

Landesbibliothek Oldenburg

Digitalisierung von Drucken

An Essay On The History Of Civil Society

Ferguson, Adam

London, 1767

Part Sixth. Of Corruption and Political Slavery.

urn:nbn:de:gbv:45:1-1517

PART SIXTH.

Of Corruption and Political Slavery.

S E C T. I.

Of Corruption in general.

IF the fortune of nations, and their tendency to aggrandisement, or to ruin, were to be estimated by merely balancing, on the principles of last section, articles of profit and loss, every argument in politics would rest on a comparison of national expence with national gain; on a comparison of the numbers who consume, with those who produce or amass the necessaries of life. The columns of the industrious, and the idle, would include all orders of men; and the state itself, being allowed as many magistrates, politicians, and warriors, as were barely sufficient for its defence and its government,

vernment, should place, on the side of its loss, every name that is supernumerary on the civil or the military list; all those orders of men, who, by the possession of fortune, subsist on the gains of others, and by the nicety of their choice, require a great expence of time and of labour, to supply their consumption; all those who are idly employed in the train of persons of rank; all those who are engaged in the professions of law, physic, or divinity, together with all the learned, who do not, by their studies, promote or improve the practice of some lucrative trade. The value of every person, in short, should be computed from his labour; and that of labour itself, from its tendency to procure and amass the means of subsistence. The arts employed on mere superfluities should be prohibited, except when their produce could be exchanged with foreign nations, for commodities that might be employed to maintain useful men for the public.

THESE appear to be the rules by which a miser would examine the state of his own affairs, or those of his country; but schemes of perfect corruption are at least as impracticable as schemes of perfect virtue. Men are not universally misers; they will not be satisfied with the pleasure of hoarding; they must be suffered to enjoy their wealth, in order that they may take the trouble of becoming rich. Property, in the common course of human affairs, is unequally divided: we are therefore obliged to suffer the wealthy to squander, that the poor may subsist; we are obliged to tolerate certain orders of



men, who are above the necessity of labour, in order that, in their condition, there may be an object of ambition, and a rank to which the busy aspire. We are not only obliged to admit numbers, who, in strict economy, may be reckoned superfluous, on the civil, the military, and the political list; but because we are men, and prefer the occupation, improvement, and felicity of our nature, to its mere existence, we must even wish, that as many members as possible, of every community, may be admitted to a share of its defence and its government.

MEN, in fact, while they pursue in society different objects, or separate views, procure a wide distribution of power, and by a species of chance, arrive at a posture for civil engagements, more favourable to human nature than what human wisdom could ever calmly devise.

IF the strength of a nation, in the mean time, consists in the men on whom it may rely, and who are fortunately or wisely combined for its preservation, it follows, that manners are as important as either numbers or wealth; and that corruption is to be accounted a principal cause of national declension and ruin.

WHOEVER perceives what are the qualities of man in his excellence, may easily, by that standard, distinguish his defects or corruptions. If an intelligent, a courageous, and an affectionate mind, constitutes the perfection of his nature, remarkable failings in any of those

those particulars, must proportionally sink or debase his character.

WE have observed, that it is the happiness of the individual to make a right choice of his conduct; that this choice will lead him to lose in society the sense of a personal interest; and, in the consideration of what is due to the whole, to stifle those anxieties which relate to himself as a part.

THE natural disposition of man to humanity, and the warmth of his temper, may raise his character to this fortunate pitch. His elevation, in a great measure, depends on the form of his society; but he can, without incurring the charge of corruption, accommodate himself to great variations in the constitutions of government. The same integrity, and vigorous spirit, which, in democratical states, renders him tenacious of his equality, may, under aristocracy or monarchy, lead him to maintain the subordinations established. He may entertain, towards the different ranks of men with whom he is yoked in the state, maxims of respect and of candour: he may, in the choice of his actions, follow a principle of justice, and of honour, which the considerations of safety, preferment, or profit, cannot efface.

FROM our complaints of national depravity, it should, notwithstanding, appear, that whole bodies of men are sometimes infected with an epidemical weakness of the head, or corruption of heart, by which they become
unfit

unfit for the stations they occupy, and threaten the states they compose, however flourishing, with a prospect of decay, and of ruin.

A change of national manners for the worse, may arise from a discontinuance of the scenes in which the talents of men were happily cultivated, and brought into exercise; or from a change in the prevailing opinions relating to the constituents of honour or of happiness. When mere riches, or court-favour, are supposed to constitute rank; the mind is misled from the consideration of qualities on which it ought to rely. Magnanimity, courage, and the love of mankind, are sacrificed to avarice and vanity, or suppressed under a sense of dependence. The individual considers his community so far only as it can be rendered subservient to his personal advancement or profit: he states himself in competition with his fellow-creatures; and, urged by the passions of emulation, of fear and jealousy, of envy and malice, he follows the maxims of an animal destined to preserve his separate existence, and to indulge his caprice or his appetite, at the expence of his species.

ON this corrupt foundation, men become either rapacious, deceitful, and violent, ready to trespass on the rights of others; or servile, mercenary, and base, prepared to relinquish their own. Talents, capacity, and force of mind, possessed by a person of the first description, serve to plunge him the deeper in misery, and to sharpen the agony of cruel passions; which lead him to
wreak

wreak on his fellow-creatures the torments that prey on himself. To a person of the second, imagination, and reason itself, only serve to point out false objects of fear, or desire, and to multiply the subjects of disappointment, and of momentary joy. In either case, and whether we suppose that corrupt men are urged by covetousness, or betrayed by fear, and without specifying the crimes which from either disposition they are prepared to commit, we may safely affirm, with Socrates, "That every master should pray he may not meet with such a slave; and every such person, being unfit for liberty, should implore that he may meet with a merciful master."

MAN, under this measure of corruption, although he may be bought for a slave by those who know how to turn his faculties and his labour to profit; and although, when kept under proper restraints, his neighbourhood may be convenient or useful; yet is certainly unfit to act on the footing of a liberal combination or concert with his fellow-creatures: his mind is not addicted to friendship or confidence; he is not willing to act for the preservation of others, nor deserves that any other should hazard his own safety for his.

THE actual character of mankind, mean-time, in the worst, as well as the best condition, is undoubtedly mixed: and nations of the best description are greatly obliged for their preservation, not only to the good disposition of their members, but likewise to those political institutions,



institutions, by which the violent are restrained from the commission of crimes, and the cowardly, or the selfish, are made to contribute their part to the public defence or prosperity. By means of such institutions, and the wise precautions of government, nations are enabled to subsist, and even to prosper, under very different degrees of corruption, or of public integrity.

So long as the majority of a people is supposed to act on maxims of probity, the example of the good, and even the caution of the bad, give a general appearance of integrity, and of innocence. Where men are to one another objects of affection and of confidence, where they are generally disposed not to offend, government may be remiss; and every person may be treated as innocent, till he is found to be guilty. As the subject in this case does not hear of the crimes, so he need not be told of the punishments inflicted on persons of a different character. But where the manners of a people are considerably changed for the worse, every subject must stand on his guard, and government itself must act on suitable maxims of fear and distrust. The individual, no longer fit to be indulged in his pretensions to personal consideration, independence, or freedom, each of which he would turn to abuse, must be taught, by external force, and from motives of fear, to counterfeit those effects of innocence, and of duty, to which he is not disposed: he must be referred to the whip, or the gibbet, for arguments in support of a caution, which the state now requires him to assume, on a supposition that he is inflexible

sible to the motives which recommend the practice of virtue.

THE rules of despotism are made for the government of corrupted men. They were indeed followed on some remarkable occasions, even under the Roman commonwealth; and the bloody axe, to terrify the citizen from his crimes, and to repel the casual and temporary irruptions of vice, was repeatedly committed to the arbitrary will of the dictator. They were finally established on the ruins of the republic itself, when either the people became too corrupted for freedom, or when the magistrate became too corrupted to resign his dictatorial power. This species of government comes naturally in the termination of a continued and growing corruption; but has no doubt, in some instances, come too soon, and has sacrificed remains of virtue, that deserved a better fate, to the jealousy of tyrants, who were in haste to augment their power. This method of government cannot, in such cases, fail to introduce that measure of corruption, against whose external effects it is desired as a remedy. When fear is suggested as the only motive to duty, every heart becomes rapacious or base. And this medicine, if applied to a healthy body, is sure to create the distemper it is destined to cure.

THIS is the manner of government into which the covetous, and the arrogant, to satiate their unhappy desires, would hurry their fellow-creatures: it is a manner of government to which the timorous and the fer-



vile submit at discretion; and when these characters of the rapacious and the timid divide mankind, even the virtues of Antoninus or Trajan, can do no more than apply, with candour and with vigour, the whip and the sword; and endeavour, by the hopes of reward, or the fear of punishment, to find a speedy and a temporary cure for the crimes, or the imbecilities of men.

OTHER states may be more or less corrupted: this has corruption for its basis. Here justice may sometimes direct the arm of the despotic sovereign; but the name of justice is most commonly employed to signify the interest, or the caprice, of a reigning power. Human society, susceptible of such a variety of forms, here finds the simplest of all. The toils and possessions of many are destined to assuage the passions of one or a few; and the only parties that remain among mankind, are the oppressor who demands, and the oppressed who dare not refuse.

