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A DEFENCE OF *REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENTS.*

LETTER SEVENTH.

Self government most conducive to happiness; the people most capable of governing themselves; the influence of self-government upon individual and national prosperity.

It is a great advantage of the republican system that, under it, men are the judges of what constitutes their own happiness, and adopt such measures, as, in their opinion, are most calculated to advance it. It may be affirmed of every human being, that he is most pleased with his own actions. It is totally immaterial whether these actions really conduce in the highest degree to his happiness, in the estimation of others. Happiness is a relative term, and depends as much, if not more, upon our opinion, than upon that of other persons. What constitutes my greatest enjoyment may be, and often is, the misery of another. I therefore, on this point, must be the sole judge; and that is happiness which I consider such, though all mankind may differ from me.

This remark strictly and universally applies to personal concerns. No man in private life suffers another to prescribe for him the particular path which shall render him most happy. Instead of this blind obedience to the will of another, he judges for himself, decides what will give him most pleasure, applies his powers of body or mind to attain it, and when attained enjoys it according to his own feelings. He, who had acquired an ample fortune, would think that man a fool or a madman, however distinguished in the eye of the world, who should tell him you *must build a house* in this particular style, you *must* live in the country, you *must* disburse your money in this particular way. If he noticed his arrogant commands, he would say, applause has turned your brain, and transported you from that sphere in which you may properly and honorably move, into one with which you have no concern. Manage your own affairs in your own way; let me in my own way manage mine; and you will thus promote your happiness without interfering with mine. What though I should build a house according to my own pleasure, live in a city instead of the country, appropriate my money as I see fit, instead of following your advice. It may be that however dissatisfied you may be, I may be highly gratified. And even if in the building my house I should not be finally pleased, I shall, notwithstanding have been gratified with forming the plan and carrying it into effect, and with the expectation of the ultimate pleasure its completion would afford me; all this source of happiness would have been dried up, if I had given up the whole to your management. Besides, I have only to accommodate it to my improved taste, (improved by a discovery of my errors) I have only to alter it, and then all will be right. There will also be a peculiar charm in reflecting that the structure, with all its conveniences and ornaments, rose at my will and under my superintendance. This is a language the force of which the most unlettered mind instantly acknowledges.

It may be applied, with analogical accuracy to systems of government and codes of laws. The people, for whose good every just system of government or code of laws is instituted, will always consider themselves more competent to govern themselves, than any one individual or body of men placed beyond their immediate controul. Whether the fact be so or not, is indifferent in the present view of the subject. It is sufficient that they think so. The necessary effect of such an opinion is, a conviction that they are free from oppression, and that the best means, within their power, are used to advance their interests. Such a conviction will ensure internal tranquility and a cheerful obedience to the laws. Relying on the integrity of their own hearts (for it is as impossible to conceive of a people, as of an individual, who will not faithfully endeavor to promote their own happiness) they will entertain none of those distrusts and enmities against men in power, who are not the immediate representatives of the people, that are the unavoidable offspring of other governments; and they will also realise their ability, in the case of errors committed by their rulers, to redress them, either by their removal or a change of their measures. The proverb, that *he who believes himself happy is happy,* will, therefore, forcibly apply to the citizens of a republic.

In applying these remarks to all other descriptions of government, opposite inferences will ensue. For, inasmuch as in them the people are but little, or not at all, concerned, they will, instead of experiencing the satisfaction that arises from managing their own concerns, unavoidably imbibe not only well founded impressions, but often extravagant apprehensions of the want of integrity or wisdom in those who govern them.—The question perpetually recurs by what tenure do those in power hold it? Whether asserted to be *jure divino*, or by positive convention, the mind, that perceives the great inequality among the subjects, that always exists in monarchies or aristocracies, will soon detect the imposition of the one, and the falsehood or inconclusiveness of the other. However virtuous the administrations of such governments may be—though it must be acknowledged that they are generally vicious—there will be seasons, and those of frequent recurrence, when the people will be called upon to make great sacrifices and to endure great privations. It is then that the question will most forcibly present itself, for whose benefit these evils are borne. Were the measures that produced them their measures, they would unhesitatingly acquiesce in their justice, nay feel a pleasure, perhaps, in bearing them. But viewing them as the offspring of the weakness or profligacy of rulers, they will experience a painful dissatisfaction, and may be impelled, by the impetuosity of their resentment, into outrages against their persons. It follows, therefore, that those very circumstances which, under a republican system, ensure tranquility and happiness, often do, under different systems, produce dissention and dissatisfaction.

