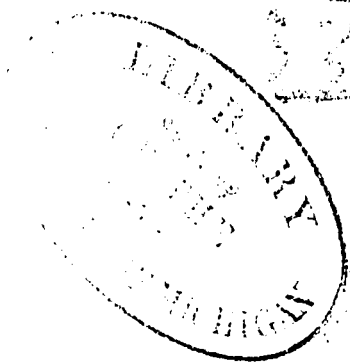


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Mr. Adams's Letter to the Abbe de Mably, &c.

[In our last number we mentioned being in possession of the following interesting article. After the publication of the anecdote from Grimm's Memoirs in the Daily Advertiser, Mr. Adams was written to by the gentleman to whom his reply is addressed, for information on the subject of this pretended application to the Abbe de Mably. Grimm himself, in a subsequent volume, contradicts the story he had previously inserted. Those who are interested in American history, or are pleased with literary anecdote, will be gratified with an authentick account of this transaction, and which places it in a clear point of view. The letter to the Abbe de Mably, which is published, except in one edition, of the "Defence of the American Constitutions," in French, is a very valuable guide to all those who may wish to investigate or write upon the subject of American history, and on this account alone it is an important document. Two original notes follow; one from the Abbe de Mably, and the other from Marmontel, who in his quality of Historiographer of France, to which he had been recently named, had requested to see the letter. The note of de Mably is almost ludicrous, from the sort of panick with which he declines the task, when told what preparations would be necessary to achieve it, after he had so boldly in conversation, asserted his intention of writing "*the whole*."—It may be excusable to add, that we are particularly gratified in publishing this statement.]

Quincy, Sept. 14th, 1816.

DEAR SIR,

SOME of those publications, which in France, as you very well know, are called foreign Gazettes and Journals, announced to the world, in 1782, that the Congress of the United States of America, had directed Dr. Franklin and Mr. Adams to request the Abbe de Mably, to furnish them with a plan of a code of laws for their future government. By whom so ridiculous a fiction was imagined, and how it found its way into those publick prints, I never knew, and always thought it idle to inquire. But if you recollect the ambition of the French Philosophers, and their ardent

desire to be distinguished by foreign States and Princes; the examples of J. J. Rousseau, Abbe Condillac, D'Alembert, Diderot, La Harpe, &c.; you will not be surprised that the report of such glory to De Mably, as to be the Legislator of the New World and of hundreds of millions of future people, became a "scandal to philosophy," and spread jealousy and envy through the whole Coterie, of which Grimm was a principal member, both at the baron D'Holbach's and at Mr. Necker's.

The Abbe de Mably himself, in his observations on our Constitutions, has said that "Mr. Adams desired his sentiments." This is true. But the meaning and the circumstances of that "desire," ought to be known, that those who think it of any consequence, may understand in what sense it is true.

Upon Mr. Adams' arrival in Paris from the Hague, upon the business of the Peace, in 1782, the Abbe de Mably's work, "on the manner of Writing History" was put into his hand. At the conclusion of that publication, the learned and ingenious Abbe declared "his intention of writing on the American Revolution."

Meeting the Abbe de Mably soon afterwards at dinner, at the country seat of Monsieur de Chalut, the Farmer-General, the Abbes De Chalut and Arnou, who were of the party, and to whom Mr. Adams had been somewhat familiarly known in 1778, 1779, and 1780, : informed him, that their friend the Abbe de Mably, was about writing "THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION!" and would be obliged to Mr. Adams, for any facts or memorials, that might be in his possession or within his power.

Mr. Adams asked "what part of the Revolution, was intended to be written? The answer was "THE WHOLE!" Adams asked, "Where had the Abbe obtained the materials?" the answer was, "It is supposed they might be obtained from the publick papers and inquiry of individuals." In reply to this, many difficulties were started by Mr. Adams, and the conversation was long and lively. Neither of the three Abbes' understood the American language. Adams' French was miserably bad. At last the gentlemen requested Adams' sentiments in writing, said they would get them translated into French, and consider them more maturely. Accordingly, in a few days, Adams wrote to the Abbe de Mably, the following

letter ; by which you will see that the invitation to the Abbe to write was a mere compliment, and rather a civil admonition not to expose his reputation by attempting a history for which he was wholly unqualified, than any formal or serious request that he would write at all.

“We ought to be obliged to any gentlemen of letters in Europe, who will favour us with his candid thoughts and advice : but in general the theory of Government is as well understood in America, as it is in Europe ; and by great numbers of individuals, is every thing relative to A FREE GOVERNMENT, infinitely better comprehended, than by the Abbe de Mably, or Mr. Turgot, amiable, learned and ingenious as they were.”

