THE

WORKS

OF

JOHN ADAMS,

SECOND PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES:

WITH

A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS,

BY

HIS GRANDSON

CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS.

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FOUR LETTERS:

BEING AN

INTERESTING CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN THOSE

EMINENTLY DISTINGUISHED CHARACTERS,

JOHN ADAMS,

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES;

AND

SAMUEL ADAMS,

LATE GOVERNOR OF MASSACHUSETTS,

ON THE IMPORTANT

SUBJECT OF GOVERNMENT.

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE four following letters were collected in 1802, and published in Boston, in a small pamphlet of thirty-two pages, with a title-page and advertisement by an unknown hand, which are here retained. They are all included in this work, as well because they form a part of the published opinions on government of John Adams, as because they show the nature of the difference of sentiment that existed between him and his friend and namesake. This difference is more or less perceptible in the action of the two, from the date of the formation of the Constitution of Massachusetts to the end of their career. Yet it must be after all conceded that it here makes itself felt rather than understood. A few words seem necessary, in order to place it in a clear light before the reader.

The real point of division appears to rest in the views taken of sovereignty. Samuel Adams, by confounding the right, conceded always to belong to a people, of changing or overturning an existing form of civil government, with that more limited one reserved under the form itself, of changing the administering officers, has the air of supposing both equally to mean an ever-present, unlimited, and absolute control of the majority in which the sovereignty resides. Hence it is, that all elective officers, from the highest to the lowest, are considered as holding only "delegated" powers, subject to the direction or control of their principals, whenever these choose to signify their wishes; and the form of government is made equivalent to a qualified democracy. This view has been always entertained by numbers in the United States, and is probably gaining, rather than losing ground, with the passage of time.

John Adams, on his side, whilst equally ready to admit the right of revolution, considers the adoption of any mixed form known in America as at once limiting the exercise of the popular sovereignty within a few specified channels. Hence his definition of a republic, as "a government in which the people have collectively, or by representation, an *essential share* in the sovereignty;" whilst his friend contends that they retain it all. It follows, from the former idea, that the officers constituted to administer the system, are not indiscriminately regarded as representatives, solely because they are elected by the people, and not at all as mere delegates to do their will.[1] A wide distinction is preserved by him between an executive chief and a senate, in whom certain defined powers are vested for a term of years, and vested absolutely, subject only to penalties for

[1] Representation of itself limits the popular sovereignty. Some observations on this subject have been already made in a note to volume iv. of this work, pp. 324 – 326.

abuse, and a house of representatives possessing the essence of the legislative or organic power, in which sovereignty is maintained to exist,[1] and intended, by the frequent recurrence of elections, to reflect accurately the will of the majority of numbers. There can be no doubt, that John Adams regarded the constitution of the United States as forming a government more properly to be classed among monarchical than among democratic republics, an idea, suggested at the outset by Patrick Henry in America, and by Godwin in England, which has reappeared in some essays of late years. And the truth or falsity of this construction cannot be said, by any means, to be established by the mere half century's experience yet had of the system. For, although in practice the action of the chief magistrate has thus far conformed with tolerable steadiness to the popular wishes, this does not seem to have arisen from any power retained by the people to prevent him, had he inclined otherwise, so much as from the moderate desires of the men who have been elected to the post. It is a remark of M. de Tocqueville, respecting the United States, that there are multitudes who have a limited ambition, but none who cherish one on a very great scale. This may be true now, in the infancy of the country, and yet time may finally bring it under the influence of the general law of human experience elsewhere. Assuming the main check which existed for forty years, the chance of reëlection, to be definitively laid aside, it is not easy to put the finger upon any clause of the constitution which can prevent an evil-disposed president for four years from using the powers vested in him in what way he pleases, without regard to the people's wishes at all. Indeed, it is possible to go a step further, and to venture a doubt whether an adequate restraint can be found against the corrupt as well as despotic use of his authority, — the sale of his patronage, as well as the perversion of his policy. The only tangible remedy, — that by impeachment, — is obviously insufficient, from the absence of all motive to wield a ponderous system of investigation after the offender has lost his power, and when he is no longer of consequence to the state. Of the sluggish nature of this process, experience in cases of inferior magnitude has already furnished enough proof. The evidence necessary to convict an offender would not be likely to accumulate until a large part of his four years of service had expired; and the remainder would probably elapse before it could be obtained. Then would come the election of a successor, with a system in no wise responsible for that which preceded it, and around which new interests would immediately concentrate. What probability is there of the ultimate infliction upon the guilty man, now become a private individual, removed from observation, of any penalty adequate to his crime? But if this reasoning, as to the absence of responsibility, be only partially true, it becomes perfectly plain that, at least in the case of a president confining himself to the use of his legitimate powers in office, however unpalatable that may be, there can be little of sovereignty exercised by the people during his term, or of punishment inflicted afterwards.