NATIONS, while they were intitled to a milder fate, as in the case of the Greeks, repeatedly conquered, have been reduced to this condition by military force. They have reached it too in the maturity of their own depravations; when, like the Romans, returned from the conquest, and loaded with the spoils, of the world, they gave loose to faction, and to crimes too bold and too frequent for the correction of ordinary government; and when the sword of justice, dropping with blood, and perpetually required to suppress accumulating disorders



orders on every side, could no longer await the delays and precautions of an administration fettered by laws.

IT is, however, well known from the history of mankind, that corruption of this, or of any other degree, is not peculiar to nations in their decline, or in the result of signal prosperity, and great advances in the arts of commerce. The bands of society, indeed, in small and infant establishments, are generally strong; and their subjects, either by an ardent devotion to their own tribe, or a vehement animosity against enemies, and by a vigorous courage founded on both, are well qualified to urge, or to sustain, the fortune of a growing community. But the savage, and the barbarian, have given, notwithstanding, in the case of entire nations, some examples of a weak and timorous character*. They have, in more instances, fallen into that species of corruption which we have already described in treating of barbarous nations; they have made rapine their trade, not merely as a species of warfare, or with a view to enrich their community, but to possess, in property, what they learned to prefer even to the ties of affection or of blood.

IN the lowest state of commercial arts, the passions for wealth, and for dominion, have exhibited scenes of oppression, or servility, which the most finished corrup-

* The barbarous nations of Siberia, in general, are servile and timid.



tion of the arrogant, the cowardly, and the mercenary, founded on the desire of procuring, or the fear of losing, a fortune, could not exceed. In such cases, the vices of men, unrestrained by forms, and unawed by police, are suffered to riot at large, and to produce their entire effects. Parties accordingly unite, or separate, on the maxims of a gang of robbers; they sacrifice to interest the tenderest affections of human nature. The parent supplies the market for slaves, even by the sale of his own children; the cottage ceases to be a sanctuary for the weak and the defenceless stranger; and rites of hospitality, often so sacred among nations in their primitive state, come to be violated, like every other tie of humanity, without fear or remorse*.

NATIONS, which in later periods of their history became eminent for civil wisdom and justice, had, perhaps, in a former age, paroxysms of lawless disorder, to which this description might in part be applied. The very policy by which they arrived at their degree of national felicity, was devised as a remedy for outrageous abuse. The establishment of order was dated from the commission of rapes and murders; indignation, and private revenge, were the principles on which nations proceeded to the expulsion of tyrants, to the emancipation of mankind, and the full explanation of their political rights.

* Chardin's travels through Mingrelia into Persia.



DEFECTS of government, and of law, may be in some cases considered as a symptom of innocence and of virtue. But where power is already established, where the strong are unwilling to suffer restraint, or the weak unable to find a protection, the defects of law are marks of the most perfect corruption.

AMONG rude nations, government is often defective; both because men are not yet acquainted with all the evils for which polished nations have endeavoured to find a redress; and because, even where evils of the most flagrant nature have long afflicted the peace of society, they have not yet been able to apply the cure. In the progress of civilization, new distempers break forth, and new remedies are applied: but the remedy is not always applied the moment the distemper appears; and laws, though suggested by the commission of crimes, are not the symptom of a recent corruption, but of a desire to find a remedy that may cure, perhaps, some inveterate evil which has long afflicted the state.

THERE are corruptions, however, under which men still possess the vigour and the resolution to correct themselves. Such are the violence and the outrage which accompany the collision of fierce and daring spirits, occupied in the struggles which sometimes precede the dawn of civil and commercial improvements. In such cases, men have frequently discovered a remedy for evils, of which their own misguided impetuosity, and
superior



superior force of mind, were the principal causes. But if to a depraved disposition, we suppose to be joined a weakness of spirit; if to an admiration, and desire of riches, be joined an aversion to danger or business; if those orders of men whose valour is required by the public, cease to be brave; if the members of society, in general, have not those personal qualities which are required to fill the stations of equality, or of honour, to which they are invited by the forms of the state; they must sink to a depth from which their imbecility, even more than their depraved inclinations, may prevent their rise.

S E C T.



S E C T. II.

Of Luxury.

WE are far from being agreed on the application of the term *luxury*, or on that degree of its meaning which is consistent with national prosperity, or with the moral rectitude of our nature. It is sometimes employed to signify a manner of life which we think necessary to civilization, and even to happiness. It is, in our panegyric of polished ages, the parent of arts, the support of commerce, and the minister of national greatness, and of opulence. It is, in our censure of degenerate manners, the source of corruption, and the presage of national declension and ruin. It is admired, and it is blamed; it is treated as ornamental and useful; and it is proscribed as a vice.

WITH all this diversity in our judgements, we are generally uniform in employing the term to signify that complicated apparatus which mankind devise for the ease and convenience of life. Their buildings, furniture, equipage, cloathing, train of domestics, refinement of the table, and, in general, all that assemblage which is rather intended to please the fancy, than to obviate real wants, and which is rather ornamental than useful.

WHEN



WHEN we are disposed, therefore, under the appellation of *luxury*, to rank the enjoyment of these things among the vices, we either tacitly refer to the habits of sensuality, debauchery, prodigality, vanity, and arrogance, with which the possession of high fortune is sometimes attended; or we apprehend a certain measure of what is necessary to human life, beyond which all enjoyments are supposed to be excessive and vicious. When, on the contrary, luxury is made an article of national lustre and felicity, we only think of it as an innocent consequence of the unequal distribution of wealth, and as a method by which different ranks are rendered mutually dependent, and mutually useful. The poor are made to practise arts, and the rich to reward them. The public itself is made a gainer by what seems to waste its stock, and it receives a perpetual increase of wealth, from the influence of those growing appetites, and delicate tastes, which seem to menace consumption and ruin.

IT is certain, that we must either, together with the commercial arts, suffer their fruits to be enjoyed, and even, in some measure, admired; or, like the Spartans, prohibit the art itself, while we are afraid of its consequences, or while we think that the conveniencies it brings exceed what nature requires.

WE may propose to stop the advancement of arts at any stage of their progress, and still incur the censure of luxury from those who have not advanced so far. The
house-



house-builder and the carpenter at Sparta were limited to the use of the axe and the saw; but a Spartan cottage might have passed for a palace in Thrace: and if the dispute were to turn on the knowledge of what is physically necessary to the preservation of human life, as the standard of what is morally lawful, the faculties of physic, as well as of morality, would probably divide on the subject, and leave every individual, as at present, to find some rule for himself. The casuist, for the most part, considers the practice of his own age and condition, as a standard for mankind. If in one age or condition, he condemn the use of a coach, in another he would have no less censured the wearing of shoes; and the very person who exclaims against the first, would probably not have spared the second, if it had not been already familiar in ages before his own. A censor born in a cottage, and accustomed to sleep upon straw, does not propose that men should return to the woods and the caves for shelter; he admits the reasonableness and the utility of what is already familiar; and apprehends an excess and corruption, only in the newest refinement of the rising generation.

THE clergy of Europe have preached successively against every new fashion, and every innovation in dress. The modes of youth are the subject of censure to the old; and modes of the last age, in their turn, are matter of ridicule to the flippant, and the young. Of this there is not always a better account to be given, than that the old are disposed to be severe, and the young to be merry.



THE argument against many of the conveniencies of life, drawn from the mere consideration of their not being necessary, was equally proper in the mouth of the savage, who dissuaded from the first applications of industry, as it is in that of the moralist, who insists on the vanity of the last. "Our ancestors," he might say, "found their dwelling under this rock; they gathered their food in the forest; they allayed their thirst from the fountain; and they were clothed in the spoils of the beast they had slain. Why should we indulge a false delicacy, or require from the earth fruits which she is not accustomed to yield? The bow of our fathers is already too strong for our arms; and the wild beast begins to lord it in the woods."

THUS the moralist may have found, in the proceedings of every age, those topics of blame, from which he is so much disposed to arraign the manners of his own; and our embarrassment on the subject, is, perhaps, but a part of that general perplexity which we undergo, in trying to define moral characters by external circumstances, which may, or may not, be attended with faults in the mind and the heart. One man finds a vice in the wearing of linen; another does not, unless the fabric be fine: and if, mean-time, it be true, that a person may be dressed in manufacture, either coarse or fine; that he may sleep in the fields, or lodge in a palace; tread upon carpet, or plant his foot on the ground; while the mind either retains, or has lost, its penetration, and its vigour, and the heart its affection to mankind, it is vain, under any such circumstance, to seek for the distinctions
of

of virtue and vice, or to tax the polished citizen with weakness for any part of his equipage, or for his wearing a fur, perhaps, in which some savage was dressed before him. Vanity is not distinguished by any peculiar species of dress. It is betrayed by the Indian in the phantastic assortments of his plumes, his shells, his party-coloured furs, and in the time he bestows at the glass and the toilet. Its projects in the woods and in the town are the same: in the one, it seeks, with the visage bedaubed, and with teeth artificially stained, for that admiration, which it courts in the other with a gilded equipage, and liveries of state.

POLISHED nations, in their progress, often come to surpass the rude in moderation, and severity of manners. "The Greeks," says Thucydides, "not long ago, like barbarians, wore golden spangles in the hair, and went armed in times of peace." Simplicity of dress in this people, became a mark of politeness: and the mere materials with which the body is nourished or clothed, are probably of little consequence to any people. We must look for the characters of men in the qualities of the mind, not in the species of their food, or in the mode of their apparel. What are now the ornaments of the grave, and severe; what is owned to be a real convenience, were once the fopperies of youth, or were devised to please the effeminate. The new fashion, indeed, is often the mark of the coxcomb; but we frequently change our fashions, without increasing the measures of our vanity or folly.



