

Gazette of the United States.

No. IX.

From SATURDAY, MAY 9, to WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 1789.

PRICE SIX PENCE.

ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS.

THE TABLET.

NUMBER IX.

"The imagination of man is naturally sublime, delighted with whatever is remote and extraordinary, and running without controul into the most distant parts of space and time, in order to avoid the objects, which custom has rendered too familiar to it."

OF all the weaknesses, to which the human mind is incident, there is not a more extraordinary one, than that blind, implicit reverence, we are apt to feel for the characters, the maxims, and the institutions of antiquity. The love of novelty, strong as it is, does not overcome our propensity to this kind of admiration. There seems to be some unaccountable fascination, that holds the mind in subjection, and prevents the clear exercise of judgment, while the imagination is taking its flight into the regions of past ages. We are so captivated with the splendor and extent of conquests which *history* presents to our view; with the lustre and elevation of characters it displays; with the various and astonishing revolutions it records, that our reason is overwhelmed, and cannot exert that force, which it discovers on other occasions.

There is scarce a circumstance that looks like perfection, or even utility of cultivation, in which ancient can bear any comparison with modern times. It may not be unentertaining, to search for the cause of our veneration for antiquity, notwithstanding it appears to have no reasonable foundation. In forming our ideas of *some* of the ancient nations, whom we profess to admire, we compare them with other cotemporary ones; whom we have been accustomed to reprobate and despise. As most of our opinions, respecting virtue and vice; praise and blame, are comparative, we sometimes bestow an extravagance of applause, on a people vicious and depraved, merely because they are not so deeply sunk in depravity, as other people, with whom we compare them. This is one reason why encomiums are so lavishly heaped on characters and actions, which scarce deserve a place in our remembrance. Perhaps this admiration is heightened by the profuse compliments, that historians have paid to particular periods and nations, at the expense and disgrace of others. We feel no motive to discredit their relation of transactions, or to doubt the propriety of their opinions or conclusions. We are pleased with indulging respect and veneration, and that pleasure costs little or nothing. There is no competition to excite jealousy, or alarm avarice.

Another reason that may be assigned for our admiring the ancient republics in so high a degree, is, that the different periods of their existence are marked with a vast variety of tragical incidents. The human mind is delighted with whatever is marvellous. This is one of the earliest propensities, that discovers itself in our nature. Every man occasionally feels within himself a languor and listlessness of mind; from which, he takes a pleasure in being roused. He is apt to affix a favorable idea to almost any cause, which has diverted him, in those moments of heaviness and insipidity. This will generally be the case, unless the incident which enlivens his feelings, is attended with immediate or personal inconvenience. With what eagerness, do we read accounts of massacres, treasons, inundations and earthquakes: When these happen at a distance, we do not feel so much *pain* for the miserable fate of those, who are involved in the distress, as we do *pleasure*, at being roused and stimulated into a vigorous state of mind. No inference dishonorable to human nature can be drawn from this reasoning. It is one of the sources of gratification, which is always innocent and sometimes useful. The inconveniences it produces does not counterbalance the advantages. We should however be on our guard, in drawing conclusions relative to our own conduct. Causes, which excite admiration, have a most powerful influence, in seducing us into error of opinion. The reason of man loses its balance, while the mind is employed in the act of admiring. In this view of the matter, it would be proper, that youth should not be allowed an unrestrained liberty, in reading ancient history. They may acquire opinions and feelings as fallacious, as an unbounded indulgence in reading novels can produce.

These remarks are only introductory to a more extensive discussion of the subject, which shall hereafter appear. In the mean time, the reader will let his reflections supply the deficiency, which unavoidably happened from this partial and imperfect essay.

A SKETCH of the POLITICAL STATE of AMERICA.

NUMBER VII.

THE leading features of the Magna Charta of America, or that mutual compact which now unites her citizens, by one common bond, are strongly impressed with the genius and character of the people who formed it, and who will be subject to its future controul: FREEDOM, or the MAJESTY OF THE PEOPLE, is wrote in Capitals upon the face of the Plan, and its tenor and substance bespeaks a critical acquaintance with the rights of mankind in its compilers, with a sacred regard to the perpetuating those rights, unimpaired, to the latest posterity.

This beautiful compilation originated from the people, the only pure fountain and source of all lawful power—nor were they, when called to form it, under any duress of mind, or undue bias, but prompted to the execution by principles of patriotism, and with a view to reciprocal advantage, having the "*Salus Populi*" for the pole Star of their conduct.

Among the particular traits of the System above attended to, which claim our attention, may be placed the periodical elections of those, who are to administer it; as also the liberal principles upon which those elections are formed, which, while they ensure a remedy for a corrupt administration, serve also as a preventive against the disease they are calculated to cure, affording a constant check to the progress of ill-directed intentions, and improper actions—and have the further good influence of presenting future opportunities for the enjoyment of the honors of their country, to those who are found to deserve them, thereby constantly encouraging a virtuous emulation among the members of the society, which operates but faintly, if at all, in those governments, where the adventitious circumstances of birth, or fortune, give the only claim to eminence and preferment: Many more are the moral and political advantages which must be derived from this part of our excellent Constitution; but as detail is not here my object, I shall proceed to a view of some other general principles, which presage equal benefit: Among which, may be ranked those strong guards, against every kind of monopoly, or exclusive advantages to be granted to any class of citizens, in preference to another, arising from a good heart, great abilities, and superior merit, is acknowledged to be the only support of an American Aristocracy.