The same course of remark may be applied, though with modified force, to the senate. In its original conception, it cannot be regarded as having been strictly

[1] For a confirmation of this view, look back to page 322 of this volume, in the Discourses on Davila, written at the same time with these letters. Also to page 480, in the first letter to Roger Sherman.

a representative body, or subject to much restraint of the popular will. It is indeed true that the course of things has introduced modifications which render it somewhat sensitive to the condition of public opinion. But the cause is to be found in the aspirations of its members to higher distinction than is given by a place in that assembly, and not in the constitution of the body itself. If we could suppose that no individual had any other object in view than to serve out his six years of public life, it is not easy to see any hold the popular sovereignty has retained upon the senate, which would prevent them from acting precisely as they chose. So strongly has this been felt in practice already, that an effort has been made, attended with partial success, to introduce a point of honor, as a counterpoise to the constitutional provision. But the scrupulous senator who resigns his post, because he will not obey the popular voice which instructs him to do what he disapproves, follows a law which is nowhere to be found laid down for him in the constitution. He could not have been held to any legal or moral responsibility, had he chosen to remain where he was for the rest of his term, and defied the instructing power.

That such were the notions of the limitation of the popular sovereignty entertained by John Adams, there can be no doubt; for they are still further illustrated in a series of three letters, written in 1789, to Roger Sherman of Connecticut, which have not before seen the light. For the sake of completing his own exposition of his system, they are appended to the following correspondence. In these papers, the provisions inserted by him in the constitution of Massachusetts, which were stricken out in the convention, are more particularly defended. They will be found to contain a curious commentary upon the federal constitution, written at the moment of its formation, and a singular mixture of accuracy and error thus far in the predictions made of its operation.

ADVERTISEMENT.

In fulfilling our engagement, we have the pleasure of presenting to the public the following letters from persons who have been eminently distinguished in the course of the American revolution. At the time they were written, Mr. JOHN ADAMS was Vice-President of the United States, and Mr. SAMUEL ADAMS the Lieutenant-Governor of Massachusetts. They will, then, naturally be considered as expressing the opinions of public men on a great and public question, deeply interesting to every citizen. Had they been earlier communicated, the uncommon agitation of the intervening time, at certain periods, might have given their contents a degree of importance, which the returning tranquillity of the country at this moment may in some measure prevent. We must still believe, notwithstanding, that but few publications can be more attractive of general notice; as well from the elevated station which the authors of them have long maintained in the world, as from the nature and importance of the principles now brought into view, on the merits of which they so widely differ.

We shall not presume to anticipate the judgment of our fellow-citizens throughout the Union on these important letters, by interposing any comments of our own. The names hitherto omitted are supplied; and we trust that no exception will be taken to their being now published, as the spirit of the correspondence would be evidently defective without them. We shall only remark, in justice to Mr. Samuel Adams, that, in the composition of his answers, he was obliged to use the hand of a friend, as he had been long incapable of using his own with facility; and that his replies must be viewed as the extemporaneous production of the moment in which they were written, without his having had an opportunity of giving them a second inspection. This circumstance will, no doubt, be duly appreciated.

The letters now appear in their proper order. What will be the public sense respecting them, we will not pretend to calculate. We must at least hope, for the honor of the community, that the sentiments they contain will not be received with a torpid insensibility or a disgraceful indifference.

LETTERS.

I.

NEW YORK, 12 September, 1790.

DEAR SIR, — Upon my return from Philadelphia, to which beloved city I have been, for the purpose of getting a house to put my head in next winter, I had the pleasure of receiving your favor of the second of this month. The sight of our old Liberty Hall and of several of our old friends, had brought your venerable idea to my mind, and continued it there a great part of the last week; so that a letter from you, on my arrival, seemed but in continuation. I am much obliged to the "confidential friend" for writing the short letter you dictated, and shall beg a continuance of similar good offices.

Captain Nathaniel Byfield Lyde, whom I know very well, has my hearty good wishes. I shall give your letter and his to the Secretary of the Treasury, the duty of whose department it is to receive and examine all applications of the kind. Applications will probably be made in behalf of the officers who served the last war in the navy, and they will be likely to have the preference to all others. But Captain Lyde's application shall nevertheless be presented, and have a fair chance.