ARE the apprehensions of the severe, therefore, in every age, equally groundless and unreasonable? Are we never to dread any error in the article of a refinement bestowed on the means of subsistence, or the conveniences of life? The fact is, that men are perpetually exposed to the commission of error in this article, not merely where they are accustomed to high measures of accommodation, or to any particular species of food, but where-ever these objects, in general, may come to be preferred to friends, to a country, or to mankind; they actually commit such error, where-ever they admire puerile distinctions or frivolous advantages; where-ever they shrink from small inconveniences, and are incapable of discharging their duty with vigour. The use of morality on this subject, is not to limit men to any particular species of lodging, diet, or cloaths; but to prevent their considering these conveniences as the principal objects of human life. And if we are asked, Where the pursuit of trifling accommodations should stop, in order that a man may devote himself entirely to the higher engagements of life? we may answer, That it should stop where it is. This was the rule followed at Sparta: The object of the rule was, to preserve the heart entire for the public, and to occupy men in cultivating their own nature, not in accumulating wealth, and external conveniences. It was not expected otherwise, that the axe or the saw should be attended with greater political advantage, than the plane and the chisel. When Cato walked the streets of Rome without his robe, and without shoes, he did so, most probably, in contempt of what his countrymen were so prone



prone to admire; not in hopes of finding a virtue in one species of dress, or a vice in another.

LUXURY, therefore, considered as a predilection in favour of the objects of vanity, and the costly materials of pleasure, is ruinous to the human character; considered as the mere use of accommodations and conveniences which the age has procured, rather depends on the progress which the mechanical arts have made, and on the degree in which the fortunes of men are unequally parcelled, than on the dispositions of particular men either to vice or to virtue.

DIFFERENT measures of luxury are, however, variously suited to different constitutions of government. The advancement of arts supposes an unequal distribution of fortune; and the means of distinction they bring, serve to render the separation of ranks more sensible. Luxury is, upon this account, apart from all its moral effects, adverse to the form of democratical government; and in any state of society, can be safely admitted in that degree only in which the members of the community are supposed of unequal rank, and constitute public order by means of a regular subordination. High degrees of it appear salutary, and even necessary, in monarchical and mixed governments; where, besides the encouragement to arts and commerce, it serves to give lustre to those hereditary or constitutional dignities which have a place of importance in the political system. Whether even here luxury leads to abuse peculiar to ages of high refinement



refinement and opulence, we shall proceed to consider in the following sections.

S E C T. III.

Of the Corruption incident to Polished Nations.

LUXURY and corruption are frequently coupled together, and even pass for synonymous terms. But in order to avoid any dispute about words, by the first we may understand that accumulation of wealth, and that refinement on the ways of enjoying it, which are the objects of industry, or the fruits of mechanic and commercial arts: And by the second a real weakness, or depravity of the human character, which may accompany any state of those arts, and be found under any external circumstances or condition whatsoever. It remains to inquire, What are the corruptions incident to polished nations, arrived at certain measures of luxury, and possessed of certain advantages, in which they are generally supposed to excel?

WE need not have recourse to a parallel between the manners of entire nations, in the extremes of civilization and rudeness, in order to be satisfied, that the vices of men are not proportioned to their fortunes; or that the habits of avarice, or of sensuality, are not founded on any certain

certain measures of wealth, or determinate kind of enjoyment. Where the situations of particular men are varied as much by their personal stations, as they can be by the state of national refinements, the same passions for interest, or pleasure, prevail in every condition. They arise from temperament, or an acquired admiration of property; not from any particular manner of life in which the parties are engaged, nor from any particular species of property, which may have occupied their cares and their wishes.

TEMPERANCE and moderation are, at least, as frequent among those whom we call the superior, as they are among the lower classes of men; and however we may affix the character of sobriety to mere cheapness of diet, and other accommodations with which any particular age, or rank of men, appear to be contented, it is well known, that costly materials are not necessary to constitute a debauch, nor profligacy less frequent under the thatched roof, than under the lofty ceiling. Men grow equally familiar with different conditions, receive equal pleasure, and are equally allured to sensuality, in the palace, and in the cave. Their acquiring in either habits of intemperance or sloth, depends on the remission of other pursuits, and on the distaste of the mind to other engagements. If the affections of the heart be awake, and the passions of love, admiration, or anger, be kindled, the costly furniture of the palace, as well as the homely accommodations of the cottage, are neglected: and men, when roused, reject their repose; or, when
wearied,



wearied, embrace it alike on the filken bed, or on the couch of straw.

WE are not, however, from hence to conclude, that luxury, with all its concomitant circumstances, which either serve to favour its increase, or which, in the arrangements of civil society, follow it as consequences, can have no effect to the disadvantage of national manners. If that respite from public dangers and troubles which gives a leisure for the practice of commercial arts, be continued, or increased, into a difuse of national efforts; if the individual, not called to unite with his country, be left to pursue his private advantage; we may find him become effeminate, mercenary, and sensual; not because pleasures and profits are become more alluring, but because he has fewer calls to attend to other objects; and because he has more encouragement to study his personal advantages, and pursue his separate interests.

If the disparities of rank and fortune which are necessary to the pursuit or enjoyment of luxury, introduce false grounds of precedency and estimation; if, on the mere considerations of being rich or poor, one order of men are, in their own apprehension, elevated, another debased; if one be criminally proud, another meanly dejected; and every rank in its place, like the tyrant, who thinks that nations are made for himself, be disposed to assume on the rights of mankind: although, upon the comparison, the higher order may be least corrupted; or
from

from education, and a sense of personal dignity, have most good qualities remaining; yet the one becoming mercenary and servile; the other imperious and arrogant; both regardless of justice, and of merit; the whole mass is corrupted, and the manners of a society changed for the worse, in proportion as its members cease to act on principles of equality, independence, or freedom.

UPON this view, and considering the merits of men in the abstract, a mere change from the habits of a republic to those of a monarchy; from the love of equality, to the sense of a subordination founded on birth, titles, and fortune, is ^{an} species of corruption to mankind. But this degree of corruption is still consistent with the safety and prosperity of some nations; it admits of a vigorous courage, by which the rights of individuals, and of kingdoms, may be long preserved.

UNDER the form of monarchy, while yet in its vigour, superior fortune is, indeed, one mark by which the different orders of men are distinguished; but there are some other ingredients, without which wealth is not admitted as a foundation of precedency, and in favour of which it is often despised, and lavished away. Such are birth and titles, the reputation of courage, courtly manners, and a certain elevation of mind. If we suppose, that these distinctions are forgotten, and nobility itself only to be known by the sumptuous retinue which money alone may procure; and by a lavish expence,



which the more recent fortunes can generally best sustain; luxury must then be allowed to corrupt the monarchical as much as the republican state, and to introduce a fatal dissolution of manners, under which men of every condition, although they are eager to acquire, or to display their wealth, have no remains of real ambition. They have neither the elevation of nobles, nor the fidelity of subjects; they have changed into effeminate vanity, that sense of honour which gave rules to the personal courage; and into a servile baseness, that loyalty, which bound each in his place, to his immediate superior, and the whole to the throne.

NATIONS are most exposed to corruption from this quarter, when the mechanical arts, being greatly advanced, furnish numberless articles, to be applied in ornament to the person, in furniture, entertainment, or equipage; when such articles as the rich alone can procure are admired; and when consideration, precedence, and rank, are accordingly made to depend on fortune.

IN a more rude state of the arts, although wealth be unequally divided, the opulent can amass only the simple means of subsistence: They can only fill the granary, and furnish the stall; reap from more extended fields, and drive their herds over a larger pasture. To enjoy their magnificence, they must live in a croud; and to secure their possessions, they must be surrounded with friends that espouse their quarrels. Their honours, as well as their safety, consist in the numbers who attend them;
and

and their personal distinctions are taken from their liberality, and supposed elevation of mind. In this manner, the possession of riches serves only to make the owner assume a character of magnanimity, to become the guardian of numbers, or the public object of respect and affection. But when the bulky constituents of wealth, and of rustic magnificence, can be exchanged for refinements; and when the produce of the soil may be turned into equipage, and mere decoration; when the combination of many is no longer required for personal safety; the master may become the sole consumer of his own estate: he may refer the use of every subject to himself; he may employ the materials of generosity to feed a personal vanity, or to indulge a sickly and effeminate fancy, which has learned to enumerate the trappings of weakness or folly among the necessaries of life.

THE Persian satrape, we are told, when he saw the King of Sparta at the place of their conference, stretched on the grass with his soldiers, blushed at the provision he had made for the accommodation of his own person: he ordered the furs and the carpets to be withdrawn; he felt his own inferiority; and recollected, that he was to treat with a man, not to vie with a pageant in costly attire and magnificence.

WHEN, amidst circumstances that make no trial of the virtues or talents of men, we have been accustomed to the air of superiority, which people of fortune derive from their retinue, we are apt to lose every sense of distinction



inction arising from merit, or even from abilities. We rate our fellow-citizens by the *figure* they are able to make; by their buildings, their dress, their equipage, and the train of their followers. All these circumstances make a part in our estimate of what is excellent; and if the master himself is known to be a pageant in the midst of his fortune, we nevertheless pay our court to his station, and look up with an envious, servile, or dejected mind, to what is, in itself, scarcely fit to amuse children; though, when it is worn as a badge of distinction, it inflames the ambition of those we call the great, and strikes the multitude with awe and respect.