Mr. Adams' letter, to the Abbe de Mably, was as follows.

To the Abbe de Mably.

It is with pleasure that I have learned your design, to write upon the American Revolution ; because your other writings, which are much admired by the Americans, contain principles of legislation, policy and negociation, which are perfectly analogous to their own. So that you cannot write upon this subject, without producing a work, instructive to the publick, and especially to my fellow citizens.

But I hope, Sir, you will not accuse me of presumption, of affectation, or of singularity, if I venture to express my opinion, that it is yet too soon to undertake a complete history of that great event ; and that there is no man, either in America or in Europe, at this day, capable of performing it, or is in possession of the materials requisite and necessary for that purpose.

To engage in such a work, a writer ought to divide the history of America into several periods.

1. From the first establishment of the Colonies in 1600, to the commencement of their disputes with Great Britain in 1761.

2. From the commencement of those disputes in 1761, occasioned by an order of the Board of Trade and Plantations in Great Britain, sent to the officers of the Customs in

America, to carry into execution, in the strictest manner, the acts of Trade, and to apply to the Courts of Judicature for writs of assistance, for that purpose ; to the commencement of hostilities, on the 19th of April, 1775. During this period of fourteen years, there was little more than a war of the quill.

3. From the battle of Lexington, to the signature of the treaty with France, on the 6th of February, 1778. During this period of three years, the war was exclusively between Great Britain and the United States.

4. From the treaty with France, to the commencement of hostilities, between Great Britain and France, in the first place, afterwards with Spain, then to the gradual progress of the armed neutrality, and the war of England against Holland. Finally, all these scenes have their catastrophe in the negotiations of the peace.

Without a distinct knowledge of the history of the Colonies in the first period, a writer will find himself embarrassed from the beginning to the end of his work, to account for events and characters which will present themselves in every step of his path, as he advances to the second, third, and fourth periods. To acquire a sufficient knowledge of the first period, it will be necessary to read all the charters granted to the Colonies, and the commissions and instructions given to Governours ; all the codes of laws of the different Colonies, (and thirteen volumes in folio of dry and disgusting Statutes cannot be read with pleasure, nor in a short time,) all the records of the Legislatures of the several Colonies, which cannot be found, but in manuscript, and by travelling in person from New-Hampshire to Georgia ; the records of the Board of Trade and Plantations in Great Britain, from its institution to its dissolution ; as also the files in the offices of some of the Secretaries of State.

There is another branch of reading which cannot be neglected if the former might be omitted. I mean those writings which have appeared in America, from time to time. I pretend not however, in the place where I am, at a distance from all books and writings, to make an exact enumeration. The writings of the ancient governours Winthrop and Winslow, Dr. Mather, Mr. Prince, Neal's History of New-England, Douglas's Summary, the Progressive Amelioration of the Lands and the present state of the British Colonies, Hutchinson's

History of the Massachusetts Bay, Smith's History of New-York, Smith's History of New-Jersey, the Works of William Penn, Dummer's Defence of the New-England Charters, the History of Virginia, and many other publick writings. All these were anterior to the present quarrel, which began in 1761.

During the second period, the writings are more numerous, and more difficult to be procured. There were then given to the publick, works of great importance. In the controversies between those who were actors in this scene, as writers, there are some who ought to be distinguished. Among them, are the governours, under the king, Pownal, Bernard and Hutchinson, lieutenant governour Oliver, Mr. Sewall, the judge of Admiralty for Halifax, Jonathan Mayhew, D. D. James Otis, Oxenbridge Thatcher, Samuel Adams, Josiah Quincy, Joseph Warren; and perhaps the following have not been less important than the foregoing, viz. the writings of Mr. Dickenson, of Mr. Wilson and Dr. Mush, of Philadelphia, of Mr. Livingston and M'Dougal, of New-York, of Col. Bland and Arthur Lee, of Virginia, and of many others. The records of the town of Boston, and **ESPECIALLY OF THE COMMITTEE OF CORRESPONDENCE; the RECORDS OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE CUSTOMS in Boston, the journals of the house of representatives, and of the council of Massachusetts Bay; moreover, the gazettes of the town of Boston, not forgetting those of New-York and Philadelphia, ought to be collected and examined, from the year 1760. All this is necessary, in order to write with precision, and in detail, the history of the discussions before hostilities commenced; during the period, from the year 1761, to the 19th of April, 1765.**