My family, as well as myself, are, I thank God, in good health, and as good spirits as the prospect of a troublesome removal will admit. Mrs. Adams desires her particular regards to your lady and yourself.

What, my old friend, is this world about to become? Is the millennium commencing? Are the kingdoms of it about to be governed by reason? Your Boston town meetings and our Harvard College have set the universe in motion. Every thing will be pulled down. So much seems certain. But what will be built up? Are there any principles of political architecture?

What are they? Were Voltaire and Rousseau masters of them? Are their disciples acquainted with them? Locke taught them principles of liberty. But I doubt whether they have not yet to learn the principles of government. Will the struggle in Europe be any thing more than a change of impostors and impositions?

With great esteem and sincere affection,
I am, my dear sir, your friend and servant,
JOHN ADAMS.

His Honor, SAMUEL ADAMS, Esq.,
Lieut.-Governor of Mass.

II.

BOSTON, 4 October, 1790.

DEAR SIR, — With pleasure I received your letter of September 12th. And as our good friend, to whom I dictated our last, is yet in town, I have requested of him a second favor.

You ask, — what the world is about to become? and, — is the millennium commencing? I have not studied the prophecies, and cannot even conjecture. The golden age, so finely pictured by poets, I believe has never as yet existed but in their own imaginations. In the earliest periods, when, for the honor of human nature, one should have thought that man had not learnt to be cruel, what scenes of horror have been exhibited in families of some of the best instructors in piety and morals! Even the heart of our first father was grievously wounded at the sight of the murder of one of his sons, perpetrated by the hand of the other. Has mankind since seen the happy age? No, my friend. The same tragedies have been acted on the theatre of the world, the same arts of tormenting have been studied and practised to this day; and even religion and reason united have never succeeded to establish the permanent foundations of political freedom and happiness in the most enlightened countries on the earth.

After a compliment to Boston town meetings and our Harvard College, as having "set the universe in motion," you tell me, — every thing will be pulled down. I think with you, "So much seems certain." But what, say you, will be built up?

Hay, wood, and stubble, may probably be the materials, till men shall be yet more enlightened and more friendly to each other. "Are there any principles of political architecture?" Undoubtedly. "What are they?" Philosophers, ancient and modern, have laid down different plans, and *all* have thought themselves masters of the true principles. Their disciples have followed them, probably with a blind prejudice, which is always an enemy to truth, and have thereby added fresh fuel to the fire of contention, and increased the political disorder.

Kings have been deposed by aspiring nobles, whose pride could not brook restraint. These have waged everlasting war against the common rights of men. The love of liberty is interwoven in the soul of man, and can never be totally extinguished; and there are certain periods when human patience can no longer endure indignity and oppression. The spark of liberty then kindles into a flame, when the injured people, attentive to the feelings of their just rights, magnanimously contend for their complete restoration. But such contests have too often ended in nothing more than "a change of impostors and impositions." The patriots of Rome put an end to the life of Cæsar, and Rome submitted to a race of tyrants in his stead. Were the people of England free, after they had obliged King John to concede to them their ancient rights and liberties, and promise to govern them according to the old law of the land? Were they free after they had wantonly deposed their Henrys, Edwards, and Richards, to gratify *family pride?* Or, after they had brought their first Charles to the block and banished his family? They were not. The nation was then governed by king, lords, and commons; and its liberties were lost by a strife among three powers, soberly intended to check each other and keep the scales even.

But while we daily see the violence of the human passions controlling the laws of reason and religion, and stifling the very feelings of humanity, can we wonder that in such tumults, little or no regard is had to political checks and balances? And such tumults have always happened within as well as without doors. The best formed constitutions that have yet been contrived by the wit of man, have, and will come to an end; because "the kingdoms of the earth have not been governed by reason." The pride of kings, of nobles, and leaders of the people, who have

all governed in their turns, have disadjusted the delicate frame, and thrown all into confusion.

What then is to be done? Let divines and philosophers, statesmen and patriots, unite their endeavors to renovate the age, by impressing the minds of men with the importance of educating their *little boys* and *girls*; of inculcating in the minds of youth the fear and love of the Deity and universal philanthropy, and, in subordination to these great principles, the love of their country; of instructing them in the art of self-government, without which they never can act a wise part in the government of societies, great or small; in short, of leading them in the study and practice of the exalted virtues of the Christian system, which will happily tend to subdue the turbulent passions of men, and introduce that golden age, beautifully described in figurative language, — when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid; the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox; none shall then hurt or destroy, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord. When this millennium shall commence, if there shall be any need of civil government, indulge me in the fancy, that it will be in the republican form, or something better.

