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Ours are the plans of fair, delightful peace,
Unwar'd by party rage, to live like brothers.

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REFLECTIONS UPON DECIUS.

An essay was some time ago published in this paper, which has commanded universal attention. It is time for us to speak our own opinion upon its contents. That opinion has been hitherto waved, because we wished it to be calm, deliberate and impartial.

It becomes us, in making these remarks, to speak of Mr. John Randolph, whose conduct is so often noticed by Decius. Of that gentleman it is difficult to speak in terms adequately descriptive of our feelings. "A nobler spirit (we believe) lives not among the sons of men. His intellectual powers are truly sublime, and his bosom burns with a godlike ambition." When the ardour of his feelings shall be tempered by experience we look to a harvest of unrivalled utility for his country. Of such a man it is impossible not to believe, that his mistakes have been dictated by a spirit, that soars above suspicion.

There are two obvious ways of replying to an argument: to deny the facts which are assumed or the inferences drawn. The first part of the investigation we leave to those intimate friends of Mr. Jefferson who are acquainted with the history of the last session of Congress. But admitting the facts as they are stated by Decius, we are prepared to deny his conclusions.

We mean not to criticise upon that part of Decius which relates to the measures of Congress. Our business is with that more interesting part which relates to the conduct of the executive, in which the charge of holding a wavering, a doubtful, an unconstitutional course, constitutes the most distinguished features.

The argument may be reduced to two general points, 1st. That Mr. Jefferson did not comply with the constitutional duty of "recommending to the consideration" of congress, the purchase of the Floridas; a measure which he judged "expedient and necessary." 2d. That he privately recommended this opinion to the members of congress. From these two points it is inferred, that Mr. J. attempted to throw off the responsibility of this measure from his own shoulders upon the members of Congress.

As to the first point, It may be shewn from the evidence of the members who formed the federal convention, that those framers of the constitution had never considered this article under the vast latitude of interpretation, which the advocates of executive influence have pretended to give it; that it was at that time supposed principally to embrace those general matters, on which the president had formed conclusive opinions, those on which he had no new documents to lay before congress; but which seemed to him to require legislative provision, and those on which the executive did not deem it advisable at the time, to lay before congress all the information he possessed. It might be shewn that this mode of interpretation is by far the most agreeable to the spirit of a republican government; for under such a constitution, that less danger is to be apprehended from the undue extension of legislative than of executive influence; that the ministerial powers of a President are already sufficiently great, without suffering him to interfere, unless in particular cases, in the deliberations of the legislature; that if these deliberations should terminate in acts which he may deem injurious to the country, he has in most cases, a sufficient power of control, in his constitutional negative over their laws; that it is ridiculous to suppose, that in those cases, where

the official information is equally admitted to them both, the wisdom of one man should be superior to the collective wisdom of many: that he is more easily corrupted and easily misled: and that his elevated situation excludes him from many of the means of bold, unshrinking and correct information. It may be shown that under a different mode of interpretation, the constitutional duty of the president would be irksome, fatiguing and meddlesome beyond example; that there would be no case, however trivial, in which the president would not deem it his duty to "recommend" his own opinion "to the consideration" to congress, and in every case however comprehensive, to submit the general measure, in all the voluminous details necessary for its execution.

It may be demonstrated, by a recurrence to executive records, that this has never been the uniform practice of the two last, or of the present administration; that they have adopted different modes to different cases; some times submitting their own opinions as to the courses to be pursued, as well as all the acts necessary for the information of congress; sometimes suggesting whether such and such course might not be worthy of the consideration of congress, without positively determining between them; and sometimes merely submitting the facts without a single commentary on them, without a single opinion as to the course to be pursued, and leaving it "with congress to pronounce, what shall be done." The ministers of the two last administrations, could state a vast variety of measures approved of by the executive, which they wisely forbore to lay before congress. It may be shown, that in a variety of important cases, the executive has adopted the two latter courses, preferring (in the words of General Washington's first inaugural speech) "to substitute, in place of a recommendation of particular measures, the tribute that is due to the talents, the rectitude, and the patriotism which adorn the characters selected to devise and adopt them;" that even when they have gone on to lay their own opinions before congress, it was not their custom to launch forth into the particular details of their project, but to confine themselves to its general outlines.

