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THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES.

THE fire lately thrown out on all the Societies within the United States comes from too respectable a source to have attracted the public attention. It is a singular conduct these societies are engaged in, instrumental in promoting the extension to the westward; in their general principles they have been deemed hostile to all law and government. No error, however harsh and indecent, that they have not been thought to deserve; no purpose, however dark and horrid, that has not been attributed to them. Eloquence, which might have adorned an Athens or a Rome, has been laboured to blacken their actions and their principles, and the "Rags and Frizzers of society" have been blown upon from one end of the continent to the other.

Such general and indiscriminate reproaches, should they have come from the meanest quarter, must naturally excite indignation in the breasts of the innocent; but coming from one which is supposed to combine the greatest wisdom and caution, as well as the power of the nation, must further produce a desire to wipe them away. And to let them pass on unnoticed would be a dishonour to the Republican Society of this State; and to subscribe to their own condemnation; and to merit those injurious appellations of the disturbers of public happiness, the incendiaries and the petty tyrants of society, the assassins of virtue and character that have been, so liberally, heaped upon them. And though, from a conscious propriety of their own views and conduct, they see no necessity for a public vindication of themselves, yet, respect to the rulers of their country, which notwithstanding the assertions of some men, they have never lost sight of; to their own character which they prize above life; to the good opinion of their fellow-citizens, which it is their pride, as well as interest, to reverse; and to that constitution which they look upon as the noblest "the guard of human rights" ever yet devised by the wisdom of man, prompt them to declare the truth, both as to the part they have acted respecting the late insurrection, as also the general reasons and principles of their institution.

First, that we should be thought to have, in any manner, contributed to the origin or support of an insurrection which we deplore as the most grievous dishonour that ever befall our country, affects us the more sensibly in that, at the very early period, we halted, by resolutions inserted in the public papers, to express our entire disapprobation of it; and have since, by every means in our power, and many of us by obeying the call of the executive to arms, as has been, truly, observed by a worthy representative of our state, endeavoured to discomenitance and to quell it. Well convinced of the inseparable connexion between law and liberty; and that the principle in our constitution which enjoins that "the will of the majority shall prevail" is not only the most "luminous" but the only practicable principle of rational freedom, we beheld with as much indignation, at least, as all others of our fellow-citizens, an attempt to violate both; and hesitated not a moment, unanimously and publicly to express it. Did our accusers derive the sentiments they have, so confidently, imputed to us from these our resolutions? It cannot be. Let them, then, declare to the people, who have a right to be informed, from some conduct of ours, or from some other source of information, they have derived it from the report of the secretary of the treasury, written with a professed view "to give the citizens at large full information on the subject of the disturbances?" We see nothing there to warrant the opinion. But, again, have emillaries from us been detected in the western counties of Pennsylvania, fomenting discontent and in-

urrection among the citizens? Have we, by letter or otherwise, exhorted them to persevere in opposition to the laws? Have we sympathized with them in the grievances, either real or pretended, which they affected to labour under? Have we, to this day expressed an opinion on the law of excise, either one way or the other? To all these questions, with our hands upon our hearts, and appealing to him who knoweth the secrets of all men, we positively answer no. Why then, has our conduct been represented as like that of so many crocodiles weeping over those very laws and that constitution which, inwardly, we were resolved to destroy? was it because that, in this country, dungeons, chains and death awaited the man who would dare to express a disapprobation which he felt respecting the form or the measures of government.

Was it because that, if real grievances oppressed us, there was no other mode of getting rid of them than by the direful and precarious resort to civil war? Was it because that it would not have seemed wiser to seek reparation in the good sense and justice, than in the blood of our countrymen; to have tried them by petition before we provoked them to Rebellion? Was it because that, among us the liberty of the press was interdicted; and liberty of speech reckoned sedition, that we should be under the necessity of pursuing the most lawful end by the most unlawful means, and of "meeting in the dark to perform incantations?" against a law which we had an aversion to, or against a Constitution which we did not approve? It would look indeed, as if personal rancour or impatience of public security which, we thank God, is yet the natural and constitutional rights of all our citizens whether individually or collectively, had no little share in the conduct of our accusers; or as if that the censure which, for aught we know, some other societies may have deserved, has, hastily at least, been extended to us. Let our fellow-citizens judge? on the opinions of men accustomed to think for themselves, we rely: well assured that "strong assertions without proof" will not, readily, be credited against us, and that, even should they, we have, still, the consciousness left of not having deserved them.