I thank you for your countenance to our friend Lyde. Mrs. Adams tells me to remember her to yourself, lady, and connections; and be assured, that I am, sincerely, your friend,

SAMUEL ADAMS.

The Vice-President of the United States.

III.

NEW YORK, 18 October, 1790.

DEAR SIR, — I am thankful to our common friend, as well as to you, for your favor of the fourth, which I received last night. My fears are in unison with yours, that hay, wood, and stubble, will be the materials of the new political buildings in Europe, till men shall be more enlightened and friendly to each other.

You agree, that there are undoubtedly principles of political architecture. But, instead of particularizing any of them, you seem to place all your hopes in the universal, or at least

more general, prevalence of knowledge and benevolence. I think with you, that knowledge and benevolence ought to be promoted as much as possible; but, despairing of ever seeing them sufficiently general for the security of society, I am for seeking institutions which may supply in some degree the defect. If there were no ignorance, error, or vice, there would be neither principles nor systems of civil or political government.

I am not often satisfied with the opinions of Hume; but in this he seems well founded, that all projects of government, founded in the supposition or expectation of extraordinary degrees of virtue, are evidently chimerical. Nor do I believe it possible, humanly speaking, that men should ever be greatly improved in knowledge or benevolence, without assistance from the principles and system of government.

I am very willing to agree with you in fancying, that in the greatest improvements of society, government will be in the republican form. It is a fixed principle with me, that all good government is and must be republican. But, at the same time, your candor will agree with me, that there is not in lexicography a more fraudulent word. Whenever I use the word *republic* with approbation, I mean a government in which the people have collectively, or by representation, an essential share in the sovereignty. The republican forms of Poland and Venice are much worse, and those of Holland and Bern very little better, than the monarchical form in France before the late revolution. By the republican form, I know you do not mean the plan of Milton, Nedham, or Turgot. For, after a fair trial of its miseries, the simple monarchical form will ever be, as it has ever been, preferred to it by mankind. Are we not, my friend, in danger of rendering the word *republican* unpopular in this country by an indiscreet, indeterminate, and equivocal use of it? The people of England have been obliged to wean themselves from the use of it, by making it unpopular and unfashionable, because they found it was artfully used by some, and simply understood by others, to mean the government of their interregnum parliament. They found they could not wean themselves from that destructive form of government so entirely, as that a mischievous party would not still remain in favor of it, by any other means than by making the words *republic* and *repub-*

lican unpopular. They have succeeded to such a degree, that, with a vast majority of that nation, a republican is as unamiable as a witch, a blasphemer, a rebel, or a tyrant. If, in this country, the word *republic* should be generally understood, as it is by some, to mean a form of government inconsistent with a mixture of three powers, forming a mutual balance, we may depend upon it that such mischievous effects will be produced by the use of it as will compel the people of America to renounce, detest, and execrate it as the English do. With these explanations, restrictions, and limitations, I agree with you in your love of republican governments, but in no other sense.

With you, I have also the honor most perfectly to harmonize in your sentiments of the humanity and wisdom of promoting education in knowledge, virtue, and benevolence. But I think that these will confirm mankind in the opinion of the necessity of preserving and strengthening the dikes against the ocean, its tides and storms. Human appetites, passions, prejudices, and self-love will never be conquered by benevolence and knowledge alone, introduced by human means. The millennium itself neither supposes nor implies it. All civil government is then to cease, and the Messiah is to reign. That happy and holy state is therefore wholly out of this question. You and I agree in the utility of universal education; but will nations agree in it as fully and extensively as we do, and be at the expense of it? We know, with as much certainty as attends any human knowledge, that they will not. We cannot, therefore, advise the people to depend for their safety, liberty, and security, upon hopes and blessings which we know will not fall to their lot. If we do our duty then to the people, we shall not deceive them, but advise them to depend upon what is in their power and will relieve them.

