

R O Y A L

A N D

NEW-BRUNSWICK



G A Z E T T E,

T H E

A D V E R T I S E R.

T U E S D A Y, NOVEMBER 20, 1787.

ST. JOHN: Printed by CHRISTOPHER SOWER, Printer to the KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY, at his Printing-Office the Corner of King and Germain Streets.

Colonel HAMILTON's Speech in a Committee of the whole House of Assembly, in the State of New-York, on the Bill for declaring the INDEPENDENCE of VERMONT.

Mr. Chairman,

THE council for the petitioners has entered into a large field of argument against the present bill. He has endeavoured to show that it is contrary to the constitution, to the maxims of sound policy and to the rights of property. His observations have not been destitute of weight. They appear to have the more force, as they are to a certain degree founded in truth. But it is the province of the committee to distinguish the just limits of the principles he has advanced; how far they extend, and where they terminate. To aid the committee in this enquiry shall be my endeavour, and following the counsel for the petitioners; through the different heads of his argument, I hope to be able to show that neither of the objections he has urged, stands in the way of the measure proposed, and that the constitution permits, policy demands it and justice acquiesces in its adoption.

The first objection is drawn from that great principle of the social compact—that the chief object of government is to protect the rights of individuals by the united strength of the community. The justness of this principle is not to be disputed! but its extent remains to be ascertained. It must be taken with this limitation: The united strength of the community ought to be exerted for the protection of individuals so far as there is a rational prospect of success; so far as is consistent with the safety and well being of the whole. The duty of a nation is always limited by these considerations—it is bound to make efforts and encounter hazards for the protection of its members, proportioned to its abilities, warranted by a reasonable expectation of a favourable issue, and compatible with its eventual security—But it is not bound to enter in or prosecute interferences of a manifest rashness and folly; or which, in the event of success, would be productive of more mischief than good.

This qualification of the principle, can no more be denied than the principle itself. The council for the petitioners indeed admits it in substance, when he admits that a case of extreme necessity is an exception to the rule; but he adds that this necessity must be apparent and unequivocal.

What constitutes a case of extreme necessity, admits of no precise definition. It is always a question of fact, to be determined by a consideration of the condition of the parties and the particular circumstances of the case itself. A case of necessity then exists, when every discerning, unprejudiced man, well acquainted with facts, must be convinced that a measure cannot be undertaken or pursued with a probability of success. To determine this an experiment is not always necessary: Circumstances may exist so decisive and palpable in their nature, as to render it the extreme of temerity to begin as well as to continue an experiment. The propriety of doing the one or the other, must equally be decided by a judicious estimator of the national situation.

The tendency of the principle contended for, and the application of it in argument, has been to prove, that the state ought to employ the common strength of the society to protect the rights of the citizens, interested in the district of territory in question, by reducing the revolted inhabitants of that district to an obedience to its laws. The enquiry therefore is—can this be done? Is it in a

rational sense practicable? Is the state in a situation to undertake it? Is there a probability that the object will be more attainable at a future day? Is there not rather a probability that it will be every day more out of our reach, and that leaving things in their present state, will be attended with serious dangers and inconveniences? Is it even desirable, if practicable, to reduce the people in question under subjection to this state?

In pursuing this enquiry we ought to bear in mind, that a nation is never to regulate its conduct by remote possibilities or mere contingencies, but by such probability as may reasonably be inferred from the existing state of things, and the usual course of human affairs.

With this caution no well informed mind can be at a loss in what manner to answer the questions I have proposed.—A concise review of the past, and a dispassionate consideration of the present, will enable us to judge with accuracy of the obligations and interests of the state.

The pretensions to independence of the district of territory in question, began shortly after the commencement of the late revolution. We were then engaged in a war for our existence as a people, which required the utmost exertion of our resources to give us a chance of success. To have diverted any part of them from this object to that of subduing the inhabitants of Vermont—so have involved a domestic quarrel which would have compelled that hardy and numerous body of men to throw themselves into the arms of the power with which we were then contending, instead of joining their efforts to ours in the common cause of American liberty, as they for a long time did, with great advantage to it, would have been a species of phrenzy, for which there could have been no apology, and would have endangered the fate of the revolution more than any one step we could have taken.

