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# REPORT

OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE SUBJECT OF AN

## EXTENSION OF SUFFRAGE.

The Committee to whom were referred certain Memorials having for their object an extension of the right of suffrage, to all white male residents of the age of twenty-one years and upwards, who shall pay taxes, or train in the militia, ask leave to report—

That they find nothing in those memorials, either of facts or reasoning, which requires the attention of the House. If there is anything noticeable in them, it is the little sense of propriety manifested in the style in which they were drawn up. The Committee have not thought it necessary to inquire particularly how many of the signers are native citizens of the state; but they are sufficiently informed to be satisfied that a very great proportion of them are not so: and it is illy calculated to produce a favourable opinion of their qualifications, (of those of them, rather, who knew what they were signing; who, on such occasions, are very few,) that persons who have adventured, and are every day adventuring among us, from other states or countries; to better their conditions; who enjoy, in common with ourselves, all the protection and benefits of our equal laws; and upon whose departure there is no restraint; should still be restless and dissatisfied, unless they can introduce here the political systems of the states they have left: and in recommending those systems, should think themselves at liberty to denounce the whole race of our ancestors, as well as the present freemen of the state, and their government, as enemies to freedom and republicanism: and as having sacrificed justice and principle to self-interest. Without troubling the house with any further mention of these memorials, the Committee recommend that the memorialists have leave to withdraw them.

The people of this state, we are convinced, have no intention to change the character of their government, by introducing a new and untried system of suffrage;—by us untried, and tried by others only to manifest its mischievous effects and the fallacy of the principle upon which it is predicated,—in the place of ancient institutions adopt-

ed by our forefathers, among the fundamental principles of their association ; and since, to the present times, preserved and practiced upon as the basis of our elective government.

But as several of the towns, by their instructions to their representatives, have manifested some apprehensions and uneasiness upon this occasion : and considering, especially, that no longer than the elective franchise is preserved in its purity can the people hope to retain in their own hands the power to protect themselves in the enjoyment of any of their other rights ; the committee will proceed to enquire into the source from which that franchise is derived ; the basis upon which it rests, or ought to rest ; and the dangers to which it is most exposed.

The Committee are confident that they shall express the sentiments of the House, when they affirm, that the right of suffrage, as it is the origin and basis of every free, elective government ; so is it the peculiar and exclusive prerogative of the people ; and cannot, without infringing that prerogative be subjected to any other controul than that of the people themselves. If representatives of the people, chosen for the ordinary purposes of legislation, could assume a controul over this right ; to limit, curtail, or extend it, at will ; they might, on the one hand, disfranchise any portion they pleased of their own electors ; might deprive them of the power ever to remove them ; and thus reduce the government to a permanent aristocracy. Or, should they take the opposite course, and degrade the elective franchise, by stripping it of all its necessary qualifications and guards ; then, instead of its remaining a great privilege and security possessed by the sound part of the community ; it would become an instrument in the hands of faction ; leading straightway to anarchy, and ultimately to despotism. A state in which the elective franchise can be thus controuled by any power out of the people, cannot, with any truth, be called republican. It is nothing to say that a legislature, chosen by the people, will, it is to be presumed, act with discretion and with a view to the interests of the people. So may an absolute monarch rule wisely, and devote himself to the welfare of the state : but they are not a free people who hold their rights at the discretion of others, one or more.

The principle would remain the same, whether there be written constitutions or not. The rights of the people are not derived from constitutions, nor are they to be encroached upon because the people may not think it necessary to attempt to guard them by means of such instruments ; which, after all, very indifferently effect the object for which they are intended. They are, on the contrary, by false or forced constructions, always perverted to justify the assumption of dangerous powers which the people never meant to grant.

We would not be understood as intimating that this State has no written constitution. The instrument which we place at the head of all our digests of the laws, is not the less our constitution because its name furnishes a theme for cavillers. The people have always held it as their constitution ; and have, more than once, manifested their satisfaction with it. It was framed and agreed upon, as it purports to have been, by the purchasers, proprietors and settlers of the state ; and its character, as their work, was not at all changed by its having been put into the form of a charter. At that time, the people, being colon-



ists, could not avoid submitting to have the usual reservations, expressive of the royal prerogative, ingrafted into it; but, independent of these appendages, it was wholly the work of the people, and was purely republican. The whole power of self-government was in their own hands: no constitution, before or since the revolution, has been framed, none can be framed, more free and popular. Our separation from the mother country perfected this constitution, by cancelling the conditions and reservations under which we held it, and leaving the work of the people entire. Let strangers, if they please, treat this instrument with levity; and hold it up as a reproach to the State, for the sage reason that it was originally called a *charter*: but let us continue to be proud of it, as a lasting monument of the free, manly and enlightened spirit of our forefathers, who could, at so early a day, and while colonists, frame, adopt, and obtain the confirmation of a constitution of self-government so perfectly republican; and by which all the natural, civil and political rights and privileges of themselves and their posterity were so amply and completely asserted and secured. It is a striking evidence of the stability of the people of this state, that they have not been infected with the rage of the times for constitution making: and that they have continued to hold the wise institutions of their ancestors in too high respect, lightly to change them for new models of constitutions, which have nothing peculiar to recommend them, except the unsubstantial allurements of being framed after the revolution.

The earliest acts of every society necessarily mark out the true limits of the elective franchise, and designate those who are qualified to take part in the conduct of their affairs. Not women, or minors, or dependants; not persons incompetent, or persons having no estates; but those proprietors only who are concerned and interested in the business to be transacted, and competent to transact it. These are the original freemen; and from this source the right of suffrage is derived.

Thus our ancestors, the purchasers, proprietors, and settlers of the State, upon their arrival here, by their own act incorporated themselves into a body politic; elected at first their Judge & Elders; & afterwards their Governors and assistants, and other officers. They at the same time adopted a resolution that "none should be received as inhabitants or freemen but by consent of the body: and by unanimous agreement, ordained and declared their government to be a *democracie; or popular government; that is to say*" (using their own language,) "*it is in the power of the Body of Freemen, orderly assembled, or the major part of them, to make or constitute just laws by which they will be regulated, and to depute, from among themselves such ministers as shall see them faithfully executed between man and man.*" And as others came to join them, and by permission purchased lands, they from time to time, admitted to the elective franchise, such of them as "*upon orderly presentation were found meet for the service of the body, and no just exception against them.*" Such as proved themselves unworthy they suspended or discharged, and again reinstated such of them as gave proof of better conduct: and none but those regularly admitted freemen were allowed to take any part in the affairs of the

government: although it appears from the separate lists kept of freemen and of inhabitants, that there were many of the latter not admitted.

These were the acts of the Freemen—proprietors of Rhode-Island. And in the year sixteen hundred and forty-seven, the towns of Providence and Warwick came into union with them, and agreed to the *model of government* thus established. In sixteen hundred sixty-two—three, the united body, styling themselves “*the purchasers and free inhabitants of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, seized and possessed by purchase and consent of the natives, to their full content, of all its lands, islands, rivers, harbours and roads,*” collected and brought into the form of a constitution, the principal ordinances of government they had before, from time to time adopted, and obtained its confirmation from the mother country. And under this compact, they lived and prospered; and their descendants have continued to prosper, as a free state, to the present day.

