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AN
IMPARTIAL REVIEW
OF THE
RISE AND PROGRESS
OF THE
CONTROVERSY BETWEEN THE PARTIES KNOWN
BY THE NAMES OF THE
FEDERALISTS & REPUBLICANS
CONTAINING

An investigation of the Radical Cause of Division; and of some of the Subordinate or
Auxiliary Causes which have been instrumental in Enlarging the Breach,
And inflaming The Minds of The Partizans

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS FROM
A Partaker in the American Revolution

(*CHARLES PETTIT*)

To A

JUNIOR CITIZEN

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

The original of this political tract is very rare, and this is the first time it has been reprinted, or its author's name given.

Charles Pettit, (1736-1806,) a noted patriot of New Jersey, held various offices of trust before the Revolution, and in 1778 became assistant Quartermaster General of the army. He declined to succeed General Greene in the office of Quartermaster General. In 1785-87 he was a member of Congress, and held various positions of honor and trust in Philadelphia. He was the grandfather of Judge Thomas McKean.

LETTER I

WHEN, in compliance with your request, I promised to give you some information concerning the rise and progress of the party divisions prevailing in this country, I was not fully aware of the extent of the field it would lead me into, nor of the great variety of facts and circumstances necessarily involved in a due consideration of the subject. I had before thought of it but cursorily and in detached parts, as circumstances occasionally presented them to my view. To arrange and methodize the variety of matter necessary to give you a clear and concise view of the subject as it appears to me, would require more time and leisure than I can conveniently command. But as I mean not wholly to decline a compliance with my promise, I shall take the liberty of using a more desultory mode of communication than I at first intended, as I can borrow opportunity from other avocations. You have undoubtedly learned from traditional as well as from historical information, that when the people of America were roused to form combinations to resist the measures of the British government, they were not actuated by a dislike to the constitution, nor by disloyalty to the King, whose constitutional authority was as universally acknowledged and respected in this country as in many other parts of his dominions.

You have also learned from the same sources the causes of that resistance, which at length arose to a revolution and ended in an entire separation of the political connection which had before subsisted between the two countries, by the independency of the United States, finally established and confirmed by the treaty of peace in 1783.

But as the party divisions which are now so conspicuous amongst us extend their roots beyond the acknowledgment of our independency by Great Britain in 1783 or even our own declaration of it [in] 1776, it may be proper to trace some of the principal

branches of these roots to origins more remote, in order to give you a view of the subject in the point of light in which it appears to me, and to enable you to judge the more clearly of the correctness of my ideas: for my design is rather to lead you into the paths of information by which you may form opinions from your own judgment than to attempt to model them by any other standard. So far as you find my ideas incorrect, you will of course reject or modify them as you find consistent with facts and fair reasoning. I may perhaps, as a party in the game, have imbibed some prejudices which may have occasioned me to overlook some points or considerations which deserve attention; and, as is customary in the ardent pursuit of a particular object, I may have given undue weight to other considerations. If you, as a less-interested spectator, discover any such errors, I shall be obliged to you to point them out to me, as I am not less desirous to correct my own opinions in whatever points they may be erroneous, than to enable you to form yours aright.

The *art* of government has been long known and practised by the administrators of it in the old world; but the true principles on which government ought to be founded and administered for the general happiness and good of the community, have been less attended to and understood than they ought to have been. Monarchies have generally originated in conquest and usurpation, and been supported by despotism, as being necessary to their preservation. And though this despotism has often been meliorated and attempered, sometimes by the liberality and good disposition of the reigning monarch and sometimes by the fear of exciting a revolt by an overstrained exercise of power; yet the existence of the power was always claimed to be in the possession of the monarch, and every relaxation in the exercise of it was to be considered as an act of grace and favour, claiming from the people an acknowledgment of obligation. This seems to be placing government on a wrong foundation, or upon the wrong end, like an inverted cone.

It was as colonists of England that the people of the United States acquired or imbibed their ideas of government, and of their rights and duties under a social compact. And for our present purpose it will not be necessary to look farther than to that country for the illustration of what I am about to say, nor to state more than a brief sketch of the leading points of their history as it relates to this subject.

