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MR. WEBSTER'S

ORATION.

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61187  
AN  
ORATION,

PRONOUNCED BEFORE THE  
CITIZENS OF NEW HAVEN,

ON THE  
ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE  
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE;

*July, 1802.*

AND

*Published at their Request.*

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BY NOAH WEBSTER, JUN.

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*“ Usus, qui unus est legum Corrector.”*  
LEV. 45. 32.

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1802.

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AN

ORATION.

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THE history of the first English settlements in America, and of the measures which prepared the way for a revolution in the colonies, is too interesting not to be well understood by men of common curiosity and reading in this State. That history unfolds a series of great events, evidently suited to accomplish important purposes in the economy of Divine Providence....events which every American of expanded views must contemplate with admiration; and every Christian, with delight. To recapitulate even the most remarkable of those events, however amusing and instructive the recital, would require more time than the appropriate business of this anniversary would afford. The day we are assembled to commemorate, summons the attention of American citizens to the history and the real objects of the revolution; to the national rights vindicated; to the dignity of character attached to the new sovereignty; to the duties imposed on the citizens, by their new rank and station among nations; to the errors which have been committed in framing the constitutions of the States and the federal compact; and especially to the means of preserving and perpetuating the benefits of Independence.

IN the lapse of twenty six years, since the date of our sovereignty, a large proportion of the inhabitants of the United States have been changed. Most of the civil and military characters, conspicuous in the revolution, are now in their graves ; and a new generation has arisen to guide the public councils, and to guard the blessings which their fathers have purchased. The experience of the same period of time, has drawn in question some opinions respecting the superior excellence of a republican government ; and clouded the brilliant prospect which animated the hopes of the revolutionary patriots. Numerous unexpected difficulties in the management of this species of government, and multifarious disappointments, under the best administrations, have arisen in thick succession, to confound the wisdom, and blast the hopes, of the most discerning friends of their country. To trace the causes of these disappointments, is to prevent a repetition of them, or prepare ourselves to meet them with advantage.

It is worthy of observation, that nations sometimes begin their political existence, as young men begin the world, with more courage than foresight, and more enthusiasm than correct judgment. Unacquainted with the perils that await their progress, or disdain the maxims of experience, and confident of their own powers, they expect to attain to supereminent greatness and prosperity, by means which other nations have found ineffectual, and bid defiance to calamities by which others have been overwhelmed..... Nations, like individuals, may be misled by an ardent enthusiasm, which allures them from the standard of practical wisdom, and commits them to the guidance of visionary projectors. By fondly cherishing the opinion that they enjoy some superior advantages of knowledge, or local situation, the rulers of a state may lose the benefit of history and observation, the surest guides in political affairs ; and delude themselves with the belief, that they have wisdom to elude,



or power to surmount the obstacles which have baffled the exertions of their predecessors.

SUCH are the mistakes of reformers ; and such have been the illusions of the enthusiastic friends of the revolution. Their imagination has been warmed with the belief, that the sequestered position of America, would exempt her citizens from the troubles which harrafs Europe ; that a general diffusion of knowledge, and superior attainments in policy, would enable them to form constitutions of government, less defective than any which have preceded them ; and that their public virtue would secure a faithful, uncorrupt, and impartial administration. Whenever a doubt has been suggested, respecting the duration of a free republic, it has been repelled by one general answer, that the system of representation, supposed to be a modern improvement in free constitutions, is calculated effectually to obviate the evils which other states have experienced, from legislatures consisting of popular assemblies.

BUT does the wide ocean that rolls between the two continents, detach our citizens from a deep interest in the affairs of Europe ? Will our commerce, a productive source of our wealth, permit a separation of interests ? And will not our prejudices and our wants, in spite of reason and patriotism, continue, for a long period, to link us to the policy, the opinions, and the interest of European nations ?

BUT if we had the power to insulate our country, our interest, and our hearts, can we assure ourselves that our citizens possess supereminent wisdom, to frame systems of government, which shall be proof against the insidious advances of corruption, and the bold assaults of faction ? What has prevented the enlightened sages of antiquity, from viewing man in all his attitudes ; and learning all the possible modes, by which the human passions operate on

society and government? After the experience of four or five thousand years, and numberless forms of government; how should it happen to be reserved for the Americans to discover the great secret, which has eluded all former inquiry, of infusing into a political constitution, the quality of imperishable durability? Is not the pretension to such superior light and wisdom in our citizens, rather an evidence of pride, self-sufficiency, and *want of wisdom*? If Moses, with an uncommon portion of talents, seconded by divine aid, could not secure his institutions from neglect and corruption, what right have we to expect, that the labors of our lawgivers will be more successful?