In sixteen hundred sixty-five they again turned their attention to the qualifications of freemen; and in pursuance of their constitution, or charter, enacted “*that all men of competent estates, and civil conversation, and obedient to the civil magistrates, shall be admitted freemen, upon their desire therein, declared to the General Assembly; either by themselves, with sufficient testimony of their fitness and qualifications, as shall by the General Assembly be deemed satisfactory; or if, by the chief officers of the town or towns where they live, they be proposed and declared as aforesaid; and that none shall have admission to vote for public officers or deputies; or enjoy any privilege of freemen; until admitted by the General Assembly, as aforesaid, and their names recorded in the general records of the Colony.*” In seventeen hundred twenty-nine, (just a century ago,) they enacted that the freehold qualification should be of the value of two hundred pounds, or ten pounds annual rent; and in seventeen hundred forty-two, adopted further provisions to prevent frauds on the law. In seventeen hundred forty-five, they passed the following act, viz. “*Whereas the manner of admitting freemen, in this colony, is so lax, and their qualifications, as to their estates, so very low, that many persons are admitted who are possessed of little or no property; and it being greatly to be feared that bribery and corruption have, (by the encouragement of evil minded persons, and by reason of such necessitous persons being admitted freemen,) spread themselves in this government, to the great scandal thereof; so that the election of public officers hath been greatly influenced thereby; and as the law already made hath been altogether ineffectual to prevent the same; be it therefore enacted that no person whatsoever shall be allowed to vote or act as a freemen in any town meeting in this Colony, or at any general election, but such only who, at the time of such their acting or voting as freemen, are really and truly possessed of lands, tenements, or hereditaments, to the full value of four hundred pounds, or which shall rent for twenty pounds per annum; being their own free estate; or the eldest son of such a freeholder.*”

Such are the ordinances which our ancestors thought necessary to preserve the rights and liberties of themselves and their posterity; by preserving the elective franchise in the hands of the sound part of the



community—the substantial freehold inhabitants of the State. Had they not a right to adopt those provisions? And have not their descendants, and those whom they have associated with them in conformity to those provisions, equally a right to preserve and adhere to them? Or, is it, indeed, true, that other individuals, (wherever they come from) who have never qualified themselves to exercise the elective franchise, and do not possess it, have yet a right to complain that they are disfranchised; and treated as slaves; because the institutions of the State are not broken down to suit their purposes? Such complainners mistake their rights; which is a right to qualify themselves as the laws require; not a right to be voters without such qualification. The right to qualify themselves is a right common to all; and the laws prescribing the qualifications apply equally to the whole community, without preference to any. Those who would claim more, would claim “the privilege of anarchy;—the privilege to disturb the peace of society.”

There are some who pretend to consider the right of suffrage as an inherent, natural right, which every man ought to enjoy. A man’s absolute, inherent rights, are, or ought to be, common to all, without distinction of age, sex or color: such for instance is the right of private property. Is the function of voting such a right? Is it not, on the contrary, one of those political rights which we derive from the society to which we belong; and which, of course, can only exist, as a right, according to the existing institutions of that society?

There is no phrase in our language, more frequently used, and with less definite meaning, than “nature,” “a state of nature.” As applied to man, and in distinction to the *state of society*, we know not what is meant by such phrases. Every man necessarily has his first existence in society. He has there his parents, at least, and his kindred; and there he becomes the parent of others. The most limited society is that of a family: and this has its patriarchal government. However small the number of men living together, may be, and although they may have entered into no express compact; nor adopted any regulations whatever for their government; they unavoidably act upon and influence each other: Their individual rights are relative, and their actions are regulated accordingly. What is this but a state of society? Hermits and solitaries themselves (if there are such) were bred and brought up in some society or other from which they have unnaturally separated themselves. The truth is, that, as to man, (a social being) a state of society is a state of nature; and the only state of nature. The endless disquisitions, which have been written upon what is termed “*the condition of man in a state of nature*;” upon, “*the origin of society*;” and “*the nature of the social compact*;” might have afforded amusement; if their sage authors, and their pupils, had contented themselves with dreaming, and telling their dreams; without laboring, to the incalculable injury of society, to have them admired and received by mankind, as the great truths and realities which ought to be adopted as the only true basis of practical government. In doing this, they have practised upon their fellow-men, without regard to their welfare, and as objects only upon whom to try their senseless and mischief-work-



ing; (or, as themselves would say) philosophical experiments in the science of government.

Of what importance is it whether we consider the elective franchise as a natural right; or as a *grant* from society; as the term itself imports; when, in either case, it must remain subject to every restriction and regulation which the paramount rights and interests of the community require? The right to acquire, to enjoy, and to dispose of property, is one of our absolute rights: But we can only acquire or transfer it by conforming to the requisites prescribed by law: Nor, if dispossessed of it, can we recover it, but by the remedies also prescribed by law. And, whatever may be the amount of a man's property; if he becomes incompetent to the management of it, it may rightly be taken from his control, and put into the hands of a guardian. It is a common expression that *a man has a right to do what he pleases with his own*; yet there are many uses to which he is not allowed to put his property, because it would be noxious to the rest of the community. Every man has a right, honestly, to acquire property; but his right to possess and enjoy property accrues and commences only with the acquirement. So every man is at liberty to acquire to himself the qualifications which will entitle him to the privilege of voting; and when he has acquired them he will be admitted to that privilege: But until then, he has no more right to claim the exercise of it, than he has to claim a right to property which he has not acquired and does not own. There is nothing too preposterous or unprincipled, to find advocates; if it can be contended that a man possesses an inherent, unqualified, uncontrollable right; without the consent of the society to which he belongs, to do an act (whether it be voting or any other act,) by which the interests of the whole community may be affected; his own perhaps (if at all) in a less degree than those of any other man? Those to whom the exercise of the elective franchise cannot safely be entrusted, have no more right to complain that it is withheld from them, than have minors or other incompetent persons: Whose public interests, great or small, are taken care of by the qualified part of the community:—The most trustworthy of all guardians, since it is for their own interest to be so.

The restrictions by which the welfare of society, requires the elective franchise to be controlled, do not at all, clash with the great truths which we all embrace:—That *the people alone are sovereign; and the source of all power; that, governments are instituted solely for their good; and that, the majority ought to govern.* What is it that any man means, when he says, that *a majority of the people ought to govern?* In this State, the number of the people is ninety-seven thousand: In South-Carolina, it is four hundred and ninety thousand. Is it meant that a majority of these in either instance, is to exercise the sovereign power; or to elect those who shall govern in their stead? No man, however visionary, entertains such an idea. Every one in the outset, excludes all but free males of twenty-one years of age and upwards; and most men exclude all but free *white* males of lawful age. But the whole of these, of every description, are but seventeen thousand in this State; and but little over forty-six thousand in South-Carolina; and a majority of them, in that State, is less than a twenty-

first part of the whole number of the people; and in this State, but a fraction over a tenth part of our population. And when we come further to deduct paupers, persons incompetent, and many others, whom all rational men agree in excluding, the disproportion is still much greater. We have included the slaves in the population of South-Carolina, because, whatever their condition, they are still a part of the people, as much as those of other descriptions, who, on account of other disqualifications, are excluded from the exercise of the right of suffrage. Thus, the answer which every man must be brought to make to the question we proposed, is, that when speaking of a majority of the people, he means only a majority of those who are qualified to exercise the sovereign power, and to elect their representatives and officers of government. Who are the qualified sovereign people, can, from the nature of the case, only be decided by themselves; for there are none else to decide it; or to whom to appeal, from the decision. If they should exclude any possessing the same qualifications as themselves, (a case, we believe, which no where ever happened,) they would act unjustly: But when they admit to the right of suffrage, persons not fit to exercise it, as they are always prone to do, then they endanger the liberties of the people and do an irreparable injury to the whole community.

