

MONTHLY REVIEW,

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ART. I. *History of the principal Republics in the World: a Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America, against the Attack of M. Turgot, in his Letter to Dr. Price dated the twenty second Day of March 1778. By John Adams, LL. D. and a Member of the Academy of Arts and Sciences at Boston. new Edition. 8vo. 3 Vols il. 1s Sterl. Boards, Stockdale. 1794.*

P E R H A P S it would not be an extravagant assertion, if we were to say that at least one half of the confusion, which arises in the world, is owing either to an ignorant misapprehension, or to a perverse abuse of words. In the affairs of politics, this axiom might be exemplified by a thousand examples, but by none more pertinently than by that which is the main subject of the present work, the term *republic*. Many persons, to whom, notwithstanding the early prepossessions of a classical education, the very name of republican, from various accidental causes, is become odious, will be surprised at being told that the British state, in its original spirit and true character, is in reality a free republic; and will wonder still more that an American republican, and one of the most able and active members of that Congress which, in 1776, first declared the American colonies free sovereign and independent states, has written one of the most able defences of the British Constitution that has ever

appeared. Yet we are very much mistaken if the truth of all this will not be confessed by every impartial reader, who attentively peruses this *History of the principal Republics in the World*—the additional title very properly prefixed to the present edition.

The circumstance which gave rise to this publication was an objection made against the constitution of the States of America by M. Turgot, in a letter to Dr. Price; “that they had, without any particular motive, imitated the customs of England, and instead of collecting all authority into one center, that of the nation, have established different bodies,—bodies of representatives, a council, and a governor, because there is in England, a House of Commons, a House of Lords, and a King.” In reply to this observation, Dr. Adams undertakes to prove, at large, that a free republic is the best of governments, and the greatest blessing to which mortals can aspire; and that the freedom of a republic can only be secured by instituting three independent branches in its legislature and preserving their independence sacred, and by keeping the legislative and executive authorities perfectly detached from each other. In order to maintain his point, this able politician sometimes reasons theoretically: but, doubtless aware of the difficulty of establishing a practicable system of government merely on abstract principles, he very judiciously makes his principal appeal to facts. He takes a succinct view of most of the states which have subsisted in the world under the name of republics: examining the various modes of government, both nominal and real, in each; and detailing such particulars, respecting the internal and external condition

condition of these states, as may serve to illustrate his general position. In the result, he finds that each state has been respectively free and happy, or otherwise, in proportion to the attention which has been paid to the distribution of its power into three orders, a governor, a senate, and the general body of the people acting personally or by their representatives. The term republic, *res publica*, principally signifies in general *public affairs*, and is applicable to every kind of government, but it has been lately by many writers arbitrarily confined to the democratic form of government, in which the whole power or sovereignty of the people is centered in a single assembly, chosen by them at stated periods. This term Dr. Adams applies with precision to his own system, by adding to it the epithet *free*; and his work is a demonstration, founded on induction, that the great principle of a free republican government is, that it shall be so constructed as to preserve an equilibrium of estates or orders, and an independent execution of the laws.

We must not attempt to follow our political historian through his well-arranged details. Our readers will derive much pleasure, and we shall not perhaps presume too far if we add, instruction also, from the perusal of his account of republics democratical, aristocratical, monarchical, or regal and mixed, at present existing in Europe; from his retrospect, in the first volume, of the several republican forms of government in Greece and Rome; and from the full descriptions which he gives, in his second and third volumes, of the rise, progress, and operations of the several political constitutions in the Italian republics, through the middle ages, to the 14th century. The general observations

observations deduced from the whole survey are, that, though there be no example of a government simply democratical, there are many of forms nearly or remotely resembling what is at present understood by collecting all authority into one center; from all which it appears that caprice, infiability, turbulence, revolutions, and the alternate prevalence of those two plagues and scourges of mankind, tyranny and anarchy, have been the effects of governments without the balance of three orders.