With respect to the reasons and principles of our institution, that the public has not, before been possessed of them, has been more owing to want of attention than of respect in us to their good opinion. When we contemplated the history of nations which had lost their freedom, some from ignorance, some from supineness and some from the intrigues and artifices of ambitious men, it appeared to us that a wise people could not exhibit too much care and activity in the preservation of that invaluable blessing. Among others which occurred, the establishment of a society, whose object it should be to study the laws and constitution of their own and other countries, to watch the operations of government and scrutinize the principles and conduct of men in power, appeared a very likely means of affecting that great end; as being well calculated to dispel ignorance, to route supineness and to counteract ambition. A nation which understands its right, will not be apt to neglect them, and a nation anxious for the preservation of its rights will not, easily, fall a sacrifice to artifice or power. Slavery has ever, been the consequence of ignorance, and no people ever yet lost their liberties till they had first, lost the knowledge of them. Now, how is this knowledge more likely to be acquired and maintained than among a society of men who, to the constant habit of investigating their rights, adds, likewise, that of applying them to all the proceedings of our public bodies; and who enjoying the perfection of science, constantly combine principle with practice? Nor does it appear that politics is less a science or dependent on less steady and inflexible principles than any other which is the object of human research;

nor is the idea of a school for acquiring a knowledge of the nature of laws and government more absurd than that of one for acquiring a knowledge of astronomy and the mathematics. And if from the latter we may learn to trace the wanderings of a planet, so from the former may we know the certain effect of certain laws and government to a people! And shall societies, for the encouragement, of the meanest arts among men, meet with the public approbation and encouragement, while a society for the study of the noblest of all arts, of the freedom, the dignity and the happiness of man be deemed unworthy of regard. But if we believed that this knowledge, in its turn, would beget a spirit of independence, both in sentiment and action, unfavourable to the admission of slavery.

The man, who, to the natural love adds the true knowledge of freedom will not, easily, be deceived by forms and names which exhibit but the appearance without the reality of what they have been: bare authority without truth or justice he will despise; and respect custom and prejudice no further than as they appear to be founded in reason and nature. Had I dared to consider himself as equally entitled with all others, from the gift of his creator, to the enjoyments of his life, his understanding, his property and his liberty, he will, before he resigns them to any man or set of men, be prompted to enquire by what right it is they demanded them. And this will, admirably fit him for promoting a third effect contemplated by our institution—that of resisting the intrigues and violence of ambitious men.

That there have been such men in all countries, history, but too well, convinces us; that there may be such in our own common prudence would prompt us to suspect. And that these men should have some other controul over them than what barely results from the Constitution and the laws is an opinion derived from experience, when we consider how Cæsar by preserving the sacred names of Senate and Consul, had art to change the whole nature of government in Rome; and now in succeeding times, the free Governments of Venice, Geneva, the United Provinces and of several other countries of Europe have been changed the most into Aristocracies and yet retained the name of republics.—The advances of ambition are often through the most secret ways; it has appeared under the different masks of religion, of patriotism and even of scorn for public life.

There are instances of men who have ventured their health, their fortunes and their lives in the service of their country, that they might, afterwards, amidst the stupid gaze of popular admiration, slide down, like molten gold, into its very vitals. There are instances, again, of others who setting out with the purest zeal for the liberties of mankind, have been corrupted in their progress, and could, never afterwards, be induced to lay down the authority which the gratitude of a nation or the necessities of the times had entrusted to them. And it appeared to us that, added to those proceedings from the laws, from a perfect freedom of speech and of the press, a society of men whose duty it should be to watch the proceedings of our public officers, would form not the least respectable or effectual check to such men. In times of public necessity, this society would sound the alarm, and, mixing among their fellow-citizens, rouse them to a contemplation of the sense of their danger. And what the alarm be, sometime, false, yet that reason, never be true?—What a good man, sometimes, suffer for his integrity and reputation, will that reason, never be detected?—Rome produced a Fabius, wife a Cæsar? What then did a Sidney, did the well? What thought a Washington, may