It may be shown that this is the precise course pursued by the President in the present instance; that having given them all the information which he possessed, and supposing them to be at least as well qualified as himself to give a correct opinion upon them, he had forbore to express his own in all its details, even admitting that he had conclusively formed one: "To them, (says he) I communicate every fact material for their information, and the documents necessary to enable them to judge for themselves: but that though he had forbore to express his own opinion in all its details, he still expressed a general one as to the course to be pursued; that this opinion was, that the present was the moment "for pressing" a "settlement" with Spain, at the same time that "force should be interposed in a certain degree," leaving it to congress to decide upon the particular course which the negotiation was to assume, and the particular force that was to be interposed. But it is unnecessary to press the investigation of this point farther, since even Decius himself is silent upon it. Even he does not make it a charge against the administration, that his official course is a violation of its constitutional duties.

O what, then, does Decius complain of? That the President, after having forbore to recommend the

purchase of the Floridas in his official message, did not hesitate to enforce that idea in a secret and unofficial manner, that he had not only forbore to recommend this pacific mode of adjustment, but that the whole complexion of his message went to the enforcing, "manly and vigorous measures."

"From the official communications, from the face of the record, (says Mr. Randolph to the secretary of the treasury) it would appear, that the executive had discharged his duty in recommending manly and vigorous measures, which he had been obliged to abandon, and compelled by congress to pursue an opposite course, when in fact, congress itself had been acting all the while at executive instigation." The chairman further observed, "that he did not understand this double set of opinions and principles." The assertion of Mr. Randolph is most explicitly and peremptorily denied.

In what part of the official communications does Mr. Randolph discover this uncontrollable hostile spirit of the executive; a spirit that was at war with any pacific adjustment of our differences? a spirit, that would not have deigned to propose the purchase of Floridas? Refer to the public or the private messages of the president we demand where is this professed manifestation of hostility?

Decius has with no little ingenuity quoted such parts only of the public message, as breathed a "manly and vigorous" sentiment. Why did he not go further? Why not also have thrown into inverted commas and italics every other part which breathed the language of Peace? The reason is, that the very next paragraph of the message would have overthrown his proud, air built castles.

In reviewing these injuries from some of the belligerent powers, the moderation, the firmness and the wisdom of the legislature will all be called into action. We ought still to hope, that time and a more correct estimate of interest as well as character, will produce the justice we are bound to expect. "Some of these injuries may perhaps admit of a peaceful remedy." Is there here displayed no sentiment of peace? No hope of adjusting our differences? No wish to attempt it by negotiation? Must the man who holds this kind of language, be necessarily accused of inconsistency, of maintaining a double set of opinions and principles, should he be at the same moment inclined towards a peaceable purchase? Are negotiations for peace and preparations for war altogether incompatible? While we hold out the olive branch, may we not sharpen the sword? Or must the man, who maintains the consistency of those two measures be charged with holding a contradictory course?

Let us now refer to the secret message, that triumphant source of consolation to the minority, and what does that tell us? Does that breathe nothing but the language of military defiance? Is there not a single "hinge, or loop, to hang a doubt on," of the peaceable disposition of the President? But analyze; take to pieces this much agitated, this much abused message; try it in the severest crucible of criticism, and see of what materials it is composed. The whole of the message contains but five paragraphs. The 1st points out the sources of our differences with Spain, as also the disposition manifested by her, up to the period of sending a "special mission." The 2d. declares the unfavorable result of this negotiation, the new steps which Spain had subsequently taken, and the defensive system which the president had determined to pursue, with the constitutional means in his hands: The

first time discloses the general conclusions of the executive on these facts, and the last paragraph consults congress as to the course to be pursued and demands the necessary means. What then is the very pith and constitution of this message? That the three first long paragraphs are a mere history of the facts, which have occurred, interspersed with one or two simple inferences as to the course which Spain might pursue; facts, not one of which shuts out the idea of a peaceable compromise; and that in one short paragraph alone, does the president "recommend to their consideration" a course to be pursued. And what course is that? Does it breathe nothing but manly and vigorous measures? Let us refer to the paragraph itself for a satisfactory answer. We quote the one before it, as being necessary to the understanding of the word "such."

"On the contrary, we have reason to believe that she (France) was disposed to effect a settlement on a plan analogous to what our minister had proposed, and so comprehensive as to remove as far possible the grounds of future collision and controversy on the eastern as well as the western side of the Mississippi.