BUT great expectations are formed from *representation* in government, which is supposed to be a modern discovery, destined to give permanency to republics. If representation were a modern invention, every good citizen would wait impatiently for the result of a fair experiment; solicitous that the inventors might not be ultimately numbered among a multitude of dreaming projectors, who commence their schemes, “*acribus initiis, incurioso fine*,”\* with ardent zeal and splendid promises, which end in nothing. But representation is not a modern discovery. It was for ages practiced, not only in France, Spain, Denmark, and Sweden, as it has been in Switzerland and Great-Britain, but in many of the small states of antiquity; not, perhaps, in the same form prescribed by our constitutions, but in a variety of modes, in which the principles of it were fully and fairly tested.

REPRESENTATION, by enabling a state to govern, without assembling all its citizens, lessens the chance of sudden and violent convulsions; but it neither humbles pride, subdues ambition, nor controls revenge and rivalry. It still

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\* TACITUS. An. lib. 6. 18.



leaves a state subject to the operation of all the turbulent, restless passions of man; changing only their direction. It is a popular opinion, but probably a great mistake, that corruption in a state is introduced by men in power; whereas, in fact, it usually originates with the candidates for preferment. Men in office, if respected and rewarded, have few temptations to abuse their trust; but strong and irresistible motives for fidelity and diligence. Their subsistence and their reputation are the most ample guaranty for a faithful discharge of their duties. Men, therefore, who *seek*, not those who *possess*, the honors and emoluments of government, are the first to introduce corruption. It is extremely important that this truth should be duly weighed; for popular jealousy is usually directed exclusively against the officers of government, when in fact, it ought to be employed to guard against the arts and address of *office-seekers*.\*

THIS truth being admitted, for it is authorized by history and observation, we have a clear rule by which to estimate

\* By corruption is here intended, not only the influence of money or favors, but an undue bias given to the minds of the electors, from violent passions and strong prejudices, which impel them to abandon *principle* to follow *men*. No man will deny that men in power sometimes abuse their trust; nor is it the intention of the writer to discountenance a proper watchfulness over public officers. This vigilance, however, is much better exercised by the legislature, than by candidates for office, printers, clerks and spies. The latter are incessantly exciting groundless alarms and popular suspicions, about officers whose conduct, on a regular inquiry, is found to be unimpeachable. Fraud and delinquency in public officers occasionally occur, and when detected, are universally reprobated and the guilty persons punished. About *real* crimes, there is rarely any difference of opinion....parties and factions arise on doubtful questions and imaginary evils. But the natural growth of corruption in a state, from the mismanagement of men in power, is extremely slow, compared with the vast increase under the impulse of the violent passions

the hazard to which a state is exposed, by a corruption of its true principles. The passions of men being every where the same, and nearly the same proportion of men in every society, directing their views to preferment, we observe that, in all governments, the object and efforts are the same, but the direction of those efforts is varied, according to the form of government, and *always applied to those who have the disposal of honors and offices*. In a monarchy, office-seekers are courtiers, fawning about the ministers or heads of departments....in a pure democracy, they are orators, who mount the rostrum, and harangue the populace, flattering their pride, and inflaming their passions....in a representative republic, they are the *friends of the people*, who address themselves to the electors, with great pretensions to patriotism, with falsehoods, fair promises, and insidious arts. In a monarchy, the minister may be corrupted, and the nation not be materially affected. In a democratic state, the populace may be corrupted by the arts or seduced by the eloquence of a popular orator. In a single hour, an Athenian assembly might be converted from the adorers, into the persecutors of their best magistrates and ablest generals....In the morning, a Themistocles and a Phocion might be idolized by the people; and at evening, sentenced to exile, or condemned to swallow poison.

raised among electors by the candidates for office. When the electors insist under *men*, they desert the true principles of elective governments....they follow *their leaders* and *their party*, without examining *measures* or *principles*. This has been the ruin of many states. It is an evil that seems to be *innate* in a republican government, that the electors never remain *free* and *unbiased*. This is a *perversion* of the true principles of an elective government, which is here called *corruption*, and it arises from factions originating mostly with *office-seekers*. For this evil, no remedy has ever been devised. One general effort of a party to change the administration in a government like ours, does more to introduce and confirm this species of corruption, than all that can be done by men in power. for half a century.



But does a representative government effectually guard the magistrates from similar abuses of popular power? If the electors cannot assemble, to listen to the seductions of an artful orator, has modern invention supplied no means, by which their minds may be perverted, and their passions inflamed? What are gazettes, handbills and pamphlets, but substitutes for orators? A species of silent messengers, walking by night and by day, stealing into farm houses and taverns, whispering tales of fraud about public officers, exciting suspicion, spreading discontent, and weakening confidence in government! What is the difference between the misguided zeal of an Athenian assembly, and of the citizens of America, except in the means and the time employed to effect the object? The one resembles a tornado, suddenly collecting and exhausting its force in undistinguishing, but momentary ravages; the other is like the slowly gathering tempest, whose lingering approach is announced by chilling blasts, and a lowering sky.