As a Monarchy, the government of England had become, before our separation, the mildest and perhaps on the whole the best attempered, of any in the known world. The constitution, after the various modifications it had undergone, was comparatively a good one, at least a plausible one in theory; but its boundaries were insufficiently secured; it was founded on a set of maxims and precedents established by practice in a course of time, which resolved everything into the will of the King and Parliament to make it what ever they should please. Supposing the parliament to be a fair representation of the people, there might have been safety in it; and the plausible appearances of this safety has given rise to different opinions on the subject. The government, instead of deriving its source from the voluntary suffrages of the people, and having for its only, or principal object, their benefit and happiness, originated in monarchy acquired by conquest. The establishment of parliaments and of every other regulation whereby the people had any share in or controul over it, were obtained from time to time by extorted, rather than voluntary, grants and concessions from the monarch; and what was not so granted or conceded was supposed to remain in the monarch as the fountain or source of all honour, distinction and power. Hence the King retained influence enough to preserve a strong party attached to his interests and views, whenever they were placed in competition with those of the people at large. From hence arose the division understood by the appellations of Court and Country parties, Tories and Whigs, and other names of distinction.

At the well-known epoch, called by way of eminence *The Revolution*, the constitution of England became more definite than it had been before; and certain principles were established which it was supposed would secure to the people an efficient share in, and controul over, the government. But the restraints to which the Executive was subjected were found to be irksome to the party attached to the high claims of monarchy; and finding themselves unable to get rid of those restraints by direct and open measures, they devised means less direct and expeditious, though not less certain, than a revolution by force; and in time regained by corruption and influence what had been lost by compact and settlement at the revolution. So that the Executive, though nominally restrained by the legislature, became in reality as potent, and armed with as much efficient strength as before the revolution; and with greater security in the exercise of those powers, because its measures were apparently covered and sanctioned by acts of parliament, which were deemed constitutional authority because the people were nominally represented in parliament.

These leading points being observed, will be sufficient marks to point out to an ingenuous mind the train of investigation and reasoning necessary to a competent knowledge of the subject.

LETTER II

THE British Colonists on the continent of America, born and educated under the British government, and accustomed to view it with respect and veneration, gloried in their connection with it under the various modifications of their respective Colonial constitutions. Having parliaments of their own in which the people were represented by men of their own free and deliberate choice, they had less occasion than the people of England, to feel, and less opportunity to perceive, the effects of that undue influence which the executive had acquired in the mother country. But when they perceived a systematic design to extend that influence by hasty

strides to this country, by acts of a legislature in which they had not even the semblance of a representation, and especially when the right of such legislation to bind them in all cases whatsoever, was openly and formally avowed, revolt became a necessary consequence. There were, notwithstanding, among the colonists many who were opposed to the revolt; some from the shackles of influence imposed on them or on their relatives and connections, by offices or grants from the Executive, or expectations or hopes of obtaining favors of that kind; others from apprehensions of danger to their persons, families or property in the contest, or fear of the consequences in case the revolt should be finally unsuccessful; and some perhaps believing that the British parliament had a constitutional right to exercise the powers they claimed. There was moreover a numerous class of people who believe or profess to believe, that they are not to intermeddle in the affairs of government, nor to resist the powers in being, nor even to enquire into the legitimacy of their foundation.

Under these heads may be found the principal sources of the obstructions interposed to impede resistance made to the encroachments of the government of Great Britain. There were undoubtedly many who took an early and decided part on what they deemed solid principles. But there were also many who, from various causes, continued in an undecided state, vibrating by the operation of contending passions, between hope and fear, patriotism and private interest, till the tide of patriotism became so strong as to overpower all opposition. Its momentum was increased even by the weight of matter which it carried on with it in a reluctantly quiescent state, till at length it brought on the crisis of the public declaration of independence. This induced a considerable separation of the particles. A number who had thus far glided on with the stream, some apparently aiding its impetus and others occasionally though feebly struggling against it, made their escape from it by flight or otherwise. Others, of less resolution, who thought they

had travelled too far with the stream to withdraw from it with safety, continued on in as quiet a state as they could, to take the chance of events and watch for occasions to profit by them.