In the argumentative parts of the work, the author reviews the sentiments of many eminent writers; particularly, among the antients, Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, Dionysius Halicarnassensis, Cicero, and Tacitus, among the moderns, of Machiavel, Sydney, Montesquieu, Harrington, Locke, Milton, Switt, Hume, Franklin, Price and *Nedham*. The work of this latter writer, entitled *the Excellence of a Free State, or the Right Constitution of a Commonwealth* published in 1656, containing every semblance of argument which can possibly be urged in favour of the democratic system, and being the work from which M. Turgot's idea of a commonwealth was probably borrowed, is examined at large by Dr. Adams. The reply to this tract which fills about three hundred pages of the third volume, forms a very important part of the present work; which we recommend to the attentive perusal of those who adopt the opinion that nothing but declamation, or sophistry, can be offered in defence of any form of government besides that which is purely democratic.

We must not take our leave of this very important, and at the present time particularly interesting, publication, without copying two or three passages

passages ; in which the author's political sentiments are fully expressed, and his forcible method of supporting them is well exemplified. We begin with selecting a few miscellaneous remarks on *Representation*, &c. from the preface :

‘ Representations, instead of collections, of the people—a total separation of the executive from the legislative power, and of the judicial from both—and a balance in the legislature by three independent equal branches—are perhaps the three only discoveries in the constitution of a free government, since the institution of Lycurgus. Even these have been so unfortunate, that they have never spread : the first has been given up by all the nations excepting one, who had once adopted it ; and the other two, reduced to practice, if not invented by the English nation, have never been imitated by any other except their own descendants in America. While it would be rash to say, that nothing further can be done to bring a free government, in all its parts, still nearer to perfection—the representations of the people are most obviously susceptible of improvement. The end to be aimed at, in the formation of a representative assembly, seems to be the sense of the people, the public voice : the perfection of the portrait consists in its likeness. Numbers, or property, or both, should be the rule ; and the proportions of electors and members an affair of calculation. The duration should not be so long that the deputy should have time to forget the opinions of his constituents. Corruption in elections is the great enemy of freedom. Among the provisions to prevent it more frequent elections, and a more general privilege of voting, are not all that might be devised. Dividing the districts, diminishing the distance of travel, and confining the choice to residents, would be great advances towards the annihilation of corruption.’—

‘ There can be no free government without a democratical branch in the constitution. Monarchies and aristocracies are in possession of the voice and influence of every university and academy in Europe. Democracy, simple democracy, never had a patron among men of letters. Democratical mixtures in government have lost almost all the advocates they ever had out of England and America.

‘ Men of letters must have a great deal of praise, and some of the necessaries, conveniencies, and ornaments of life. Monarchies and aristocracies pay well and applaud liberally. The people have almost always expected to be served gratis, and to be paid for the honour of serving them ; and their applauses and  
adoration

adorations are bestowed too often on artifices and tricks, on hypocrisy and superstition, on flattery, bribes, and largesses. It is no wonder then that democracies and democratical mixtures are annihilated all over Europe, except on a barren rock, a paltry fen, and inaccessible mountain, or an impenetrable forest. The people of England, to their immortal honour, are hitherto an exception; but to the humiliation of human nature, they shew very often that they are like other men. The people in America have now the best opportunity, and the greatest trust, in their hands, that Providence ever committed to so small a number since the transgression of the first pair: if they betray their trust, their guilt will merit even greater punishment than other nations have suffered, and the indignation of heaven. If there is one certain truth to be collected from the history of all ages, it is this; that the people's rights and liberties, and the democratical mixture in a constitution, can never be preserved without a strong executive, or, in other words, without separating the executive power, from the legislative. If the executive power, or any considerable part of it, is left in the hands either of an aristocratical or a democratical assembly, it will corrupt the legislature, as necessarily as rust corrupts iron, or as arsenic poisons the human body; and when the legislature is corrupted the people are undone.