This idea is too obvious to need being enlarged upon. The most prejudiced will acquit the state from blame for not trying the effect of force against that people during the continuance of the war. Every moderate measure, every thing short of hostility, or a total sacrifice of those rights, which were the original cause of the revolt, and which are the occasion of the opposition to the present bill, were tried.—Conciliating laws were passed, overtures made, negotiations carried on in Congress, but all to no purpose.

The peace found the Vermonters in a state of actual independence, which they had enjoyed several years—organized under a regular form of government, and increased in strength by a considerable accession of numbers. It found this state the principal seat of the war, exhausted by peculiar exertions, and overwhelmed in debt. The embarrassments arising from this situation press on daily. The utmost exertion of wisdom in our public councils, would not be more than equal to extricating us from them. As matters stand, the public debts are unprovided for, and the public credit prostrate.

Are we now then, in a situation to undertake the reduction of Vermont? Or are we likely speedily to be in such a situation? Where are our resources, where our public credit to enable us to carry on an offensive war?

We ought to recollect, that in war, to defend or attack, are very different things—to the first, the mountains, the wildernesses, the militia, sometimes even the poverty of a country will suffice; the latter requires an army and a treasury.

The population of Vermont will not be rated too high, if stated at nearly one half of that of

New-York.—Can any reasonable man suppose that New-York, with the load of debt the revolution has left upon it, and under a popular government, would be able to carry on with advantage an offensive war against a people half as numerous as itself, in their own territory; a territory defended as much by its natural situation, as by the numbers and hardihood of its inhabitants? Can it be imagined that it would be able finally to reduce such a people to its obedience? The supposition would be chimerical and the attempt madness.

Can we hope a more favourable posture of affairs hereafter? Will not the population and strength of Vermont increase in ratio to our own? There is perhaps no essential difference between their government and ours—the necessity of making provision in one way, or another, for the exigencies of the union, and for the discharge of the debts of the state, must continue to subject our citizens to heavier burthens than are borne by the inhabitants of that country; who have no call for revenue beyond the support of their domestic administration. A country possessing a fertile soil exempt from taxes, cannot fail of having a rapid growth.

The enterprise will of course become more difficult by delay, and procrastination can only serve to render the claims of the state and its citizens, in the opinion of mankind, obsolete, and to give the cement of time to the connection which the people of Vermont have in all appearance already formed with the British government. This last point I shall discuss more fully in another place.

I have confined myself in my reasoning to an examination of what is practicable on the part of this state alone.—No assistance is to be expected from our neighbours: Their opinion of the origin of the controversy between this state and the people of Vermont, whether well or ill founded, is not generally in our favor; and it is notorious that the eastern states have uniformly countenanced the independence of that country.—This might suggest to us reflections that would confirm the belief of the impracticability of destroying, and the danger of attempting to destroy that independence.

The scheme of coercion would ill suit even the disposition of our own citizens; the habits of thinking, to which the revolution has given birth, are not adapted to the idea of a contest for dominion over a people disinclined to live under our government.

And in reality it is not the interest of the state ever to regain its dominions over them by force. We shall do well to advert to the nature our government and the extent of the state, according to its acknowledged limits. Are we sure we shall be able to govern what we already possess, or would it be wise to wish to try the strength of our government over a numerous body of people disaffected to it, and compelled to submit to its authority by force? For my part I should regard the re-union of Vermont to this state as one of the greatest evils that could befall it, as a source of continual embarrassment and disquietude.

It is hinted by the council for the petitioners that many of the inhabitants of Vermont are desirous of living under our government; and sanguine tempers have long ago predicted that they would shortly grow weary of their independence, throw it off and become reunited with us and New-Hampshire of their own accord. There are clear principles of human nature to which we may resort to falsify this prediction.—In popular governments the sentiments of the people generally take their tone from their leaders.—The leaders of