Our constitutions and forms of government, which had been framed and adopted in the heat and confusion of revolutionary times, however well adapted to the times and circumstances under which they were formed, when zeal to accomplish the revolution and the pressure of common danger gave to the resolutions and recommendations of representative bodies the energetic force of penal laws, yet when the object was obtained and the external pressure of common danger abated, these constitutions and forms of government were found to be deficient in points essential to social order and political economy. Amendments therefore became highly necessary, especially in the federal constitution.

The evils arising from the imbecility of the federal government had become obvious to every attentive mind. System and order in many important and essential points of government, had fallen into decay and disarrangement; and habits of disorder, destructive of national character, were gaining ground in an alarming degree. Attempts were made at partial remedies, which generally failed of success and would probably have proved inadequate if they had been carried into effect. At length, by a kind of general consent, a convention was called of delegates from each state in the Union, to take the matter into consideration and devise a remedy. On a careful survey of the Constitution then in being, they found it defective in so many important points that they deemed it expedient to lay it aside as irreparable, and to constitute one entirely new and independent of it, except the use of such of the materials saved from the wreck as could be wrought into the new structure. When this new fabrication was exposed to the people for their approbation, it was seen in various points of view, according to the local situations, wishes, expectations and other circumstances of the beholders. It therefore gave rise to various opinions concerning its propriety,

fitness and utility. But so general was the opinion that a change from the former defective plan was necessary, that there was a prevalent disposition in favour of the adoption, in confidence that it would probably be a change for the better, but could not be for the worse, especially as it contained in it a provision for amendment or renovation if, on experience, either should be found necessary or expedient.

SOME however were apprehensive that the adoption as it stood would be a change too great, by going, as they conceived, from one extreme to another; that is, by giving the Federal government, which had been too weak, a degree of power incompatible with the rights and powers which were necessary to be preserved in the respective States; and that instead of being a federal, there might be danger of its becoming a consolidated general government, too unwieldy to be administered without the exercise of powers in a manner incompatible with the safety of individuals. On the other hand there were some who expressed an opinion that too little power was given to the federal government by the Constitution, and too much still reserved in the different States; insomuch that dangers might be apprehended that the general government would be thereby unduly impeded in its operations, and restrained in the exercise of the powers intended to be given by the Constitution.

These were the leading points of controversy in the debates on the question of adoption; and though in the extent to which these debates were ramified a great variety of subordinate questions were under discussion, they were generally derivable from the same source and founded on the same principles. The prevailing party, for the adoption, assumed the title of *Federalists*, and of course designated their opponents by the title of *Anti-federalists*. The minority, however, acquiesced in the adoption, and after having obtained the ratification of some amendments which they supposed added farther security to the separate rights of the respective States

and of individuals, considered it as a FEDERAL CONSTITUTION with which they were satisfied and which merited their support. But the *principles* which gave rise to the grand division of opinions before suggested, still remained. They were of earlier origin than any of our American constitutions, being the same which in all ages, and in all countries where the people have had any share in the government, have been influential in dividing the people into what are commonly designated by *Court* and *Country* parties, and which in England have been also denominated *High Church* and *Low Church*, *Tories* and *Whigs*, &c. It cannot be necessary to attempt to explain to you farther the precise meaning of these epithets; they have borne so conspicuous a part in history, especially in that of England, that you cannot mistake their common meaning. Neither do I suppose it necessary on this occasion to attempt to describe the different forms or systems of government to which these principles and opinions are severally best adapted, or are most likely to produce.

LETTER III

It has been commonly said, and no less commonly received as a truth in America, that the people in this country are generally more enlightened and better informed, especially in matters relating to civil government, than the mass of people in any other country. The opportunities they have had, and the duties to which they have been called in their respective colonial governments, afford much ground for the supposition. A people under such circumstances, free from external restraint and influence, and perfectly at liberty to frame a social compact according to their own choice, could hardly fail to give it a republican form, as most likely to admit of the exercise of a sufficient degree of power to preserve internal order and harmony in the community, and to combine and direct the concentrated force and strength of the whole to such points as may become necessary to national defence and pro-

tection, without endangering the safety of individual freedom and happiness. The Constitution of the United States, though perhaps short of that degree of perfection which would not admit of amendment, is justly deemed superior to any other system of government which has heretofore been adopted by an extensive nation. It embraces the principles necessary to social happiness and individual safety, and to the exercise of the national strength and power for the purposes of external defence and protection. And if peace in Europe had continued a few years longer amongst the great maritime nations, it is probable that we should have been habituated to a more harmonious organization under this constitution than we have experienced.