‘The rich, the well-born, and the able, acquire an influence among the people that will soon be too much for simple honesty and plain sense in a house of representatives. The most illustrious of them must therefore be separated from the mass, and placed by themselves in a senate; this is, to all honest and useful intent, an ostracism. A member of a senate of immense wealth, the most respected birth, and transcendent abilities, has no influence in the nation in comparison of what he would have in a single representative assembly. When a senate exists, the most powerful man in the state may be safely admitted into the house of representatives, because the people have it in their power to remove him into the senate as soon as his influence becomes dangerous. The senate becomes the great object of ambition; and the richest and the most sagacious wish to merit an advancement to it by services to the public in the house. When he has obtained the object of his wishes, you may still hope for the benefits of his exertions, without dreading his passions; for the executive power being in other hands, he has lost much of his influence with the people, and can govern very few votes more than his own among the senators.’

The idea suggested in this last paragraph is uncommon, and furnishes an important argument for

for the institution of a senatorial body. We proceed:—

The United States of America have exhibited, perhaps, the first example of governments erected on the simple principles of nature; and if men are now sufficiently enlightened to disabuse themselves of artifice, imposture, hypocrisy, and superstition, they will consider this event as an era in their history. Although the detail of the formation of the American governments is at present little known or regarded either in Europe or America, it may hereafter become an object of curiosity. It will never be pretended that any persons employed in that service had any interviews with the gods, or were in any degree under the inspiration of heaven, any more than those at work upon ships or houses, or labouring in merchandize or agriculture; it will for ever be acknowledged that these governments were contrived merely by the use of reason and the senses. As Copley painted Chatam; West, Wolf; and Trumbull, Warren and Montgomery; as Dwight, Barlow, Trumbull, and Humphries composed their verse, and Belknap and Ramsay history; as Godfrey invented his quadrant, and Rittenhouse his planetarium; as Boyston practised inoculation, and Franklin electricity; as Paine exposed the mistakes of Raynal, and Jefferson those of Buffon, so unphilosophically borrowed from the *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Americains*, those despicable dreams of De Pauw—neither the people, nor their conventions, committees, or sub-committees considered legislation in any other light than ordinary arts and sciences, only as of more importance. Called without expectation, and compelled without previous inclination, though undoubtedly at the best period of time both for England and America, to erect suddenly new systems of laws for their future government, they adopted the method of a wise architect, in erecting a new palace for the residence of his sovereign. They determined to consult Vitruvius, Palladio, and all other writers of reputation in the art; to examine the most celebrated buildings, whether they remain entire or in ruins; compare these with the principles of writers, and inquire how far both the theories and models were founded in nature, or created by fancy; and when this should be done, as far as their circumstances would allow to adopt the advantages, and reject the inconveniencies of all. Unembarrassed by attachments to noble families, hereditary lines and successions, or any considerations of royal blood, even the pious mystery of holy oil had no more influence than that other of holy water: the people universally were too enlightened to be imposed on by artifice, and their leaders, or more properly followers, were men of too much honour to attempt it. Thirteen govern-  
ments

ments thus founded on the natural authority of the people alone, without a pretence of miracle or mystery, which are destined to spread over the northern part of that whole quarter of the globe, are a great point gained in favour of the rights of mankind. The experiment is made, and has completely succeeded: it can no longer be called in question, whether authority in magistrates, and obedience of citizens, can be grounded on reason, morality; and the Christian religion, without the monkery of priests, or the knavery of politicians. As the writer was personally acquainted with most of the gentlemen in each of the states, who had the principal share in the first draughts, the following letters were really written to lay before the gentleman to whom they are addressed, a specimen of that kind of reading and reasoning which produced the American constitutions.'