WHATEVER may be the form of government, therefore, corruption and misrepresentation find access to those who have the disposal of offices; by various means and different channels indeed, but proceeding primarily from demagogues and office-seekers, of bold designs and profligate principles.

It is said, however, that we have constitutions of government, or fundamental compacts, which proscribe abuses of power, by defining the exact limits of right and duty, and controlling both rulers and people. But how long will a constitutional barrier resist the assaults of faction? From the nature of things, the words of a fundamental code must be general, to comprehend cases which cannot possibly be specified; and of course, liable to be extended, or frittered away by construction. The danger from this quarter is imminent, and hardly admitting of a remedy, when popular jealousy is excited against the constitution, and the rights or the prejudices of the people are to be favored, by enlarging.

or abridging its powers. When a magistrate becomes more popular than the constitution, he may "draw sin as it were with a cart-rope,"\* in the work of extending his power over the instrument which was intended to restrain usurpation. Whatever vanity and self-confidence may suggest, in favor of the restraints of a paper compact, all history and uniform experience evince, that against men who command the current of popular confidence, the best constitution has not the strength of a cobweb. The undisguised encroachments of power give the alarm and excite resistance.... But the approaches of despotism, under cover of popular favor, are insidious and often deceive the most discerning friends of a free government.

"Virtue," says the learned, but visionary Montesquieu, "is the foundation of a republic.".... "Virtue will maintain a free government," is echoed and reechoed by the political enthusiast.... Where is this virtue, and what is it? Among the ancient Greeks and Romans, it was personal bravery, an enthusiastic love of military glory, and a heroic contempt of death, in the service of their country. This species of virtue, so often displayed by the citizens of ancient democracies, is not exclusively the property of republicans. It was found as vigorous and pure under the old monarchy of France, as in Athens or Sparta; and is still as energetic a principle in Denmark, Sweden, or Great-Britain. It proceeds from early habits, and a strong attachment to the place where men are born, and to the customs, manners, and government, in which they are educated. It is the growth of every soil, and the production of every age. Yet this species of virtue, never yet preserved a republic from decay.

If by virtue, writers mean *pure morals*, we shall all agree that such virtue is the true, safe, and permanent foundation of a republic; and so it is, of every other species of gov-

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\* ISAIAH V. 18.



ernment. But when have pure morals adorned the character of a whole nation? A free government founded on exact and universal morality might be durable, if such morality could be enforced, and guarded from declension:....but this presupposes what history and observation, do not authorize us to expect.

SOME enthusiasts preach to us the *self denial* of the Spartans, their frugal meals, their rigid discipline, and contempt of riches. Others urge the example of the Chinese, who restrain commerce to preserve their manners from corruption, and their religion and government from innovation. But such examples are inapplicable; for they suppose a condition of society, which would admit of such restraints; or a rigor of despotism which no free nation would now bear. An attempt to restrain commerce, in a state where commercial habits prevail, would occasion a revolution. Even an attempt to introduce the iron money of Sparta into modern Turkey or Russia, would probably shake the throne, and convulse the empire, of the prince who should hazard the experiment.

If there is a possibility of founding a perfectly free government, and giving it permanent duration, it must be raised upon the pure maxims, and supported by the undecaying practice, of that religion, which breathes "peace on earth, and good will to men." That religion is perfectly republican....it is calculated to humble the pride and allay the discontent of men....it restrains the magistrate from oppression, and the subject from revolt....it secures a perfect equality of rights, by enjoining a discharge of all social duties, and a strict subordination to law. The universal prevalence of that religion, in its true spirit, would banish tyranny from the earth. Yet this religion has been perverted, and in many countries, made the basis of a system of ecclesiastical domination, which has enslaved the minds of men, as political power had before enslaved their bodies. To correct



these evils, a set of fanatical reformers, called philosophers, charging that oppression to the religion itself, which sprung only from its abuses, have boldly denied the sacred origin of Christianity, and attempted to extirpate its doctrines and institutions. Strange, indeed, that the zealous advocates of a republican government, should wage an inveterate war against the only system of religious principles, compatible with rational freedom, and calculated to maintain a republican constitution!....

BUT vain are the speculations of closet-philosophy! Baseless and fleeting are the illusions of theory! All forms of government have been tried, from the theocracy of the Israelites, to the splendid paper constitutions of the French reformers. And where are they? What have been their duration and success? Like the vast cities of antiquity, the most of them are known only in story, or their moss-grown ruins alone are left, as proofs that they once existed. Some of them, like the massy pillars of Palmyra, broken and defaced, still exhibit evidence of their ancient splendor, and appear magnificent even in ruins. Others, like the stupendous walls of Babylon, have been so totally swept away by the ravages of time, that not a stone or a moldering column remains to tell where they stood.

