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THOUGHTS  
ON THE  
NEW AND OLD PRINCIPLES  
OF  
POLITICAL OBEDIENCE.

“ Where gentry, title, Wisdom, cannot conclude but by the  
“ yea and no of general ignorance ;—it must omit real neces-  
“ sities, and give way the while to unstable slightness.”

CORIOI. Act 3. Sc. 1.

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THOUGHTS, &c.

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C H A P. I.

*On the Doctrine of Compact.*

**I**F the mind submits with reluctance to uncertainty in matters of mere speculation, it is more particularly anxious to remove it from subjects on which theory becomes connected with practice, and our opinions must materially influence our conduct.

The grounds and reasons of political obedience may become a subject of this description.

While government is firmly established, and no apprehension is entertained that any event will happen to lessen its security, obedience to  
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the existing laws is a duty so obvious to all, that it may be considered as a matter of curiosity rather than of practical use, to investigate the real grounds of it, or to distinguish the various reasonings by which different individuals have arrived at the same conclusion. But when the political horizon begins to be overcast; when the propriety of the existence of the government in its present shape is drawn in question; when the different alterations, which some think it expedient to introduce into the system, and the various creations, which others wish to substitute in its place, are already the subject of discussion, and may become that of contention, it is useful, if not necessary, to examine more closely into the nature of our civil relations. In such times we shall do wisely in looking, as soon as possible, for some light to guide us in our political course. Perhaps we shall not be able to keep in the right road when we see it. Difficulties and dangers will impede our progress, and our passions are ever at hand to seduce us on one side or the other; but at least we shall have more reason to hope for a prosperous conclusion to our journey, than if we were to set out in the dark without having enquired the way.

It is the best mode of ascertaining the extent of a duty, to discover if we can how it became  
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one, and to find out the grounds of the obligation to perform it. Obedience to civil government has been referred to a supposition of a compact between the members of the society; and though this mode of accounting for the relations in which we stand to each other, and the duties we respectively owe to the state, has of late been discountenanced by many, and left undefended by all, yet I cannot perceive that any solid argument has been urged against it; and sure I am, that it is better than the doctrine which those who decry it would substitute in its room, inasmuch as a permanent and quiet government is preferable to a series of revolutions.

It is not meant to be contended that society has in fact originated from compact. Could we look back to its commencement in different parts of the world, we should find in many instances that a few crafty individuals imposed upon the simplicity of their neighbours, or some stronger savage than the rest, compelled his fellows to yield obedience to his superiour force, that the government of the infant state was planned by fraud, and its foundations laid in blood. But time, which is ever gradually stealing from us the knowledge of what has preceded our own existence, has thrown a veil  
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over the early periods of society, and left us to attribute such an origin to the political union, as may be agreeable to the rights and duties which flow from it, and consistent with the principles on which it is to be preserved. The hypothesis of compact has on that account been adopted by most of our older writers as the basis of their reasoning on that subject; but modern politicians disdain to owe any thing to antiquity; and previous to the overthrow of the governments it has bequeathed to us, they are desirous to remove the principles and maxims upon which those governments rest as their foundation.

This compact has been considered as twofold—first, an express agreement between the primitive founders of the state, and next a tacit or implied assent to that agreement by each of its succeeding members, to be collected from an acquiescence under its laws and acceptance of its protection. An original agreement is the only mode in which society could have been formed without injustice, and if we wish, in our discussions on the relative duties of citizens, to arrive at fair and equitable conclusions, surely that purpose will best be effected if we set out from a just beginning, and consider our relation to each other as springing from a source unpolluted with fraud or violence. But it is not  
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this part of the hypothesis which requires either defence or explanation; the difficulty with which the subject is attended meets us, when we proceed onwards to consider the obligation, to observe the laws in succeeding generations: and I confess, I am by no means inclined to refer this obligation to an implied assent to the original agreement, for it cannot be contended that an individual, who should declare his refusal to be a member of the society as soon as he should have arrived at such an age as to be capable of exercising his judgment on the subject, would, in consequence of such declaration, be absolved from obedience to its regulations and exempt from its controul: how then can the obligation arise from an implied assent, when it would equally exist in the case of an express dissent? An implied assent may indeed be considered as the ground and cause of the allegiance which is due to a state, from a native of another country coming to settle in it, because by such act he plainly indicates an intention to be incorporated among its citizens, and to partake, as far as it will permit him, of their duties and privileges: but we must look elsewhere for the bond of union which holds together the descendants of the parties to the original agreement; and I am strongly inclined to think, however opposite the opinion may be to the prevailing maxims and

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prejudices of the times, that the obligation in the posterity of the primitive founders of the state, to observe its laws and institutions, will be best accounted for by supposing it to arise from the original compact between their ancestors.

As I shall have occasion, in a subsequent chapter, to enquire into the right of a majority over a minority, I mean here only to contend that each individual of the succeeding generations, when he arrives at maturity, becomes bound to adhere to the compact, which his forefathers must be supposed to have made for him as well as for themselves; that he has no right to break it to the disadvantage of others, nor, I think, in particular cases, to withdraw himself from its influence, by removing into another country against the consent of his fellow-citizens.