WE judge of entire nations by the productions of a few mechanical arts, and think we are talking of men, while we are boasting of their estates, their dress, and their palaces. The sense in which we apply the terms, *great*, and *noble*, *high rank*, and *high life*, shew, that we have, on such occasions, transferred the idea of perfection from the character to the equipage; and that excellence itself is, in our esteem, a mere pageant, adorned at a great expence, by the labours of many workmen.

To those who overlook the subtle transitions of the imagination, it might appear, since wealth can do no more than furnish the means of subsistence, and purchase animal pleasures, that covetousness, and venality itself, should keep pace with our fears of want, or with our appetite for sensual enjoyments; and that where the appetite is satiated, and the fear of want is removed, the
mind

mind should be at ease on the subject of fortune. But they are not the mere pleasures that riches procure, nor the choice of viands which cover the board of the wealthy, that inflame the passions of the covetous and the mercenary. Nature is easily satisfied in all her enjoyments. It is an opinion of eminence, connected with fortune; it is a sense of debasement attending on poverty, which renders us blind to every advantage, but that of the rich; and insensible to every disgrace, but that of the poor. It is this unhappy apprehension, that occasionally prepares us for the desertion of every duty, for a submission to every indignity, and for the commission of every crime that can be accomplished in safety.

AURENGZEBE was not more renowned for sobriety in his private station, and in the conduct of a supposed dissimulation, by which he aspired to sovereign power, than he continued to be, even on the throne of Indostan. Simple, abstinent, and severe in his diet, and other pleasures, he still led the life of a hermit, and occupied his time with a seemingly painful application to the affairs of a great empire*. He quitted a station in which, if pleasure had been his object, he might have indulged his sensuality without reserve; he made his way to a scene of disquietude and care; he aimed at the summit of human greatness, in the possession of imperial fortune, not at the gratifications of animal appetite, or the enjoyment

* Gemelli Carceri.

of



of ease. Superior to sensual pleasure, as well as to the feelings of nature, he dethroned his father, and he murdered his brothers, that he might roll on a carriage incrusted with diamond and pearl; that his elephants, his camels, and his horses, on the march, might form a line extending many leagues; might present a glittering harness to the sun; and loaded with treasure, usher to the view of an abject and admiring croud, that awful majesty, in whose presence they were to strike the forehead on the ground, and be overwhelmed with the sense of his greatness, and with that of their own debasement.

As these are the objects which prompt the desire of dominion, and excite the ambitious to aim at the mastery of their fellow-creatures; so they inspire the ordinary race of men with a sense of infirmity and meanness, that prepares them to suffer indignities, and to become the property of persons, whom they consider as of a rank and a nature so much superior to their own.

THE chains of perpetual slavery, accordingly, appear to be rivetted in the East, no less by the pageantry which is made to accompany the possession of power, than they are by the fears of the sword, and the terrors of a military execution. In the West, as well as the East, we are willing to bow to the splendid equipage, and stand at an awful distance from the pomp of a princely estate. We too, may be terrified by the frowns, or won by the smiles, of those whose favour is riches and honour,
and

and whose displeasure is poverty and neglect. We too may overlook the honours of the human soul, from an admiration of the pageantries that accompany fortune. The procession of elephants harnessed with gold might dazzle into slaves, the people who derive corruption and weakness from the effect of their own arts and contrivances, as well as those who inherit servility from their ancestors, and are enfeebled by their natural temperament, and the enervating charms of their soil, and their climate.

IT appears, therefore, that although the mere use of materials which constitute luxury, may be distinguished from actual vice; yet nations under a high state of the commercial arts, are exposed to corruption, by their admitting wealth, unsupported by personal elevation and virtue, as the great foundation of distinction, and by having their attention turned on the side of interest, as the road to consideration and honour.

WITH this effect, luxury may serve to corrupt democratical states, by introducing a species of monarchical subordination, without that sense of high birth and hereditary honours which render the boundaries of rank fixed and determinate, and which teach men to act in their stations with force and propriety. It may prove the occasion of political corruption, even in monarchical governments, by drawing respect towards mere wealth; by casting a shade on the lustre of personal qualities, or
family-

PROVIDENCE



family-distinctions; and by infecting all orders of men, with equal venality, fervility, and cowardice.

S E C T. IV.

The same subject continued.

THE increasing regard with which men appear, in the progress of commercial arts, to study their profit, or the delicacy with which they refine on their pleasures; even industry itself, or the habit of application to a tedious employment, in which no honours are won, may, perhaps, be considered as indications of a growing attention to interest, or of effeminacy, contracted in the enjoyment of ease and conveniency. Every successive art, by which the individual is taught to improve on his fortune, is, in reality, an addition to his private engagements, and a new avocation of his mind from the public.

CORRUPTION, however, does not arise from the abuse of commercial arts alone; it requires the aid of political situation; and is not produced by the objects that occupy a sordid and a mercenary spirit, without the aid of circumstances that enable men to indulge in safety any mean disposition they have acquired.

PROVIDENCE

PROVIDENCE has fitted mankind for the higher engagements which they are sometimes obliged to fulfil; and it is in the midst of such engagements that they are most likely to acquire or to preserve their virtues. The habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties, not in enjoying the repose of a pacific station; penetration and wisdom are the fruits of experience, not the lessons of retirement and leisure; ardour and generosity are the qualities of a mind roused and animated in the conduct of scenes that engage the heart, not the gifts of reflection or knowledge. The mere intermission of national and political efforts is, notwithstanding, sometimes mistaken for public good; and there is no mistake more likely to foster the vices, or to flatter the weakness, of feeble and interested men.

If the ordinary arts of policy, or rather, if a growing indifference to objects of a public nature, should prevail, and, under any free constitution, put an end to those disputes of party, and silence that noise of dissension, which generally accompany the exercise of freedom, we may venture to prognosticate corruption to the national manners, as well as remissness to the national spirit. The period is come, when, no engagement remaining on the part of the public, private interest, and animal pleasure, become the sovereign objects of care. When men, being relieved from the pressure of great occasions, bestow their attention on trifles; and having carried what they are pleased to call *sensibility* and *delicacy*, on the subject of ease or molestation, as far as real



weakness or folly can go, have recourse to affectation, in order to enhance the pretended demands, and accumulate the anxieties, of a sickly fancy, and enfeebled mind.

IN this condition, mankind generally flatter their own imbecility under the name of *politeness*. They are persuaded, that the celebrated ardour, generosity, and fortitude, of former ages, bordered on frenzy, or were the mere effects of necessity, on men who had not the means of enjoying their ease, or their pleasure. They congratulate themselves on having escaped the storm which required the exercise of such arduous virtues; and with that vanity which accompanies the human race in their meanest condition, they boast of a scene of affectation, of languor, or of folly, as the standard of human felicity, and as furnishing the properest exercise of a rational nature.

IT is none of the least menacing symptoms of an age prone to degeneracy, that the minds of men become perplexed in the discernment of merit, as much as the spirit becomes enfeebled in conduct, and the heart misled in the choice of its objects. The care of mere fortune is supposed to constitute wisdom; retirement from public affairs, and real indifference to mankind, receive the applauses of moderation and virtue.

GREAT fortitude, and elevation of mind, have not always, indeed, been employed in the attainment of
valuable

valuable ends; but they are always respectable, and they are always necessary when we would act for the good of mankind, in any of the more arduous stations of life. While, therefore, we blame their misapplication, we should beware of depreciating their value. Men of a severe and sententious morality have not always sufficiently observed this caution; nor have they been duly aware of the corruptions they flattered, by the satire they employed against what is aspiring and prominent in the character of the human soul.

It might have been expected, that in an age of hopeless debasement*, the talents of Demosthenes and Tully, even the ill-governed magnanimity of a Macedonian, or the daring enterprise of a Carthaginian leader, might have escaped the acrimony of a satirist, who had so many objects of correction in his view, and who possessed the arts of declamation in so high a degree:

*I, demens, et sevos curre per Alpes,
Ut pueris placeas, et declamatio fias,*

is part of the illiberal censure which is thrown by this poet on the person and action of a leader, who, by his courage and conduct, in the very service to which the satire referred, had well nigh saved his country from the ruin with which it was at last overwhelmed.

* Juvenal's 10th satire.



Heroes are much the same, the point's agreed,
From Macedonia's madman to the Swede,
is a distich, in which another poet of beautiful talents,
has attempted to depreciate a name, to which, probably,
few of his readers are found to aspire.

If men must go wrong, there is a choice of their very errors, as well as of their virtues. Ambition, the love of personal eminence, and the desire of fame, although they sometimes lead to the commission of crimes, yet always engage men in pursuits that require to be supported by some of the greatest qualities of the human soul; and if eminence is the principal object of pursuit, there is, at least, a probability, that those qualities may be studied on which a real elevation of mind is raised. But when public alarms have ceased, and contempt of glory is recommended as an article of wisdom, the sordid habits, and mercenary dispositions, to which, under a general indifference to national objects, the members of a polished or commercial state are exposed, must prove at once the most effectual suppression of every liberal sentiment, and the most fatal reverse of all those principles from which communities derive their hopes of preservation, and their strength.