If such has been the fate of all former systems of government, must we indulge the melancholy thought, that such is to be the fate of ours? Let us examine the foundations of our own systems....to determine, if possible, whether they will sustain the magnificent edifice of freedom and happiness, which their projectors have contemplated.

THE eminent characters who have conducted the revolutions in England and America, have laid it down as a fundamental principle in government, that by nature all men are *free, independent, and equal*; and this principle,

without definition or limitation, forms a main pillar of our constitutions.

If there were but a single man on earth, he certainly could have no masters, but the elements and the inflexible laws of nature. But political axioms, if not mere empty sounds, must have reference to a social state. How then, can men, exposed to each others power, and wanting each others aid, be *free* and *independent*? If one member of a society is free and independent, all the members must be equally so. In such a community, no restraint could exist, for this would destroy freedom and independence. But in such a state of things, the will of each individual would be his only rule of action, and his *will* would be supported by his *strength*. Force then would be the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong, and the wills of the weaker must bend to the power of the stronger. A society, therefore, existing in a state of nature, if such a state can be supposed in which there should be no law but individual wills, must necessarily be in perpetual anarchy or despotism. But no such state of society can exist. The very act of associating destroys the natural freedom and independence of each member of the society, anterior to any compact limiting their respective powers and rights; for it is a principle, resulting from the very nature of society, independent of any mutual agreement for the purpose, that one individual shall not exercise his own power to another's prejudice. Of course, by the very constitution of society, the will of each member is restrained by the laws of general utility, or common good, the details of which are to be regulated by the supreme power. Whatever may be the abstract reasoning of men on this subject, the practice has been, and by the nature of man, must continue to be, that the members of a state or body politic, hold all their rights subject to the direction and control of the sovereignty of the state. It is needless to discuss questions of natural right as distinct from a social state; for all rights are social, and subordinate to



the supreme will of the whole society. Nor, without such a supreme controlling power over all the members of a state, can an individual possess and enjoy liberty. In the supposed state of nature, every man being free from the restraint of *law*, every man would be subject to the restraint of *force*, and of course would be a slave. Civil liberty, therefore, instead of being derived from *natural freedom* and *independence*, is the creature of society and government. Man is too feeble to protect himself, and unless he can protect himself, he is not free. But to secure protection, man must submit to the restraints of a sovereign power; subordination, therefore, is the very essence of civil liberty. Yet how often has the abstract, undefined proposition, that "all men are by nature free and independent," furnished the motive or the apology, for insurrection!

EQUALLY fallacious is the doctrine of *equality*, of which much is said, and little understood. That one man in a state, has as good a right as another to his life, limbs, reputation and property, is a proposition that no man will dispute. Nor will it be denied that each member of a society, who has not forfeited his claims by misconduct, has an equal right to protection. But if by *equality*, writers understand an equal right to distinction, and influence; or if they understand an equal share of talents and bodily powers; in these senses, all men are *not* equal. Such an equality would be inconsistent with the whole economy of nature. In the animal and vegetable world, however strong the general resemblance in the individuals of a species, each is marked with a distinct character; and this diversity is one of the principal beauties of creation, and probably an important feature in the system. There are, and there must be, distinctions among men....they are established by nature, as well as by social relations. Age, talents, virtue, public services, the possession of office and certain natural relations, carry with them just claims to distinction, to influ-



ence and authority. Miserable, indeed, would be the condition of men, if the son could disengage himself from the authority of his father; the apprentice from the command of his master; and the citizen from the dominion of the law and the magistrate.\*

AGAIN....It is asserted as an axiom in politics, that the sovereign power resides in the *people*. Unfortunately our language does not, like the Roman, distinguish the *populus* from the *plebs*; the free citizens from those who have not the privilege of suffrage. But if we restrict the word *people* to the free citizens or electors, what act of sovereign power do they or can they exercise? They cannot assemble for debate; but sovereignty consists in the single will of a body acting together, deliberating, deciding, and capable of carrying its decrees into effect. Do the people possess this power?



