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**An Essay On The History Of Civil Society**

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Sect. III. Of National Objects in general, and of Establishments and  
Manners relating to them.

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## S E C T. III.

*Of National Objects in general, and of Establishments and Manners relating to them.*

WHILE the mode of subordination is casual, and forms of government take their rise, chiefly from the manner in which the members of a state have been originally classed, and from a variety of circumstances that procure to particular orders of men a sway in their country, there are certain objects that claim the attention of every government, that lead the apprehensions and the reasonings of mankind in every society, and that not only furnish an employment to statesmen, but in some measure direct the community to those institutions, under the authority of which the magistrate holds his power. Such are the national defence, the distribution of justice, the preservation and internal prosperity of the state. If these objects be neglected, we must apprehend that the very scene in which parties contend for power, for privilege, or equality, must disappear, and society itself no longer exist.

THE consideration due to these objects will be pleaded in every public assembly, and will produce, in every political contest, appeals to that common sense and opinion of mankind, which, struggling with the private views



views of individuals, and the claims of party, may be considered as the great legislator of nations.

THE measures required for the attainment of most national objects, are connected together, and must be jointly pursued: they are often the same. The force which is prepared for defence against foreign enemies, may be likewise employed to keep the peace at home: the laws made to secure the rights and liberties of the people, may serve as encouragements to population and commerce: and every community, without considering how its objects may be classed or distinguished by speculative men, is, in every instance, obliged to assume or to retain that form which is best fitted to preserve its advantages, or to avert its misfortunes.

NATIONS, however, like private men, have their favourite ends, and their principal pursuits, which diversify their manners, as well as their establishments. They even attain to the same ends by different means; and, like men who make their fortune by different professions, retain the habits of their principal calling in every condition at which they arrive. The Romans became wealthy in pursuing their conquests; and probably, for a certain period, increased the numbers of mankind, while their disposition to war seemed to threaten the earth with desolation. Some modern nations proceed to dominion and enlargement on the maxims of commerce; and while they only intend to accumulate riches at home, continue to gain an imperial ascendant abroad.

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THE characters of the warlike and the commercial are variously combined: they are formed in different degrees by the influence of circumstances that more or less frequently give rise to war, and excite the desire of conquest; of circumstances that leave a people in quiet to improve their domestic resources, or to purchase, by the fruits of their industry, from foreigners, what their own soil and their climate deny.

THE members of every community are more or less occupied with matters of state, in proportion as their constitution admits them to a share in the government, and summons up their attention to objects of a public nature. A people are cultivated or unimproved in their talents, in proportion as those talents are employed in the practice of arts, and in the affairs of society: they are improved or corrupted in their manners, in proportion as they are encouraged and directed to act on the maxims of freedom and justice, or as they are degraded into a state of meanness and servitude. But whatever advantages are obtained, or whatever evils are avoided, by nations, in any of these important respects, are generally considered as mere occasional incidents: they are seldom admitted among the objects of policy, or entered among the reasons of state.

WE hazard being treated with ridicule, when we require political establishments, merely to cultivate the talents of men, and to inspire the sentiments of a liberal mind: we must offer some motive of interest, or some



hopes of external advantage, to animate the pursuits, or to direct the measures, of ordinary men. They would be brave, ingenious, and eloquent, only from necessity, or for the sake of profit: they magnify the uses of wealth, population, and the other resources of war; but often forget that these are of no consequence without the direction of able capacities, and without the supports of a national vigour. We may expect, therefore, to find among states the bias to a particular policy, taken from the regards to public safety; from the desire of securing personal freedom, or private property; seldom from the consideration of moral effects, or from a view to the genius of mankind.

## S E C T. IV.

*Of Population and Wealth.*

**W**HEN we imagine what the Romans must have felt when the tidings came that the flower of their city had perished at Cannæ; when we think of what the orator had in his mind when he said, “That the youth among the people was like the spring among the seasons;” when we hear of the joy with which the huntsman and the warrior is adopted, in America, to sustain the honours of the family and the nation; we are made to feel the most powerful motives to regard the increase and preservation of our fellow-citizens. Interest, affection,

affection, and views of policy, combine to recommend this object; and it is treated with entire neglect only by the tyrant who mistakes his own advantage, by the statesman who trifles with the charge committed to his care, or by the people who are become corrupted, and who consider their fellow-subjects as rivals in interest, and competitors in their lucrative pursuits.

