

Mr. Sower,

A publication in your useful paper of the following disquisitions on government and civil liberty by a celebrated author, will doubtless be acceptable to your customers.

COMMON SENSE.

A DISQUISITION ON Government and civil Liberty.

IF any one casts his eye on the title of this essay, short as it is, he will scarcely be persuaded to read any farther; as he will rationally conclude, that, on a subject so hackneyed by the best and worst writers of all ages, from Aristotle to the news-paper politicians of the present times, nothing can be added, which can afford either instruction or entertainment: but so many absurd principles, concerning government and liberty, have of late been disseminated with unusual industry; principles as false as mischievous, as inconsistent with common sense as with all human society; that it seems necessary that they should not pass quite unnoticed, especially as they require nothing more, than to be fairly stated, so be refuted. The most considerable of them are the following; to each of which I shall say a few words.

- 1st. That all men are born equal.
- 2dly. That all men are born free.
- 3dly. That all government is derived from the people.
- 4thly. That all government is a compact between the governors and the governed.
- 5thly. That no government ought to last any longer, than it continues to be of equal advantage to the two contracting parties, that is, to the governed, as to the governors.

First then; That all men are born equal; by which proposition, if it is only meant, that all men are equally born, that is, that one man is as much better born as another, I shall not dispute its truth: but in every other sense it is entirely false; for we daily see, that some are born with beautiful and healthy bodies, and some with frames distorted, and filled with the most deplorable diseases; some with minds fraught with the seeds of wisdom and genius, others with those of idiocy and madness; some, by the laws and constitutions of their countries, are born to the inheritance of affluent fortunes and distinguished honours, others to a life of poverty, labor, and obscurity. How then can be said to be born equal, I cannot comprehend. If by this proposition it is to be understood, that, at the time of their birth, all men are possessed with an equal share of power, wealth, wisdom, learning, and virtue; when they are equally incapable of possessing any; this would be no less ridiculous, than to assert, that all men are born with teeth of the same length, when none of them are born with any teeth at all. But, supposing they were all born equal; would this prove, what is always intended to be proved by it, that they ought always to continue so? or can any argument be drawn from thence, against their future inequality, and subordination? must no man presume to be six feet high, because perhaps he was born of the same size as another, who is now but four? must no man assume power over another, because they were born equal, that is, because at their birth they were both incapable of exercising any power whatever? thus, we see, this mighty argument, drawn from the supposed natural equality of mankind, by which all powers and principalities are threatened to be overthrown, is entirely false, and if true, is nothing to the purpose for which it has been so often and so pompously introduced.

Secondly; That all men are born free. This is so far from being true, that the first infringement of this liberty is being born at all; which is imposed upon them, without their consent, given either by themselves or their representatives; and it may easily be shown, that man, by the constitution of his nature, never subsists a free and independent Being, from the first to the last moment of his residence on this terrestrial globe: where, during the first nine months of his existence, he is confined in a dark and sultry prison, debarred from the light and air; till at length, by an *Hubris* Corpus brought by the hand of some kind deliverer, he is set at liberty: but what kind of liberty does he then enjoy? he is bound hand and foot, and fed upon bread and water, for as long a period; no sooner is he unbound, than he makes so bad a use of his liberty, that it becomes necessary that he should be placed in a state of the severest discipline, first under a nurse, and then a schoolmaster, both equal tyrants in their several departments; by whom he is again confined without law, condemned without a jury, and whipt without mercy. In this state of slavery he continues many years, and at the expiration of it, he is obliged to continue an involuntary subject of some civil government; to whose authority he must submit, however ingeniously

he may dispute her right, or be justly stung for disobedience to her laws. And this is the sum total of human liberty. Perhaps it may be said, that all this may be ingenious and ridiculous, but cannot be intended for serious argument; to which I reply, that it is the most serious argument that can be offered, because it is derived from the works and the will of our Creator; and evidently shows, that man was never designed by him to be an independent and self-governed Being, but to be trained up in a state of subordination and government in the present life, to fit him for one still more perfect in another: and if it was not a reflection too serious, I should add, that, in the numerous catalogue of human vices, there is not one, which so completely disqualifies him from being a member of that celestial community, as a factious and turbulent disposition, and an impatience of control; which frequently assumes the honorable title of the love of liberty.