\* No doctrine has been less understood or more abused, than that of political *equality*. It is admitted that all men have an equal right to the enjoyment of their life, property and personal security; and it is the duty as it is the object, of government to protect every man in this enjoyment. The man who owns a single horse or cow, has as strong a claim to have that property protected, as the man who owns a ship or a thousand acres of land. So far the doctrine of *equal rights*, is vindicable. But that all men have an equal claim to distinction and authority, is contradicted by the opinions and practice of people in every country. Whatever absurdities men may write, publish and repeat, respecting natural and political equality; in practice, they are usually correct, and would always be so, if they could be left to act from their unbiassed sentiments. All men naturally respect age, experience, superior wisdom, virtue and talents....and when they are to make appointments, they pursue this natural sentiment, and select men who are best qualified for the places. If most men should be asked, are you qualified for the office of chief magistrate....of judge....of ambassador....of president of a college...of commander of a ship of war? They will acknowledge their unsuitness....they abandon all claims to these distinctions. But the same men will maintain that they have all an *equal right* to suffrage; that is, to an *equal* influence

To avoid this absurdity, some writers allege that the sovereign power is *derived from* the people. This proposition is more correct. The people possess the right of electing agents or substitutes to meet and constitute the supreme power...and farther than this right of electing, which is exercised by a private act of each individual, the people cannot possibly have a share in the sovereign power. This right of election is certainly a precious right, and one which, if used with discretion, is the safety and glory of a free state; but the exercise of it cannot, with propriety, be denominated, an act of sovereignty.

CLOSELY connected with this axiom, are the principles recognized by some of the State Constitutions, that "the people have a right to meet together to consult upon the common good, give instructions to their representatives, and request of the legislature a redress of wrongs." But

in government. But all men are not equally competent to judge of proper characters to fill offices. This is however not the main objection to the principle. Government is chiefly concerned with the *rights of person* and *rights of property*. Personal rights are few, and are not subject to much difficulty or jealousy. All men are agreed in the *principle* of protecting persons, and differ very little in the *mode*. But the *rights of property*, which are numerous, and form nineteen twentieths of all the objects of government, are beyond measure intricate, and difficult to be regulated with justice. Now if all men have an equal right of suffrage, those who have *little* and those who have *no* property, have the power of making regulations respecting the property of others....that is, an equal right to control the property with those who own it. Thus, as property is *unequally* and suffrages *equally* divided, the principle of *equal* suffrage becomes the basis of *inequality of power*. And this principle, in some of our larger cities, actually gives a *majority of suffrages* to the men who possess not a *twentieth of the property*. Such is the fallacy of abstract propositions in political science! In truth, this principle of *equal suffrage* operates to produce extreme *inequality of rights*; a monstrous inversion of the natural order of society....a species of oppression that will ultimately produce a revolution.



are the rights here described compatible with each other? Are they consistent with the nature of a representative republic? The electors appoint deputies or substitutes, and by that act, delegate away their own power; how then can they meet and exercise the same power? And it is to be observed in this species of delegation, that the agent is appointed, for this very reason, that the electors in person cannot deliberate and act upon public affairs, in their several towns or districts; for if they could, no substitution would be necessary. The right in the electors to meet and deliberate on the common good, is directly incompatible with the act of delegation, which they have before exercised. And it ought not to be forgotten, that the insurgents in Massachusetts, in 1786, cited the clause in the declaration of rights, prefixed to the Constitution of that State, recognizing this right of meeting and consulting for the common good, in justification of their opposition to the laws.

It should be remarked farther, that the same clauses in the constitutions, which authorize the people to *instruct* their representatives, permit them only to *request* of the legislature a redress of grievances. But a right to *instruct*, is a right to *direct* and *control*. *Instruction* implies *superior power*; whereas, *request* implies a *want of such power*, or *subordination*. Such are the contradictions which disfigure our constitutions!

In the same spirit of exalting the *people* over the legislature and the magistrate, it is asserted that the officers of government are the *servants of the people*, and *accountable to them*. Is not the direct tendency of such language to degrade all authority, to bring the laws and the officers of government into contempt, and to encourage discontent, faction and insurrection? Such language is not correct.... the proposition is not true either in theory or fact. The legislative officers are declared, by the constitution, not to be liable to be called in question for their opinions or



votes....their inviolability is guaranteed in the most express manner. How then can they be accountable to the people? The two propositions are a contradiction in terms. The power of the people to omit choosing a representative at a subsequent election, is, by no means, a power to call him to account for his conduct. Nor are executive and judicial officers responsible to the people....if guilty of crimes and misdemeanors, they are answerable to the laws in courts of justice, and to no other tribunal.

It is not unfrequent, that the citizens of our country express their surprize at the popular tumults which have disturbed our tranquility. They are astonished that in this free country, the people should be so lost to a sense of their duty, as to resist the laws. But their surprize must cease, when, upon examination, they find that the people have a *constitutional* right to direct and control the legislature. The transition from the right of *instruction* to the right of *resistance*, is extremely easy; and if all officers of government are the *servants* of the *people*, how can it be expected that the *masters* should not, at times, take the government out of the hands of the *servants*!

EQUALLY absurd is the doctrine that the universal enjoyment of the right of suffrage, is the best security for free elections and a pure administration. The reverse is proved by all experience, to be the fact; that a liberal extension of the right of suffrage accelerates the growth of corruption, by multiplying the number of corruptible electors, and reducing the price of venal suffrages.