It is noble to possess happiness and independence, either in retirement, or in public life. The characteristic of the happy, is to acquit themselves well in every condition; in the court, or in the village; in the senate, or in the private retreat. But if they affect any particular station,

tion, it is surely that in which their actions may be rendered most extensively useful. Our considering mere retirement, therefore, as a symptom of moderation, and of virtue, is either a remnant of that system, under which monks and anchorets, in former ages, have been canonized; or proceeds from a habit of thinking, which appears equally fraught with moral corruption, from our considering public life as a scene for the gratification of mere vanity, avarice, and ambition; never as furnishing the best opportunity for a just and a happy engagement of the mind and the heart.

EMULATION, and the desire of power, are but sorry motives to public conduct; but if they have been, in any case, the principal inducements from which men have taken part in the service of their country, any diminution of their prevalence or force is a real corruption of national manners; and the pretended moderation assumed by the higher orders of men, has a fatal effect in the state. The disinterested love of the public, is a principle without which some constitutions of government cannot subsist: but when we consider how seldom this has appeared a reigning passion, we have little reason to impute the prosperity or preservation of nations, in every case, to its influence.

IT is sufficient, perhaps, under one form of government, that men should be fond of their independence; that they should be ready to oppose usurpation, and to repel personal indignities: under another, it is sufficient, that
they

they should be tenacious of their rank, and of their honours; and instead of a zeal for the public, entertain a vigilant jealousy of the rights which pertain to themselves. When numbers of men retain a certain degree of elevation and fortitude, they are qualified to give a mutual check to their several errors, and are able to act in that variety of situations, which the different constitutions of government have prepared for their members: but, under the disadvantages of a feeble spirit, however directed, and however informed, no national constitution is safe; nor can any degree of enlargement to which a state has arrived, secure its political welfare.

IN states where property, distinction, and pleasure, are thrown out as baits to the imagination, and incentives to passion, the public seems to rely for the preservation of its political life, on the degree of emulation and jealousy with which parties mutually oppose and restrain each other. The desires of preferment and profit in the breast of the citizen, are the motives from which he is excited to enter on public affairs, and are the considerations which direct his political conduct. The suppression, therefore, of ambition, of party-animosity, and of public envy, is probably, in every such case, not a reformation, but a symptom of weakness, and a prelude to more sordid pursuits, and ruinous amusements.

ON the eve of such a revolution in manners, the higher ranks, in every mixed or monarchical government, have

have need to take care of themselves. Men of business, and of industry, in the inferior stations of life, retain their occupations, and are secured, by a kind of necessity, in the possession of those habits on which they rely for their quiet, and for the moderate enjoyments of life. But the higher orders of men, if they relinquish the state, if they cease to possess that courage and elevation of mind, and to exercise those talents which are employed in its defence, and its government, are, in reality, by the seeming advantages of their station, become the refuse of that society of which they once were the ornament; and from being the most respectable, and the most happy, of its members, are become the most wretched and corrupt. In their approach to this condition, and in the absence of every manly occupation, they feel a dissatisfaction and languor which they cannot explain: They pine in the midst of apparent enjoyments; or, by the variety and caprice of their different pursuits and amusements, exhibit a state of agitation, which, like the disquiet of sickness, is not a proof of enjoyment or pleasure, but of suffering and pain. The care of his buildings, his equipage, or his table, is chosen by one; literary amusement, or some frivolous study, by another. The sports of the country, and the diversions of the town; the gaming-table*; dogs, horses, and wine,

* These different occupations differ from each other, in respect to their dignity, and their innocence; but none of them are the schools from which men are brought to sustain the tottering fortune of nations; they are equally avocations from what ought to be the principal pursuit of man, the good of mankind.

are



are employed to fill up the blank of a listless and unprofitable life. They speak of human pursuits, as if the whole difficulty were to find something to do: They fix on some frivolous occupation, as if there was nothing that deserved to be done: They consider what tends to the good of their fellow-creatures, as a disadvantage to themselves: They fly from every scene, in which any efforts of vigour are required, or in which they might be allured to perform any service to their country. We misapply our compassion in pitying the poor; it were much more justly applied to the rich, who become the first victims of that wretched insignificance, into which the members of every corrupted state, by the tendency of their weaknesses, and their vices, are in haste to plunge themselves.

It is in this condition, that the sensual invent all those refinements on pleasure, and devise those incentives to a satiated appetite, which tend to foster the corruptions of a dissolute age. The effects of brutal appetite, and the mere debauch, are more flagrant, and more violent, perhaps, in rude ages, than they are in the later periods of commerce and luxury: but that perpetual habit of searching for animal pleasure where it is not to be found, in the gratifications of an appetite that is cloyed, and among the ruins of an animal constitution, is not more fatal to the virtues of the soul, than it is even to the enjoyment of sloth, or of pleasure; it is not a more certain avocation from public affairs, or a surer prelude to national decay, than it is a disappointment to our hopes of private felicity.

IN

IN these reflections, it has been the object, not to ascertain a precise measure to which corruption has risen in any of the nations that have attained to eminence, or that have gone to decay; but to describe that remissness of spirit, that weakness of soul, that state of national debility, which is likely to end in political slavery; an evil which remains to be considered as the last object of caution, and beyond which there is no subject of disquisition in the perishing fortunes of nations.

S E C T. V.

Of Corruption, as it tends to Political Slavery.

LIBERTY, in one sense, appears to be the portion of polished nations alone. The savage is personally free, because he lives unrestrained, and acts with the members of his tribe on terms of equality. The barbarian is frequently independent from a continuance of the same circumstances, or because he has courage and a sword. But good policy alone can provide for the regular administration of justice, or constitute a force in the state, which is ready on every occasion to defend the rights of its members.

IT has been found, that, except in a few singular cases, the commercial and political arts have advanced together.

gether. These arts have been in modern Europe so interwoven, that we cannot determine which were prior in the order of time, or derived most advantage from the mutual influences with which they act and re-act upon one another. It has been observed, that in some nations the spirit of commerce, intent on securing its profits, has led the way to political wisdom. A people, possessed of wealth, and become jealous of their properties, have formed the project of emancipation, and have proceeded, under favour of an importance recently gained, still farther to enlarge their pretensions, and to dispute the prerogatives which their sovereign had been in use to employ. But it is in vain that we expect in one age, from the possession of wealth, the fruit which it is said to have borne in a former. Great accessions of fortune, when recent, when accompanied with frugality, and a sense of independence, may render the owner confident in his strength, and ready to spurn at oppression. The purse which is open, not to personal expence, or to the indulgence of vanity, but to support the interests of a faction, to gratify the higher passions of party, render the wealthy citizen formidable to those who pretend to dominion; but it does not follow, that in a time of corruption, equal, or greater, measures of wealth should operate to the same effect.

ON the contrary, when wealth is accumulated only in the hands of the miser, and runs to waste from those of the prodigal; when heirs of family find themselves straitened and poor, in the midst of affluence; when the cravings of luxury silence even the voice of party and
faction;

faction; when the hopes of meriting the rewards of compliance, or the fear of losing what is held at discretion, keep men in a state of suspense and anxiety; when fortune, in short, instead of being considered as the instrument of a vigorous spirit, becomes the idol of a covetous or a profuse, of a rapacious or a timorous mind; the foundation on which freedom was built, may serve to support a tyranny; and what, in one age, raised the pretensions, and fostered the confidence of the subject, may, in another, incline him to servility, and furnish the price to be paid for his prostitutions. Even those, who, in a vigorous age, gave the example of wealth, in the hands of the people, becoming an occasion of freedom, may, in times of degeneracy, verify likewise the maxim of Tacitus, That the admiration of riches leads to despotical government*.

MEN who have tasted of freedom, and who have felt their personal rights, are not easily taught to bear with incroachments on either, and cannot, without some preparation, come to submit to oppression. They may receive this unhappy preparation, under different forms of government, from different hands, and arrive at the same end by different ways. They follow one direction in republics, another in monarchies, and in mixed governments. But where-ever the state has, by means that do not preserve the virtue of the subject, effectually guarded his safety; remissness, and neglect of the public, are likely to follow; and polished nations of every

* Est apud illos et opibus honos; coque unus imperitat, &c. Tacitus de mor. Ger. c. 44.



description, appear to encounter a danger, on this quarter, proportioned to the degree in which they have, during any continuance, enjoyed the uninterrupted possession of peace and prosperity.

LIBERTY results, we say, from the government of laws; and we are apt to consider statutes, not merely as the resolutions and maxims of a people determined to be free, not as the writings by which their rights are kept on record; but as a power erected to guard them, and as a barrier which the caprice of man cannot transgress.

WHEN a basha, in Asia, pretends to decide every controverfy by the rules of natural equity, we allow that he is possessed of discretionary powers. When a judge in Europe is left to decide, according to his own interpretation of written laws, is he in any sense more restrained than the former? Have the multiplied words of a statute an influence over the conscience, and the heart, more powerful than that of reason and nature? Does the party, in any judicial proceeding, enjoy a less degree of safety, when his rights are discussed, on the foundation of a rule that is open to the understandings of mankind, than when they are referred to an intricate system, which it has become the object of a separate profession to study and to explain?

IF forms of proceeding, written statutes, or other constituents of law, cease to be enforced by the very spirit

rit from which they arose; they serve only to cover, not to restrain, the iniquities of power: they are possibly respected even by the corrupt magistrate, when they favour his purpose; but they are contemned or evaded, when they stand in his way: And the influence of laws, where they have any real effect in the preservation of liberty, is not any magic power descending from shelves that are loaded with books, but is, in reality, the influence of men resolved to be free; of men, who, having adjusted in writing the terms on which they are to live with the state, and with their fellow-subjects, are determined, by their vigilance and spirit, to make these terms be observed.