In investigating this subject, it will be highly proper to contemplate the situation of man at his first entrance into the world. He comes not in a condition either to protect himself, or to make contracts for protection.

Tum porro puer, ut sævis projectus ab undis  
Navita, nudus humi jacet, infans, indigus omni  
Vitæ auxilio, cum primum in luminis oras

Nixibus

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Nixibus ex alvo matris natura profudit  
Vagituque locum lugubri complet, ut æquum est  
Cui tantum in vitâ refcet tranfire malorum.

LUCRET. Lib. 5. 223.

The picture is not pleasing to the pride of modern philosophy, but it is consistent with truth; it is drawn from the life. Shall then this weak and impotent being, after being supplied in all his wants by his parents, and having shared in all the advantages of their contracts with the community, be permitted to deny a participation of the duties arising from such agreements? When under the guardianship of the state, he has arrived at that period of life at which its assistance is less required, shall he disclaim his connection with the arm that has defended him, and consider himself at liberty to accede or not, at his pleasure, to a compact of which he has already enjoyed the benefits?

If it be urged, that it is hard to be compelled to observe a contract in consequence of having partaken of its advantages before we were sensible of its extent, or able to judge of the reasonableness of the duties it imposes, it might be sufficient to answer, that the hardship arises from the imbecility of human nature, which has given us wants before it has furnished us with a

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capacity

capacity to contract for their supply, and has thereby made it necessary for us to incur a debt before we can understand the terms of repayment; that our duties in general are not the consequences of our own choice; and that we might as well complain, that life itself was imposed upon us without our previous consent, and that we were sent into the world without being first consulted as to our willingness to undertake the journey, or even informed of the difficulties and dangers through which it lay: but let us see whether, upon a closer view of the subject, this hardship may not disappear. So greatly do the advantages of union overbalance the additional duties it imposes, that it would be difficult to point out any society which did not furnish its members with better means of acquiring happiness, than they could ever have expected to meet with in that independent and unconnected state in which, but for the provisions of our ancestors, we must have found ourselves. A state, in which property could extend little further than actual possession, while the great evils of human life, sickness, and old age, must fall, with irresistible violence, upon a being who must look to his own exertions for support, and rely on his own personal strength for protection.

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If then society be a blessing, if in society all classes of men are in possession of greater advantages than could have fallen to their lot in the state I have alluded to, can any person consider the obligation to accept of this improved state as a hardship, because he thinks some other individuals in society are still more advantageously situated than himself; or imagines that, had he been in the place of his ancestors, his superiour wisdom could have devised a better system? In short, is a benefit to be considered as a hardship, because that benefit is not so great as the person on whom it is conferred, thinks it might have been, or because it is enjoyed by others in a greater degree?

But the grand objection which has been urged against the doctrine of compact is, that it lends its support indiscriminately to a bad government as well as to a good one; and that if it be in one instance the guardian of liberty, it is equally ready to become in another the shield of despotism. If that were the case, I certainly should not become its advocate; for whenever any constitution ceases to afford protection to all its subjects, when it allows the passions of any man, or set of men, to be gratified at the expence of the happiness of others, I shall readily admit, and perhaps with as much eagerness as the most zealous partizan  
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of democracy contend, that nothing should protect such a system from change, or preserve it from absolute annihilation if it did not admit of reform.

But let us see how the doctrine of compact tends to support a government of this description. We presumed an agreement between the original members of the state for the purpose of accounting for the relations in which their successors stand to each other; but if their relative situations are such as could not have arisen from any just beginning, the presumption is repelled; if the government be oppressive and unjust, we may, without any violence to the doctrine of compact, conclude it to have originated in fraud or violence; it confesses the root from whence it sprung; the features of the offspring betray its parentage, and the supposition of a former agreement can never be resorted to for the purpose of preserving that system which carries within itself evidence that it has no claim to its protection.

The doctrine of compact is well known by the laws of this country; and I am not contending for the application of it to the protection of government in any greater extent than as the English law has always adopted, and used it  
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for the preservation of local regulations in all parts of the kingdom. The law of England enforces obedience to particular customs, and protects distinct places in the enjoyment of usages different from the general law of the land, presuming, from the single fact of their having long existed without interruption, that they owe their origin to some agreement among those in whose time they were first introduced. But it never was found that this doctrine led to injustice, for if the custom or usage in question be absurd, or inequitable, or, in short, such as could not have had a reasonable commencement, the law considers the presumption it had raised in its favor, to be overturned by the internal evidence to the contrary; and exactly in the same manner may we reason in the case of government.

But the misapprehension of the effects of this doctrine of compact can only have proceeded from a total misconception of the nature of the agreement alluded to, which is not absolute but conditional—of course we cannot attribute more force to the presumed compact than would attend it if real; let us suppose an instance then in which the people, or their ancestors, had actually met, and in person settled the constitution. Yet if the government, formed under the sanction

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tion of that meeting, either immediately, or in process of time, failed to answer the purposes for which government must ever be instituted; if real grievances proceeded from it, and any class of the people did not receive that protection in respect to their persons and property in consideration of which alone we enter into society, and which forms the equivalent for the surrender of our natural rights, I should not hesitate to say that the agreement itself was of no effect, on the failure of the condition, which must always be presumed to accompany it, and that the system itself must fall, as the foundation on which it rested was no more. We cherish the tree, while we can enjoy its protection and repose beneath its shelter; but if it prove of a noxious quality and shed a baneful influence around it, or though its shade were originally grateful, if its vigour be impaired by age, or storms have robbed it of its verdure, we may lay the axe to its root, and have only to take care that it do as little mischief as possible in its fall.

