, to oppress a part of the citizens. When it therefore conferred the supreme and absolute government, without an express reserve, it was necessarily with the tacit reserve, that the sovereign should use it for the safety of the people, and not for their ruin. If he becomes the scourge of the state, he degrades himself; he is no more than a public enemy, against whom the nation may and ought to defend itself; and, *if he has carried his tyranny to the utmost height*, why should the life of so cruel and perfidious an enemy be spared? Who presumes to blame the Roman senate, that declared Nero an enemy to his country?

“But it is of the *utmost* importance to observe, that this judgment can only be passed by the nation, or by the body by which it is represented; and that the nation itself cannot make any attempt on the person of the sovereign, but in cases of *extreme necessity*, and when the prince by violating the laws and threatening the safety of his people, puts them in a state of war against him. The person of the sovereign, the very interest of the nation declares sacred and inviolable; but not that of an *unnatural tyrant*, and an enemy of the public. We seldom see such monsters as Nero. In the most common cases, when a prince violates the fundamental laws; when he attacks the liberties and privileges of his subjects; when he is absolute; when his govern-

ment, *without* being carried to the *utmost length* of tyranny, manifestly tends to the ruin of the nation; it may resist him, try him, and withdraw from his obedience; but though this may be done, his person should be spared, and that for the welfare of the state. It is more than one age since the English took up arms against their king, and obliged him to descend from the throne. The bold and ambitious took advantage of the terrible ferment caused by fanaticism and a party-spirit, and Great Britain suffered her sovereign to die unworthily on a scaffold. The nation coming to itself, acknowledged its blindness: but if it some years after made a solemn reparation, it was not only from the opinion that the unfortunate Charles I. did not deserve so cruel a fate; but doubtless, from a conviction that for the safety even of the state, the person of the sovereign ought to be sacred and inviolable; and that the whole nation ought to render this maxim venerable in paying a respect to it, when the care of its *own preservation* would permit.”

“—As it is very difficult to oppose an absolute prince, and it cannot be done without raising great disturbances in the state, and the most violent and dangerous commotions; it ought to be attempted only in cases of extremity, when the public misery is raised to such a height, that the people may say with Tacitus, *miseram pacem, vel bello bene mutari*; that it is better to expose themselves to a civil war than to endure them. But if the prince's authority be limited, if it in some respect depends on a senate, or on a parliament that represents the nation, there are means of resistance, and of curbing him, without exposing the state to such violent shocks. There can be no reason to expect that the evil will be extreme, when such mild and innocent remedies can be applied to it.”

“—As soon as a nation acknowledges a prince for its lawful sovereign, all the citizens owe him a faithful obedience. He can neither govern the state, nor perform what the nation expects from him, if he is not punctually obeyed. Subjects then, have no right, in doubtful cases, to question the wisdom and justice of their sovereign's commands; this examination belongs to the prince: His subjects ought to suppose, if there be a possibility of doing it, that all his orders are just and salutary; he alone is accountable for the evil that may result from them.”

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