If the happiness of a people, in a republic, be so greatly promoted by the natural partiality men feel for their own measures, how much more will it be promoted by those measures being, in general, the best calculated to insure that effect. Such is, in truth, the case which common sense and history both demonstrate.

It is alleged that a people are incapable of devising wise laws or of vigorously and impartially executing them. Though this should be granted, it proves nothing to the point. Notwithstanding such incapacity they may be fully competent to the choice of wise and virtuous rulers, and to the formation of a correct judgment of their measures. This, united to an ardent love of liberty, is all that the complete execution of the republican system requires. And this knowledge is possessed by the citizens of most civilized nations. The most eminent writers on government, some of them the apologists and defenders of monarchy, lay it down as an established truth that the people make the best choice of rulers; such is the opinion among others, of Locke, Montesquieu, Trenchard, Machiavel, Voltaire and Rousseau.

Montesquieu in his spirit of laws says: "The people are extremely well qualified for choosing those whom they are to entrust with part of their authority. They have only to be determined by things to which they cannot be strangers, and by facts that are obvious to sense. They can tell when a person has fought many battles and been crowned with success; they are therefore very capable of electing a general, &c."

"Should we doubt of the people's natural capacity, in respect to the discernment of merit, we need only cast an eye on the series of surprising elections made by the Athenians and Romans: which no one surely will attribute to hazard."

"We know that though the people of Rome assured to themselves the right of raising plebeans to public offices, yet they never would exert this power: and though at Athens, the magistrates were allowed, by the laws of Aristides, to be elected from all the different classes of inhabitants, there never was a case says Xenophon, that the common people petitioned for employments which could endanger either their purity or glory.—

"As most citizens have sufficient abilities to chuse, though unqualified to be chosen; so he people, though capable of calling others to an account for their administration, are incapable of conducting the administration themselves.

Machiavel declares:—

"In wisdom, steadiness, and judgment, the people have greatly the advantage of princes. By some occult and singular quality they frequently foresee the most astonishing events. For this reason the voice of the people is compared to the voice of God. And in judging respecting matters that are doubtful you shall seldom find them mistaken. Let two orators, equally eloquent, discuss a subject before them, pro and con, they will be sure to take the most rational side: a proof that they are no less capable of truth than other orders of men.

"In the election of magistrates they are equally infallible; nor can they ever be prevailed upon to advance a corrupt and infamous character, than which nothing is more common with princes."

Voltaire says:—

"A man that would be chosen by the people, will certainly be disappointed, if he bear not the reputation of being a man of honor: whereas at court he may easily insinuate himself into a post, agreeably to the maxim of a great prince, that a courtier, to make his fortune, should be without honour or pride."

Still more decided is the language of Rousseau:—

"In a republic the voice of the people hardly ever raises unworthy persons to high posts in the administration, making choice only of men of knowledge & abilities, who discharge their respective functions with honor: whereas those who generally make their way to such posts under a monarchical government are men of little minds and mean talents, who owe their preferment to the meritricious arts of flattery and intrigue. The public are less apt to be deceived in their choice than a prince, and a man of real merit is as rarely to be found in the ministry of a king, as a blockhead at the head of a republic."

Whatever may be the capacity of the people to decide at their enaction, on the policy of measures, these writers do not deny, nor, is it recollected that any others have denied, their full competency to decide on their effects. As this is the grand test of wisdom, it is that which finally stamps their character. Who can, indeed, be more sensible of the effects of public measures then they who never fail to feel them? Rulers, whether in the character of kings, lords or priests, may be regardless of the effects of great national calamities by retreating from them, while they bask in the sunshine of prosperity; but the people, however little they may share in advantages, too often seized by the avidity of power, must always realise their full portion of disaster. Hence they are, and ever must be, the best judges of the ultimate tendency of measures. The ruler may be dazzled with his own glory, and partaking in the prosperity while he avoids the adversity of his country, may imagine all is well when the nation is unhappy; but the people who compose the nation, and who have no protection from evil and no retreat from misfortune, can never be mistaken. Their feelings are an oracle of truth, & as they feel they decide.