During the third and the fourth period, the records, pamphlets, and gazettes of the thirteen states, ought to be collected, as well as the journals of Congress, (of which nevertheless, a great part is still secret,) and the collection of the new constitutions of the several states. The Remembrancer, and the Annual Register, periodical papers published in England; the affairs of England and America, and the Mercury of France, published in Paris, and the Dutch Politician, printed at Amsterdam; the whole course of the

correspondence of General Washington with Congress, from the month of July, 1775, to this day, which has not yet been published, and which will not be published till Congress shall order or permit it. Allow me to say, that until this vast source of information shall be opened, it will be scarcely possible for any man to undertake the history of the American war. There are still, other writings of importance, in the office of the secret committee of Congress, in the committee of foreign affairs, in the committee on the treasury, in the marine or naval committee, in the board of war, as long as it existed, and of the departments of war, of the navy, the finances, and of foreign affairs, from their institution. There are also letters of American ministers in France, Spain, Holland and other parts of Europe.

The greatest part of the documents and materials being still secret, it is premature to undertake a general history of the American revolution. But too much labour and care cannot be employed in making collections of these materials. There exist, however, in fact, already two or three general histories of the American war, and the American revolution; published in London, and two or three others published in Paris. Those in the English language, are only materials indigested and confused, without discernment; and all these histories, both in French and English, are only monuments of the complete ignorance of the writers of their subject.

The whole of a long life, to begin at the age of twenty years, would be necessary, to assemble from all nations and from all parts of the world, in which they are deposited, the documents proper to form a complete history of the American revolution; because it is indeed the history of mankind during that epoch. The histories of France, Spain, Holland, England, and the neutral powers, must be united with that of America. The materials ought to be assembled from all these nations; and the documents the most important of all, as well as the characters of actors and the secret springs of action, are still concealed in cabinets and enveloped in cyphers.

Whether, you, sir, undertake to give a general history, or only observations and remarks, like those you have published concerning the Greeks and Romans, you will produce a work, very interesting and instructive, in morality, policy, and legis-

lation ; and I shall esteem it an honour and a pleasure to furnish you with any little assistance in my power to facilitate your researches.

It is impossible for me to say, whether the government of France would wish to see any work profoundly written and by an author of great celebrity, in the French language. Principles of government must be laid open, so different from those which we find in Europe, especially in France, that such an essay perhaps, would not be seen with indifference. But of this I am not a competent judge.

Permit me, sir, before I finish this letter, to point at a key to all this history. There is a general analogy in the governments and characters of all the thirteen states. But it was not, till the debates and the war began in Massachusetts Bay, the principal province of New-England, that their primitive institutions produced their first effect. Four of these institutions ought to be amply investigated and maturely considered, by any person who wishes to write with correct information upon this subject, for they have produced a decisive effect, not only in the first determinations of the controversies in writing, and the first debates in councils, and the first resolutions to resist in arms ; but also, by the influence they had on the minds of the other colonies, by giving them an example to adopt more or less the same institutions and similar measures. The four institutions intended, are

1. The towns or districts.
2. The congregations.
3. The schools.
4. The militia.

The towns are certain extents of country, or districts of territory, into which Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, New-Hampshire and Rhode Island are divided. These towns contain upon an average, say, six miles or two leagues square. The inhabitants who live within these limits are formed by law into corporations, or bodies politick, and are invested with certain powers and privileges ; as, for example, to repair the great roads or highways, to support the poor, to choose their municipal officers, called selectmen, their constables, their collectors of taxes, and other officers ; and above all, their representa-

tives in the legislature; as also, the right to assemble, whenever they are summoned by their selectmen, in their town halls, there to deliberate upon the publick affairs of the town, or to give instruction to their representatives in the legislature. The consequences of these institutions have been, that the inhabitants, having acquired from their infancy the habit of discussing, of deliberating, and of judging of publick affairs; it was in these assemblies of towns or districts, that the sentiments of the people were formed in the first place, and their resolutions were taken, from the beginning to the end of the disputes and the war with Great Britain.

The congregations are religious societies, which comprehend the whole people. Every district contains a parish or religious congregation. In general they have but one, though some of them have several. Each parish has a temple for publick worship, and a minister maintained at the publick expense. The constitutions of these congregations are extremely popular, and the clergy have little influence or authority, beyond that which their own piety, virtues, and talents naturally give them. They are chosen by the people of their parishes, and receive their ordinations from the neighbouring clergy. They are all married, have families, and live with their parishioners in an intimate and perfect friendship. They visit the sick; they are charitable to the poor; they solemnize marriages and funerals, and preach twice every Sunday; the smallest imputation on their moral character, would destroy their influence and ruin them forever. They are therefore wise, virtuous, and pious men. Their sentiments are in general conformable to those of their people, and they are jealous friends of liberty.