It has also been a received maxim, that a frequent rotation of officers, is among the means of guarding a state from the malpractices of the public agents. But this principle has been extended too far, and experience has compelled some of the states to recede from it in their revised constitutions. It has been found that a short and precarious ten-

urs of offices, is the direct means of degrading them, and making them an object of desire only to worthless and incompetent men.

SUCH are the brilliant theories which have dazzled the founders of our states! Such the illusions by which the admirers of a republican government have been fascinated and misled! But it is the fate of man to be confounded by his own wisdom, and to see the elegant structures raised by his fancy, demolished by the rough hand of experiment. Nor is mortification the only evil to be expected from the fallacy of political doctrines. Errors, wrought into constitutions, have a sanction that gives them high authority, which it requires a long period of time, and perhaps the experience of several public calamities, to destroy.

THERE is another evil, connected with the very nature of elective governments, which is little suspected by the mass of people, but which of itself balances half the good that is secured by elections; this is, the dependence which the representatives feel upon their immediate constituents. This evil is augmented in proportion to the frequency of the elections and the smallness of the districts in which the candidates are chosen. The fear of losing a future election, subdues the firmness of mind which is a primary quality in a public officer....it even lays snares for his integrity. It contracts his views to the spot in which his electors reside, and often deters him from acting for the interest of the whole community....it makes him the humble instrument of party politics, and local intrigue....it converts him from the rank of a dignified legislator of a state or nation, into a servile, political pettifogger. And to complete the evil, the opinions of each representative must be made known to his constituents, by placing the yeas and nays on the journals of the house of which he is a member. With such a system of elections and legislation, the weakness of man forbids us



to expect, that representatives will not often forsake the public interest, to secure a temporary popularity.

BUT the occasional sacrifices of conscience and the public good to popular fame, are not the darkest shades in the picture. The man who only flatters and cringes to gain applause, is a saint, compared with the man who tramples on law and constitution to secure the popularity his arts have obtained, and to retain the confidence of a party. There is something extremely contemptible in the factitious character of a popularity-seeker, or mere man of the people.

“ ALL tongues speak of him, and the bleared sights,  
 Are spectacled to see him. Your prattling nurse  
 Into a rapture lets her baby cry,  
 While she chats him. The kitchen malkin pins  
 Her rich fl lockram 'bout her recchy neck,  
 Clambering the walls to see him; stalls, bulks, windows,  
 Are smothered up, leads filled, and ridges horsed,  
 With variable complexions ...all agreeing,  
 In earnestness to see him....such a pothor,  
 As if that whatsoever god, who leads him,  
 Were slily crept into his human powers,  
 And gave him graceful posture.”

SHAKESPEAR, CORIOLANUS.

THE natural consequence of too much popularity is, that it enables the possessor to violate the laws and constitution of his country, and sacrifice its interests with impunity.... During the war in Europe, in the beginning of the last century, the Duke of Marlborough, by an unusual tide of victory, was borne so high in popularity, that he had influence enough to prolong that war, for the purpose of enriching himself; and a commission was actually prepared, which would have made him general for life, but it was



rendered ineffectual by a single member of the ministry, who had firmness enough to refuse his seal.\*

To be a tyrant with any tolerable degree of safety, a man must be fully possessed of the confidence of the *people*. Charles the first of England extended the royal prerogative to an unwarrantable length, and lost his head....but that prince could not have sent a detachment of three hundred men to drive the commons of England from their hall, and have effected his purpose. That act of despotism was reserved for the republican Cromwell, the *friend of the people*. James the second was an arbitrary man, a catholic, and odious to the English nation....he was, therefore, compelled to abdicate his throne. But his successor, William, a friend of the whigs, ascended the throne upon a tide of popularity; and *he* could deliberately sign an illegal and barbarous warrant for the murder of the whole village of Glencoe, in Scotland, and never be called in question for the murderous deed!† “Oh, ’tis excellent,” says the poet,

“To have a giant’s strength; but it is tyrannous  
To use it like a giant.”

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

THE open advocate of a strong government is subject to popular odium, his encroachments are eyed with jealousy, or resisted by force. But the hypocritical pretender to patriotism acquires, in the confidence of the people, a giant’s force, and he may use it like a giant. The people, like artless females, are liable to be seduced, not by the men they hate or suspect, but by those they love.

.....“Our natures do pursue,  
Like rats that raven down their proper bane,  
A thirsty evil, and when we drink, we die.”

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

\* Johnson’s Life of Swift.

† Smollet. continuation of Hume. Anno. 1691.