Can we then allow ourselves to doubt, that the freemen of the State, in whose hands its safety and welfare are deposited, possess adequate power to guard and secure the elective franchise from abuse, by all the restrictions necessary for that purpose? Or can we, for a moment admit, than any individual, or class of them, can have any other claim to the exercise of that franchise than the legitimate one, which their possessing the wholesome qualifications required by the laws will always give them.

If it were possible, certainly it would be right, to confine the elective franchise to the sound part of the community; and that none should be entrusted with it, but, such as are real citizens of the State; have an interest in its welfare; and are friends to their country and its free government. Unfortunately, it is much easier, to define the necessary qualifications, than to ascertain how far they are possessed by individuals. But, on the side of strict qualification there is no danger. None ever flowed from that source. Those who are to exercise that power from which all other powers are derived, and by whose votes the whole community are to be affected; cannot be too highly qualified, nor their qualifications too strictly examined and exacted. And, as it is impossible to contrive any rule, by which to ascertain the moral and civil qualifications of men; we must be contented with adopting such a general one as will be most likely to insure the greatest safety, with the fewest exclusions.

It is well expressed, in the bill of rights of one of our sister States, that "all men having sufficient evidence of permanent common interest with, and attachment to, the community, have a right of suffrage." This is sound as a general principle; but is not sufficiently definite for a rule of practice. A permanent interest is, in all cases, the surest, and in most, the only evidence of attachment to the community. For although a citizen born, unless he is an unworthy and an unnatural



one, will be likely, under any circumstances, to feel some attachment to his native State; yet from others we may not expect such attachments unless they have a permanent interest at stake in the State; and have adopted it as their permanent place of residence. And then, their attachment is but a secondary one, and is generally measured by their interest, and not much to be counted upon until after a long term of residence and trial. We know therefore, of no better general rule by which to regulate the right of suffrage, than the rule which requires that most probable evidence of permanent interest and attachment, which is furnished by the ownership of property, and by actual permanent citizenship. Let us particularly consider each of these qualifications, that we may satisfy ourselves whether either of them can be dispensed with. The ground on which a property qualification appears to be founded, is, that the right of property is one of our great, natural and absolute rights. We have, individually, a personal right to defend it; and a claim upon society for its protection against the encroachments of others. Those therefore who have acquired property and possess this right, and have an interest in its protection by wholesome laws and a good government; ought to have a voice and influence in the enactment of those laws, and in the government. It is usual to speak of property as of little value, compared to life or liberty; and this, no doubt is true, if we amuse ourselves with such comparisons. It may be of little consequence to others what amount of property is possessed by any individual. To society it is of vastly more importance that every man should be secure in the possession of a single foot of land or a single dollar, than that he should be the owner of a township. But to weigh our great natural rights against each other, in order to ascertain their relative value, is mere speculation. They cannot be so weighed, for they cannot be separated. Where there is no security for the right of property, there can be none for any of our other rights. Nay, it is only through attempts against this right, that our other rights can be assailed:—So far is it from being true, that the right of property is of minor importance. Break down the barrier by which that right is protected, and all will be rapine, violence and bloodshed.

Thus the whole science of legislation and jurisprudence is exercised in application to the rights of property. All the acts of government; nearly all the provisions even of our small penal code; are referable to the same source:—The protection of the rights of property. Nor can the liberties of the people ever be in danger where the rights of property are perfectly secure. For it is power over the territories, wealth and resources of a State, which at once form the temptation and furnishes the means of usurpation. So long, (and only so long,) as any government can effectually be restrained from touching any more of the private property of the citizens, than is necessary for its faithful administration, it will never be emboldened to become careless of its dependance upon and responsibility to them: Since it will not have it in its power to surround itself (to any alarming extent) with those hosts of mercenaries, civil as well as military;—(especially the former, always the most unprincipled and dangerous) which can only exist upon the spoils of the people.



By security in the rights of private property is not meant merely "the impartial administration of equal and expedient laws;" which is said to be a good definition of civil liberty. For such laws may be made, and so administered, by a despotic government. But the citizen, or rather, the subject of such a government, has no security for the continuance of the blessing: He holds it not as his right; but at the sufferance of this ruler. The only security for the preservation of this right, is, that those who possess the right should possess the power to protect it.

And, if these are sound principles, it seems to follow necessarily, that those who have no property, or less than the laws now require, as a qualification; are not likely, (speaking of them as a class, and not meaning to apply the remark to every individual,) to feel a common interest with the rest of the community, in the protection of the right of property; nor in the general object of legislation, nor in the wise administration of justice; and if so, that it cannot be wise, or safe, or just to entrust them with power and control over those subjects.

To remind us that the possession of property is no certain proof of the possession of virtue or patriotism, is advancing nothing inconsistent with the fact that those who do possess property must necessarily feel a stronger interest in the preservation of the right of property. And thus it is certain that even the vicious and unprincipled among this class, are generally friendly to wise and equal laws, and to able and upright courts. Their viciousness is shewn in a disposition to evade the execution of those laws in their own, individual cases: and even in this, the more they have at stake the less likely they are to trespass on the laws which protect them. We must recollect also, that a great portion of those who are without property have reduced themselves to that condition by their own improvidence, extravagance or vices; and are therefore, in all respects, unfit to be entrusted with any control over the property or rights of others.

The other principal evidence of qualification;—permanent citizenship, is at least, as essential as that of property. Who, that do not permanently belong to the State, can have a right; or can with safety, be permitted, to have an agency in its laws and government? None indeed can feel that attachment to the institutions and peculiar customs of a State; that respect for the memory and principles of its founders, that pride in its character and standing as a State; and that deep interest in the maintainance of its rights and privileges; none like those who have been bred and brought up in its bosom. Surely then, if any others are to be admitted to share equally with these, the powers and prerogatives of governing their own native State; it ought to be those only who have adopted it, in preference to all other States, as the permanent place of residence; the only home of themselves and their offspring. Even these, as we have before observed, cannot feel the same strong interest in it as native citizens. Their ancestors were not among ours. Their natural connexions are in other places, and their habits, attachments and predilections have been formed before they came: what then can we expect, or claim, of those who come merely with a view to some present object of gain; to seek for some business or employment to make trial of, among us, to be pursued or not as they may find their account



in remaining here a longer or shorter period for that purpose? persons who leave their native homes from necessity, and whose constrained absence serves to strengthen their attachments to them; their distaste to all other places of residence; their hopes of some day returning to their homes, there to enjoy the fruits of their enterprizes abroad. What claims have these upon us, more than to the rites of hospitality and the protection of our laws?