Philosophers, ancient and modern, do not appear to me to have studied nature, the whole of nature, and nothing but nature. Lycurgus's principle was war and family pride; Solon's was what the people would bear, &c. The best writings of antiquity upon government, those, I mean, of Aristotle, Zeno, and Cicero, are lost. We have human nature, society, and universal history to observe and study, and from these we may draw all the real principles which ought to be regarded. Disci-

ples will follow their masters, and interested partisans their chieftains; let us like it or not, we cannot help it. But if the true principles can be discovered, and fairly, fully, and impartially laid before the people, the more light increases, the more the reason of them will be seen, and the more disciples they will have. Prejudice, passion, and private interest, which will always mingle in human inquiries, one would think might be enlisted on the side of truth, at least in the greatest number; for certainly the majority are interested in the truth, if they could see to the end of all its consequences. "Kings have been deposed by aspiring nobles." True, and never by any other. "These" (the nobles, I suppose,) "have waged everlasting war against the common rights of men." True, when they have been possessed of the *summa imperii* in one body, without a check. So have the plebeians; so have the people; so have kings; so has human nature, in every shape and combination, and so it ever will. But, on the other hand, the nobles have been essential parties in the preservation of liberty, whenever and wherever it has existed. In Europe, they alone have preserved it against kings and people, wherever it has been preserved; or, at least, with very little assistance from the people. One hideous despotism, as horrid as that of Turkey, would have been the lot of every nation of Europe, if the nobles had not made stands. By nobles, I mean not peculiarly an hereditary nobility, or any particular modification, but the natural and actual aristocracy among mankind. The existence of this you will not deny. You and I have seen four noble families rise up in Boston,—the Crafts, Gores, Dawes, and Austins. These are as really a nobility in our town, as the Howards, Somersets, Berties, &c., in England. Blind, undistinguishing reproaches against the aristocratical part of mankind, a division which nature has made, and we cannot abolish, are neither pious nor benevolent. They are as pernicious as they are false. They serve only to foment prejudice, jealousy, envy, animosity, and malevolence. They serve no ends but those of sophistry, fraud, and the spirit of party. It would not be true, but it would not be more egregiously false, to say that the people have waged everlasting war against the rights of men.

"The love of liberty," you say, "is interwoven in the soul of man." So it is, according to La Fontaine, in that of a wolf;

and I doubt whether it be much more rational, generous, or social, in one than in the other, until in man it is enlightened by experience, reflection, education, and civil and political institutions, which are at first produced, and constantly supported and improved by a few; that is, by the nobility. The wolf, in the fable, who preferred running in the forest, lean and hungry, to the sleek, plump, and round sides of the dog, because he found the latter was sometimes restrained, had more love of liberty than most men. The numbers of men in all ages have preferred ease, slumber, and good cheer to liberty, when they have been in competition. We must not then depend alone upon the love of liberty in the soul of man for its preservation. Some political institutions must be prepared, to assist this love against its enemies. Without these, the struggle will ever end only in a change of impostors. When the people, who have no property, feel the power in their own hands to determine all questions by a majority, they ever attack those who have property, till the injured men of property lose all patience, and recur to finesse, trick, and stratagem, to outwit those who have too much strength, because they have too many hands to be resisted any other way. Let us be impartial, then, and speak the whole truth. Till we do, we shall never discover all the true principles that are necessary. The multitude, therefore, as well as the nobles, must have a check. This is one principle.

"Were the people of England free, after they had obliged King John to concede to them their ancient rights?" The people never did this. There was no people who pretended to any thing. It was the nobles alone. The people pretended to nothing but to be villains, vassals, and retainers to the king or the nobles. The nobles, I agree, were not free, because all was determined by a majority of their votes, or by arms, not by law. Their feuds deposed their "Henrys, Edwards, and Richards," to gratify lordly ambition, patrician rivalry, and "family pride." But, if they had not been deposed, those kings would have become despots, because the people would not and could not join the nobles in any regular and constitutional opposition to them. They would have become despots, I repeat it, and that by means of the villains, vassals, and retainers aforesaid. It is not family pride, my friend, but family popularity, that does the great mischief, as well as the great good. Pride, in the heart of

man, is an evil fruit and concomitant of every advantage; of riches, of knowledge, of genius, of talents, of beauty, of strength, of virtue, and even of piety. It is sometimes ridiculous, and often pernicious. But it is even sometimes, and in some degree, useful. But the pride of families would be always and only ridiculous, if it had not family popularity to work with. The attachment and devotion of the people to some families inspires them with pride. As long as gratitude or interest, ambition or avarice, love, hope, or fear, shall be human motives of action, so long will numbers attach themselves to particular families. When the people will, in spite of all that can be said or done, cry a man or a family up to the skies, exaggerate all his talents and virtues, not hear a word of his weakness or faults, follow implicitly his advice, detest every man he hates, adore every man he loves, and knock down all who will not swim down the stream with them, where is your remedy? When a man or family are thus popular, how can you prevent them from being proud? You and I know of instances in which popularity has been a wind, a tide, a whirlwind. The history of all ages and nations is full of such examples.