But scarcely had our Constitution begun its operation when the Revolution in France drew the attention of the principal nations of Europe, and occasioned or furnished a pretence for, extensive combinations and hostilities which involved us, in some measure, in their consequences. Our situation and our interests made a state of perfect neutrality on our part a desirable object. But our treaty with France, under which we had received many important benefits, in a time of great need, gave that nation claims upon our friendship and hospitality which no other nation had an equal right to expect; and the remembrance of benefits recently derived from their efforts in our behalf, aided by the sympathetic feelings of individuals for a people labouring to emancipate themselves from a situation somewhat similar to that from which they had assisted us to extricate ourselves, created in the minds of the people of this country a general wish for the success of the revolution in France. This disposition was known and cordially felt in France: but being in the height of a revolutionary struggle themselves, in which the calm dictates of prudence are liable to be overborne by the effervescence of enthusiastic feelings, they did not make due allowance for our having recovered from the frenzy of revolution, and subsided into a degree of order and constitutional

organization. They seemed to suppose us still in a revolutionary state, as fermentable as themselves and ready to accompany them in their flights, however fanciful or desperate. The early ministers of the French republic, especially the first,* assumed a conduct in this country which our government deemed incompatible with the dignity of an independent nation to suffer, and inconsistent with our declared neutrality to permit. On the complaint of the President to the government of France, the minister was superseded and removed from office. Our neutrality was announced by public proclamation, which also announced a prohibition of the sale of prizes, and of the arming, equipping and commissioning vessels of war in our ports, or raising troops by any of the hostile powers, in the United States. In the meantime, however, the British government, supposing perhaps that these measures of the French in this country had been more countenanced by our government than they really were, and perceiving, as they imagined, a general predilection in the minds of the people of this country in favour of France, and having moreover, by various means reduced France to a situation which they expected would produce a counter-revolution and the restoration of royalty in that country, under their auspices, they probably thought it not an unfavourable time to punish the Americans for the disgrace which they had suffered by the successful revolution of these republicans. They authorized, or at least encouraged, depredations to be made on the American commerce, incompatible with a state of amity and peace; and measures were taken in the British colonies bordering on the United States, and amongst the neighbouring Indian tribes, which manifested designs of farther hostility.

These circumstances, on the one side and on the other, were highly perplexing to the government of the United States, and to the people individually. A state of neutrality and peace was so evidently their true interest that it could not fail to be their desire.

*Genet.

But how this desirable state could be best maintained consistently with the honour and dignity of an independent nation, was a matter of difficulty. Some supposed it would be best, at all hazards, to repel hostile aggressions by force in their early stages, and to retaliate them by retort. Others were for a kind of commercial warfare, by withholding our commerce from the aggressing power: and some few of these proposed going so far as a sequestration of such property of the aggressing power as could be found within our reach. Others again seemed to suppose that we had given plausible if not just cause for the aggressions and threats we had experienced, and that we ought to acknowledge our errors, and shew our desire of amendment by taking part in hostilities against France. Of this last class, however, though the number was not inconsiderable, there were but few, if any, who were intitled to a voice in our councils by birth and by services rendered in effecting the Revolution. To carry any of these propositions into effect required the interposition of the legislature; and each of them were opposed by too many obstacles to be hastily adopted. The President thought it best to try the gentler mode of negociation and treaty, to which his constitutional powers were adequate without the intervention of the legislature; he therefore dispatched a minister plenipotentiary for this purpose, to the court of Great Britain.