"The present crisis in Europe is favorable for pressing such a settlement, and no moment should be lost in availing ourselves of it. Should it pass unimproved, our situation would become more difficult. Formal war is not necessary, it is not probable that it will follow; but the protection of our citizens the spirit and honor of our country require that force should be interposed in a certain degree. It will probably contribute to advance the object of peace."

Can any one doubt that the man who held this language was the friend of negotiation? A negotiation which in the present crisis of Europe would be immediately pressed. But it may be said that a certain degree of force was to be interposed, and how can this measure be reconciled to the negotiation for peace? Of what species, however, was this force to be? It was no regular army to wage an offensive war against Spain, because the president expressly observes, that formal war is not necessary; it is improbable that it will follow." The president only appealed to congress for military means "which it belongs to congress exclusively to yield or deny." His own constitutional powers were limited. He was without power to increase the regular army by new enlistments. He had not at that moment even the means to call out the militia of the country: for the law to authorize a detachment of the militia was not passed until some time in April; four months at least after the communication of the message.

The purport of this secret message then seems to be in complete unison with that of the public one. It recommends to us an attitude of defence, at the same moment that we are to press our plans for negotiation. But it neither proceeds to point out the particular force that is to be interposed, nor the particular course that this negotiation ought to assume. From the observation that "the course to be pursued will require the command of means which it belongs to Congress exclusively to yield or deny," it may, indeed, with some show of probability be inferred, that Mr. Jefferson was not averse to the purchase of the Floridas; because that measure would require pecuniary means which it belongs exclusively to congress to yield or deny. To conclude any other mode of negotiation, the power of the president were of themselves independent, complete, and indeed, exclusive of congress.

This complaint of Decius the at least resolve itself into this proposition; not that Mr. Jefferson has ever maintained "a double set of opinions and principles," for which insinuation can no longer be justified by the "official communications," but that he expressed his own opinions as to the course, which the negotiation should be made to assume, in a private and unofficial manner; thus attempting to throw upon congress all the responsibility of adopting pacific measures; a responsibility which he should have himself assumed in a constitutional shape? And measures which he should never have attempted to introduce by secret and irresponsible influence.

But on this subject, it might be shewn, that the inferences of Decius are not supported by his facts; that had the President proceeded to tamper with the different members of the republican party, to volunteer his opinions as to the proper course to be pursued, and attempted to guile the opinions and votes of the individual members, he would have deserved a much severer rebuke, than flows from the pen of Decius. It may be shewn, that a very obvious distinction is here to be taken, which Decius has completely forgotten; that the President would have been to blame, had he solicitously attempted to influence the opinions of Congress, but that the mere giving of his own opinion when he was consulted by any one who had a right to ask his assistance, was at least an innocent if not a commendable course, and that the whole pith of Decius's statement amounts at last to one accusation. It may be shewn that in the support of this charge, Decius has brought forward but three relevant facts; Mr. J. Randolph's secret conversation with the President; his communication on this subject with the Secretary of the Treasury; and Gen. Varnum's alleged declaration on the floor of Congress. With respect to the first, it may be shewn from the very statement advanced by Decius himself, that Mr. Jefferson did not express his own opinions to Mr. Randolph, until the latter gentleman had the proper to consult him: it was not until Mr. Randolph had expressed "his willingness and readiness to co-operate, as far as his principles and judgment would permit, in such plans as the executive might have devised for the occasion," that he "then learned, not without some surprise, that an appropriation of two millions was wanting to purchase Florida," and that had Mr. Jefferson on such an occasion forbore to express his views however imperfect to Mr. Randolph, the very leader of the republican party in Congress, and the chairman of the secret committee, not only Mr. Randolph himself, but the whole country would have reason to condemn his silence. With respect to Mr. Gallatin's proposition, even admitting that it was presented at the request (or direction) of the President, it may be shewn, that it was not presented to Mr. Randolph until several days after he himself had consulted the President as to the course to be pursued; that it was not even then presented under all the imposing dignity of the President's name; that it was not declared to be his wish, or even his conclusive opinion; that Mr. Gallatin expressly rejected the idea, of being understood to recommend the measure; "but if the committee should deem it advisable, he had devised a plan for raising the necessary supplies, as he had been requested (or directed) in that case to do." With respect to General Varnum's alleged assertion, it is enough to observe, that he himself on the floor of Congress expressly denied the idea of ever having made