3. There are schools in every town, established by an express law of the colony. Every town, containing sixty families, is obliged, under a penalty, to maintain constantly, a school and a school master, who shall teach his scholars, reading, writing, arithmetick, and the rudiments of the Latin and Greek languages. All the children of the inhabitants, the rich as well as the poor, have a right to go to these schools. There are formed the candidates for admission, as students into the colleges at Cambridge, New-Haven, Princeton, and Dartmouth. In these colleges are educated future masters for these schools.

future ministers for these congregations, doctors of law and medicine, and magistrates and officers for the government of the country.

4. The militia comprehends the whole people. By virtue of the laws of the country, every male inhabitant between sixteen and sixty years of age, is enrolled in a company and a regiment of militia, completely organized with all its officers. He is enjoined to keep always in his house and at his own expense, a firelock in good order, a powder horn, a pound of powder, twelve flints, four and twenty balls of lead, a cartouch box, and a knapsack; so that the whole country is ready to march for its own defence upon the first signal of alarm. These companies and regiments are obliged to assemble at certain times in every year, under the orders of their officers for the inspection of their arms and ammunition, and to perform their exercises and manœuvres.

Behold, sir, a little sketch of the four principal sources of that prudence in council, and that military valour and ability, which have produced the American revolution; and which I hope, will be sacredly preserved as the foundations of the liberty, happiness and prosperity of the people.

If there are any other particulars, concerning which I can give you any information, be so kind as to point them out. I have the honour to be, &c. 1782.

JOHN ADAMS.

[In another letter to the same gentleman on this subject, Mr. Adams makes the following remarks in relation to Grimm and his memoirs:]

“I never saw the Baron till 1785, when I left Paris, never to see it more, he was then only a secret correspondent of the Empress of Russia, and some of the Sovereigns of Germany. He was soon appointed a publick Minister, admitted into the diplomattick Corps, and consequently became known to Mr. Jefferson.”

“The Baron's great work in fifteen volumes, will be read with different views. The lovers of Romance founded in truth, will find it an exquisite entertainment. I need not tell you how the Amateurs and Connoisseurs of the Fine Arts, Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, Statuary, Musick.

Poetry, Eloquence, and every species of theatrical instruction and amusement, will be delighted with it.”

“I own to you, I admire it, as the best history of the causes, the rise, and progress, of the French Revolution to 1790, that I have seen.”

L'ABBE DE MABLY est bien fâché de ne s'être pas trouvé chez lui quand Monsieur Adams lui a fait l'honneur d'y passer. Il a celui de lui remettre l'écrit qu'il a adresse : jamais l'Abbé de Mably ne s'est proposé d'écrire l'histoire de la revolution d'Amérique, il seroit mort avant que d'avoir rassemblé la moitié des materiaux d'un si important ouvrage. Il sera tres obligé à Monsieur Adams s'il veut avoir la bonté de lui faire tirer une copie de la derniere partie de cet écrit, en y joignant quelques remarques sur le genie et les interets de quelques unes des premiers confederés, et surtout sur l'état actuel des richesses ou fortunes des particuliers, et sur la nature du luxe connu en Amérique.

Mr. Marmontel a l'honneur de faire mille complimens a Monsieur Adams, et de lui renvoyer l'excellente lettre qu'il a eu la bonté de lui confier'. Elle lui fait sentir plus que jamais l'extreme besoin qu'il a de ses secours et de ses lumieres pour etre en etat d'écrire passablement l'histoire de la grande revolution, qui fait la gloire de l'Amérique septentrionale et qui assure son bonheur.

Ce. 8, Mars, 1783.



FOR THE NORTH-AMERICAN JOURNAL.

Naumkeag, ———.

SIR,

IN the 7th number of your Journal I proposed furnishing you with some observations on “the antiquity of the United States ;” respecting which, I had been led to entertain an opinion in a degree different from the one, generally held on the subject. A further investigation has opened such a wide field of proof and illustration, that to embrace the whole would require a more elaborate work, than I shall perhaps ever be willing to undertake. Being desirous however, to place before the publick a few hints on this interesting topick, I have thought the simplest mode of doing this, would be, to throw an abstract of these researches into the form of an irregu-