In the meantime the tide of success had somewhat changed its course in Europe. The French, by extraordinary exertions, had become more formidable to their enemies, and clouded the prospect of their being subdued. The disposition of the British court respecting America was changed, and the American minister found little difficulty in coming to an explanation with them on the subject of his mission. A treaty was formed for settling and removing the subjects of discontent which had arisen between them and us. If this treaty had extended no farther than was necessary for this object, it is probable it would have received the general approbation of the citizens of the United States; but it contained also a

plan of amity and commerce, by which it was proposed to connect the friendship and interests of the two countries by an enlargement of their commercial intercourse. In this plan were interwoven stipulations which were deemed by many citizens, both within and without the doors of Congress, injurious to if not incompatible with our prior national engagements, and perhaps not perfectly consistent in other respects, with the dignity of an independent nation. One article in this treaty was deemed by the Senate so totally inadmissible that, although the majority were disposed to advise the ratification of the rest, they accompanied their advice with an explicit rejection of that article. It was also evident, from many circumstances, that difficulties occurred to the mind of the President concerning the ratification, without further corrections than the expunging of this article; but after deliberating some time on the various consequences of his determination either way, and probably considering that on the whole the consequences of rejection might be attended with greater evils than would be produced by adoption, and that in the latter case he was armed with the constitutional advice of the Senate for his support, whereas in case of rejection he should be singly and alone responsible, he decided in favour of the qualified ratification advised by the Senate.

LETTER IV

I do not mean by what I have said respecting the British treaty and the circumstances respecting it, to call into question either the wisdom or the patriotism of the President in the business; nor would the subject have obtained more than a bare mention on this occasion, if so much, were it not that I conceive it has been highly influential in marking the differences of the parties, and in exciting that spirit of animosity in opposing each other, which has given occasion to this communication. The parties have designated each other by various epithets and remarks, disgraceful to the character of Americans, on different occasions; and amongst other terms of

reproach “English Party” and “French Party” have been applied with Billingsgate freedom. These appellations, though they did not derive their origin entirely from this treaty, derived more currency and importance from it than they had obtained before; for previously to this æra the Americans, friendly to the revolution, were but little divided by the distinctions which these appellations indicate, however they might be divided in other respects.

It cannot be necessary to enumerate the various reproachful epithets which each of the parties in their warmth have bestowed on the other; they are numerous, and most of them intended to irritate and provoke; in this respect they have seldom failed of success and are perhaps nearly equally balanced. The distinction of the parties however, may be as clearly understood by a single appellation appropriated to each as by the variety they have used respecting each other. I shall therefore, when I have occasion to speak of them, distinguish them by calling one of them Federalists, and the other Republicans; not because I think either of them entitled to the exclusive appropriation, but because these are the appellations which they seem to have respectively chosen for themselves. For federalists, to be fairly intitled to the name, must be republicans; and republicans, according to the national constitution, must also be federalists. Both parties profess an attachment to and a reverence for, the Constitution as their guide, but from the principles and causes I have heretofore suggested, they frequently differ in opinion as to the modes and measures manifesting their attachment and veneration, and reciprocally charge each other with designs to warp, subvert and destroy the Constitution itself.

The government seems to be designated by the constitution as a government of laws, rather than of men; and in the framing and executing of the laws, as well as in the choice of men to perform the service, it is naturally to be expected in a community of freemen that diversity of opinion should frequently arise. It may indeed be said to be necessary that measures proposed by some should be

opposed or questioned by others, so far at least as to promote discussion; for the best of men are liable occasionally to err, and by collision of opinions the truth may be brought to light. One would imagine that in a community of enlightened and patriotic citizens these discussions would be conducted with decency, moderation and fair argument; and that constitutional decisions by a majority of suffrages, would be fairly obtained and peaceably acquiesced in, without breaches of moderation and decorum.

That the affairs of the United States have not on all occasions been conducted with a due degree of moderation and magnanimity—that debates and discussions have run into intemperate disputes and altercations, and exhibited unwarrantable demonstrations of envy, hatred and malicious animosity, is much to be lamented. These things cannot have been occasioned merely by differences of opinion concerning the construction and meaning of the constitution, or the measures necessary to support and carry it into fair operation. We must look to other circumstances for the causes of the extension, if not of the origin of these evils.