WE are taught, under every form of government, to apprehend usurpations, from the abuse, or from the extension of the executive power. In pure monarchies, this power is commonly hereditary, and made to descend in a determinate line. In elective monarchies, it is held for life. In republics, it is exercised during a limited time. Where men, or families, are called by election to the possession of temporary dignities, it is more the object of ambition to perpetuate, than to extend their powers. In hereditary monarchies, the sovereignty is already perpetual; and the aim of every ambitious prince, is to enlarge his prerogative. Republics, and, in times of commotion, communities of every form, are exposed to hazard, not from those only who are formally raised to places of trust, but from every person what-
ever,



ever, who is incited by ambition, and who is supported by faction.

IT is no advantage to a prince, or other magistrate, to enjoy more power than is consistent with the good of mankind; nor is it of any benefit to a man to be unjust: but these maxims are a feeble security against the passions and follies of men. Those who are intrusted with any measures of influence, are disposed, from a mere aversion to constraint, to remove opposition. Not only the monarch who wears a hereditary crown, but the magistrate who holds his office for a limited time, grows fond of his dignity. The very minister, who depends for his place on the momentary will of his prince, and whose personal interests are, in every respect, those of a subject, still has the weakness to take an interest in the growth of prerogative, and to reckon as gain to himself the incroachments he has made on the rights of a people, with whom he himself and his family are soon to be numbered.

EVEN with the best intentions towards mankind, we are inclined to think, that their welfare depends, not on the felicity of their own inclinations, or the happy employment of their own talents, but on their ready compliance with what we have devised for their good. Accordingly, the greatest virtue of which any sovereign has hitherto shown an example, is not a desire of cherishing in his people the spirit of freedom and independence; but what is in itself sufficiently rare, and
highly

highly meritorious, a steady regard to the distribution of justice in matters of property, a disposition to protect and to oblige, to redress the grievances, and to promote the interest of his subjects. It was from a reference to these objects, that Titus computed the value of his time, and judged of its application. But the sword, which in this beneficent hand was drawn to protect the subject, and to procure a speedy and effectual distribution of justice, was likewise sufficient in the hands of a tyrant, to shed the blood of the innocent, and to cancel the rights of men. The temporary proceedings of humanity, though they suspended the exercise of oppression, did not break the national chains: the prince was even the better enabled to procure that species of good which he studied; because there was no freedom remaining, and because there was no where a force to dispute his decrees, or to interrupt their execution.

WAS it in vain, that Antoninus became acquainted with the characters of Thrasea, Helvidius, Cato, Dion, and Brutus? Was it in vain, that he learned to understand the form of a free community, raised on the basis of equality and justice; or of a monarchy, under which the liberties of the subject were held the most sacred object of administration*? Did he mistake the means of procuring to mankind what he points out as a blessing? Or did the absolute power with which he was

* M. Antoninus, lib. 1.

furnished,



furnished, in a mighty empire, only disable him from executing what his mind had perceived as a national good? In such a case, it were vain to flatter the monarch or his people. The first cannot bestow liberty, without raising a spirit, which may, on occasion, stand in opposition to his own designs; nor the latter receive this blessing, while they own that it is in the right of a master to give or to withhold it. The claim of justice is firm and peremptory. We receive favours with a sense of obligation and kindness; but we would enforce our rights, and the spirit of freedom in this exertion cannot take the tone of supplication, or of thankfulness, without betraying itself. "You have intreated Octavius," says Brutus to Cicero, "that he would spare those who stand foremost among the citizens of Rome. What if he will not? Must we perish? Yes; rather than owe our safety to him."

LIBERTY is a right which every individual must be ready to vindicate for himself, and which he who pretends to bestow as a favour, has by that very act in reality denied. Even political establishments, though they appear to be independent of the will and arbitration of men, cannot be relied on for the preservation of freedom; they may nourish, but should not supersede that firm and resolute spirit, with which the liberal mind is always prepared to resist indignities, and to refer its safety to itself.

WERE a nation, therefore, given to be moulded by a sovereign, as the clay is put into the hands of the potter,

ter, this project of bestowing liberty on a people who are actually servile, is, perhaps, of all others, the most difficult, and requires most to be executed in silence, and with the deepest reserve. Men are qualified to receive this blessing, only in proportion as they are made to apprehend their own rights; and are made to respect the just pretensions of mankind; in proportion as they are willing to sustain, in their own persons, the burden of government, and of national defence; and are willing to prefer the engagements of a liberal mind, to the enjoyments of sloth, or the delusive hopes of a safety purchased by submission and fear.

I speak with respect, and, if I may be allowed the expression, even with indulgence, to those who are intrusted with high prerogatives in the political system of nations. It is, indeed, seldom their fault that states are enslaved. What should be expected from them, but that being actuated by human desires, they should be averse to disappointment, or even to delay; and in the ardour with which they pursue their object, that they should break through the barriers that would stop their career? If millions recede before single men, and senates are passive, as if composed of members who had no opinion or sense of their own; on whose side have the defences of freedom given way, or to whom shall we impute their fall? to the subject, who has deserted his station; or to the sovereign, who has only remained in his own; and who, if the collateral or subordinate members of government shall



cease to question his power, must continue to govern without any restraint?

IT is well known, that constitutions framed for the preservation of liberty, must consist of many parts; and that senates, popular assemblies, courts of justice, magistrates of different orders, must combine to balance each other, while they exercise, sustain, or check the executive power. If any part is struck out, the fabric must totter, or fall; if any member is remiss, the others must inroach. In assemblies constituted by men of different talents, habits, and apprehensions, it were something more than human that could make them agree in every point of importance; having different opinions and views, it were want of integrity to abstain from disputes: our very praise of unanimity, therefore, is to be considered as a danger to liberty. We wish for it, at the hazard of taking in its place, the remissness of men grown indifferent to the public; the venality of those who have sold the rights of their country; or the servility of others, who give implicit obedience to a leader by whom their minds are subdued. The love of the public, and respect to its laws, are the points in which mankind are bound to agree; but if, in matters of controversy, the sense of any individual or party is invariably pursued, the cause of freedom is already betrayed.

HE whose office it is to govern a supine or an abject people, cannot, for a moment, cease to extend his powers. Every execution of law, every movement of
the

the state, every civil and military operation, in which his power is exerted, must serve to confirm his authority, and present him to the view of the public, as the sole object of consideration, fear, and respect. Those very establishments which were devised, in one age, to limit, or to direct the exercise of an executive power, will serve, in another, to settle its foundations, and to give it stability; they will point out the channels in which it may run, without giving offence, or without exciting alarms, and the very councils which were instituted to check its incroachments, will, in a time of corruption, furnish an aid to its usurpations.

THE passion for independence; and the love of dominion, frequently arise from a common source: There is, in both, an aversion to controul; and he, who, in one situation, cannot brook a superior, must, in another, dislike to be joined with an equal.

WHAT the prince, under a pure or limited monarchy, is, by the constitution of his country, the leader of a faction would willingly become in republican governments. If he attains to this envied condition, his own inclination, or the tendency of human affairs, seem to open before him the career of a royal ambition: but the circumstances in which he is destined to act, are very different from those of a king. He encounters with men who are unused to disparity; he is obliged, for his own security, to hold the dagger continually unsheathed. When he hopes to be safe, he possibly means



to be just ; but is hurried, from the first moment of his usurpation, into every exercise of despotical power. The heir of a crown has no such quarrel to maintain with his subjects : his situation is flattering ; and the heart must be uncommonly bad, that does not glow with affection to a people, who are, at once, his admirers, his support, and the ornaments of his reign. In him, perhaps, there is no explicit design of trespassing on the rights of his subjects ; but the forms intended to preserve their freedom, are not, on this account, always safe in his hands.

SLAVERY has been imposed upon mankind in the wantonness of a depraved ambition, and tyrannical cruelties have been committed in the gloomy hours of jealousy and terror : yet these demons are not necessary to the creation, or to the support of an arbitrary power. Although no policy was ever more successful than that of the Roman republic in maintaining a national fortune ; yet subjects, as well as their princes, frequently imagine that freedom is a clog on the proceedings of government : they imagine, that despotical power is best fitted to procure dispatch and secrecy in the execution of public councils ; to maintain what they are pleased to call *political order* *, and

* Our notion of order in civil society is frequently false : it is taken from the analogy of subjects inanimate and dead ; we consider commotion and action as contrary to its nature ; we think it consistent only with obedience, secrecy, and the silent passing of affairs through the hands of a few. The good order of stones in a wall, is their being properly fixed in the places for which they are hewn ; were they to stir the building must fall : but the good order of
men

and to give a speedy redress of complaints. They even sometimes acknowledge, that if a succession of good princes could be found, despotical government is best calculated for the happiness of mankind. While they reason thus, they cannot blame a sovereign who, in the confidence that he is to employ his power for good purposes, endeavours to extend its limits; and, in his own apprehension, strives only to shake off the restraints which stand in the way of reason, and which prevent the effect of his friendly intentions.