CHAP.

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## C H A P. II.

*Of the Will of the Majority.*

BUT let us see what has been substituted in the room of compact. Modern theorists make obedience to the government a duty, because the government must be supposed to be agreeable to the will of the majority of the people existing under it. The will of the majority is considered as its only just support; and whenever the party which is desirous of a change becomes more numerous than those who are satisfied with the present state of things, it has a right, according to the new opinions, to overturn the constitution and frame a new one at its pleasure. In order to support this new doctrine, they lay it down as an axiom that every man must possess, in society, a right to interfere in the management of public affairs, either immediately, or through the medium of a representative;—a right, say they, to have a share in the regulation of our own conduct and concerns is in its nature inalienable;—it cannot be taken away, nor ourselves shackled by any act done before we were in existence; but on our arrival  
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at the age of discretion, we ought to be as much at liberty to exercise this right as were our forefathers, when first they came out of their caves and dens to form the social union. It may be proper, therefore, to examine, whether there be any such inalienable right, for all their reasonings proceed upon this basis; and if their fundamental position be untrue, of course the whole system must fall to the ground. I confess I am acquainted with no other criterion to determine what portion of men's rights they are empowered, either for themselves, or on behalf of posterity, to give up, on their entrance into a state of society, than the advantage to be derived from the surrender. Whatever rights, by being lodged in different hands from those which originally possess them, may reasonably be expected to become more beneficial than they otherwise would be, we have, in my opinion, full power to alienate, always remembering that the alienation is conditional, and that upon the due exertion of all power should depend its continuance in the hands to which it is entrusted. The right to a share in the government is clearly of this description. The direction of public affairs requires not only great abilities, but much leisure and extensive information. We know that every man is not a moralist or a natural philosopher; and yet we are more immediately con-

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concerned to understand the principles which should regulate our own actions, than to inquire into what relates to the management of the state, and the book of nature lies more open to our inspection than the mysteries of government. In these sciences too we might find surer foundations to go upon; the grounds of right and wrong continue always the same, and the properties of matter are unchangeable; but the statesman has no fixed rule to guide him in his progress: political expediency changes every day with the circumstances and emergencies of the times: he must look forward to a dark and uncertain futurity, into which the most piercing eye cannot far penetrate; and though all calculations that depend upon what is to come must be liable to be overthrown by a single unforeseen event; yet it is only by a comparison of probable consequences, that he can decide on one measure in preference to another. And if any man wishes for proofs of this difficulty of governing, drawn from observation, which is always more convincing than abstract speculation, let him look round the world, and see how few political institutions have answered the purposes for which they were introduced; or if he chuses to confine himself to the history of his own country, let him examine the lists of those who have voted on great political questions in parliament,

parliament. After making every allowance for the effects of prejudice and party, he will find, in most instances, names much to be respected on both sides, and the opinions of wise and good men in direct opposition to each other; surely then he must confess, that to decide on political measures is no easy task, and that the tracks which such men have missed cannot be very plain.

Politics then are a difficult subject. But wealth must be unequally distributed in all countries where industry is not checked; and it is certain that the rich must have more leisure, and possess in a far greater degree the means of information, than that part of the society whose daily occupation is to provide subsistence for themselves and their families; it follows, therefore, that the happiness of the latter class may be as much advanced as that of the former\*, by contracting the circle in which political power is to move. Accordingly this has been

\* I do not mean to consider the interference in government in person, separately from that by a representative, because though there are other reasons against extending the former, which do not affect the latter, yet the argument drawn from want of information applies generally to either kind of interference. To decide, or to influence the decision, is much the same thing; and in order to judge of the conduct of those who have supported or opposed great political measures, it is material that we should understand the measures themselves.

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done in all ages. And in different countries, a greater or less proportion of the inhabitants have been admitted to a share in the government according to the particular circumstances attending each society. The governors of a rich and populous nation, spread over an extensive territory, upon whom must devolve the care of providing for the internal administration and police of a great empire, of reconciling the discordant interests of its different parts, of cherishing its arts and manufactures at home, and of regulating a commercial intercourse with all parts of the globe abroad, must exert a very different degree of attention and information from that, which would be sufficient to manage the less complicated concerns of a single town or inconsiderable district. In the constitutions, therefore, of the modern empires political power ought not to be so widely diffused through the mass of the people as, it was in the small republican states of antiquity. But I am not called upon to mark out what proportion of the members of a society should interfere in the government; it is sufficient for my purpose to shew that such a right does not necessarily continue in all. In fact, no society has ever yet existed in which all have interfered; and when we are told, that in the ancient republics every citizen had a vote, it should be remembered,

