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From the Balance. A POLITICAL CATECHISM.

Question.—What is liberty?

Answer.—Liberty is an angel; she is the first born of heaven; she is a goddess; and all who refuse to worship her, are unworthy to breathe the vital air.

Q. Is this goddess visible?

A. She is always invisible to man in civil society; eye hath not seen her; nor can civilized men fully conceive what she is. The *Savage*, ah, the *Savage*, only knows her charms; and quaffs bowls of nectar from her hands.

Q. Since liberty is invisible, how is it known that she really exists?

A. Her existence is known by a supernatural, or rather a preternatural afflatus or inspiration;—and it is also known from the works of her hands.

Q. Have some men been favoured with extraordinary measures of this afflatus or inspiration.

A. Yes; there have been *apostles* of liberty—sublimated souls, who panted with unutterable terror for a near communication with the goddess;—such were the French philosophists; such also were Robespierre, Marat, Danton, and hundreds of others, in the French Republic, who fired with the holy zeal of liberty, sacrificed millions of human victims at her shrine.

Q. What are the works of liberty, which manifest her existence?

A. The works of liberty, which manifest her existence, are very many and very wonderful to tell. In Republican France, above all countries, the works of liberty have appeared, in numbers & sublimity, such as to excite a most pleasing astonishment:—*there a pretty prostitute, dressed in white, was enthroned in a temple as the representative of the goddess and was worshipped by the enlightened people—there was paid a dear tribute to the goddess liberty; not of silver and gold, but of the lives of miriads of men, women and children.—How august was the scene, when liberty, in the full exercise of her prerogatives, erected a thousand Bastilles; when blood flowed from guillotines, like rivers; when the groans and wailings of reprobates, met with the mockery and derision they deserved; when the waters of the river Loire were discoloured with blood and choked with human corpes; when *Jans-culottes* took rank of nebles; and rent the air with shouts of *vive la liberte!*—*Ca ira* was resounded over the wide-spread gallic regions; *ca ira* was resounded, in this country, by every friend of the equal rights of man.—Ah, that was a glorious day!—Never was liberty so triumphant; never were her works so manifest.*

Q. What are your ideas of the liberty of political opinion?

A. I glory in it as the birth-right of every free-born American; it is dearer than life itself:—*I tripped of that, I should feel myself a slave—a grovelling worm of the dust.*

Q. Wherein consists the liberty of political opinion?

A. The liberty of political opinion consists in this, that every man, nay, that every woman and child, in the United States have free permission to think as the leaders of the Democrats think:—and I boldly aver, and will maintain it, that any act or edict, that should contravene this liberal construction of the liberty of political opinion, would be an act of "political intolerance," both "despotic and wicked."

Q. What are the peculiar privileges belonging to those whose political opinions are perfectly orthodox?

A. They are cherished in the bosom of our holy church; all their moral offences are blotted out, or covered with the mantle of charity; their follies and weaknesses are never mark'd against them to them exclusively belongeth the privilege of eligibility to offices of all grades, from the highest to the lowest.

Q. What are the penalties to be inflicted on those who fall into a licentiousness respecting political opinion, so far forth as to presume to think for themselves?

A. They are to be excommunicated; they are to be anathematized;—all their former services are to be buried under a

torrent of holy execration against their abominable heresy: they are to be chased from whatever offices they had held; and their removal from office is to be instantly followed by gibbetting their characters.

Q. Is such a "procedure" justified by respectable precedents?

A. It is: the republics, both in France and England; the reign of the Edwards, and the Henrys,—of Richard third—of queen Mary; of the whole line of the Stuarts; and also the records of the star-chamber, furnish a variety of precedents in favour of such a compulsory uniformity—precedents, which had been buried under the rust of time, and are therefore venerable for their antiquity.

Q. What is liberty of speech?

A. It is the liberty of speaking well of the present administration, (Mr. Burr excepted) and of all who have obtained, or shall obtain offices under it, in what ever ways or by what ever means.

Q. In what estimation do you hold the liberty of the press?

A. I venerate it as the ark of our political safety—as the protecting shield of all our other privileges. The freedom of the press has been my favourite toast—the darling theme that has awakened all my sensibilities. Witness, ye venerable shades of *Vaultus* and *Franklin*, with what fervours of zeal have I expatiated on this subject, while listening crowds hung upon my lips! Witness with what execration I loaded the authors of that instrument of tyranny, the sedition law!—While I have a heart to feel, a tongue to speak, and a hand to act, I will never desert this sacred cause. Ye powers above record my vow—I solemnly protest that "I am ready to shed the last drop of my blood in defence of the liberty of the press."