THUS prepared for usurpation, let him, at the head of a free state, employ the force with which he is armed, to crush the seeds of apparent disorder in every corner of his dominions; let him effectually curb the spirit of dissension and variance among his people; let him remove the interruptions to government, arising from the refractory humours and the private interests of his subjects; let him collect the force of the state against its enemies, by availing himself of all it can furnish in the way of taxation and personal service: it is extremely probable, that, even under the direction of wishes for the good of mankind, he may break through every barrier of liberty, and establish a despotism, while he flat-

men in society, is their being placed where they are properly qualified to act. The first is a fabric made of dead and inanimate parts, the second is made of living and active members. When we seek in society for the order of mere inaction and tranquillity, we forget the nature of our subject, and find the order of slaves, not that of free men.

ters



ters himself, that he only follows the dictates of sense and propriety.

WHEN we suppose government to have bestowed a degree of tranquillity which we sometimes hope to reap from it, as the best of its fruits, and public affairs to proceed, in the several departments of legislation and execution, with the least possible interruption to commerce and lucrative arts; such a state, like that of China, by throwing affairs into separate offices, where conduct consists in detail, and in the observance of forms, by superseding all the exertions of a great or a liberal mind, is more akin to despotism than we are apt to imagine.

WHETHER oppression, injustice, and cruelty, are the only evils which attend on despotical government, may be considered apart. In the mean time it is sufficient to observe, that liberty is never in greater danger than it is when we measure national felicity by the blessings which a prince may bestow, or by the mere tranquillity which may attend on equitable administration. The sovereign may dazzle with his heroic qualities; he may protect his subjects in the enjoyment of every animal advantage or pleasure: but the benefits arising from liberty are of a different sort; they are not the fruits of a virtue, and of a goodness, which operate in the breast of one man, but the communication of virtue itself to many; and such a distribution of functions in civil society, as gives to numbers the exercises and occupations which pertain to their nature.

THE



THE best constitutions of government are attended with inconvenience; and the exercise of liberty may, on many occasions, give rise to complaints. When we are intent on reforming abuses, the abuses of freedom may lead us to inroach on the subject from which they are supposed to arise. Despotism itself has certain advantages, or at least, in times of civility and moderation, may proceed with so little offence, as to give no public alarm. These circumstances may lead mankind, in the very spirit of reformation, or by mere inattention, to apply or to admit of dangerous innovations in the state of their policy.

SLAVERY, however, is not always introduced by mere mistake; it is sometimes imposed in the spirit of violence and rapine. Princes become corrupt as well as their people; and whatever may have been the origin of despotical government, its pretensions, when fully explained, give rise to a contest between the sovereign and his subjects, which force alone can decide. These pretensions have a dangerous aspect to the person, the property, or the life of every subject; they alarm every passion in the human breast; they disturb the supine; they deprive the venal of his hire; they declare war on the corrupt as well as the virtuous; they are tamely admitted only by the coward; but even to him must be supported by a force that can work on his fears. This force the conqueror brings from abroad; and the domestic usurper endeavours to find in his faction at home.

WHEN

beily



WHEN a people is accustomed to arms, it is difficult for a part to subdue the whole; or before the establishment of disciplined armies, it is difficult for any usurper to govern the many by the help of a few. These difficulties, however, the policy of civilized and commercial nations has sometimes removed; and by forming a distinction between civil and military professions, by committing the keeping and the enjoyment of liberty to different hands, has prepared the way for the dangerous alliance of faction with military power, in opposition to mere political forms, and the rights of mankind.

A people who are disarmed in compliance with this fatal refinement, have rested their safety on the pleadings of reason and justice at the tribunal of ambition and of force. In such an extremity, laws are quoted, and senates are assembled, in vain. They who compose a legislature, or who occupy the civil departments of state, may deliberate on the messages they receive from the camp or the court; but if the bearer, like the centurion who brought the petition of Octavius to the Roman senate, shew the hilt of his sword *, they find that petitions are become commands, and that they themselves are become the pageants, not the repositories of sovereign power.

THE reflections of this section may be unequally ap-

* Sueton.

plied



plied to nations of unequal extent. Small communities, however corrupted, are not prepared for despotical government: their members, crowded together, and contiguous to the seats of power, never forget their relation to the public; they pry, with habits of familiarity and freedom, into the pretensions of those who would rule; and where the love of equality, and the sense of justice, have failed, they act on motives of faction, emulation, and envy. The exiled Tarquin had his adherents at Rome; but if by their means he had recovered his station, it is probable, that in the exercise of his royalty, he must have entered on a new scene of contention with the very party that restored him to power.

IN proportion as territory is extended, its parts lose their relative importance to the whole. Its inhabitants cease to perceive their connection with the state, and are seldom united in the execution of any national, or even of any factious, designs. Distance from the seats of administration, and indifference to the persons who contend for preferment, teach the majority to consider themselves as the subjects of a sovereignty, not as the members of a political body. It is even remarkable, that enlargement of territory, by rendering the individual of less consequence to the public, and less able to intrude with his counsel, actually tends to reduce national affairs within a narrower compass, as well as to diminish the numbers who are consulted in legislation, or in other matters of government.



THE disorders to which a great empire is exposed, require speedy prevention, vigilance, and quick execution. Distant provinces must be kept in subjection by military force; and the dictatorial powers, which, in free states, are sometimes raised to quell insurrections, or to oppose other occasional evils, appear, under a certain extent of dominion, at all times equally necessary to suspend the dissolution of a body, whose parts were assembled, and must be cemented, by measures forcible, decisive, and secret. Among the circumstances, therefore, which in the event of national prosperity, and in the result of commercial arts, lead to the establishment of despotism, there is none, perhaps, that arrives at this termination, with so sure an aim, as the perpetual enlargement of territory. In every state, the freedom of its members depends on the balance and adjustment of its interior parts; and the existence of any such freedom among mankind, depends on the balance of nations. In the progress of conquest, those who are subdued are said to have lost their liberties; but from the history of mankind, to conquer, or to be conquered, has appeared, in effect, the same.

SECT.



S E C T. VI.

Of the Progress and Termination of Despotism.

MANKIND, when they degenerate, and tend to their ruin, as well as when they improve, and gain real advantages, frequently proceed by slow, and almost insensible, steps. If, during ages of activity and vigour, they fill up the measure of national greatness to a height which no human wisdom could at a distance foresee; they actually incur, in ages of relaxation and weakness, many evils which their fears did not suggest, and which, perhaps, they had thought far removed by the tide of success and prosperity.

WE have already observed, that where men are remiss or corrupted, the virtue of their leaders, or the good intention of their magistrates, will not always secure them in the possession of political freedom. Implicit submission to any leader, or the uncontrouled exercise of any power, even when it is intended to operate for the good of mankind, may frequently end in the subversion of legal establishments. This fatal revolution, by whatever means it is accomplished, terminates in military government; and this, though the simplest of all governments, is rendered complete by degrees. In the first pe-



riod of its exercise over men who have acted as members of a free community, it can have only laid the foundation, not completed the fabric, of a despotical policy. The usurper, who has possessed, with an army, the centre of a great empire, sees around him, perhaps, the shattered remains of a former constitution; he may hear the murmurs of a reluctant and unwilling submission; he may even see danger in the aspect of many, from whose hands he may have wrested the sword, but whose minds he has not subdued, nor reconciled to his power.

THE sense of personal rights, or the pretension to privilege and honours, which remain among certain orders of men, are so many bars in the way of a recent usurpation. If they are not suffered to decay with age, and to wear away in the progress of a growing corruption, they must be broken with violence, and the entrance to every new accession of power must be stained with blood. The effect, even in this case, is frequently tardy. The Roman spirit, we know, was not entirely extinguished under a succession of masters, and under a repeated application of bloodshed and poison. The noble and respectable family still aspired to its original honours: The history of the republic, the writings of former times, the monuments of illustrious men, and the lessons of a philosophy fraught with heroic conceptions, continued to nourish the soul in retirement, and formed those eminent characters, whose elevation, and whose fate, are, perhaps, the most affecting subjects of human story. Though unable to oppose the general
bent

bent to fervility, they became, on account of their supposed inclinations, objects of distrust and aversion; and were made to pay with their blood, the price of a sentiment which they fostered in silence, and which glowed only in the heart.

WHILE despotism proceeds in its progress, by what principle is the sovereign conducted in the choice of measures that tend to establish his government? By a mistaken apprehension of his own good, sometimes even of that of his people, and by the desire which he feels on every particular occasion, to remove the obstructions which impede the execution of his will. When he has fixed a resolution, whoever reasons or remonstrates against it is an enemy; when his mind is elated, whoever pretends to eminence, and is disposed to act for himself, is a rival. He would leave no dignity in the state, but what is dependent on himself; no active power, but what carries the expression of his momentary pleasure. Guided by a perception as unerring as that of instinct, he never fails to select the proper objects of his antipathy or of his favour. The aspect of independence repels him; that of fervility attracts. The tendency of his administration is to quiet every restless spirit, and to assume every function of government to himself*.

When

* It is ridiculous to hear men of a restless ambition, who would be the only actors in every scene, sometimes complain of a refractory spirit in mankind;

When the power is adequate to the end, it operates as much in the hands of those who do not perceive the termination, as it does in the hands of others by whom it is best understood: the mandates of either, when just, should not be disputed; when erroneous or wrong, they are supported by force.