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that every individual was not there a citizen, and that in those boasted edifices of liberty the slaves of the citizens formed no inconsiderable part of the inhabitants. However, since I am upon the subject, I am inclined to state shortly what appears to me to be the general principle upon which the distribution of power, among different ranks of men, should be regulated. The higher orders in the state must be admitted to be the best qualified, in point of ability, to direct its concerns; but as experience teaches us, that when political power is left entirely in their hands, the temptation to abuse it becomes too strong to be resisted; it is necessary that the power should be divided to prevent it from being misapplied, and that such a share of it should reside among the lower classes as should be sufficient to prevent them from being oppressed. The people have no right to govern, but they have an indisputable right to all the advantages which result from a good government. Somewhere, therefore, in every state there should exist such an influence as should make it the interest of those, who manage the public affairs, to consult the common welfare, and pay the same attention to the happiness of all. Whenever then, either from the lower classes themselves, or from those who are connected in interest with them, such a number of individuals shall

shall be admitted to participate in the government, as shall be sufficient to make the poor equally the objects of its care with the rich, in my opinion political power is properly distributed, the use of power in the hands of the people is only to secure them from oppression; if they have more than is sufficient for that purpose it can answer no good end, but may do much mischief, and must infallibly clog and impede the operations of government. I shall not here enter into a discussion of the merits of our present constitution in this respect, but I cannot but observe that the advocates for reform are exceedingly fond of arguing a priori on that subject. If a man were taken to see a curious machine (the cotton or silk-mills for instance) actually at work; and if, in order to find out whether it were well adapted to the purpose for which it had been made, he should attentively examine its structure, and reason learnedly upon the various component parts of it, instead of looking at the manufacture itself which lay before his eyes, we should think him much more intent upon displaying his own ingenuity than on discovering the truth. But our present reformers have adopted this mode of considering the subject of parliamentary representation, they amuse themselves with finding faults in its theory, and are perpetually repeating to us, that

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we are unequally represented; but they would do well not to reason upon the form of government in order to ascertain its merits, but to look to its effects, and to consider that inequality of representation must be taken to be either a defect or an advantage, according to the consequences which flow from it. We have long remained under our constitution in its present shape: our prosperity, if we are happy, or our grievances, if we are otherwise, may clearly be referred to that source. It is not my intention, at present, to give any opinion upon the propriety of alteration: I mean only to point out the actual situation of the people as the only fact by which this question can be determined; and at the same time I cannot but confess that those of their friends, who so good-naturedly associated for the express purpose of making them sensible of their misery, have as yet given us very little information on that subject.

But to return from this digression, I am aware that most of the advocates for this inalienable right of every individual to interfere in the government, will object to any arguments against it drawn from the superior qualifications for that purpose, to be found in the upper orders, or the more opulent part of society, for they will deny that any such orders should exist; they contend  
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for an unqualified abolition of all civil distinctions: and as the inequality they complain of amongst men is not so much the effect of political power as of wealth, I presume it is their intention that an equal division of the former should, in due time, be followed by an impartial distribution of the latter. In France they have for some time talked of possessions as belonging rather to the state than to the individuals who may happen to be in the enjoyment of them: and the leader of the discontented party in this country, or at least the person, who, by the pains which have been taken to circulate his writings, must be supposed to have published their political creed, has already begun the attack upon property by proposing, in this great commercial state, certain limits beyond which a man should not be permitted to enjoy the fruits of his own industry. We easily see the object of this first violation of those principles of property which the wisdom of successive ages has established and sanctified: but it is curious to observe the alterations which have taken place in the prejudices of mankind within a short time. Formerly we paid the highest attention to the opinions of antiquity, and looked up, perhaps, with too scrupulous a veneration to the wisdom of our forefathers. This, however, was a prejudice easily accounted for; the force

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of habit will incline us to respect, what in early youth we have been accustomed to admire: and as conclusions, which have once been proved and admitted, are used without recapitulating the reasonings which led to them, it cannot much be wondered at if we sometimes adopted, without sufficient investigation, maxims which had been received and acted upon, and trusted that those, in whose time they were first established, had taken care to be satisfied of that proof, which we were too busy, or too idle, to enquire into ourselves: but a prejudice *against* whatever has preceded our own times has not the appearance of a reason to support it; the love of novelty is the passion of children, and should be confined to the nursery, for it is highly pernicious when it finds its way into the counsels of the state and influences the plans of government. In ancient times too it has been usual to extol the happiness of the lower situations of life, to consider anxiety as the constant companion of greatness, and disease as more than overbalancing the enjoyments of luxury. Poets have been delighted to sing health residing in a cottage, and sleep leaving the "kingly couch" to close the eyes of the peasant: while philosophy has taught that those, who are employed in providing for the necessities of life, escape the imaginary evils which disturb the repose

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pose and destroy the comfort of the opulent, that power bestows little pleasure on its possessor, that it is short in its duration, and on its departure leaves the mind enfeebled and unable to support the change. But the modern theorists, having been in general men of low stations, have been so fascinated with the attractions of riches, and dazzled with the splendour of greatness, that they have hastily concluded happiness to consist in wealth and power, and have, of course, been clamorous for the extension of them.