Popularity, that has great fortune to dazzle; splendid largesses, to excite warm gratitude; sublime, beautiful, and uncommon genius or talents, to produce deep admiration; or any thing to support high hopes and strong fears, will be proud; and its power will be employed to mortify enemies, gratify friends, procure votes, emoluments, and power. Such family popularity ever did, and ever will govern in every nation, in every climate, hot and cold, wet and dry, among civilized and savage people, Christians and Mahometans, Jews and Heathens. Declamation against family pride is a pretty, juvenile exercise, but unworthy of statesmen. They know the evil and danger is too serious to be sported with. The only way, God knows, is to put these families into a hole by themselves, and set two watches upon them; a superior to them all on one side, and the people on the other.

There are a few popular men in the Massachusetts, my friend, who have, I fear, less honor, sincerity, and virtue, than they ought to have. These, if they are not guarded against, may do another mischief. They may excite a party spirit and a mobbish spirit, instead of the spirit of liberty, and produce another

Wat Tyler's rebellion. They can do no more. But I really think their party language ought not to be countenanced, nor their shibboleths pronounced. The miserable stuff that they utter about the *well-born* is as despicable as themselves. The *ευγενεις* of the Greeks, the *bien nées* of the French, the *wel-gebohren* of the Germans and Dutch, the *beloved families* of the Creeks, are but a few samples of national expressions of the same thing, for which every nation on earth has a similar expression. One would think that our scribblers were all the sons of redemptioners or transported convicts. They think with Tarquin, "*In novo populo, ubi omnis repentina atque ex virtute nobilitas fit, futurum locum forti ac strenuo viro.*"

Let us be impartial. There is not more of family pride on one side, than of vulgar malignity and popular envy on the other. Popularity in one family raises envy in others. But the popularity of the least deserving will triumph over envy and malignity; while that which is acquired by real merit, will very often be overborne and oppressed by it.

Let us do justice to the people and to the nobles; for nobles there are, as I have before proved, in Boston as well as in Madrid. But to do justice to both, you must establish an arbitrator between them. This is another principle.

It is time that you and I should have some sweet communion together. I do not believe, that we, who have preserved for more than thirty years an uninterrupted friendship, and have so long thought and acted harmoniously together in the worst of times, are now so far asunder in sentiment as some people pretend; in full confidence of which, I have used this freedom, being ever your warm friend.

JOHN ADAMS.

His Honor, SAMUEL ADAMS, Esq.,
Lieut.-Governor of Mass.

IV.

BOSTON, 20 November, 1790.

MY DEAR SIR, — I lately received your letter of the eighteenth of October. The sentiments and observations contained in it demand my attention.

A republic, you tell me, is a government in which "the peo-

ple have an essential *share* in the sovereignty." Is not the *whole* sovereignty, my friend, essentially in the people? Is not government designed for the welfare and happiness of all the people? and is it not the uncontrollable, essential right of the people to amend and alter, or annul their constitution and frame a new one, whenever they shall think it will better promote their own welfare and happiness to do it? That the sovereignty resides in the people, is a political doctrine which I have never heard an American politician seriously deny. The constitutions of the American States reserve to the people the exercise of the rights of sovereignty, by the annual or biennial elections of their governors, senators, and representatives; and by empowering their own representatives to impeach the greatest officers of the state before the senators, who are also chosen by themselves. *We, the people*, is the style of the federal constitution. They adopted it; and, conformably to it, they delegate the exercise of the powers of government to particular persons, who, after short intervals, resign their powers to the people, and they will reëlect them, or appoint others, as they think fit.

The American legislatures are nicely balanced. They consist of two branches, each having a check upon the determinations of the other. They sit in different chambers, and probably often reason differently in their respective chambers, on the same question. If they disagree in their decisions, by a conference, their reasons and arguments are mutually communicated to each other. Candid explanations tend to bring them to agreement; and then, according to the Massachusetts constitution, the matter is laid before the first magistrate for his revision. He states objections, if he has any, with his reasons, and returns them to the legislators, who, by larger majorities, ultimately decide. Here is a mixture of three powers, founded in the nature of man; calculated to call forth the rational faculties in the great points of legislation into exertion; to cultivate mutual friendship and good humor; and, finally, to enable them to decide, not by the impulse of passion or party prejudice, but by the calm voice of reason, which is the voice of God. In this mixture you may see your "natural and actual aristocracy among mankind," operating among the several powers in legislation, and producing the most happy effects. But the son of an excellent man may never inherit the great qualities of his