With respect to the British constitution, considered theoretically, Dr. A. as we have already intimated, is liberal in his commendations. Of M. de Lolme's work on the subject, he says that it is the best defence of the political balance of three powers that even was written. He adds:

'If the people are not equitably represented in the house of commons, this is a departure in practice from the theory.—If the lords return members of the house of commons, this is an additional disturbance of the balance: whether the crown and the people in such a case will not see the necessity of uniting in a remedy, are questions beyond my pretensions: I only contend that the English constitution is, in theory, the most stupendous fabric of human invention, both for the adjustment of the balance, and the prevention of its vibrations; and that the Americans ought to be applauded instead of censured, for imitating it as far as they have. Not the formation of languages, not the whole art of navigation and ship-building, does more honour to the human understanding than this system of government. The Americans have not indeed imitated it in giving a negative, upon their legislature, to the executive power; in this respect their balances are incomplete, very much, I confess, to my mortification: in other respects, they have some of them fallen short of perfection, by giving the choice of some militia officers, &c. to the people—these are however small matters at present. They have not made their first magistrates hereditary, nor their senators: here they differ from the English constitution, and with great propriety.

'The Agrarian in America is divided into the hands of the common people in every state, in such a manner, that nineteen  
twentieths



twentieths of the property would be in the hands of the commons, let them appoint whom they could for chief magistrate and senators: the sovereignty then, in fact, as well as morality, must reside in the whole body of the people; and an hereditary king and nobility, who should not govern according to the public opinion, would infallibly be tumbled instantly from their places: it is not only most prudent then, but absolutely necessary, to avoid continual violence, to give the people a legal, constitutional, and peaceable mode of changing these rulers, whenever they discover improper principles or dispositions in them. In the present state of society, and with the present manners, this may be done, not only without inconvenience, but greatly for the happiness and prosperity of the country. In future ages, if the present states become great nations, rich, powerful, and luxurious, as well as numerous, their own feelings and good sense will dictate to them what to do: they may make transitions to a nearer resemblance of the British constitution, by a fresh convention, without the smallest interruption to liberty. But this will never become necessary, until great quantities of property shall get into few hands.

‘The truth is, that the people have ever governed in America: all the weight of the royal governors and councils, even backed with fleets and armies, have never been able to get the advantage of them, who have always stood by their houses of representatives in every instance, and carried all their points; and no governor ever stood his ground against a representative assembly: as long as he governed by their advice he was happy; as soon as he differed from them he was wretched, and soon obliged to retire.’

We shall conclude these extracts with the following concise and animated picture of American freedom:

‘Our people are undoubtedly sovereign—all the landed and other property is in the hands of the citizens—not only their representatives, but their senators and governors, are annually chosen—there are no hereditary titles, honours, offices, or distinctions—the legislative, executive and judicial powers are carefully separated from each other—the powers of the one, the few, and the many, are nicely balanced in their legislatures—trials by jury are preserved in all their glory, and there is no standing army—the *habeas corpus* is in full force—the press is the most free in the world—and where all these circumstances take place, it is unnecessary to add, that the laws alone can govern.’

With a constitution so admirably adapted as that of Great Britain is shewn to be for the preservation of liberty, such, in the general outline, with due allowance for antient institutions, ought to be the present picture of British freedom. If the fact be in any respect otherwise, the defect, not being in the machine, must be in the manner of working it. When the absurd and disgraceful antipathy, which has arisen in this country against *reform*, shall have subsided, we trust that such regulations will be adopted, as will effectually prove that the balancing system of government, so ably defended in this work, is practically, as well as theoretically, productive of every blessing which can be enjoyed in a free government.

ART. II. *An Essay on Colonization*, particularly applied to the Western Coast of Africa, with some free Thoughts on Cultivation and Commerce; also brief Descriptions of the Colonie already formed, or attempted, in Africa, including those of Sierra Leona and Botama. By C. B. Wadstrom. In Two Parts. Part I. Illustrated with a Nautical Map and other Plates. 4to. pp. 200. 12s. Sterl. Boards. Nicol, &c.

IT is not easy to estimate the political eminence to which Great Britain would probably by this time have arisen, had she observed towards the republic of France a conduct at once neutral and amicable; and had been contented with paying to the principles of liberty the manly homage of recognizing the representatives of the French people. She would now have been the emporium of all commerce, and at her pleasure the mediatress of peace; Holland had been sacred territory; and, while her rival was grappling with a coalition of despots, she might safely and at leisure have staked out, along the coast of Africa, the rudiments of a colonization dear to humanity