The opinions both of the ancient and modern school are erroneous, but the new prejudice is attended with most danger. The sum of human felicity in any one class of men is more nearly equal to that in another, than is commonly imagined; but to reduce mankind to a common level would materially diminish the happiness of all. Let us consider, for a moment, the real nature and situation of man, which it is not now much the fashion to attend to in discussing these subjects. He is not placed upon this earth to rest contented with what he finds here, to slumber out his days in indolence, or to sit down with his hands folded before him, till he shall be called into another state of existence: but this must inevitably be the case according to the new system of equality, in which every

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one would have as great a share of the good things of this world as was sufficient for his support, and none would look forward to more. Neither the mind or body of man can remain in health without being constantly exercised; the use of orders and distinctions in society is to furnish it with employment, and to hold out to every individual an object of pursuit. It signifies little to his happiness whether he be in a higher or lower rank, provided there be one immediately above him into which he may hope, by industry and perseverance, to raise himself. The fable of the Eastern Physician is well known, who prescribed to his patient, sinking under the effects of indolence, to play for a long time with a ball, in which he persuaded him, that he would enclose certain drugs that would operate through the pores of the skin: the ball contained nothing unusual in it, but the cure was effected in a few days by the exercise of the game. The deception practised by the physician is that which forms the groundwork of all human happiness. There is no secret virtue in wealth and greatness; but the exercise, which the pursuit of them affords us, preserves the health of the mind: it keeps off the disorders of indolence, and is even necessary for the preservation of our faculties. In estimating then the effects of any particular rank or species of power upon

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upon the members of the society, we must look further than to those who are possessed of it. The pleasure derived from a farm, and a vote for the representation of the county, is not confined to the freeholder; the boy who drives the plough and hopes his industry will in time make him the possessor of a tenement, enjoys a share of it. The manufacturer who cheers his labours at the loom with songs of one, who, from an apprentice has become lord mayor, derives, perhaps, as great an accession of happiness from the existence of that office, as he, who, cloathed in the robes of magistracy, knows that its honours are not unaccompanied with fatigue.

In our passage through life we should soon be too weary to proceed, if we did not meet objects on the way to engage our attention, and if hope were not always at hand to flatter us that every next step would be less irksome than the preceding ones. The strongest proof of the foregoing observations is, the readiness which has frequently been observed in those, on whom Fortune has lavished with a profuse hand all she can bestow, to engage in schemes of alteration, and endanger the existence of the government, which protects their possessions. They cannot long remain contented with their present enjoyments,

ments, because content is not consistent with our nature; and having no object of pursuit in the existing system, they are naturally inclined to wish for a change, not that they expect their future situation to be an improved one, but it will be new when it comes, and in the mean time it will be something to look forward to. As equality then is so far from being the proper state of man that it is the one most inconsistent with his happiness, it is impossible to support, on this ground, any more than any other, the inalienable right of every individual to interfere in the government.

But if we were inclined to admit it, for the sake of argument, the existence of this right in individuals, it would by no means follow that the majority might overturn the constitution when they chose, and frame a new one at their pleasure.

This has been called a doctrine of revolutions; but I think, when we so call it, we should lay out of our consideration the idea of force, which is usually comprehended under the term; for if it be true that the majority have that right contended for, it must be equally so that the remainder of the society ought quietly to submit to the exercise of it; and, consequently, what-  
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ever ill effects arise from a struggle between the two parties, should not be imputed to the right but to the obstruction of it.

But revolutions considered abstractedly from all ideas of violence are still evils. Property is so interwoven with power, that any great and sudden alteration in the latter must materially affect the former; and the whole class of incorporeal possessions, which are entirely the creatures of political institution, must of course be annihilated with the system out of which they sprang; and the ill consequences of any sudden alteration in property are not to be measured by the extent of the actual loss to individuals. Man is still more indebted to society for security than protection. An attack upon his possessions might not happen, in a state of nature, for a considerable time; but the apprehension of it must be constant and would be the greater evil of the two. But every revolution, which affects property, must inevitably lessen our confidence in the state to protect it, and of course tends to deprive us of one of the greatest advantages we derive from the social union: and it must, on other accounts, be far from being a matter of indifference to any man, whether the system, under which he lives, shall continue to exist if he has no particular ground of dislike to it:  
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he has probably formed all his plans with reference to it; and whatever his rank may be in society, yet if it be not the lowest he has something to lose. A revolution necessarily effects a sudden change in the relative situations of the members of the community; and though no station is peculiarly the abode of happiness, yet to be at once thrown down from that in which we are at present to a lower, or even to be interrupted in our gradual progress towards a higher, is a serious misfortune. It is not enough to say, that those who derive a benefit from the alteration will be more numerous than the sufferers, and that consequently the sum of happiness in the society will be increased: infinite must be the disproportion between the gain and the loss, before one part of mankind can have a right to improve their situation at the expence of another. But the new opinions, while they necessarily render the most excellent constitution insecure, provide no redress for the grievances of a minority. In many instances they would justify oppression and legalise tyranny; for as long as the despot has the majority of the society at his command (and longer he will not find it easy to continue on his throne) his acts have the sanction of public acquiescence in common with those of the best and mildest government.