(Here the respondent is supposed to lay one hand on his breast, and to brandish the other hand in a most violent manner: and in uttering the words, "I am ready to shed the last drop of my blood," he is supposed to turn a little pale.)

Q. Was the sedition law really an act of treason against the rights of the people?

A. It was downright treason against the freedom of the press; it was treason against the dignity and majesty of the people & against their dearest rights. It was the most tyrannical, the most abominable, the most horrible, the most accursed act, that ever was passed in a free country; and such I have always declared it to be. That execrable law gagged and throttled every printing press in the land, that was worthy of countenance and support.

Q. Did the sedition law repress the publication of truth, or deny the privilege of giving truth in evidence?

A. The sedition law permitted the truth in evidence? but that circumstance was a mere farce, a mockery. It was permitting the aggrieved party to avail themselves of impossibilities!—a downright insult upon the understandings of men! It was for promoting the best interests of the people, that the wickedness and treacheries of the former administrations had been exposed. Washington had been denounced as "the man who had given currency to political iniquity; and had legalized corruption"—Adams had been called a hoary headed traitor, and had been charged with the murder of Jonathan Robbins—Jay had been accused of having been bribed with British gold; Pickering of robbing the public treasury of millions of dollars—Wolcott of burning the war office, to conceal the knavery of the officers.—These charges have been circulated throughout the union, and they ought to circulate, without check or hindrance, for the information of the abused people; but though their truth was as clear as a sunbeam, they could not be proved in a court of justice; and for this plain reason, because they were not of a *provable* nature. Therefore the sedition law, invading proof, when it was well known that proof was no where to be found, did but add insult to injury.

Q. In what manner did the passing the sedition law affect the characters of the former administration.

A. The sedition law mortally wounded the characters of those who passed it. It was the engine that pulled them down

and plunged them in disgrace. The legislature of Virginia made and published spirited resolutions against the sedition act: those resolutions were circulated over the United States. An instantaneous alarm was given through the country. Every where it was declared that the press was shackled—that a blow had been aimed at the vitals of liberty—that the officers of government were wickedly plotting to hide their own villainy by suppressing free inquiry—that their reign had been "the reign of terror"—that the people were to be kept in ignorance of the doings of their rulers—that while they were thus hood-winked, the yoke of slavery was intended to be riveted on their necks. The happiest effects were produced; the people were electrified; they were aroused; they were struck with horror; they were filled with indignation:—they chased from office those corrupt men who had passed the sedition law, & supplied their places with characters distinguished for their patriotism.

Q. Since the reign of terror is ended, and the reign of equity and mildness has commenced, what is the liberal indulgence that is now given to the press?

A. Besides the *ex-officio* of the former administrations, Mr. Burr, the second magistrate in the nation, is also given up to the printers, as free and lawful plunder; and I have almost burst my sides with laughing, to see with what art and industry our *imported* patriots, Duane & Cheatham, have hunted him down, while the *subalterns* all set up their barking and followed the chase.

Q. Is not your party indebted to the talents and influence of Mr. Burr for its triumph over the federalists?

A. This debt is cancelled.—M. Burr is excommunicated; he lies under the *bann* of our church; he is an outlaw: it has been discovered that he eat and drank with heretics—that he even offered a toast, this abominable, this treasonable sentiment, "*the union of all benevolent men.*" That man has sinned beyond the hopes of mercy; floods of tears would not avail to wash away his crimes;—The *bill of the holy Vatican* is thundered against him; its anathemas are poured upon his devoted head—and all patriotic printers are n duty bound to denounce him as a traitor, and to compare him to *Benedict Arnold.*

Q. What is the standard of freedom by which the press is and ought to be guided, as it respects the character and measures of Mr. Jefferson?

A. As it respects that august personage, the excommunicated "sect" is, as yet, allowed a very licentious indulgence; inasmuch as no previous restraint is laid on the press, by binding federal printers, *suble unconvicted of crime*, to keep the peace and to their good behaviour. A great apostle of liberty, who contemplates the beauties of the goddess, with inextinguishable rapture and daily kneels at her altar and kisses her shrine, in vain attempted such a previous restraint.—Mortifying defeat! Ah, the blindness of certain judges! They had not far enough advanced in the "march of sentiment" to perceive the necessity and salutary nature of such a measure.