If then the people are the most competent to chuse wise and good men for their rulers, and to decide on the wisdom of their measures, and, at the same time, as in a republican government, possess the power of declaring their sentiments and of continuing or removing their rulers, it will inevitably follow that the public concerns will be managed with greater wisdom and fidelity, than under other systems.

That the happiness of a people is best promoted by a republican government conclusively appears from the history of all those nations whose institutions have approached the nearest to it. Montesquieu bestows the highest encomium upon a republic when he makes the virtue of the people the only basis on which it can rest, and declares virtue to be its necessary offspring. There can be no doubt that those nations, as well as individuals, who are the most virtuous, are likewise the most happy.

Free nations, which are ever those in which the people have a large share of power, have been, from the commencement of the world, the most prosperous. In them the human powers have expanded with the greatest vigour, and have produced at the earliest periods those combinations of labor and thought from which have arisen the conveniences of life and the refinements of art. Greece was the cradle not only of liberty, but of science, and Rome, in the proudest days of the republic, produced her greatest orators, generals and poets. It has been boasted of the age of Augustus that it excited and employed the brightest talents. But it is a fact, that all the great men of that period were born before the extinction of liberty, and that they had no successors. We have the authority of Machiavel, who was no eulogist of free governments, that "Republics furnish the world with a greater number of brave and excellent characters than kingdoms, the reason" he says, "is that in republics virtue is honored and promoted, while in monarchies and kingdoms it incurs suspicion."

Hume says:

"It is impossible for the arts and sciences to arise at first among any people, unless that people enjoy the blessings of a free government. To expect that the arts and sciences should take their first rise in a monarchy is to expect a contradiction. Before these refinements have taken place, the monarch is ignorant and uninstructed, and not having knowledge sufficient to make him sensible of the necessity of balancing his government upon general laws, he delegates his full power to all inferior magistrates. This barbarous policy debases the people, and forever prevents all improvements: a people governed after such a manner are slaves in the full and proper sense of the word; and it is impossible they can ever aspire to any refinements of taste or reason.

"Eloquence certainly springs up more naturally in popular governments. Emulation too, in every accomplishment, must there be more animated and enlivened; and genius and capacity have a fuller scope and career."

Not only have periods of liberty been the most auspicious to the arts; they have likewise been the most productive of general industry and enterprise. Carthage, while a free state, was the emporium of the world; with the destruction of her freedom she lost her commerce. In modern history, England, the freest nation in Europe, has extended trade to the greatest extent; while in Turkey, the most enslaved, it scarcely exists.

The numbers of a nation are generally a criterion of its happiness. Where they either do not progress or run retrograde we may be sure the people are unhappy; and where they increase a strong indication is afforded of prosperity. The Grecian and Roman republics rapidly extended their numbers, notwithstanding their terrible wars; and in modern times the numbers of the English, the Dutch and the Swiss have greatly increased, while those of the most despotic nations have as rapidly declined.

Montesquieu, in his Persian Letters, observes that:

"Mildness of government contributes wonderfully to the increase of mankind. All republics are a convincing proof of this. Nothing invites strangers more than liberty, and opulence, which always follows it. The former is courted for its own sake, and the calls of nature attract men to those countries where the latter is to be found.

"The species multiplies wherever there is a sufficiency for the children without lessening the substance of their parents.

"The equality of the inhabitants, which usually produces an equality in their fortunes, brings plenty, and conveys life into every part of the body politic.

"The case is otherwise where the government is despotic; the prince, the courtier, and a few private men ingross all the riches, while the rest languish in want and misery.

"If a man be in narrow circumstances, and finds himself likely to beget children poorer than himself, he will decline marrying; or if he marry, he will be afraid of having too great a number of children, who may utterly undo him, and be in a worse condition themselves than their fathers were at first.

"Men are like plants, that never flourish if they are not well cultivated. Among a miserable people the species not only decreases, but sometimes degenerates also."