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But every step we advance in this new system of politics, we meet with some new difficulty. When the majority have annihilated the constitution, whence are they to derive the right of framing a new one to bind the rest against their consent? The word majority is a relative term; it is referable to the society, of which those who compose it are members; but the destruction of the constitution operates to dissolve the society; the political relations must cease with the laws out of which they arise; men of all ranks become independent unconnected individuals; they are like the particles of matter, when, according to the theory which some have adopted to explain the deluge, the principles of attraction were suspended; and the component parts of this globe leaving the different stations assigned to them at the creation, rolled about, without distinction, in one fluid mass. That distant parts of the empire would become disunited is obvious. Suppose the people of this country, in a moment of delirium, had overthrown their present constitution, and were proceeding to frame a new one on the principles of the French philosophy; and suppose the inhabitants of Wales, or of any other district in this island, formed a part of the minority of the people at large by being unanimous in their abhorrence of the change, it is impossible to con-

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tend that a right could exist in the rest of the nation to oblige them to accede to the new system, or to prevent them from either retaining their old laws and usages, or setting up a new constitution for themselves upon such principles as they might approve. There are no natural boundaries to states and kingdoms. Some of the French legislators have, indeed, to answer the purposes of their ambition, presumed that certain mountains and rivers mark out the limits to which their empire was intended by nature to extend: but this opinion is not likely to find many advocates out of their own country. The only mode in which it could have been at first determined, consistently with justice, over what tract of land a state should extend, or of what portion of mankind it should consist, must have been by agreement among its first members; and if on the destruction of the constitution any obligation still continues to obey the majority of our former fellow-citizens, it must be by virtue of this agreement among our ancestors, that the inhabitants of such a particular district should constitute a nation; but to contend for this would be to contend for the force of a compact, in a much stronger instance than that in which it has been denied. If our ancestors could not answer for our conditional obedience to a system, whose merits they could in some degree judge of,

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because it existed in their own time, much less would they have a right to bind us to an absolute submission to whatever might be dictated at any future period, by a set of men of whom they could know nothing. I believe every man in this island would rather find himself under an obligation to adhere to the British constitution, while it continues to answer the purposes of government, than to obey the will of the majority of the people of Great Britain, however absurd and unjust may be their commands. Perhaps a remnant of the darkness of the last age yet hangs about my mind, or possibly the blaze of reason and philosophy, which has burst upon the world within these few years, overpowers the weak sight of ordinary men, and veils from them the objects it displays to others. But I confess I am neither able to discover the right of each individual to interfere in the government, nor that of the majority to pull down and build up constitutions at their pleasure.

CHAP.



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desperate a remedy) the question with him would be, what do the majority think on this occasion? Does Cornwall remain quiet? Is Yorkshire well affected? Is there any appearance of discontent in the western counties? According to this doctrine we acted wrong in employing an armed force to repress those proceedings in this capital, commonly known by the name of the Riots of 1780, without having first ascertained whether the mob in London did not speak the sentiments of the mob in the country; and whether the clamours of the thousands, who were then assembled for the destruction of houses belonging to Roman Catholics, might not have been the first voices of a majority, and an expression of the general will. But dreadful indeed will be our situation in times of political dissensions, if, as often as the event of a battle, or the fluctuation of the public mind, shall throw the majority into one scale or the other, one party shall be at once converted from traitours into lawful sovereigns, and the other shall become traitours by continuing to pursue the line of conduct which was right when they adopted it! In the new system, right becomes the slave of caprice, or she is degraded into an appendage of fortune and made to follow her through the vicissitudes of a civil war.

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The great body of the people are too far removed from the sight of government, to have any opinions of their own concerning its merits: they adopt, therefore, such as are from time to time suggested to them, by different heads of parties, to suit their own ends, and of course they are proverbially inconstant. History abounds with complaints of the vicissitudes of their lot, who depend upon the public approbation; and it was left for the wisdom of the present age, to make that which is too uncertain to support the fortunes of individuals, the basis of systems of government, and the sole foundation on which public tranquillity is to rest.

Upon no such pillars stands the English constitution. We consider it as provided by the care of our ancestors, for the benefit of succeeding generations; and intended by them to descend, as the noblest inheritance which could be bequeathed, from man to man. We do not think ourselves at liberty, wantonly, to destroy or deface the venerable structure; but we hold it to be our duty, while it continues to answer the purpose for which it was erected, to sustain, to repair, and to beautify it, and, finally, to deliver it down to our posterity, in as good a condition as that in which we received it from our fore-

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forefathers. This is the language of our constitutional writers: and on the doctrine of compact, as on a rock, is fixed that system, against which the storms have raged, and the tempest has beat in vain. While in France, during the short period of their present popular frenzy, one "baseless fabrick" has already passed away. It will be impossible to ascertain the internal merits of constitutions founded on such principles, because they cannot remain long enough to become the subject of examination: they may be compared to clouds, which mock the eye of the spectator by changing their shape while he is contemplating them, and which the slightest agitation in the air totally dissolves.

The effects, however, of the French constitution speak plainly in its condemnation. History affords no instance of so rapid a decline in any other nation, as that which France has experienced, without the loss of a battle against a foreign enemy, and without a civil war. If it be said that the progress of misery in that country is assignable to some other cause, it may be answered, that the French themselves have referred it to the constitution, and have thought it expedient to pull down their new temple of liberty at the expence of many lives. The event of the 2d of September is a decisive proof

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that there is something wrong in their principles, for they have certainly either composed a bad government or overturned a good one.