It is inherent in the nature of power, especially of executive power, to excite in its possessors a desire to increase the proportion constitutionally vested in them. It has been often said, and not uncommonly acquiesced in, that despotic power in an individual, or government by a single will, would be the best mode for the happiness of the people, provided security could be obtained that the person vested with such power, and his successors, would always possess superior wisdom and patriotism, with a constant desire to promote such happiness. But it is not necessary, in order to support this axiom, to suppose that every man in power aims at becoming a despot; nor to impute to him motives unfriendly to the people, by desiring to increase his own power. An honest man vested with limited power may suppose that if his power were enlarged he could use it more beneficially for the people, and he may

be honestly disposed to do so, and therefore may wish to remove some of the restraints which he finds impede the exercise of that disposition. But the experience of the world has shewn that the extension of power, even to the best of men, may become a precedent [of] which a successor, however unfit to be trusted with it, might and most probably would avail himself. And hence the inconveniences of the restraints which limit and controul the exercise of power in the hands of the executive are submitted to for the sake of safety; as the evils they produce are of less magnitude, and less to be dreaded, than those which might be expected from the relaxation of those restraints and the enlargement of such limits farther than is absolutely necessary for the due execution of the laws.

These observations will be considered as a qualification of and if necessary an apology for, what has been or shall be said concerning the executive of the United States.

The principles heretofore suggested as dividing the people of all countries enjoying any degree of freedom into what is commonly understood by Court and Country parties, I take to be the principal root or leading cause of division of the parties in this country called Federalists and Republicans. This, though probably the primary cause, does not in the United States, however, operate alone. To do justice to the subject it will be necessary to take into view several auxiliary causes which tend to irritate and inflame the parties, and to strengthen and confirm their prejudices against each other. These may be described under different heads, for which I must refer you to my next letter.

LETTER V

It was suggested in my last letter that some notice should be taken in this of the auxiliary causes which strengthen and confirm the prejudices of the parties, in aid of what was considered as the primary or leading cause of division; and these were to be arranged under several heads.

1. *The principles and prejudices which opposed the Revolution.*

The whole of the inhabitants, with very few exceptions, who were opposed to the Revolution and the establishment of the independency of the United States, and who remained or have been re-admitted as citizens, are here to be noticed as on one side of the party division. To which may be added the greater part of those who reluctantly yielded a passive submission to the general will and public measures in the time of the revolution, to avoid the consequences of opposition, but carefully avoided rendering any services, either in person or by their property, as far as they decently could. It may be just, however, respecting the persons included under this head to say that, since the treaty of peace with Great Britain, by which the independency of the United States was explicitly acknowledged, they have yielded obedience to the laws and shewn a disposition to support them in common with other citizens. But it may be remarked at the same time that in their ideas of government the principles of monarchy are still predominant; and they have generally manifested a desire to have our government assimilated in form and practice, as nearly as may be, to that of Great Britain.

2. *The accession of Emigrants from other Countries.*

The early part of the disturbances now existing in Europe occasioned many persons to change their places of residence. The fame of our rising empire as a peaceful asylum, and as affording rich sources of speculation in lands and commercial pursuits, drew the attention of some of them to this country. Their wealth, and the information they were supposed to possess, were esteemed by some and especially by those described under the preceding head, as valuable acquisitions. They were generally attached to governments of which monarchy was a prominent feature, and were cherished accordingly by those of similar sentiments. To these may be added a vastly greater number of the subjects of Great Britain, in-

vited hither by prospects of commercial and speculative advantages; some with views of becoming permanent settlers and citizens, others to make experiments on which they might form future determinations, and a class still more numerous, as agents to enliven the chain of commercial connections already established between the two countries, and to form new ones as occasion might offer. A considerable number became naturalized citizens, and attached themselves to this country for life; others may probably do the same, but a great number obtain their transitory views as British subjects and carry on trade with British capitals and on British account, intending hereafter to return with their acquisitions. The posterity of some [of] these may become attached to this as their native country; but it is probable that those who are natives of Britain will not generally so far relinquish the prejudices imbibed in early education and strengthened by habit, as to bestow on this country a preferable attachment, tho' the wealth they possess may have been chiefly acquired in it. With the aid of these auxiliaries, who have pretty uniformly been found on the side approaching nearest to the principles of monarchy in all political questions, the party choosing to be distinguished by the name of Federalists have acquired a degree of strength and influence which has enabled them to give the *tone* and *fashion* to political opinions and conversations in most places of public resort and convivial meeting.