There would be nothing to apprehend from this source if none but substantial citizens from sister States came here to reside. But such as these are under no necessity, and few such have any inclination, to turn their backs upon their native States. There are exceptions certainly. We have a number of very valuable fellow citizens who are natives of other States. These we trust, make no complaints that they are not sufficiently honored and distinguished among us. But many if not most of those who come are not of the same description. They bring little else with them than the pride of belonging to larger and (in their estimation,) more respectable States: which they consider as quite sufficient to entitle them to distinction here. But the evils resulting from the admission, upon too slender qualifications, of native citizens of sister States, who come to reside here; are driven wholly from our thoughts, when we come to reflect upon the dangers to be dreaded from the indiscriminate, (in many States actually indiscriminate,) admission of strangers from all quarters of the globe; of all nations, races, tribes and tongues, to the exercise of the elective franchise: as if it was a worthless thing that could not be abused. Truly, of all the countries upon the face of the globe, this, our country, is the most bountiful.— Bountiful, we fear, to its own destruction. As if the American people, could not, of themselves, enjoy the fruits and bounties of their country, because they were the Lords of a territory ample enough to afford the same blessings to their posterity through a thousand generations:— As if the descendants of those who made the country their own, and made it sovereign and independent, were not able to protect it, or to preserve the blessings bequeathed to them; our government stretched out its arms and invited to the bosom of the country, the overflowings of all nations. Invited them not only to come and help us enjoy the good things of the land; but to take part in governing us and our country. It hastened to provide laws for “*naturalizing*,” (as it is termed,) and incorporating with American citizens all who should be brought, all of the colour called white, and who were not called slaves, however abject and servile their actual condition might be. And to protect them not only here but on the seas, against the claims of their native countries, a second national war was (professed to be,) engaged in: for the prosecution of which the blood and resources of the people were staked and freely expended, and the nation burthened with a debt of millions. No wonder that such substantial allurements were not held out in vain. Since the creation of the world, never were such captivating prospects presented; not only to the forlorn, depressed and debased, but to the restless, ambitious and aspiring of all countries. No wonder they came, and continue to come by myriads: those who could not otherwise get here, selling themselves for a term of years to any trader who would buy and bring them. The importation of this



staple commodity became a regular branch of business : and upwards of twenty-seven thousand head were imported from Great Britain alone, in a single year ; a number nearly equal to a third of the whole population of this State. What numbers were brought from all other countries in the same year we cannot tell. A single merchant or mercantile house, in New-York, we are informed, now keeps no less than eighteen ships, wholly and constantly employed in this business of importing and supplying us with fellow-citizens and freemen. What the whole mass accumulating, as it has been, for near half a century since the establishment of our Independence, now amounts to, it is beyond the powers of calculation to ascertain.

We shall not be understood as meaning to include all who come here in a general description of the common mass of emigrants. We know that there are many highly respectable foreigners who have adopted this for their country ; and who would be an ornament, and valuable acquisition to any country. There are also among them, many sober, industrious, skillful people employed in the humbler, and to us, quite as useful, walks of life. Our remarks are applicable to the vast multitudes of a different description ; a great majority of whom were in their own country in as degraded a condition, as men can be brought to, by abject servitude, poverty, ignorance and vice. What consciousness of the dignity and rights of man ; what conceptions of the principles of free republican institutions, can such as these have ?

The late Mr Jefferson, in his "Notes on Virginia;" speaking of the impolicy of encouraging emigrants to this country; who, he says, come mostly from despotic monarchies, makes the following remarks. "They will bring with them the principles of the governments they leave, imbibed in their earliest youth; or if able to throw them off, it will be in exchange for unbounded licentiousness, passing as usual, from one extreme to another. It would be a miracle were they to stop precisely at the point of temperate liberty. These principles, with their language, they will transmit to their children. In proportion to their numbers, they will share with us the legislation. They will infuse into it their spirit, warp and bias its directions and render it a heterogeneous, and incoherent, distracted mass." Yet to such as these, all honors, offices and emoluments here are freely open. The late law of the United States, requiring foreigners to be propounded a certain time before being naturalized; was intended to correct the evils experienced under former acts: But it affords merely a temporary and very partial relief any where; and in some States foreigners are admitted upon a few months residence, whether citizens of the United States or not.

The evils we have thus entailed upon our posterity, and are experiencing ourselves, were inevitable. The hosts of new created freemen were soon too numerous not to feel their strength, and make it to be felt. Not contented with exercising the right of suffrage individually and quietly, they organized, or rather were organized by their aspiring leaders, into *affiliated* political societies, bearing their proper national names. These societies established in most if not all, of the principal cities, kept up a correspondence with each other; held their political meetings; passed resolves, approbating and denouncing men and measures; nominating and dictating who should be governors,



senators and representatives—State and Federal; and even selecting their man for the presidency and vice-presidency of the United States. Nor are their resolves mere idle boasts or threats. They have been considered so powerful that propitiatory addresses and appeals are made to them; soliciting their countenance and patronage, in behalf of candidates for the highest offices in the gift of the people, not excepting the presidency itself. The controul which these societies and people thus exercise over some of the largest States, and particularly over the great cities, is almost unlimited.

The grand schemes of internal improvement, which of late years have been so extensively embarked in, by inviting the loose, floating part of the foreign population to migrate from State to State, enables multitudes of them to exercise the elective franchise in the various States where those schemes are in prosecution; particularly those States which require but a short term of residence, and no qualifications at all. And we are assured that several thousand of these free suffrage men, who were canalling and road making, under their superintendants, in one of the most populous of the western States, by their votes, were the means of displacing some of the most valuable of its Representatives to Congress; and had a great effect in the choice of the presidential electors, if they did not turn the scale, in that State.

The people of those States, (and we may rejoice that the New-England States are such) which are so fortunate as to possess few temptations for these emigrants, have been left, unmolested, to manage their own State affairs as they were managed by their fathers before them. But no State can escape its share of a national misfortune. The relative weight and influence of the States, and the apportionment of State representation in the federal government, are greatly affected by the vast amount of foreign population. And the character of a large portion of that representation is also affected by the same influences. Nor can it be supposed that the national government itself will remain wholly unaffected by them. But those influences are most blighting to the morals, principles, stability and character of the nation itself. How can a country, whose native citizens are undistinguished, and can exercise no prerogatives but in common with an immense, multifarious and exotic population; strangers to one another, as much as to the native citizens: How can such a country hope ever to attain to that exaltation of national character, without which a nation may become powerful, for a time, but can never be great and renowned? There was nothing of which the great ancient republics, as long as they remained uncorrupted, were so proud and tenacious, as of the rights of citizenship. No strangers were ever honored or trusted with them, but upon some signal service rendered to the State. And all were held to be strangers to the country, but those who were inheritors of its glory and bound in its destinies. Thus every citizen was allied to his country and identified with it. And hence that inextinguishable spirit of patriotism, that innate love of country, that devotedness to its glory; and that lofty pride of national character, which signalized the people of those States; and carried them to heights of grandeur and power to which the world paid homage. To be called "*a Spartan*," "*an Athenian*," or "*a Roman*," was greater honor



than to be a prince. Nor is their fame still at all diminished. Even to this day, all civilized people employ the terms "*Grecian*" and "*Roman*," to designate whatever they deem most perfect in the arts, in eloquence, refinement and wit, in language, history and poetry; as well as in virtue, patriotism, heroism and glory.