The circumstance which distinguished the French constitution from all others, both ancient and modern, but which naturally arose from the principles upon which it was formed, was its tendency to annihilate the principle of aristocracy by an unqualified abolition of all privileged orders. This principle is one of the noblest and most useful impulses which operate upon the heart of man; it is liable, like every thing else, to be perverted, and may become the source of insolence and oppression; but, if properly directed,

"It aids and strengthens Virtue where it meets her,  
"And imitates her actions where she is not."

Riches have so strong a tendency to corrupt and vitiate the mind, that in a state from which the principle of aristocracy is banished, profligacy must be their constant companion. Ranks and orders prevent, in a great degree, the bad effects of wealth; they lessen its influence on the people at large, by furnishing rival objects of desire, while they counteract its power in their own members, by exciting them to maintain the

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same superiority in virtue as in situation; by suggesting to them, that their conduct is more exposed to the eye of the public; that they are not decorated with rank to be gazed at as a spectacle, but distinguished by it and brought forward as objects of imitation; and that they have not only their own private vices to answer for, but are, in some measure, responsible for those which may have been produced or cherished by their example. This aristocratic principle is much strengthened, and rendered more useful, by the inclination we receive from nature to connect ourselves in idea, with the fame of such of our ancestors as have distinguished themselves, and to look upon successive generations as interested in the conduct and reputation of each other. It is absurd to say, that the supposition of our deriving any merit from the actions of others, is founded on prejudice. If a man becomes a better member of society, while he considers himself as disgracing his fathers by his bad actions, and preparing, by his good ones, an incitement to goodness for his children, I care not whether the feeling be confirmed by prejudice or reason; it is an auxiliary in the cause of virtue, and should not be neglected.

Respect

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Respect for family should be created and encouraged, where it does not otherwise exist by hereditary honours; but the French legislators have not only abolished that encouragement, but avow a determination to extinguish, if possible, the sentiment. They should remember that this spirit of aristocracy flourished, in full vigour, in those ancient republics, which they profess to look to as models, in point of character, for themselves; that in their best times to have supported the dignity of a great family; to have been "*magnæ pars imitanda domus*" was an honourable boast; and the descendant of a noble ancestry would have disdained to need the restraint of law to regulate his conduct.

" Mi natura dedit sanctas a sanguine leges,  
" Ni possim melior judicis esse metu."

The Greeks and Romans would not have burned the records of illustrious families; they would not have destroyed the statues of Henry the Fourth and of the great Conde and Montmorency, to cherish ideas of equality by obliterating the memory of departed greatness. On the contrary, they placed the statues of distinguished characters in the houses of their descendants. They taught them, in early youth, to look up to these as witnesses of their conduct;

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to feel a secret satisfaction in their presence, while they were conscious of virtue; and to fancy, in their countenances, the frown of disapprobation, when they deviated from the paths of glory.

The French are much mistaken if they think their principles of equality will form any thing which resembles the ancient republican character. The virtues of antiquity were not such as adorn and polish life; they were not calculated to promote the comfort and happiness of mankind like the milder and more graceful manners of modern ages; but we find a grandeur in the sternness of the old republicans which commands respect. There is an awful dignity in their sentiments, and a splendid magnificence in their actions, which astonishes, though it cannot conciliate, and forces us to admire what we could never have loved. But what is there of all this in the conduct of their modern imitators? When we look at the national assembly acting under the influence of a mob, and see its members contending with clamorous eagerness who shall first recommend himself to his new masters, by adopting their ferocious principles, and sanctioning the massacre of thousands as an act of public justice; will such a scene bring to our remembrance the Roman

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man senators resigning themselves, on the capture of their city, to death, and sitting in silent majesty to wait its approach, from the barbarous ancestors of the present race of barbarians? When we read that Fabricius gave notice to Pyrrhus of the offer made to take him off by poison, and expressed a noble indignation at the thought of treachery against a most formidable enemy, we may, indeed, call to mind, (but the parallel will not be much to the credit of modern times) that it was proposed, in the national convention, to raise an army of assassins to murder all the kings in Europe; that the proposal became a subject of deliberation, and that the measure was laid aside, not from the feelings of humanity but the fears of retaliation.

There is only one common feature in the ancient and modern republicans; we recognize in the latter the same turbulent disposition, the same restless desire of extending their empire which characterized the former; but there the resemblance ends, and they differ widely in the means of effecting their purpose.

France attempts to succeed in her designs by sowing the seeds of sedition in the neighbouring kingdoms, by destroying the principles of subordination, and sapping the foundations of every other government. It is her policy to dissolve

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dissolve the bonds of society, and to enslave the world under the pretence of restoring it to freedom.