Freedom of speech, and debates, and an unrestrained use of the Press, will operate as powerful auxiliaries, in cherishing and supporting the future Liberties of the country, by their natural tendency to check and frustrate the ill designs of men in power, and who, though unrestrained by the admonitions of conscience, that faithful Monitor over all human actions, will dread the stigma of a contemning public.

That relief of the mind from religious thralldom, which has been productive of so many evils in other countries, and which is so completely guarded against in America, stands among the foremost of those great characteristics, which give her form of government a preference to any one extant: Here the infallibility of the Pope is with humility contradicted, while the magic power of his foot, thrills with but faint and feeble palpitations: Here the kind aid of the civil arm, is no longer exerted to destroy, by fire and sword, the bodies of men, in order to save their souls: Here without subscribing to thirty-nine articles, which thirty-nine times in a day are frequently broken, a person can be admitted to the privileges and honors of his country: It is here that true Religion presents her alluring and captivating charms in resplendent lustre: A recluse and monastic life, is no longer supposed to adorn the votaries of Christianity: But those actions, which are prompted by the most diffusive benevolence, are esteemed the most grateful incense to that Deity, who is benevolence and love.

In America, Religion waves her peaceful banners, courting, by her intrinsic merits, that obedience to her service, which any adventitious power has ever been found inadequate to effect.

AMERICANUS.

(To be continued.)

EXTRACT FROM "AMERICAN ESSAYS."

ON DUELLING.

A BRAVE and virtuous man, "dares do all that may become a man, who dares do more is none." A good citizen will ever respect his rulers, and revere the laws, and must therefore be averse to the committing any act unlawful, or

unjust; he will blust at the palpable injustice, and daring effrontery of the man, who in a civilized state shall assume the power of judging and determining in his own cause; he can not admit that the laws of honor, supercede those of reason, religion and nature; he can not conceive that any man has a right to determine at will that another has offended him, and insist that the supposed offender shall acknowledge what he knows, or believes to be false, or deliberately consent to be murdered, or become a murderer; he sensibly feels that his country, his amiable wife, and his innocent, promising infants, are not beneath a gentleman's notice; and that he has no right to rob them of his services, kind offices, support and protection; he believes that in Heaven there is no exclusive privilege for gentlemen; and that he cannot plead the laws of *modern honor* before the sacred bar of unerring justice: But, O tempora! O mores! He feels too sensibly the force of cruel custom, and knows not how to avoid the guilt, without disgrace; a most impious custom has sanctified the crime, and made the apprehensions of unjust reproach more dreadful to the christian, than damnation: Such is the folly and depravity of this *Quixotish age*, that a man dares not be just to himself, his family, or his country, lest he should incur the odium of being afraid to die, or to shed a little innocent blood; and though he should have slain an host of his country's foes in the field of battle, yet these shall not secure his fame in the opinion of the honorable fanatics, should he decline to stain his name with fashionable murder; as there might probably be some so base, and malignant, as to affect to believe, that the hero was more afraid of death, than of the crime; and the force of custom, and the fear of reproach, are now become so powerful and obligatory, that he must be more or less than man, who can avoid sacrificing every thing precious, estimable, sacred, and truly honorable, in compliance with the foolish fascinating phantom called *honor*: Yet *duelling* has sometimes only proved to be a *little scheme*, of *little minds*, to build a *little fame*; it is often a brazen shield, forged by desperate gamblers, and sharpers, to protect their tender names from truth's searching painful probe; and surely those, whose characters will stand the test of public inquisition, can never with reason and propriety, resort to this slender, doubtful, desperate support; it is therefore devoutly to be wished, that no *real* gentleman would be guilty of an act, that not only tarnishes his name, but renders it suspected of former taints, by confounding it with those who have no other means to support their pretensions to a decent character, or continue their ruinous connexions with gentlemen; and who, but for this infamous tenure, would be expelled all reputable society, but are now admitted into all companies, who by the laws of honor are obliged to be civil to those impudent, intruding harpies, or to fight them; and thus are the young, unsuspecting, and unwary, often *honorably* eased of their fortunes.

As *duelling* therefore, has evidently no other tendency, but to prove rashness, folly, or guilt, it is certainly a mode of decision, that should be held in the most sovereign contempt, by every intrinsic gentleman: Suppose a desperate gamester should offer to stake a sum equal to a gentleman's whole fortune on the throw of a die, would he not be condemned as a madman, or a fool, who should listen to such a proposal? But should the gamester choose to put the gentleman's more important life, at an equal, or perhaps greater hazard, the *laws of honor* have decreed, that he shall die a *fool*, or survive a *felon*. Such is the precarious tenure of our lives at this day, that if any man is tired of life, and chooses me for his butcher, or if he takes a fancy to cut my throat, or blow my brains out, he sends me a polite card to meet him at a particular time and place; I am bound in *honor* to attend, and death closes the tragi-comi-farical scene.

And can we, in our sober senses, be drawn into this disgraceful and destructive vortex, in pursuit of an empty bubble, swelling only with the sound of honor? Can the *soldier* pluck the dear bought laurels from his brow, and transplant them on a dunghill? Can he descend from the hero to the murderer? Can he stain his glory with his brother's blood? Or, can he stoop to die, like bullies, gamblers, madmen, boys and fools? Can a man of sense, cool, temperate, and dispassionate, resolve against nature, reason and conviction, to close a life of uniform virtue, with a crime? Can he approach Death in the mask of an hypocrite, and with affected composure, strive to hide a bleeding heart? Can the tender father, and fond husband, deliberately draw the cruel dagger, to give the fatal stab to the future peace of his innocent family? Can the *Patriot* rob his country of an use-