But, this our infant nation, claims the merit of making *a new and lively experiment in republican government*, and there is every reason to believe that the experiment would be successful, if its success depended upon the American people; with a view to whose character and principles the new government was framed. But this has not been permitted by our second race of philosophers. We must be universal philanthropists. We must not only preserve equality among ourselves but must make all mankind equal with us. No matter how worthless the materials; the moment they are brought to our hands they are to be converted into republicans and patriots; *American* patriots: and they shall instantly become high principled and enlightened freemen; shall perfectly comprehend all the principles and purposes of our republican institutions; and shall be rulers over the land.

It is but forty-six years since our independence was acknowledged; and no more than fifty-three since it was claimed. Once in every year we celebrate its era; and then we rehearse over the deeds and virtues of our ancestors; their enterprise and hardihood; *American* trials and sufferings in this; then, immense wilderness; their unconquerable spirit of republicanism; their achievements, triumphs and final success. And well may we be thus proud of the past. But we can feel little pride in the reflection that this same country, so gained and settled, once so peopled, enfranchised, exalted and ruled by a race of patriots and heroes; already has become every body's country; and that a real *American* descendant of that race is now almost a stranger in his native land.

We are called a new country; and a young people, who are trying a new experiment in a free government. And thus we are flattered into the grateful persuasion, that ours are a virtuous people, unhacknied in the vices and corruptions of the old governments and people. This is a most dangerous error. Our government, to be sure, as an independent one, is new; and so is the country a new one; and ought to be the parent country of a young and virtuous race of people. But the fact is, that, new as the country is, it is already, in a great measure, in possession of a population as perfectly initiated in all the mysteries of vice; as conversant in all the scenes of depravity, and as old and ripe, as the population of the oldest countries, of which it made a part, before it got here; and by no means, a better part. In short, that it embraces every grade of people; of every description and character, that can be found in any of the oldest and most depraved countries of the old world.

Can there be any stronger reason for guarding (while we may) the elective franchise, with the greatest vigilance and strictness: That it may be preserved, as long as possible, in the hands of the sound part of the community?

Whether this has been a healthy growth of the nation: whether Americans are made happier or more virtuous, by means of this accu-



mulation of heterogeneous foreign population : whether three millions of American citizens, who composed the nation when its independence commenced, with all the means of subsistence in the greatest abundance, would not have multiplied sufficiently fast : whether the genuine descendants of the great founders and fathers of this nation, would not have inherited their virtues, their love of freedom and their immoveable firmness and spirit in its maintenance : and whether, such an uncontaminated race of native freemen would not have attained to a loftier elevation of national character, and have exalted their nation to higher destinies, and a more commanding rank among the nations of the earth : These are considerations which it is now painful, because useless, to dwell upon. Nor can it be necessary that we should dwell upon them in order to convince ourselves how infinitely important it is, that if we do not strengthen, we should, at least, do nothing to impair the strength of those institutions by which alone the management of our own State and its concerns can be preserved in the hands of its own substantial, legitimate freemen.

Those who do not raise their thoughts to the elective franchise as the only safeguard of the people's rights, and value it only as it may be made most available in the political market, are, of course, inimical to all provisions calculated to preserve it in its purity ; and most of all to those requiring a freehold qualification. Our ancestors foresaw from the beginning that the ownership and possession of a competent freehold in the town where the freeman is to vote, would prove to be the only sure evidence either of actual citizenship or permanent interest in the town or state. The public records show the title to the freehold ; and its value is apparent ; or, if questionable, is ascertained by appraisers. But, if a pecuniary, or personal property qualification was to be substituted, what evidence, in the slightest degree to be depended upon, could be expected in one case out of an hundred ? Loose, verbal declarations, to be sure, would not be wanted as long as votes are wanted, and by means of them, any number of vagrant voters might be transplanted into any and every town in the state. In those states where the experiment has been tried it was found to result in worse than universal suffrage : it was universal suffrage brought about by perjury, bribery and corruption. In addition to the frauds committed by means of false swearing, it was the practice to provide some article valued at the amount required ; a watch, for instance, which was made to serve for any number of recruits, who, thus qualified, were marched up to the polls one after another, attended by a guard to prevent any of them from running off with his qualification.

To free themselves from this prostitution of the elective franchise, the states which had felt its effects, resorted to an expedient in vogue in most of the other states. By that expedient the payment of a tax is the only evidence required of the voter's property. This scheme is not liable to the same objections as the other on the score of frauds ; but comes almost, if not quite, as near to universal suffrage. For nothing but actual pauperism is in fact excluded : when the right of suffrage may be thus bought for a mite, in the name of a tax, twice the amount of which a dexterous beggar might perhaps acquire by his trade every day in the week. This tax qualification therefore is, in

truth, merely a nominal one. It furnishes no evidence either that the voter is worth any thing or is any more than an occasional, temporary resident. In short, it does not afford the slightest security to the elective franchise. It is also a strong objection to this species of qualification, that it rests with a set of assessors to make and unmake freemen at pleasure—a power which they may sometimes be tempted to exercise with a view to the support of the party they belong to, and upon which they depend for their posts and emoluments.

We all remember the frauds upon the right of suffrage, by means of spurious deeds, which were formerly practiced even in this state, where that right was so strictly guarded by our election laws. Those frauds at the time furnished an argument in favor of universal suffrage; on the ground that all regulations were futile and abortive. It is true that they could not here be practiced to any alarming extent, and have since been effectually suppressed. But the recollection of them ought to make us aware of the desperate extremities to which party men, in high party times, (each party condemning the practice, as unprincipled, but justifying itself by the example of the other,) will go to effect their purposes.

But those who favor universal suffrage, make no account of such considerations. They would not allow public safety and welfare to have any weight in competition with what they denominate, republican principle. We do not forget that they profess not to be in favor of universal suffrage: But the doctrines they advocate result in the same thing, and nothing better. It is assumed, as a great principle, (of some kind or other,) that all who contribute towards the support of government, by paying a tax, or training in the militia, or (according to some,) by working on a highway; have a right to a voice in the choice of their rulers. Thus, if a set of assessors rate a man for a shilling tax, or a militia captain puts his name on the roll and gives him a holiday, training and treat; or if a surveyor calls upon him, (a stout foreigner perhaps,) for half a day's work (or play) on a road—which the man would not be likely to decline, when as the price of it, he is to possess himself of a valuable privilege always commanding a price in the market. In either of these cases the man is to be transformed, at once, into a freeman. And men, thus qualified, are to be hailed as part of the sovereign people; and marched up to the freemen's meeting; there to balance the votes of as many of the most substantial native freeholders and freemen: And that too in questions which may vitally affect the very safety and welfare of the State. What wretched conceptions must that man have of the importance of the right of suffrage, who can thus estimate it! Is there any such preposterous principle as this—that fixes a petty price upon the elective franchise, without regard to fitness or unfitness for the exercise of it? Whoever pays a tax, pays it for the protection which the laws extend to himself and his property, (if he has any;) whoever works on a highway, is required to do so because he has the use of it; and whoever trains in the militia is required to do so by the laws of Congress: But does either or all of these acts furnish any evidence that the man is qualified, or at all fit, to be entrusted with the exercise of the all-important right of suffrage; and to interfere in the affairs of government? And is he to exercise that pow-