Thirdly; That all government is derived from the people. This is another fallacious proposition; which in one sense is true, but with regard to the principles so often established upon it, is entirely false. It is true, indeed, that all government is so far derived from the people, that there could be no government if there were no people to be governed: if there were no subjects there could be no kings, nor parliaments if there were no constituents, nor shepherds if there were no sheep; but the inference usually drawn from this proposition is utterly false, which is, that because all government is derived from the people, the people have a right to reform it, and administer it themselves, whenever they please. But whatever claim they may have to this right, the exercise of it is impracticable, from the very nature of government; for all government must consist of the governors, and the governed; if the people at large are the governors, where shall we be able to find the governed? All government is power, with which some are intrusted, to control the actions of others; but how is it possible that every man should have a power to control the actions of every man? this would be a form of government, which we have heard sometimes recommended as the best perfect, in which all are governed by all; that is, in other words, where there is government at all. I agree with these pretended patriots, that the people in every country have a right to resist manifest grievances and oppressions, to change their governors, and even their constitutions, on great and extraordinary occasions; whenever they grow under the rod of tyranny, they have a right to shake it off, and form a constitution more productive of liberty; and, in like manner, if they find themselves torn by irreconcilable factions, and debilitated by internal contentions, they have an equal right to change it for a government more arbitrary and decisive. But we shall not agree so well in our definition of that important and misapplied term 'the people'; by which I would be understood to mean the whole body of a nation, advised and directed by the most respectable members of it; who are possessed of rank, property, wisdom and experience: But who are those in this country, whom our modern demagogues distinguish by this name, and vest with this supreme dominion? Not the hereditary peers of the realm; not the representatives of this very people in parliament assembled; not the pastors of the church, the sages of the law, or the magistrates who are guardians of the public safety; not the possessors of landed property, the opulent stockholder, or the wealthy merchant. These are all represented as tools of ministers, lovers of slavery, united in a conspiracy to destroy their country and ruin themselves: they point out to us no defenders of our liberties or properties, but those who have themselves neither; no public spirit, but in the garb of Grub-street; no reformation, but from the parlous of St. Giles's; nor one Solon, or Lycurgus, but who is to emerge the tin-mines of Cornwall, or the coal-pits of Newcastle. These are not the people whom I should chuse to trust with unlimited power, because I know they are totally incapable of employing it to any salutary purpose, even for themselves; and whatever might be our grievances, redress from such hands would be much more intolerable.

Fourthly; That all government is a compact between the governors and the governed. This imaginary compact is represented by some, as a formal agreement entered into by the two contracting parties, by which the latter gives up part of their natural independence, in exchange for protection granted by the former; without which voluntary surrender, no one man, or body of men, could have a right to control the actions of another; and some have gone so far as to assert, that this surrender cannot be made binding by representation, that parents cannot consent to it for their children, or nations for individuals, but that every one must give his personal con-

sent, and that on this alone the constitution of every government is or ought to be founded; but all this is a ridiculous fiction, intended only to subvert all government, and let mankind loose to prey upon each other; for in fact, no such compact ever was proposed or agreed to, no such natural independence ever possessed, and consequently can never have been given up. We hear a great deal about the constitutions of different states, by which are understood some particular modes of government, settled at some particular times, which ought to be supported with religious veneration through all succeeding ages: in some of these, the people are supposed to have a right to greater degrees of liberty than in others, having made better bargains for themselves, and given up less of their natural independence: but this, and all conclusions drawn from these premises, must be false, because the facts on which they are founded are not true; for no such constitutions, established on general consent, are any where to be found; all which, we see, are the offspring of force or fraud, of accident, and the circumstances of the times, and must perpetually change with those circumstances: in all of them, the people have an equal right to preserve or regain their liberty, whenever they are able. But the question is not, what right they have to liberty, but what degree of it they are capable of enjoying, without accomplishing their own destruction. In some countries this is very small, and in none can it be very great, because the depravity of human nature will not permit it. Compact is repugnant to the very nature of government; whose essence is compulsion, and which originates always from necessity, and never from choice or compact; and it is the most egregious absurdity, to reason from the supposed rights of mankind in an imaginary state of nature, a state the most unnatural, because in such a state they never did or can subsist, or were ever designed for. The natural state of man is by no means a state of solitude and independence, but of society and subordination; all the effects of human art are parts of his nature, because the power of producing them is bestowed upon him by the author of it. It is as natural for men to build cities, as for birds to build nests; and to live under some kind of government, as for bees and ants; without which he can no more subsist than those social and industrious insects; nor has he either more right, or power, than they, to refuse his submission. But if every man was possessed of this natural independence, and had a right to surrender it on a bargain, he must have an equal right to retain it; then he has a right to chuse, whether he will purchase protection at the price of freedom, or whether he prefers liberty and plunder to safety and constraint: a large majority of mankind, who have neither property nor principles, would undoubtedly make choice of the latter, and all these might rob, and murder, and commit all manner of crimes with impunity; for, if this their claim to natural independence is well founded, they could not be justly amenable to any tribunal upon earth, and thus the world would soon become a scene of universal rapine and bloodshed. This shows into what absurdities we run, whenever we reason from speculative principles, without attending to practicability and experience: for the real truth is no more than this, every man, by the constitution of human nature, comes into the world under such a degree of authority and restraint as is necessary for the preservation and happiness of his species and himself; this is no more left to his choice, than whether he will come into the world or not; and this obligation he carries about with him, so long as he continues in it. Hence he is bound to submit to the laws and constitution of every country in which he resides, and is justly punishable for disobedience to them. To ask a man whether he chuses to be subject to any law or government, is to ask him whether he chuses to be a man, or a wild beast, and wishes to be treated accordingly. So far are men from being possessed of this natural independence, on which so many systems of anarchy have been erected, that submission to authority is essential to humanity, and a principal condition on which it is bestowed: man is evidently made for society, and society cannot subsist without government, and therefore government is as much a part of human nature, as a hand, a heart, or a head; all these are frequently applied to the work of purposes, and so is government; but it would be ridiculous thence to argue, that we should live longer and happier without them. The Supreme Governor of the world has not determined who shall be his viceroy, nor what forms of government shall be adopted; but he has unalterably decreed that there shall be some; and therefore, though no particular government can lay claim to a divine institution, as much as eating, and for the same reason because we cannot subsist without it.