father; this is a common observation, and there are many instances of its truth. Should we not, therefore, conclude that hereditary nobility is a solecism in government? Their lordships' sons or grandsons may be destitute of the faintest feelings of honor or honesty, and yet retain an essential share in the government, by right of inheritance from ancestors, who may have been the minions of ministers, the favorites of mistresses, or men of real and distinguished merit. The same may be said of hereditary kings. Their successors may also become so degenerated and corrupt, as to have neither inclination nor capacity to know the extent and limits of their own powers, nor, consequently, those of others. Such kind of political beings, nobles or kings, possessing hereditary right to essential shares in an equipoised government, are very unfit persons to hold the scales. Having no just conception of the principles of the government, nor of the part which they and their copartners bear in the administration, they run a wild career, destroy the checks and balances, by interfering in each other's departments, till the nation is involved in confusion, and reduced to the danger at least of bloodshed, to remove a tyranny which may ensue. Much safer is it, and much more does it tend to promote the welfare and happiness of society, to fill up the offices of government after the mode prescribed in the American constitutions, by frequent elections of the people. They may, indeed, be deceived in their choice. They sometimes are. But the evil is not incurable; the remedy is always near; they will feel their mistakes and correct them.

I am very willing to agree with you, in thinking that improvements in knowledge and benevolence receive much assistance from the principles and systems of good government. But is it not as true that, without knowledge and benevolence, men would neither have been capable nor disposed to search for the principles or form the system? Should we not, my friend, bear a grateful remembrance of our pious and benevolent ancestors, who early laid plans of education? by which means, wisdom, knowledge, and virtue have been generally diffused among the body of the people, and they have been enabled to form and establish a civil constitution, calculated for the preservation of their rights and liberties. This constitution was evidently founded in the expectation of the further progress and *extraordi-*

nary degrees of virtue. It enjoins the encouragement of all seminaries of literature, which are the nurseries of virtue, depending upon these for the support of government, rather than titles, splendor, or force. Mr. Hume may call this a "chimerical project." I am far from thinking the people can be deceived, by urging upon them a dependence on the more general prevalence of knowledge and virtue. It is one of the most essential means of further, and still further improvements in society, and of correcting and amending moral sentiments and habits and political institutions; till, "by human means," directed by Divine influence, men shall be prepared for that "happy and holy state," when "the Messiah is to reign."

"It is a fixed principle that all good government is, and must be republican." You have my hearty concurrence; and I believe we are well enough acquainted with each other's ideas to understand what we respectively mean when we "use the word with approbation." The body of the people in this country are not so ignorant as those in England were in the time of the interregnum parliament. They are better educated; they will not easily be prevailed upon to believe that "a republican is as unamiable as a witch, a blasphemer, a rebel, or a tyrant." They are charmed with their own forms of government, in which are admitted a mixture of powers to check the human passions and control them from rushing into exorbitances. So well assured are they that their liberties are best secured by their own frequent and free election of fit persons to be the essential sharers in the administration of their government, and that this form of government is truly *republican;* that the body of the people will not be persuaded nor compelled to "renounce, detest, and execrate" the very word *republican* "as the English do." Their education has "confirmed them in the opinion of the necessity of preserving and strengthening the dikes against the ocean, its tides and storms;" and I think they have made more safe and more durable dikes than the English have done.

We agree in the utility of universal education, but "will nations agree in it as fully and extensively as we do?" Why should they not? It would not be fair to conclude that, because they have not yet been disposed to agree in it, they never will. It is allowed that the present age is more enlightened than former ones. Freedom of inquiry is certainly more encouraged;

the feelings of humanity have softened the heart; the true principles of civil and religious liberty are better understood; tyranny in all its shapes is more detested; and bigotry, if not still blind, must be mortified to see that she is despised. Such an age may afford at least a flattering expectation that nations, as well as individuals, will view the utility of *universal education* in so strong a light, as to induce sufficient national patronage and support. Future ages will probably be more enlightened than this.

The love of liberty is interwoven in the soul of man. "So it is in that of a wolf." However irrational, ungenerous, and unsocial the love of liberty may be in a rude savage, he is capable of being enlightened by experience, reflection, education, and civil and political institutions. But the nature of the wolf is, and ever will be, confined to running in the forest to satisfy his hunger and his brutal appetites; the dog is inclined, in a very easy way, to seek his living, and fattens his sides from what comes from his master's kitchen. The comparison of La Fontaine is, in my opinion, ungenerous, unnatural, and unjust.

Among the numbers of men, my friend, are to be found not only those who have "preferred ease, slumber, and good cheer, to liberty;" but others, who have eagerly sought after thrones and sceptres, hereditary shares in sovereignty, riches and splendor, titles, stars, garters, crosses, eagles, and many other childish playthings, at the expense of real nobility, without one thought or care for the liberty and happiness of the rest of mankind.