NOR is it among the least evils proceeding from the ambition of popular favor, that the *friends of the people* are willing to secure it, by relaxing the energy of the laws. They know that legal restraints are odious, and will hazard the public peace, rather than not gratify the licentious propensities of their partizans. But,

“ Mercy is not itself that oft looks so ;  
Pardon is still the nurse of second woe.”

“ We have strict statutes and most biting laws,  
(The needful bits and curbs for headstrong steeds :)  
Which for these fourteen years we have let sleep ;  
Even like an overgrown lion in a cave,  
That goes not out to prey : now, as fond fathers  
Having bound up the threat’ning twigs of birch,  
Only to stick it in their children’s sight  
For terror, not for use ; in time the rod  
Becomes more mocked than feared ; so our decrees,  
Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead ;  
And liberty plucks justice by the nose ;  
The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart  
Goes all decorum.”.....

#### MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

BUT why this gloomy picture of errors committed, and evils felt or expected ? Ought we to renounce our predilection for a republican government, and abandon, in despair, the experiment which our fathers have begun ? By no means. Not only our duty enjoins, but necessity impels us to prosecute plans of national grandeur and happiness, which were contemplated by the revolution. To advance, indeed, requires courage and firmness ; but to retreat is impossible, and would be infamy.

To ourselves, however, and to posterity, it will be useful to inquire, with candor and impartiality, into the causes of our disappointments. The real truth is, our revolutionary



schemes were too visionary....and our hopes too sanguine. A republican government, in which the supreme power is created by choice, is unquestionably the most excellent form of government in theory; and with all its imperfections, is, in fact, the most eligible form, for nations in the early stages of society. In old, corrupt, and very populous nations, it is probable that the state of society must always prevent the mass of citizens, from acquiring that portion of property, knowledge and independence of mind, which are absolutely essential to render an elective government a public blessing. Government takes its form very much from the character of the people to be governed; and a republican or free government, necessarily springs from the state of society, manners and property in the United States. No other form is proper for the country....no other will suit the present state of society....no other can be imposed upon our citizens. It would be as difficult to establish a monarchy in the United States, as to found a durable republic in France; and the difficulty would, in both, proceed from a common cause, the unfitness of each species of government for the people of the respective countries. The French project, of *conquering all nations into liberty*, or of giving them all a republican government, has had its admirers.... We have seen the tragedy and its catastrophe. As well might the reformers of government attempt to fit all nations with one kind of garment....compelling a Laplander to wear, in winter, the muslins of India, or the tribes that pant beneath a sultry sun on the banks of the Senegal, to wrap themselves in the furs of Siberia.

BUT although a republican government is admitted to be the best, and most congenial to our state of society, its innate perfections and unavoidable abuses, render it far less durable, than its enthusiastic admirers have supposed. This conclusion, drawn from experience, should silence the com-

plaints of men, who look for more perfection in government than it is susceptible of receiving; it should allay the animosities and temper the discussions of our citizens;...it should produce a more indulgent spirit towards the faults of men in power, and the errors of private individuals.

THE consideration, also, that the intended effects of a free government, are mostly defeated by an abuse of its privileges, should make us more solicitous to acquire a deep and correct knowledge of its true principles, and more vigilant in guarding against the impositions of designing men....men who seek offices by fair promises, and flatter only to deceive. Most men are more willing to command than to obey....and more men are desirous to obtain public favor, than are willing to deserve it, by severe study and laborious services. One truth, also, ought to be deeply impressed on the minds of freemen, that men of real worth are always the last to seek offices for themselves....and the last to clamor against men of worth who possess them.

BUT while considerations like these should abate the expectations of the enthusiast, we should carefully avoid despondence, and faithfully exert our talents to realize the blessings of freedom, under our present form of government. The real object of the revolution was, to secure to the United States, the privilege of governing themselves....not to dissolve all government and resign our country to be the sport of licentious passions and wild misrule. The real object of Independence ought not to be abandoned....it must be steadily and perseveringly pursued. Weak or wicked men may occasionally rise to distinction in the public councils; but whoever may be the men in power, let the government be obeyed. As the poet enjoins:

“Respect to your great place; and let the devil  
Be sometimes honored for his burning throne.”

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.



To know the real worth of men, their talents and views must be put to the test. The weak and the corrupt, exalted to high and responsible stations, are tried and exposed.... and from their elevations, they fall like Lucifer, never again to rise. Nor are combinations of profligate men very formidable in society; as their influence can never be of long duration. Were the power of such combinations equal to the turpitude of the members, they would, in every age, overwhelm the earth. But it is the decree of heaven that the league of iniquity should dissolve, like a rope of sand; for the same perfidious principles which impel men to betray their country and its religion, will make them treacherous to each other.