Giles Fletcher in his account of Muscovy says—"Many villages and towns are entirely without inhabitants; and in the way towards Moscow, betwixt Volaghda and Gareslave, for about an hundred English miles, there are at least fifty villages, some half a mile long, some a whole mile long, that stand wholly desolate, without a single inhabitant. The like desolation is seen in all other places of the realm."

Mr. Trenchard informs us, "That when Sienia and Pisa were free states, they swarmed with people, and were rich in trade and territory: Sienia alone was computed to have had above half a million of subjects; but in a matter of a hundred and four score years, during which time it has been in the possession of his highness of Tuscany, they are sunk below twenty thousand, and these miserably poor."—"The city of Pisa alone was reckoned, when it was free, to have had an hundred and fifty-thousand inhabitants, all happy in liberty and commerce; and now they are about ten thousand, without liberty and commerce, and bread. Formerly an hundred of its citizens could fit out an hundred gallies, maintain them during a war, at their own charge; and now the whole city could not maintain one."

Examples might be multiplied, to any extent, of the dreary influence of slavery and oppression, on the lives, the labour and happiness of nations. Whatever region of the earth liberty has visited, she has made a garden, while despotism is only to be traced through a wilderness.

But on this subject Americans need no foreign instruction. Their own country and hearts attest the value of freedom. In what quarter of the universe has the rudeness of nature been subdued into productive fertility with a bolder hand; where have numbers increased with equal rapidity; where has information so widely spread its illumination; where is happiness so generally the inmate of every breast? Were the despot, whose low passions are habitually inflamed by the sensual pleasures of a seraglio, to contemplate the picture of such a nation, indebted to liberty for universal happiness, and admit one spark of reason, he would, in indignant virtue, break the chains of his splendid slavery, and rise with exultation to a level with the poorest citizen of our republic.

Hamburgh, August, 19.

Accounts from Berlin, of the 9th inst. state, that the king of Prussia gave a private audience of near four hours, on the same day, to his envoy to Bonaparte, at Brussels, the privy councellor Lombard, who had retured to Berlin on the 8th. M. Lombard's mission related not only to the terms on which Prussia wished to prevail on Bonaparte to remove all obstacles to the free navigation of the Elbe and Weser, but also to other more momentous proposals. As to the latter, which chiefly relates to the future fate of the electorate of Hanover, the council is said to have rejected them, while to the evacuation of Lower Saxony by his troops he gave his assent, on condition of Malta's being first given up by the English, and a general armistice by land and sea. Prussia has promised to make an overture on this subject to the British court, but very slight hopes are entertained of its being attended with success.

The Petersburgh letters of the 26th ult. still give hopes of the ultimate success of the Russian mediation; meanwhile the naval armaments in the ports of that empire are carried on with redoubled activity. What the object can be, remains a profound secret; but the French government are certainly very busy in making representations to the Russian cabinet, to induce it to occupy the Sound with a considerable fleet, to prevent a blockake on the part of Great Britain. "Should such a blockade really take place," says a letter from Riga, of a very recent date, "it is certain that Russia would be compelled, with the other powers of the north, to make the French respect the neutrality of the Northern continent, particularly of Germany; this the more so, as Russia could not bear the consequences of such a blockade longer than three months, owing to its being so overstocked with its own produce, and money in that country being extremely scarce at present.

Brussels, August 5.

The hope of a successful issue to the Russian mediation, notwithstanding its acceptance by the belligerent Powers, is not great. France insists on the status quo from the date of a convention for an armistice to be concluded, and consequently, while England retains possession of Malta, will continue to occupy the territory and parts of Lower Saxony, of which she has taken possession. To this, however, the Cabinet of St. James' has not yet consented.

LONDON, Aug. 16—22.

Dublin is to be divided into fifty districts, in each of which ten or more of the principal inhabitants are to form a committee specially charged with the maintenance of peace and good order.—They are to keep accurate registers of every house within their several districts, and of the number, quality, occupation and visible means of livelihood of the inhabitants or occupiers of the same, and of their respective servants, inmates, sojourners and lodgers and of all removals of inhabitants, and all changes of habitation that may take place from time to time within their several districts, specially notifying if at any time an unusual number of strangers shall appear to arrive, giving immediate notice thereof to government, and detaining in the mean time all such strangers so arriving as shall not give a satisfactory account of themselves.