AMONG rude societies, and among small communities in general, who are engaged in frequent struggles and difficulties, the preservation and increase of their members is a most important object. The American rates his defeat from the numbers of men he has lost, or he estimates his victory from the prisoners he has made; not from his having remained the master of a field, or from his being driven from a ground on which he encountered his enemy. A man with whom he can associate in all his pursuits, whom he can embrace as his friend; in whom he finds an object to his affections, and an aid in his struggles, is to him the most precious accession of fortune.

EVEN where the friendship of particular men is out of the question, the society, being occupied in forming a party that may defend itself, and annoy its enemy, finds no object of greater moment than the increase of its numbers. Captives who may be adopted, or children of either sex who may be reared for the public, are accordingly considered as the richest spoil of an enemy. The practice of the Romans in admitting the vanquished to



share in the privileges of their city, the rape of the Sabines, and the subsequent coalition with that people, were not singular or uncommon examples in the history of mankind. The same policy has been followed, and was natural and obvious where-ever the strength of a state consisted in the arms of a few, and where men were valued in themselves, distinct from the consideration of estate or of fortune.

IN rude ages, therefore, while mankind subsist in small divisions, it should appear, that if the earth be thinly peopled, this defect does not arise from a disregard to numbers on the part of states. It is even probable, that the most effectual course that could be taken to increase the species, would be, to prevent the coalition of nations, and to oblige mankind to act in such small bodies as would make the preservation of their numbers a principal object of their care. This alone, it is true, would not be sufficient: we must probably add the encouragement for rearing families, which mankind enjoy under a favourable policy, and the means of subsistence which they owe to the practice of arts.

THE mother is unwilling to increase her offspring, and is ill provided to rear them, where she herself is obliged to undergo great hardships in the search of her food. In North America, we are told, that she joins to the reserves of a cold or a moderate temperament, the abstinencies to which she submits from the consideration of this difficulty. In her apprehension, it is matter of prudence,

dence, and of conscience, to bring one child to the condition of feeding on venison, and of following on foot, before she will hazard a new burden in travelling the woods.

IN warmer latitudes, by the different temperament, perhaps, which the climate bestows, and by a greater facility in procuring subsistence, the numbers of mankind increase, while the object itself is neglected; and the commerce of the sexes, without any concern for population, is made a subject of mere debauch. In some places, we are told, it is even made the object of a barbarous policy, to defeat or to restrain the intentions of nature. In the island of Formosa, the males are prohibited to marry before the age of forty; and females, if pregnant before the age of thirty-six, have an abortion procured by order of the magistrate, who employs a violence that endangers the life of the mother, together with that of the child\*.

IN China, the permission given to parents to kill or to expose their children, was probably meant as a relief from the burden of a numerous offspring. But notwithstanding what we hear of a practice so repugnant to the human heart, it has not, probably, the effects in restraining population, which it seems to threaten; but, like many other institutions, has an influence the reverse of what it seemed to portend. The parents marry with this means of relief in their view, and the children are saved.

\* Collection of Dutch voyages.

HOWEVER





HOWEVER important the object of population may be held by mankind, it will be difficult to find, in the history of civil policy, any wise or effectual establishments solely calculated to obtain it. The practice of rude or feeble nations is inadequate, or cannot surmount the obstacles which are found in their manner of life. The growth of industry, the endeavours of men to improve their arts, to extend their commerce, to secure their possessions, and to establish their rights, are indeed the most effectual means to promote population: but they arise from a different motive; they arise from regards to interest and personal safety. They are intended for the benefit of those who exist, not to procure the increase of their numbers.

IT is, in the mean time, of importance to know, that where a people are fortunate in their political establishments, and successful in the pursuits of industry, their population is likely to grow in proportion. Most of the other devices thought of for this purpose, only serve to frustrate the expectations of mankind, or to mislead their attention.

IN planting a colony, in striving to repair the occasional wastes of pestilence or war, the immediate contrivance of statesmen may be useful; but if in reasoning on the increase of mankind in general, we overlook their freedom, and their happiness, our aids to population become weak and ineffectual. They only lead us to work on the surface, or to pursue a shadow, while we neglect the substantial concern; and in a decaying state, make



us tamper with palliatives, while the roots of an evil are suffered to remain. Octavius revived or enforced the laws that related to population at Rome: but it may be said of him, and of many sovereigns in a similar situation, that they administer the poison, while they are devising the remedy; and bring a damp and a palsy on the principles of life, while they endeavour, by external applications to the skin, to restore the bloom of a decayed and a sickly body.

IT is indeed happy for mankind, that this important object is not always dependent on the wisdom of sovereigns, or the policy of single men. A people intent on freedom, find for themselves a condition in which they may follow the propensities of nature with a more signal effect, than any which the councils of state could devise. When sovereigns, or projectors, are the supposed masters of this subject, the best they can do, is to be cautious of hurting an interest they cannot greatly promote, and of making breaches they cannot repair.