er whether fit or not? It is true that the possession of a freehold estate is no positive proof that the possessor is worthy to be a freeman. But making all reasonable allowances for exceptions, the probability is, that those who possess, and especially those who have acquired for themselves a competent freehold, are more industrious, prudent and substantial: are more permanently settled, and feel greater interest in and attachment to the State, in which they are owners and cultivators of the soil, than those who have either squandered the inheritance earned for them by their fathers, or have failed to acquire any for themselves; although the acquisition was to be accompanied by this so much coveted right of suffrage. We are aware that there are many worthy citizens not possessed of the freehold qualification. But these are constantly acquiring it for themselves. And in this country, almost every man of industry and good conduct; every good citizen, in short; is almost certain speedily to acquire (if he will) a sufficient freehold qualification. And in the mean time, this class of citizens, equally with all others, enjoy the benefit of the wise provisions by which the elective franchise is guarded from abuse. Still, it is true, there will remain some wholesome citizens, whom ill fortune and unavoidable circumstances prevent from qualifying themselves. Of these, we hope, there are but few, and we regret there should be any. They will reflect that no general rule can be made so perfect as to be free from all exceptions: And when they see the management of affairs in the hands of the substantial part of the community, (as far as this can be accomplished,) they will not desire that a general rule, best for the whole, should be broken down or relaxed on their individual account, when that prostration of the rule would take away all value from the privilege itself; by letting in at the same time, multitudes of others, of a different character, to exercise it without regard to the welfare of the community. Nor do we believe that any complaints are made by this class of citizens. We know that most of those who do acquire sufficient freeholds are seldom in any haste to qualify themselves to take a part in the political intrigues and contests of the day. And most of them are urged forward to be propounded and admitted, and to attend town meetings by persons who take more interest in the matter than they do themselves.

There is one other class of citizens of whom we have not taken any notice. We mean those who do possess sufficient property to qualify themselves, and do not choose to. Such persons have as little right to complain as those who do possess sufficient freeholds and will not be at the trouble of having themselves propounded; as little right as they would have to complain that carriages are not provided for them, at the public expence to carry them to town meetings. If any of those who having it fully in their power and at their own option to qualify themselves for voters as soon as they please, are so indifferent to the privilege; or so engrossed by more profitable pursuits; or so greedy, that they will not spare the small sum of one hundred and thirty-four dollars to purchase a freehold, because it might give them a little less profit; they ought, at least, to remain quiet and peaceable citizens. For should any of them, instead of qualifying themselves, like good citizens, suffer themselves to be drawn into mischievous cabals and to act conspicuous parts in clamorous and disorderly meetings, set on foot by

troublesome demagogues and noisy political agitators, to answer their own purposes; they would give but a poor promise of their suitability to become freemen; and the longer they continue unqualified the better. We are however persuaded that there are very few, if any of such a description of persons. Complaints, such as we now hear, are almost always made, not by, but in the name of those who are, (or would be if left to themselves,) perfectly satisfied with things as they are.

Thus some people are greatly scandalized at the privilege of oldest sons to be voters, when, probably, there is no instance of complaint on that score from the brothers. But it seems that this is a monstrous feature in our system, because in feudal times and countries, the oldest son was sole heir to the estate of the father: and as we have abrogated that doctrine, and declared all the children to be equally entitled to inherit, it is inferred that if the oldest son is admitted to be a voter, the others ought equally to be admitted. This seems to us not to be very good reasoning. The right of the oldest son to vote is not derived from the father, nor has it any connexion with the inheritance of his property. If it had, the daughters ought to share in it as much as the sons. But it is a privilege granted to that son by the freemen; and does not in any way diminish or detract from any right or claim of his brothers or sisters. Suppose the oldest son possessed no such privilege, and the subject was now, for the first time, to be considered by the freemen.—What conclusions would they probably come to? They would, no doubt, be desirous of extending the privilege to as many of the citizens as could be safely entrusted with it: and if they should be of opinion, (as it is probable they would,) that it would be safe in the hands of sons of freeholders and freemen, though it might not be in the hands of those who were neither freeholders nor sons of them; they would then consider whether it should be extended to all, or a part of those sons. It is not to be conceived that the freemen would be disposed to make any unnecessary distinction between their own sons: But here it would forcibly occur to them that to extend the privilege to all their sons, would make a very unequal distribution of influence among those who had many sons and those who had few or none. They would therefore necessarily and properly discard this plan: and, as the most equal one, in which all would be likely to agree, they would give the privilege to one son only of every freeman having a son; and this, as a matter of course, would be the oldest son. For if there were no reasons for preferring, there could be none for passing by him, when establishing a general rule, by which one only of the sons can be taken. And if all the sons of the freeholders were to be consulted, there can be no doubt that they would make the same selection. The privilege is not granted, (as some suppose,) as a favor to the oldest son, with a view to distinguish him above his brothers; but because it is deemed safe and expedient that it should be exercised by some one of the sons; and the oldest is fixed upon by common consent. He is more easily designated than others. A second, or third son might not exist; and to select the youngest would be going out of the way to show a preference. The privilege, besides, in many cases, would remain unenjoyed for years by the youngest son, while it might be enjoyed if in the hands



of the oldest. He is presumed to have more experience and maturity of judgment. In all well regulated families, the elder brother is looked up to by the younger part of the family not only with affection, but with respect and confidence as their safest friend and adviser, next to their parents. He is taught to be so by those parents; and expected to supply their places, to the utmost of his power, when their own parental care should be withdrawn. And he is generally sensible of the sacredness of the trust and faithful in the observance of it. Those who would mar such family ties by exciting jealousies in younger brothers against the elder; because he, temporarily, exercises a privilege which one of them only can exercise, are but indifferent friends to society. If then, the sound judgments of the freemen would lead them to approve of such a rule, if it did not already exist; they would hardly be deterred from adopting it, by being reminded that in old feudal countries, oldest sons are sole heirs to their fathers' property. Nor would they believe that any principle of justice required them to deny the grant of a privilege to one of their sons, because they would not make similar grants to all the rest of them. With regard to the general operation of this provision, we believe that it materially favors the middling and poorer classes of freeholders, who, in numbers, greatly exceed the more wealthy class.

Upon our principal subject—the necessity of requiring a freehold qualification, we have only further to remark, that it has a strong tendency to check the monopoly of large landed estates in the hands of a few individuals: and operates as an incitement to meritorious young men, to acquire for themselves a privilege, from participating in which many, though not all, of the unworthy, are excluded. A privilege which ought to be entrusted to those only who are profoundly sensible of its importance; and of the responsibility which the possession of it imposes upon them.