Thus far the auxiliaries mentioned have been generally, if not wholly, an addition to the power of the Federalists. It may be proper, however, to mention that there have been also emigrants from other countries who have taken part with the republicans. Those of them who have been accustomed to mechanical and laborious employments have generally done so, as well as some few in the more fashionable grades of society; but these excepted the number has been comparatively small. Some of them however, have by their conduct manifested more zeal than prudence, and have been rendered more conspicuous and important than they would other-

wise have been, by the notice and remarks of their opponents. These, or at least some of them, have perhaps done more injury than service to the republican interest, by intemperate and incautious manifestations of their zeal, which has probably had an influence in turning a number of voters from the republican to the federal party, in the manner which will be suggested under the next head.

3. *The desire of being esteemed fashionable in genteel society, and the hope of preferment by the favourable notice of men in power.*

A considerable proportion of the people in all countries, even of those of respectable connections, appearances and standing, do not take the pains to investigate political subjects with sufficient attention and accuracy to form independent opinions with satisfactory correctness. They are apt to take it for granted that men in high offices must have obtained them by superior talents and fitness for their stations; that they must therefore be the most proper judges of the measures to be taken for the public welfare, and that any measures which they devise or approve ought to be adopted without scrupulous question, because question leads to debate and perhaps opposition, which may obstruct the wheels of government. Strange as an implicit belief in these ideas may appear to men of study and more thorough information, and however illy adapted to a free republic, they are so plausible as to find a sufficient number of advocates to make them fashionable; and the influence of fashion is too generally known to need description, especially when it is considered through what channels, on what motives and by what means such favours as the supreme executive generally has the power of bestowing, are usually distributed; and how great a proportion of the people of this country, now in the meridian of life and acting on the stage of politics have acquired the age of manhood since the Revolution and of course can have very little experimental knowledge of the trials, the feelings and the governing motives of that eventful era. A farther remark under this head may not be inapplicable.

You will generally find that whenever a person takes part on either side of a contest, his passions, however dormant they were before, become agitated by opposition and strengthen and confirm his prejudices; his reasoning faculties become subservient to those prejudices and his judgment is in a great measure guided by the spirit of the party he is connected with. You will find this remark generally justified by observation on parties in a trivial contest, as well as in those of a more serious and important kind; as visible perhaps at a horse-race or a cock-match as at the election of a Representative or a principal magistrate.

LETTER VI.

Having in my last stated to you some of the auxiliary causes which have had a tendency to widen the breach between the parties and to inflame their passions and increase their prejudices against each other, I shall proceed to mention more of those causes as being worthy of consideration.

4. *The unhappy, misunderstandings which have taken place between this country and France.*

Without going into a minute enquiry concerning the origin and progress of these misunderstandings, it is admitted by moderate men of both our parties that there has been error on both sides, but that the greatest portion of it has been on the side of France. Many of their demands have been unreasonable and unjust in themselves, and urged in an unreasonable manner; and their national conduct towards us has been not only unfriendly but unjustly and injuriously hostile to a degree that demanded pointed expressions of resentment. But in the mode of expressing that resentment, and the circumstances preparatory to and accompanying some of the measures for the purpose, the parties have disagreed in opinion. The republicans did not generally suppose it was necessary, nor consistent with our national character and existing circumstances, to endeavour

to widen the breach between the two countries and inflame their resentment against each other, by other circumstances in the affairs and conduct of France than such as related to the matters in controversy between them and us; and especially by inflammatory speeches and publications respecting such other matters and circumstances in the conduct of France, as they may have deemed necessary to the success of the revolution, which the people of this country had from sympathy and other causes been or professed to be, generally desirous of seeing established. How far we have exceeded the bounds of propriety in this respect, and from what motives it has been made fashionable to do so, those who have laboured in the business and those whose opinions and conduct have been influenced by it, would do well to consider. On one side it has been supposed to be carried to a degree of excess and extravagance dangerous to the commonwealth and injurious to our national character, and it has consequently been a matter of acrimonious controversy between our contending parties, especially between the less moderate of them.