“WHEN nations were divided into small territories, and petty commonwealths, where each man had his house and his field to himself, and each county had its capital free and independent; what a happy situation for mankind,” says Mr Hume, “how favourable to industry and agriculture, to marriage and to population!” Yet here were probably no schemes of the statesman for rewarding the married, or for punishing the single; for inviting foreigners to settle, or for prohibiting

biting the departure of natives. Every citizen finding a possession secure, and a provision for his heirs, was not discouraged by the gloomy fears of oppression or want: and where every other function of nature was free, that which furnished the nursery could not be restrained. Nature has required the powerful to be just; but she has not otherwise intrusted the preservation of her works to their visionary plans. What fewel can the statesman add to the fires of youth? Let him only not smother it, and the effect is secure. Where we oppress or degrade mankind with one hand, it is vain, like Octavius, to hold out in the other, the baits of marriage, or the whip to barrenness. It is vain to invite new inhabitants from abroad, while those we already possess are made to hold their tenure with uncertainty; and to tremble, not only under the prospect of a numerous family, but even under that of a precarious and doubtful subsistence for themselves. The arbitrary sovereign, who has made this the condition of his subjects, owes the remains of his people to the powerful instincts of nature, not to any device of his own.

MEN will crowd where the situation is tempting, and, in a few generations, will people every country to the measure of its means of subsistence. They will even increase under circumstances that portend a decay. The frequent wars of the Romans, and of many a thriving community; even the pestilence, and the market for slaves, find their supply, if, without destroying the source, the drain become regular; and if an issue is made for  
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the offspring, without unfetling the families from which they arise. Where a happier provision is made for mankind, the statesman, who by premiums to marriage, by allurements to foreigners, or by confining the natives at home, apprehends, that he has made the numbers of his people to grow, is often like the fly in the fable, who admired its success, in turning the wheel, and in moving the carriage: he has only accompanied what was already in motion; he has dashed with his oar, to hasten the cataract; and waved with his fan, to give speed to the winds.

PROJECTS of mighty settlement, and of sudden population, however successful in the end, are always expensive to mankind. Above a hundred thousand peasants, we are told, were yearly driven, like so many cattle, to Peterburgh, in the first attempts to replenish that settlement, and yearly perished for want of subsistence\*. The Indian only attempts to settle in the neighbourhood of the plantain †, and while his family increases, he adds a tree to the walk.

If the plantain, the cocoa, or the palm, were sufficient to maintain an inhabitant, the race of men in the warmer climates might become as numerous as the trees of the forest. But in many parts of the earth, from the nature of the climate, and the soil, the spontaneous pro-

\* Strahlenberg.

† Dampier.



duce being next to nothing ; the means of subsistence are the fruits only of labour and skill. If a people, while they retain their frugality, increase their industry, and improve their arts, their numbers must grow in proportion. Hence it is, that the cultivated fields of Europe are more peopled than the wilds of America, or the plains of Tartary.

BUT even the increase of mankind which attends the accumulation of wealth, has its limits. The *necessary of life* is a vague and a relative term : it is one thing in the opinion of the savage ; another in that of the polished citizen : it has a reference to the fancy, and to the habits of living. While arts improve, and riches increase ; while the possessions of individuals, or their prospects of gain, come up to their opinion of what is required to settle a family, they enter on its cares with alacrity. But when the possession, however redundant, falls short of the standard, and a fortune supposed sufficient for marriage is attained with difficulty, population is checked, or begins to decline. The citizen, in his own apprehension, returns to the state of the savage ; his children, he thinks, must perish for want ; and he quits a scene overflowing with plenty, because he has not the fortune which his supposed rank, or his wishes, require. No ultimate remedy is applied to this evil, by merely accumulating wealth ; for rare and costly materials, whatever these are, continue to be sought ; and if silks and pearl are made common, men will begin to covet some new decorations, which the wealthy alone can procure. If they are indulged in their humour, their demands are repeated :

peated: For it is the continual increase of riches, not any measure attained, that keeps the craving imagination at ease.

MEN are tempted to labour, and to practise lucrative arts, by motives of interest. Secure to the workman the fruit of his labour, give him the prospects of independence or freedom, the public has found a faithful minister in the acquisition of wealth, and a faithful steward in hoarding what he has gained. The statesman in this, as in the case of population itself, can do little more than avoid doing mischief. It is well, if, in the beginnings of commerce, he knows how to repress the frauds to which it is subject. Commerce, if continued, is the branch in which men committed to the effects of their own experience, are least apt to go wrong.