We have often been told how far we are behind our sister states in our conceptions of free government; and have been called upon to follow their example, and act upon their enlightened views of the universal right of suffrage. It would be wise for us to profit by the wisdom of others; but not wise to surrender our own judgements to theirs without conviction. Let us, then, take such a view of those provisions in other constitutions, which relate to this subject, as will enable us to form a just estimate of the improvements they are supposed to contain.

Of the twenty-four States already embraced in the Union, *Virginia* and *Rhode-Island* require a freehold qualification for voters. *Connecticut* requires a freehold of seven pounds yearly value, or the payment of taxes, or one years service in the Militia, (unless excused,) and that the voters shall have gained a settlement in the state: and turning to the laws of that state to ascertain what the applicant has to do to gain a settlement, we find that if he comes from a sister state he must reside, at least, one year in the town in Connecticut where he is to gain his settlement, and must be possessed, in his own right, in fee, of real estate in that state of the value of three hundred and thirty-four dollars, free of incumbrance, the deed of which shall have been one year on record: and without such substantial recommendation, he gains no settlement, unless especially favoured by the authority of the



town. *Maryland* requires a freehold of fifty acres, or property to the amount of thirty pounds. *North-Carolina* requires a freehold of fifty acres to vote for Senators; the payment of taxes to vote for county members; and a freehold to vote for town representatives. *South-Carolina*, a freehold of fifty acres, or payment of taxes. *Tennessee*, a freehold in the county where the vote is given, unless the voter is resident there. *New-Jersey* requires fifty pounds *proclamation* money, clear estate. *New-York* requires that the voter shall pay taxes, (unless exempted,) or serve in the Militia, (unless excused,) or be assessed to labour on the highway; in which case he must be three years an inhabitant of the state, and one year of the town or county where he votes. *Mississippi* requires payment of taxes or enrolment in the Militia. Seven other States, viz. *New-Hampshire, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Ohio, Georgia, and Louisiana*, require only the payment of taxes as evidence of property. The remaining seven, viz. *Maine, Vermont, Kentucky, Illinois, Alabama, Indiana and Missouri*, require no property qualification, nor any equivalent or substitute. The Constitutions of all the States, except three, *expressly* exclude females. In two of those three, they are excluded by *construction*; and in the other (*New-Jersey*) where females formerly voted, in high party times, they are now excluded by *act of the legislature, amending the Constitution*. Thirteen of the States expressly exclude all people of colour. The other eleven, viz. *Maine, New-Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, North-Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee*, admit, or do not expressly exclude them. But one of these (*New-York*) makes a marked distinction between her white and her coloured voters:—requiring of the latter freehold estates for which they pay taxes of two hundred and fifty pounds value, and three years instead of one years residence. One State excludes paupers; another, paupers and persons under guardianship; a third adds Indians not taxed, to these exclusions. Connecticut requires the qualification of a good moral character; and Vermont requires peaceable and quiet behaviour and an oath. Pennsylvania and Delaware allow the sons of voters to vote for one year after coming of age. Every State requires a residence of a shorter or longer time, from three months up to three years. Every State excludes all under twenty-one years of age. Five of them only require citizenship of the United States.

Such are the various modes in which the elective franchise is disposed of by the constitutions of different states. And who can fail to perceive in them those incongruities which always show themselves when impracticable theories are attempted to be strained into practice. While reading some of them, we could not have been greatly surprised to have found it solemnly ordained, that *no qualifications of any kind are necessary or ought to be required, to entitle men freely to exercise the elective franchise at all times, and in all places, wherever they may happen to sojourn*. And yet, after all the sacrifices made of practical utility and public safety to theoretical right, the same instruments, in every instance, contain other features wholly irreconcilable with that predominant doctrine. By what right is it that the whole of one of the sexes are uncerimoniously excluded? They are as intelligent, discreet



and industrious; are more highly cultivated, and more correct in habits, manners and morals; and what is of great importance, they are generally more permanent residents in their native states; more identified with, and more strongly attached to them than our own sex. Their claims therefore, are quite as strong as those of the sex by whom they are excluded. And why then are they excluded? Those who are influenced only by considerations of public utility, are at no loss for an answer. The exercise of the elective franchise, as it is every where exercised at the polls, would be inconsistent with those peculiar virtues and characteristics of the sex; and would impair those social ties and relations which ought to be held sacred. It is *expediency* therefore, and that only, which justifies the exclusion. The abstract principle of right, upon which the constitutions we speak of are professedly based, forbids such exclusions. How then can those, who profess to act upon that principle, justify a flagrant violation of it, upon the plea of *expediency*, which in most other instances they sacrifice to it. If practical public utility is to be consulted at all, it ought to be consulted throughout, as the only sound principle of action; and it is an abuse of that principle and of the very name of *public good*, to resort to it only when we have no other means of escaping the too glaring absurdities which our favorite systems and theories would run us into. Where then is the consistency of those constitutions, which, professing the principle of a universal right of suffrage, exclude at a sweep, the most meritorious half of society on the score of sex; and one half of the remainder on the score of age; and then proceed to admit indians, negroes and others called people of color; all persons, in short, of every description; not excepting paupers, persons under guardianship, foreigners, strangers, servants, dependants, or convicts even, and without the least regard to qualifications of any kind.—As if all living things in the human shape; (except females, and those who lack a single day or more of the precise age of twenty-one years,) are worthy agents to exercise the power of appointing those who are to rule over the people and to hold in their hands, the lives, liberties, rights and property of the whole community.

It would seem, that men, fond of theories, are ever most attached to those which are most visionary and baseless. Nothing short of such a propensity could, we think, have blinded any rational man to the impolicy of admitting people of colour, upon any terms, in this country, to the exercise of the right of suffrage. Without insisting that the African race labour under any peculiar mental or physical disabilities, it is enough to remark, that different races (if we may not say, different species,) of men, can never be so far assimilated as to embrace the same views of the common good; or to unite in pursuing the same common objects and interests. What then must be the consequences, when a distinct race of men—whom nature herself has distinguished by indelible marks; and whom the most zealous asserters of their equality, admit to be, if not a distinct species, at least a variety of the human species: are invested with the right of suffrage; and brought up to the polls to act a part in the political contests with which the country is continually agitated? Whether justly, or not, they will always continue to be looked upon and treated as an inferior order of



beings. And they, on their part, will never cease to remember, with feelings of bitterness and hatred, the long abject condition of their species. No degraded race of men was ever yet satisfied with being raised to a footing of equality. They never feel that equality, nor believe it to be acknowledged by others. They remain unsatisfied until they have gained an undisputed ascendancy. It is not in nature for them to feel grateful for the grant of privileges which they consider as their own by right; and as having been tyrannically withheld from them. On the contrary; every step they are advanced does but strengthen the hostility of their spirit, by giving them a nearer prospect of triumph and revenge. There are few, we believe, so infatuated as to think that this race of people can ever be so incorporated into the mass of society as to form one identical people, freed from all traces of former distinction. Nothing indeed but the most depraved taste, feelings and principles can bring any man to wish for such a condition of things. The laws of our nature will not be suspended, or changed, to realize the speculations of dreaming theorists. But until this shall come to pass; this peculiar race must remain by themselves, and act by themselves; not in harmony and as equals; but in subserviency or hostility; or both, by turns. If in New-England these evils are less perceptible, it is only because the source of them is more confined. Yet even here, in some of the large cities, where the people of colour chiefly resort, much trouble and inconvenience have frequently been occasioned by them. But in those States where slaves are held, and must of necessity continue to be held, however reluctantly on the part of holders, the most serious evils must result from the admission of a mixed multitude of freed blacks and people of colour, to form an intermediate class between the slaves and the proprietors. An ill-boding connexion and intercourse will be kept up between the free people of colour and the slaves, tending to render the latter discontented and unruly, and leading to continual plottings and mischiefs. We are far from being advocates for slavery; but we are convinced, that great as the error of introducing slaves into this country may have been; it would be a far greater error and evil even to resort to the experiment of converting them into freemen in the same country in which they are held as slaves. Such an experiment would only end in the final extermination of those people themselves as well as in the destruction of great portions of those by whom they are held.