5. *The abuse of the freedom of the press.*

Amongst the causes which have, in a high degree, been instrumental in raising and disseminating the prevailing acrimony of party spirit, may be reckoned that highly-cherished guardian of liberty, the freedom of the press. The abuse of this instrument needs no farther evidence to prove it than the daily emanations from the presses in almost every town in the United States. But the abuse of a thing does not afford a fair argument against the proper use of it. Where to fix the blame of this abuse I do not pretend to determine. Neither of the parties seem to be sufficiently free from it to fix it exclusively on the other; and the votaries of each pretend to justify themselves on the principles of self defence. The public taste in this respect is unquestionably viciated by passions and prejudices. Printers and Editors are but men, subject to like

infirmities with others. As *men* they have rights and privileges equal with other citizens; but as *printers* they act in the appropriate character of instruments of communicating intelligence. It were to be wished that the distinction met with due attention. A free press under the absolute command of an indiscretely passionate man may be likened to a dangerous weapon in the hands of a madman, and may be at least equally injurious to the community.

6. *The peculiar construction of our constitutional frame of government.*

The essential quality by which this constitutional frame of government is supposed to claim a preferable distinction from any that has preceded it, may be summarily expressed by applying to it the title of a REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY. The republicans profess to admire it as a social compact founded on the broad scale of freedom and the rights of man, by which these rights and the freedom of individuals are to be restrained so far, and no farther, than is necessary for the establishment of social order and decorum, and by which the whole force of the contracting parties may be combined for this purpose and for national protection and defence against external pressure and violence; leaving a sufficient degree of individual freedom for the pursuit of happiness and comfort unrestrained farther than is necessary to guard against injury to others or to the public. But these descriptions are too concise to be understood exactly alike in the whole extent they comprise, even by those who may approve the essential principles contained in them. Different degrees of information and of the powers of comprehension, necessarily diversify opinions respecting the details of an extensive system, however uniformly the compound whole may be esteemed and approved. The republicans may therefore be considered under different heads or classes. But as these divisions, chiefly formed by the causes just mentioned, are more or less distinguishable by the irritation of the passions, and from other circumstances incapable of accurate description, and do not necessarily imply a diversity of

political *principles*, they may be left to your own observation. The two parties, however, have found occasion to differ in opinion on these subordinate points or details sufficiently to thwart and irritate each other by opposition.

Having thus stated to you my ideas of the radical ground of division, as well as of the exciting causes of the rise and progress of the party dissensions which disturb the harmony of society in the United States, questions may naturally arise concerning the probable effects of the excess to which they have arisen; but these I must leave to time and to such conjectures as your own observation may suggest. If we were to believe that the two parties generally were governed by such principles, views and motives as are imputed to them respectively by the distorted imaginations of some of the inflamed partizans on the opposite side, we should have much reason to apprehend that, whichever side should gain the ascendancy, the federal constitution would be in imminent danger of destruction. But I cannot believe in the highly-wrought charges made by either against the other as a party generally, whatever may be the eccentric notions or intentions of some individuals in the one and in [the] other party. There may possibly be among those claiming the title of Federalists, men who wish to establish a degree of aristocracy incompatible with the genuine spirit of the Constitution, or even to introduce monarchy; but I cannot suppose that such designs pervade the body generally as a party. They would do well however, to examine the conduct of members who are suspected of such designs, and if they find any manifestations or indications of the kind, to discard them as unworthy the name of either Federalists or Republicans. It is also possible that there are men claiming the title of Republicans, of a disposition too turbulent and factious to rest quietly under any established system of regulations for the preservation of good order in society; but their importance, whether considered in point of number or respectability, ought to be an object of contempt rather than of fear. The principles of anarchy cannot

steal into operation unobserved. They are of a nature to approach by overt acts, and can never gain strength in a well-organized and well administered government, especially in a community of freemen. The idea, therefore, that the Republicans as a body would countenance measures tending to anarchy as part of their system, seems inadmissible.

On the contrary I believe that if the two parties would exercise a sufficient degree of care and moderation to examine, with calmness and deliberation, into the motives and intentions of each other, they would find that, setting aside the factious and perhaps interested motives and views of a comparatively small number of demagogues on the one side and on [the] other, they have had the same general object in view, and that there would be but little difference of opinion as to the mode of pursuit, other than what arises from the principles stated as the primary cause of such difference, which might be so attempered by prudence and moderation as to avoid disturbing the harmony of society or interrupting the friendly intercourse of individuals.

FINIS