Q. On what grounds was the previous restraint attempted?

A. It was attempted on the ground of the statute of Edward third, a great and worshipful king of England; who lived nearly five centuries ago; indeed long before any printing-press had been known. A most luminous period that was, when all business in England was done in French and Latin, and the English tongue was scarcely spoken.—Yet neither the reasonableness of the thing, nor the antiquity of the precedent availed.—The motion was rejected, though pressed with all the pathetic eloquence that ever inspired a tongue devoted to liberty's sacred cause. Blast the disappointment! I wash my hands of it. Whatever man, with mere individual might, could do, was actually done. It a single arm could have affected it; the freedom of the press would have been established on a firm and immoveable basis: but some men who are right in the main need further disciplining.

* Mr. Burr has been actually denounced as a traitor; and has even been compared to *Benedict Arnold*, in some of the democratic papers.

Q. Is then the *inviolability* of Mr. Jefferson's character and measures, in no manner shielded from the unhallowed touch of federalists?

A. It is, in a manner, (though alas! too feebly,) shielded from those vile caittiffs, by the *British Common law*. Printers have the licentious indulgence of publishing what they please concerning Mr. Jefferson. They are laid under no heavy bonds for their good behaviour: no commissioners have been appointed to give a previous licence to political publications. Indeed, "they order things better in France," that dear land of liberty. Printers *here*, I say, are allowed to publish whatever they please on politics; liable merely to fines, bonds and imprisonment, if they presume to publish aught, that may tend to diminish the character of our august chief, or of the other officers of government, whom he delighteth to honour.

Q. May not printers publish proveable truths against the administration, without incurring punishment?

A. No such an indulgence would lead to the most fatal consequences, and is not to be suffered in a free country.—It would open a door for intolerable licentiousness; it would tend to prostrate government by bringing it into contempt; it would expose the faults of great men to vulgar eyes, and might wound their feelings. *Truth* is sharper than a serpent's tooth; it stings and irritates an elevated mind ten fold more than falsehood.—I therefore our wise ancestors, some seven or nine hundred years ago, established it as a maxim, that "*the greater the truth, the greater the libel.*"

Q. Do you then approve the British government?

A. None can approve it less, or detest it more; it is a system of intolerable oppression and slavery; it is a mass of rotten institutions. To call it a free government is an insult upon the human understanding; every good republican is bound to execrate it, and to wish for its speedy downfall: Yet the English common law, as relates to libels, is, under present circumstances, an excellent weapon wherewith to defend the rights of the people: it is exactly suited to the condition of this country.

Q. In case that Mr. Jefferson should betray and sacrifice the dearest interests of the nation, and that the facts relating to his perfidy should be capable of being fully substantiated by proof;—might they not be published with impunity?

A. Such a thing is impossible.—The English have a maxim, that "the king can do no wrong;" 'tis stupid to say this of a king: but Mr. Jefferson has more wisdom, more virtue, more honour, than all the kings have put together, who reign in Christendom. He betray and sacrifice the interest of the nation! The supposition is blasphemy.

Q. Inasmuch as the angels of light become foul apostates, it is surely not impossible that even Mr. Jefferson may err and do wrong; and if such an incident should exist and the public should thereby be greatly endangered, ought not the people to know it?

A. It would be best that the people should not know it: the publication of such intelligence would light up the torch of sedition; it would diminish the people's confidence in their chief magistrate, and would estrange their hearts from his sacred person.

Q. Should a printer publish any fact of this kind, together with substantial documents in proof; what must be the consequence?

A. The presumptuous wretch must be indicted, and punished according to law.

Q. Should he produce in court twenty substantial witnesses, in proof of his allegation, would not this circumstance tend to affect his acquittal?

A. If he should produce in court an hundred witnesses, it could no wise avail him. The bench would not permit them to be sworn: common law forbids it.

Q. If Mr. Jefferson should personally appear in court and acknowledge the fact alleged against him, might not this exculpate the publisher?

A. It would in no manner tend to his exculpation but would really aggravate the offence: it would prove that the allegation were a great truth; and consequently, that it were a great libel.

* See the writings of Rousseau, the Abbe Raynal, Godwin, &c.