"The people, who have no property, feel the power of governing by a majority, and ever attack those who have property." "The injured men of property recur to finesse, trick, and stratagem to outwit them." True. These may proceed from a lust of domination in *some* of both parties. Be this as it may, it has been known that such deceitful tricks have been practised by some of the rich upon their unsuspecting fellow-citizens, to turn the determination of questions so as to answer their own selfish purposes. To plunder or filch the rights of men, are crimes equally immoral and nefarious, though committed in different manners. Neither of them is confined to the rich or the poor; they are too common among both. The lords, as well as the commons, of Great Britain, by continued large majorities, endeavored by finesse, tricks, and stratagems, as well as threats, to

prevail on the American colonies to surrender their liberty and property to their disposal. These failing, they attempted to *plunder* our rights by force of arms. We feared their arts more than their arms. Did the members of that hereditary house of lords, who constituted those repeated majorities, then possess the spirit of nobility? Not so, I think. That spirit resided in the *illustrious* minorities in both houses.

But, "by nobles," who have prevented "one hideous despotism, as horrid as that of Turkey, from falling to the lot of every nation of Europe," you mean, "not peculiarly an hereditary nobility, or any particular modification, but the natural and actual aristocracy among mankind;" the existence of which I am not disposed to deny. Where is this aristocracy found? Among men of all ranks and conditions. The cottager may beget a wise son; the noble, a fool. The one is capable of great improvement; the other, not. Education is within the power of men and societies of men. Wise and judicious modes of education, patronized and supported by communities, will draw together the sons of the rich and the poor, among whom it makes no distinction; it will cultivate the natural genius, elevate the soul, excite laudable emulation to excel in knowledge, piety, and benevolence; and, finally, it will reward its patrons and benefactors, by shedding its benign influence on the public mind. Education inures men to thinking and reflection, to reasoning and demonstration. It discovers to them the moral and religious duties they owe to God, their country, and to all mankind. Even savages might, by the means of education, be instructed to frame the best civil and political institutions, with as much skill and ingenuity as they now shape their arrows. Education leads youth to "the study of human nature, society, and universal history," from whence they may "draw all the principles" of political architecture which ought to be regarded. All men are "interested in the truth." Education, by showing them "the end of all its consequences," would induce at least the greatest numbers to enlist on its side. The man of good understanding, who has been well-educated, and improves these advantages, as far as his circumstances will allow, in promoting the happiness of mankind, in my opinion, and I am inclined to think in yours, is indeed "well-born."

It may be "puerile and unworthy of statesmen" to declaim

against *family pride;* but there is, and always has been, such a ridiculous kind of vanity among men. "Statesmen know the evil and danger is too serious to be sported with." I am content they should be put into one hole, as you propose; but I have some fears that your watchmen on each side will not well agree. When a man can recollect the *virtues* of his ancestors, he certainly has abundantly more solid satisfaction than another who boasts that he sprang from those who were *rich* or *noble*, but never discovers the least degree of virtue or true worth of any kind. "Family popularity," if I mistake not, has its source in family pride. It is, by all means, sought after, that homage may be paid to the name of the title or estate, to supply the want in the possessor of any great or good quality whatsoever. There are *individuals* among men, who study the art of making themselves popular, for the purpose of getting into places of honor and emoluments, and, by these means, of gratifying hereafter the noble passion, "family pride." Others are so enchanted with the music of the sound, that they conceive it to be supreme felicity. This is, indeed, vanity of vanities! and if such deluded men ever come to their senses, they will find it to be vexation of spirit. When they reflect on their own folly and injustice, in having swallowed the breath of applause with avidity and great delight, for merit which they are conscious they never had; and that many, who have been the loudest in sounding their praises, had nothing in view but their own private and selfish interests, it will excite in them the feelings of shame, remorse, and self-contempt. The truly virtuous man and real patriot is satisfied with the approbation of the wise and discerning; he rejoices in the contemplation of the purity of his own intentions, and waits in humble hope for the plaudit of his final judge.

I shall not venture again to trespass on the benevolence of our confidential friend. You will not be sorry. It will afford you relief; for, in common civility, you *must* be at the trouble of reading one's epistles. I hope there will be a time when we may have "sweet communion together." In the interim, let me not lose the benefit of your valuable letters. Adieu.

Believe me, your sincere friend,

SAMUEL ADAMS.

The Vice-President of the United States.