WHILE we thus attend to the objects of the revolution, with the errors and dangers to which our government is exposed, let us employ a moment in calling to mind the gloomy scenes, and vicissitudes of the war, the wants, the feebleness and the distractions of the Colonies; the distresses of the army, and the solicitude of our citizens. This solemn anniversary has demands upon the sensibilities of the heart, no less than upon the faculties of the mind; and by mingling the recollections of manly sorrow, with the joys of the day, we unite the purposes of virtue with convivial pleasure, and give dignity to the festival.... Let this anniversary renew the deep, but tranquil grief of the aged sire, who bore the bleeding carcase of a brave son, from the field of victory to a grave\*.... Let it revive the keen anguish of the mother, whose heart was wrung by the loss of a favorite son, and of the widow, bereaved of an affectionate husband.... Let it soften the heart of the orphan, whose hopes of protection and support were blasted by the prema-

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\* Alluding to a fact which took place at Bennington.

ture fate of a kind father! Yet while we yield, for the moment, to the sensibilities of our nature, let the proud recollection of the glory won, and the blessings acquired, in the field of battle, arrest the sympathies of the soul, and check the rising flood of sorrow. While our hearts melt with the recollection of the severe sufferings, and glorious fate, of our departed friends, let us be animated with new zeal to imitate their virtues, and with fresh desires to cherish the honor and interest of the country, which they shed their blood to defend.

LET the youth of our country, who were not spectators of the distresses of the war; but who have entered upon the stage of life in time to see the silver locks of the revolutionary patriots, and to witness the scars and the poverty of the war-worn soldier....let these ponder the history and listen to the tale of their fathers' sufferings, and their country's danger. Let them read the animated and energetic addresses of the first American Congress, whose firmness and eloquence would have honored a Roman Senate.... Let them early imbibe the manly and dignified sentiments of that illustrious council which pointed out the road to independence....Let them catch a portion of the patriotic flame....and by learning to revere the sentiments, may they be led to follow the example, of those venerable sages.... Let them review, in imagination, the heroic achievements of the American troops....Let them see, at Bunker's hill, a few hardy farmers, twice repulsing the numerous, well-marshalled columns of the foe, and holding the issue of the contest in suspense....Let them transport their imaginations to the hills of Bennington, the fields of Saratoga, the almost inaccessible cliffs of Stony Point, and the plains of Yorktown where the armies of America closed their triumphs; there let them admire the heroism of the citizen soldier, and catch the spirit of victory. Then let them cast their eyes



upon a shattered army, retreating before a triumphant foe .... See the magnanimous WASHINGTON, almost deserted and driven to despair, rallying a small band of half-clothed, dispirited troops, whose naked feet, lacerated with the frost-bound clods, stained the road with blood, as they marched to the victories of Trenton and Princeton! Let scenes like these lead them to compassionate the distresses of a half-famished soldiery, who suffered and bled to defend the blessings which we now enjoy, and whose services are yet unrewarded. And when our youth see a needy soldier, grown old in poverty, or the widows and orphans of soldiers, doomed to want by the loss of their protectors, and the depreciation of government paper, let them open the liberal hand of bounty, and by relieving their wants, still divide with them the burthens and the distresses of the revolution. Let them consider that upon them has devolved the task of defending and improving the rich inheritance, purchased by their fathers. Nor let them view this inheritance of National Freedom and Independence, as a fortune that is to be squandered away, in ease and riot, but as an estate to be preserved only by industry, toil and vigilance. Let them cast their eyes around upon the aged fathers of the land, whose declining strength calls for their support, and whose venerable years and wisdom demand their deference and respect. Let them view the fair daughters of America, whose blushing cheeks and modest deportment invite their friendship and protection; whose virtues they are to cherish and reward by their love and fidelity; and whose honor and happiness it is their duty to maintain inviolable. Let them learn to merit the esteem and affections of females of worth, whose rank in life depends much on the reputation of their husbands, and who therefore never fail to respect men of character, as much as they despise those who waste their lives in idleness, gaming and frivolous pursuits.

AND let us pay the tribute of respect to the memory of the illustrious hero who led our armies in the field of victory, and the statesman who first presided over our national councils. Let us review the history of his life, to know his worth and learn to value his example and his services. Let us, with a solemn pleasure, visit his tomb; there to drop a tear of affection, and heave a fervent sigh, over departed greatness.... There let us pluck a sprig of the willow and the laurel that shade the ashes of a WASHINGTON, and bear it on our bosoms, to remind us of his amiable virtues, his distinguished achievements, and our irreparable loss!.... Then let us resume our stations in life, and animated by his illustrious example, cheerfully attend to the duties assigned us, of improving the advantages, secured to us by the toils of the revolution, and the acquisition of independence.

FINIS.

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### ERRATUM.

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Page 13, line 7. For *enthusiastics* read *enthusiasts*.

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