You must die, was the answer of Octavius to every suit, from a people that implored his mercy. It was the sentence which some of his successors pronounced against every citizen that was eminent for his birth or his virtues. But are the evils of despotism confined to the cruel and sanguinary methods, by which a recent dominion over a refractory and a turbulent people is established or maintained? And is death the greatest calamity which can afflict mankind under an establishment by which they are divested of all their rights? They are, indeed, frequently suffered to live; but distrust, and jealousy, the sense of personal meanness, and the anxieties which arise from the care of a wretched interest, are made to possess the soul; every citizen is reduced to a slave; and every charm by which the community engaged its members, has ceased to exist. Obedience is the only duty that remains, and this is exacted by force. If under such an establishment, it be necessary to witness scenes of debasement and horror, at the hazard of catching the infection, death becomes a relief; and the libation which Thrasea was made to pour from his arteries, is to be

kind; as if the same disposition from which they desire to usurp every office, did not incline every other person to reason and to act at least for himself.

considered

considered as a proper sacrifice of gratitude to Jove the Deliverer*.

OPPRESSION and cruelty are not always necessary to despotical government; and even when present, are but a part of its evils. It is founded on corruption, and on the suppression of all the civil and the political virtues; it requires its subjects to act from motives of fear; it would assuage the passions of a few men at the expence of mankind; and would erect the peace of society itself on the ruins of that freedom and confidence from which alone the enjoyment, the force, and the elevation of the human mind, are found to arise.

DURING the existence of any free constitution, and whilst every individual possessed his rank and his privilege, or had his apprehension of personal rights, the members of every community were to one another objects of consideration and of respect; every point to be carried in civil society, required the exercise of talents, of wisdom, persuasion, and vigour, as well as of power. But it is the highest refinement of a despotical government, to rule by simple commands, and to exclude every art but that of compulsion. Under the influence of this policy, therefore, the occasions which employed

* Porrectisque utriusque brachii venis, postquam cruorem effudit, humum super spargens, proprius vocato Quæstore, *Libemus*, inquit, *Jovi Liberatori*. Specta juvenis; et omen quidem Dii prohibeant; ceterum in ea tempora natus es, quibus firmare animum deceat constantibus exemplis. *Tacit. Ann. lib. 16.*

and



and cultivated the understandings of men, which awakened their sentiments, and kindled their imaginations, are gradually removed; and the progress by which mankind attained to the honours of their nature, in being engaged to act in society upon a liberal footing, was not more uniform, or less interrupted, than that by which they degenerate in this unhappy condition.

WHEN we hear of the silence which reigns in the seraglio, we are made to believe, that speech itself is become unnecessary; and that the signs of the mute are sufficient to carry the most important mandates of government. No arts, indeed, are required to maintain an ascendant where terror alone is opposed to force, where the powers of the sovereign are delegated entire to every subordinate officer: nor can any station bestow a liberality of mind in a scene of silence and dejection, where every breast is possessed with jealousy and caution, and where no object, but animal pleasure, remains to balance the sufferings of the sovereign himself, or those of his subjects.

IN other states, the talents of men are sometimes improved by the exercises which belong to an eminent station: but here the master himself is probably the rudest and least cultivated animal of the herd; he is inferior to the slave whom he raises from a servile office to the first places of trust or of dignity in his court. The primitive simplicity which formed ties of familiarity and affection betwixt the sovereign and the keeper of his herds

herds *, appears, in the absence of all affections, to be restored, or to be counterfeited amidst the ignorance and brutality which equally characterise all orders of men, or rather which level the ranks, and destroy the distinction of persons in a despotical court.

TO CAPRICE and passion are the rules of government with the prince. Every delegate of power is left to act by the same direction; to strike when he is provoked; to favour when he is pleased. In what relates to revenue, jurisdiction, or police, every governor of a province acts like a leader in an enemy's country; comes armed with the terrors of fire and sword; and instead of a tax, levies a contribution by force: he ruins or spares as either may serve his purpose. When the clamours of the oppressed, or the reputation of a treasure amassed at the expence of a province, have reached the ears of the sovereign, the extortioner is indeed made to purchase impunity by imparting a share, or by forfeiting the whole of his spoil; but no reparation is made to the injured; nay, the crimes of the minister are first employed to plunder the people, and afterwards punished to fill the coffers of the sovereign.

IN this total discontinuance of every art that relates to just government and national policy, it is remarkable, that even the trade of the soldier is itself greatly neglected. Distrust and jealousy on the part of the

* See Odyffey.



prince, come in aid of his ignorance and incapacity; and these causes operating together, serve to destroy the very foundation on which his power is established. Any undisciplined rout of armed men passes for an army, whilst a weak, dispersed, and unarmed people, are sacrificed to military disorder, or exposed to depredation on the frontier from an enemy, whom the desire of spoil, or the hopes of conquest, may have drawn to their neighbourhood.

THE Romans extended their empire till they left no polished nation to be subdued, and found a frontier which was every where surrounded by fierce and barbarous tribes; they even pierced through uncultivated deserts, in order to remove to a greater distance the molestation of such troublesome neighbours, and in order to possess the avenues through which they feared their attacks. But this policy put the finishing hand to the internal corruption of the state. A few years of tranquillity were sufficient to make even the government forget its danger; and in the cultivated province, prepared for the enemy, a tempting prize and an easy victory.

WHEN by the conquest and annexation of every rich and cultivated province, the measure of empire is full, two parties are sufficient to comprehend mankind; that of the pacific and the wealthy, who dwell within the pale of empire; and that of the poor, the rapacious, and the fierce, who are inured to depredation and war.

The

The last bear to the first nearly the same relation which the wolf and the lion bear to the fold; and they are naturally engaged in a state of hostility.

WERE despotic empire, mean-time, to continue for ever unmolested from abroad, while it retains that corruption on which it was founded, it appears to have in itself no principle of new life, and presents no hope of restoration to freedom and political vigour. That which the despotic *master has sown, cannot quicken unless it die*; it must languish and expire by the effect of its own abuse, before the human spirit can spring up anew, or bear those fruits which constitute the honour and the felicity of human nature. In times of the greatest debasement, indeed, commotions are felt; but very unlike the agitations of a free people: they are either the agonies of nature, under the sufferings to which men are exposed; or mere tumults, confined to a few who stand in arms about the prince, and who, by their conspiracies, assassinations, and murders, serve only to plunge the pacific inhabitant still deeper in the horrors of fear or despair. Scattered in the provinces, unarmed, unacquainted with the sentiments of union and confederacy, restricted by habit to a wretched œconomy, and dragging a precarious life on those possessions which the extortions of government have left; the people can no where, under these circumstances, assume the spirit of a community, nor form any liberal combination for their own defence. The injured may complain; and while he cannot obtain the mercy of government, he may implore



the commiseration of his fellow-subject. But that fellow-subject is comforted, that the hand of oppression has not seized on himself: he studies his interest, or snatches his pleasure, under that degree of safety which obscurity and concealment bestow.

THE commercial arts, which seem to require no foundation in the minds of men, but the regard to interest; no encouragement, but the hopes of gain, and the secure possession of property, must perish under the precarious tenure of slavery, and under the apprehension of danger arising from the reputation of wealth. National poverty, however, and the suppression of commerce, are the means by which despotism comes to accomplish its own destruction. Where there are no longer any profits to corrupt, or fears to deter, the charm of dominion is broken, and the naked slave, as awake from a dream, is astonished to find he is free. When the fence is destroyed, the wilds are open, and the herd breaks loose. The pasture of the cultivated field is no longer preferred to that of the desert. The sufferer willingly flies where the extortions of government cannot overtake him; where even the timid and the servile may recollect they are men; where the tyrant may threaten, but where he is known to be no more than a fellow-creature; where he can take nothing but life, and even this at the hazard of his own.

AGREEABLY to this description, the vexations of tyranny have overcome, in many parts of the East, the desire



fire of settlement. The inhabitants of a village quit their habitations, and infest the public ways; those of the valleys fly to the mountains, and, equipt for flight, or possessed of a strong hold, subsist by depredation, and by the war they make on their former masters.

THESE disorders conspire with the impositions of government to render the remaining settlements still less secure: but while devastation and ruin appear on every side, mankind are forced anew upon those confederacies, acquire again that personal confidence and vigour, that social attachment, that use of arms, which, in former times, rendered a small tribe the seed of a great nation; and which may again enable the emancipated slave to begin the career of civil and commercial arts. When human nature appears in the utmost state of corruption, it has actually begun to reform.

IN this manner, the scenes of human life have been frequently shifted. Security and presumption forfeit the advantages of prosperity; resolution and conduct retrieve the ills of adversity; and mankind, while they have nothing on which to rely but their virtue, are prepared to gain every advantage; and when they confide most in their fortune, are most exposed to feel its reverse. We are apt to draw these observations into rule; and when we are no longer willing to act for our country, we plead in excuse of our own weakness or folly, a supposed fatality in human affairs.

THE



THE institutions of men are, indeed, likely to have their end as well as their beginning: but their duration is not fixed to any limited period; and no nation ever suffered internal decay but from the vice of its members. We are sometimes willing to acknowledge this vice in our countrymen; but who was ever willing to acknowledge it in himself? It may be suspected, however, that we do more than acknowledge it, when we cease to oppose its effects, and when we plead a fatality, which, at least, in the breast of every individual, is dependent on himself. Men of real fortitude, integrity, and ability, are well placed in every scene; they reap, in every condition, the principal enjoyments of their nature; they are the happy instruments of providence employed for the good of mankind; or, if we must change this language, they show, that while they are destined to live, the states they compose are likewise doomed by the fates to survive, and to prosper.

T H E E N D.