THE trader, in rude ages, is short-sighted, fraudulent, and mercenary; but in the progress and advanced state of his art, his views are enlarged, his maxims are established: he becomes punctual, liberal, faithful, and enterprising; and in the period of general corruption, he alone has every virtue, except the force to defend his acquisitions. He needs no aid from the state, but its protection; and is often in himself its most intelligent and respectable member. Even in China, we are informed, where pilfering, fraud, and corruption, are the reigning practice with all the other orders of men, the great merchant is ready to give, and to procure confidence: while his countrymen act on the plans and under the restric-



tions of a police adjusted to knaves, he acts on the reasons of trade, and the maxims of mankind.

IF population be connected with national wealth, liberty and personal security is the great foundation of both: and if this foundation be laid in the state, nature has secured the increase and the industry of its members; the one by desires the most ardent in the human frame; the other by a consideration the most uniform and constant of any that possesses the mind. The great object of policy, therefore, with respect to both, is, to secure to the family its means of subsistence and settlement; to protect the industrious in the pursuit of his occupation; to reconcile the restrictions of police, and the social affections of mankind, with their separate and interested pursuits.

IN matters of particular profession, industry, and trade, the experienced practitioner is the master, and every general reasoner is a novice. The object in commerce is to make the individual rich; the more he gains for himself, the more he augments the wealth of his country. If a protection be required, it must be granted; if crimes and frauds be committed, they must be repressed; and government can pretend to no more. When the refined politician would lend an active hand, he only multiplies interruptions and grounds of complaint; when the merchant forgets his own interest to lay plans for his country, the period of vision and chimera is near, and the solid basis of commerce withdrawn. He might  
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be told, perhaps, that while he pursues his advantage, and gives no cause of complaint, the interest of commerce is safe.

THE general police of France, proceeding on a supposition that the exportation of corn must drain the country where it has grown, had, till of late, laid that branch of commerce under a severe prohibition. The English landholder and the farmer had credit enough to obtain a premium for exportation, to favour the sale of their commodity; and the event has shewn, that private interest is a better patron of commerce and plenty, than the refinements of state. One nation lays the refined plan of a settlement on the continent of North America, and trusts little to the conduct of traders and short-sighted men; another leaves men to find their own position in a state of freedom, and to think for themselves. The active industry and the limited views of the one, made a thriving settlement; the great projects of the other were still in idea.

BUT I willingly quit a subject in which I am not much conversant, and still less engaged by the views with which I write. Speculations on commerce and wealth have been delivered by the ablest writers, who have left nothing so important to be offered on the subject, as the general caution, not to consider these articles as making the sum of national felicity, or the principal object of any state.





ONE nation, in search of gold and of precious metals, neglect the domestic sources of wealth, and become dependent on their neighbours for the necessaries of life: another so intent on improving their internal resources, and on increasing their commerce, that they become dependent on foreigners for the defence of what they acquire. It is even painful in conversation to find the interests of trade give the tone to our reasonings, and to find a subject perpetually offered as the great business of national councils, to which any interposition of government is seldom, with propriety, applied, or never beyond the protection it affords.

WE complain of a want of public spirit; but whatever may be the effect of this error in practice, in speculation it is none of our faults: we reason perpetually for the public; but the want of national views were frequently better than the possession of those we express: we would have nations, like a company of merchants, think of nothing but the increase of their stock; assemble to deliberate on profit and loss; and, like them too, intrust their protection to a force which they do not possess in themselves.

BECAUSE men, like other animals, are maintained in multitudes, where the necessaries of life are amassed, and the store of wealth is enlarged, we drop our regards for the happiness, the moral and political character of a people; and anxious for the herd we would propagate, carry our views no farther than the stall and the pasture. We  
forget



forget that the few have often made a prey of the many; that to the poor there is nothing so enticing as the coffers of the rich; and that when the price of freedom comes to be paid, the heavy sword of the victor may fall into the opposite scale.

WHATEVER be the actual conduct of nations in this matter, it is certain, that many of our arguments would hurry us, for the sake of wealth and of population, into a scene where mankind being exposed to corruption, are unable to defend their possessions; and where they are, in the end, subject to oppression and ruin. We cut off the roots, while we would extend the branches, and thicken the foliage.

IT is possibly from an opinion that the virtues of men are secure, that some who turn their attention to public affairs, think of nothing but the numbers and wealth of a people: it is from a dread of corruption, that others think of nothing but how to preserve the national virtues. Human society has great obligations to both. They are opposed to one another only by mistake; and even when united, have not strength sufficient to combat the wretched party, that refers every object to personal interest, and that cares not for the safety or increase of any stock but its own.

S E C T.