[To be continued.]

Mr. SOWER,

I AM a man considerably advanced in years, and I am convinced from observation and experience that principles of morality may be inculcated by the relation of pious tales.—It affords me therefore peculiar consolation to find myself in possession of a volume of ancient Fables and that I have a chance of communicating them to the present generation through your useful paper. I send you one to be inserted in your next, and I shall continue to furnish others as occasion may require. If I should die before the whole are extracted I hereby promise to leave you the book in my last will and testament. And you may make the best of it.

I am your sincere well-wisher,

ÆSOP. Junr.

FABLE I.

ONCE on a time an Ape, who had been dressed for the entertainment of a factious company, was let loose on a desolate Island.—When he found himself safely landed, he skip'd with great agility about the shore and then perambled the forest. It happened that the Weazels, were at that time, forming a project to sip the foundation of the government which was in the hands of an Elephant of great experience and try'd firmness. The little animals were struck with admiration at the first approach of the Ape—for he wore a coat of over laced, and a sword—and a cockade. It instantly occurred to them that he was providentially sent to assist them in their operations against the Elephant and they immediately resolved to address him in the most polite and public manner—taking care not to express what the nature of their designs were. After some deliberation they agreed on the following words:

"MIGHTY MONKEY,

"We the Weazels of this island (infer here from motives of loyalty) beg leave to introduce ourselves into your august presence and to tender our official congratulations on your life anniversary. The wonderful beauty of your person—the perfect elegance of your manners—your dress and your address have dazzled our eye-sight—while the embellishments of your mind by of like sparks from a taper and electrum and illuminate the understandings of the Weazels. To you—the most illustrious of all possible Monkeys, we look up as the great AURORA BOREALIS which is to guide our future footsteps and we humbly flatter ourselves that your worship will condescend to share with us the benefits which we expect to participate. And then the Weazels (some of whom are nobly descended) will reassume that importance, which Weazels have always had in society when headed by a Monkey who has seen the world."

The vanity of the Ape was increased by the adulation of the Weazels—and full of his own consequence, he returned the following Answer:

"GENTLEMEN WEAZELS,

"Strategy as it may appear—I am once a Weazel myself, and I still retain an attachment to the Weazel signification. I feel towards my fellow order of created Beings, my blood is the blood of Weazels. Congratulations therefore from a respectable body cannot fail to gratify the most grateful feelings in my mind, and it shall be the study of my life, Gentlemen Weazels, to convince you that I am really and truly what I appear to be.—An Ape of distinction."

This favourable answer produced a general shout among the Weazels, and they instantly proceeded to a free communication with the Ape, in which they disclosed all their secret intentions—but—unluckily, the various matters which they were to discuss took up a great deal of time. They were obliged to adjourn and meet repeatedly. During this period of business Jack's coat grew ragged—his ruffles were torn, and he was reduced to his original appearance—he became a creature with a tail instead of a beard with a sword. The Weazels finding that they had organized an enterprise without the assistance of the Ape with great contempt, and he was obliged to embrace the earliest opportunity to abandon the island.

MORAL.

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