The ancient republics boldly avowed the love of conquest; they wrestled openly with the nations around them; they disdained to dress ambition in the cloak of hypocrisy, or to conceal the dagger in the leaves of the olive. It is not very difficult to conceive the reasons which induced France to wish for the subversion of the British empire; or to attack it openly, when she found that it was fixed on too solid a foundation to be undermined. We are the most capable of stopping, in future, the progress of her ambition; we have long been her rival; and though our conduct, in observing the strictest neutrality for four years, might have been a sufficient proof to them that we were sincere in our professions not to take any advantage of her present situation, yet it is impossible to separate suspicion from guilt, and to persuade those, who find no good faith in their own minds, to rely on its existence in others. They behold too, with mingled anger and shame, our behaviour to the unfortunate priests. They saw a whole people throwing off, at the sight of distress, those prejudices which time itself could not wear away, forgetting the long disputed distinctions of the

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two religions, and remembering only that both proceeded from one common master, who had commanded his followers to clothe the naked, and feed the hungry. They were conscious that the sight of these innocent victims of their cruelty must incense us against them; and their own knowledge did not furnish them with any principle, by which man could be restrained from crushing the objects of his displeasure whenever an opportunity offered. In addition to these considerations, their present legislators found it necessary to keep up the delusion of the people, by turning their attention to external enemies, and persuading them that a foreign war is the cause of their present calamities. They hoped too, by holding out the commerce of England as a rich booty, to get rid of those discontented, disorderly persons, who, finding no longer any work in the country, have flocked in crowds to Paris, and are clamorous for bread. Besides, the tranquil prosperity of the people, under the English constitution, presented a contrast very unfavourable to their views. Something, too, may be attributed to that envious malignity, with which those, who have plunged into vice, and are sunk deep in misery, view the happiness of others. It may be remembered, that all the evils of this world proceed from that source; and that it was this cursed principle, which prompted the

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the devil to seduce our first parents from their obedience,

“ That with him,  
“ Bereaved of happiness, they might partake  
“ His punishment, eternal misery.”

MILTON,

The good sense of this country has once disconcerted their plans and intrigues; but it becomes us to remain upon our guard. Our ruin is an object of too much importance in their eyes, for them to desist on the failure of a first attempt. The English nation has borne testimony to its own happiness; our prosperity has shone out, and unable to support its light, the serpents have slunk away into their holes and corners; but let adversity overshadow us, and they will again crawl forth from their hiding places.

The spirit of discontent, though for the present repressed, must always exist, in some degree, in every society; and may, by events which cannot be foreseen, be called into action. We have among ourselves, societies, avowedly formed for the purpose of nourishing this sentiment.

\* We have publications calculated to produce that

\* When, among other publications of that nature, we see a *Protest* against the war with France, price 6d. we cannot

that effect, not, perhaps, adapted to the lowest capacities, but addressed to the lowest orders of the people, by being sold at a low price.

Leaders will never be wanting to conduct any scheme that promises to introduce confusion. There are in every country men, who, impatient of the slow progress of ambition in a well ordered state, where they can only rise through ranks and gradations to eminence, are eager for a revolution, that they may vault at once into the seat of power—may “ride in the whirlwind, and direct the storm;” men who would gratify, without remorse, their desire of celebrity at the expence of the general happiness, and are ready to assist at any conflagration, in hopes that the light of the flames may render them conspicuous.

I have purposely avoided to consider the murder of the late king of France, in the course of the preceding reflections. The circumstances of that horrid transaction, plainly shew the profligacy of morals, and total disregard to de-

cannot but observe, that every man, who may afford to give sixpence for a pamphlet, is not competent to understand the balance of power on the continent, and to form an opinion on the consequences which may result to the rest of Europe, from the present situation and conduct of France.

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gency, which prevail in that country, and are, therefore, a strong proof of the bad effects of the new principles; but to enter into a detail of them, would of itself require a volume. I shall only observe, with respect to the attempt which has been made to defend it by our example, that the death of Charles the first was, at least, conducted in a very different manner; and that, in that instance, the sacred veneration which hangs round the person of a king, had been removed, in a great measure, from the minds of the people, by their having been long accustomed to meet him as an enemy in the field, and to lift the sword against his life in battle. It was, however, a foul crime, and only less black than the one which has followed it; but it is no excuse for one murder, that another has been formerly perpetrated, under circumstances not very dissimilar.

I hope the authors of the present atrocious deed will look out for some better consolation, than can be derived from this solitary precedent, before conscience, whom, as yet, they know not, shall, at the hour of death, represent their crime to them in its true colours; when, not daring to address the God whom they have abandoned and insulted, they shall wish that those prayers of their injured monarch, which they

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they would not permit to be heard on earth, may be attended to in heaven in their favour. Perhaps that hour, with respect to most of them, is not far distant; they have taught "bloody instructions," and may, hereafter, feel the effects of their own lesson. Famine, too, has already made its appearance among them. The world has long been shocked at their wickedness; it may soon tremble at their punishment; but our pity will have been almost exhausted by the sufferings they have occasioned in others. But I will not dwell upon this subject. The French are no otherwise the objects of my present attention, than as their conduct serves to illustrate the tendency of the principles they have adopted.

I meant not to declaim against their enormities, but to examine the theory which has led to them, and to consider whether it will not necessarily produce the same effects in every other country into which it may be introduced. I am not addressing myself to the feelings, but to the judgment. Truth has no need to interest the passions in her cause. And though sometimes we meet her in the dress of eloquence, she wears it, as the son of Neptune wore his armour, for ornament and not for use; not to

assist her in the conquest, but to add to the splendour of the victory.

“ Non hæc, quam cernis, equinis  
“ Fulva jubis cassis, neque onus cava parma sinistra  
“ Auxilio mihi sunt, decore est quaesitus ab istis.”

OVID.

FINIS.