But, the feature in the constitutions we have been speaking of, least in harmony with the doctrine of universal right of suffrage (which in other respects, is carried to such extremes in those instruments;) is the striking difference they make in the qualifications of the electors, and of those whom they are allowed to elect. In none of those States, (except Connecticut,) can a single one of the electors; who is barely qualified to act as such; be himself elected a representative, much less a senator. In most of those States, a senator or representative, (with some difference as to amount,) must possess a clear freehold estate of very considerable extent:—from one hundred to five hundred acres; and of value, from one hundred pounds to one thousand dollars. In one State, the freehold must be worth five hundred pounds sterling; and in another, a thousand pounds sterling clear of debt. And where



real and personal property together, make the qualification ; the amount required is still much greater. In one State, in addition to a freehold of five hundred acres ; the candidate must *own ten negroes*. The term of residence, also, must be much longer than is required for voters :—viz. from one to seven years : and the candidates must be of more mature age, viz. from twenty-two up to thirty-five years, in different States.

Could the framers of those Constitutions more clearly have manifested their own consciousness of the extreme worthlessness to which they had degraded the elective franchise ; and their apprehensions of the ruinous consequences which must result from that degradation ; than in this attempt to guard against those consequences, by an expedient, so inconsistent with the principle they had acted upon in regulating that franchise ! Considering the claim to be a voter ; and the claim to be voted for, (or not to be excluded from being voted for,) to be of precisely the same character ; and that, if there is any positive right in the one case there is the same right in the other ; we cannot perceive the consistency of prohibiting those who have the right to vote, from voting for one another ; or for any other persons, except those pointed out to them.

Upon this view of the constitutions of other States, we beg leave to inquire, wherein the freedom of the people, as regards the elective franchise, is better consulted and secured by any one of those constitutions than it is by our own institutions.

Your committee are too deeply impressed with the importance of the subject referred to their consideration, to close this report without presenting at least a partial view (since they can do no more,) of the dangers by which a free people are encompassed, without hope of escape, when the elective franchise is suffered to fall into the hands of those who are at all times the fit and ready instruments of ambitious individuals. Power over the people and their rights, in a free state, can only be obtained, in the first instance, by the aid of voters. That a great portion of the community make it the study and business of their lives to possess themselves of as much of this power as possible ; and by means of it, to support themselves at the public expense ; we know full well. But how it is that this distinct class of people succeed, and invest themselves with offices and honors ; with fees, salaries and emoluments : when, if compared with the rest of the people, in point of worth and merit, they would be found to be below an average :—How it is, in short, that the people themselves are used by the politician as the implements of his trade : this mystery we can only comprehend by considering the mixed materials ; the various classes and descriptions of people of which society, every where is composed.

That inequality in the condition of men, of which nature herself is the primary cause—bestowing as she does, her gifts of intellectual and physical powers and faculties, profusely upon some ; upon others and others ; through every gradation, less and less liberally ; and finally, upon very many affording nothing better than mere negative qualities—feebleness of capacity and tameness of spirit, which leaves them without the power, and even the inclination ever to enter into competition with those more bountifully endowed—the inequality thus originating ; and increased without limits by artificial and acquired advantages and in-



fluences; this it is by which every community is divided into distinct classes, which, in the progress of society, become more and more strongly marked.

But the character thus stamped upon the frame of society would, of itself, be of less importance were it not for the advantages taken of it, by the strong over the weak, the ambitious over the dependant. In a Commonwealth, like that of the United States, the thousands and tens of thousands of offices, dignities and honors, supported and aggrandized by millions and tens of millions of revenues, regularly collected, without failure, from the people, for that service:—these mighty temptations, generate and bring forth a countless host of aspirants of every grade and character, who devote their time and faculties to the study and practice of politics as a trade, upon their success in which, all the best prospects in life depend. These form a distinct class or profession, having separate interests and being clearly marked and distinguished from the rest of the community; by the peculiar character of their occupations; the instruments with which they work, and the value and description of the products of their skill and labour. And of these there is always a double set—those who are in possession of the posts of office, with their connexions and adherents; expecting offices and favours; and those who are unceasingly struggling to dispossess them. This class has never existed in any country, without there being found, in the opposite extreme, a numerous class of dependant instruments. And between these two, and subjected to the encroachments of both, are the industrious classes of the people by whom the others are sustained and supported.

We may shrink from the idea of an aristocracy. But the best historians inform us that there was never yet a Commonwealth without even its order of hereditary nobility. The Federal Constitution has guarded against the introduction of titles of nobility. So did the celebrated Tuscan cities, and yet they had them. And that there is in this country, as well as in every other, however free, an aristocracy of office; naturally and unavoidably produced by the power, patronage and influence inseparable from the possession of all the great and minor offices of government, we must be dull indeed not to know. And although we have no title of nobility, yet, as the Republic of Holland had its "*High Mightinesses*," so have we our *Excellencies*, *Honourables* and *Worshipfuls*:—titles with which, those who are exalted to them, are as proud (or vain) of them as the Dukes and Earls of other countries of their titles. They all feel the same love of power, and distinction, and emoluments, by whatever titles they are called.

It will not be supposed, we trust, that our remarks are intended to apply to any particular administration, past or present; or to any particular party or individuals. Different parties may and will advocate and pursue different political schemes in which they may all of them be more or less right or wrong. We have no idea that in point of political virtue and patriotism, one political party can claim any preference over another. We speak solely of the natural tendency of all republican governments, and of the natural propensities and influences which will inevitably govern all men (with few exceptions) who are in possession of power or are in pursuit of it.



It is true that the people ought to put the most liberal construction upon the conduct of their rulers: to make every reasonable allowance for the errors they may commit; and firmly and effectually to aid and support them in the performance of their official duties. But all this they may do without forgetting that it is the disposition and tendency of all governments to strengthen their own hands and increase their own powers by encroaching upon those of the people. And that, in short, the best that can be said of them is, that they are a necessary evil. It is not true that men in power feel none but a common interest with the body of the people. They do, and will ever feel a far stronger, personal, individual interest in perpetuating and increasing their own power; and will, most of them, in furtherance of these private purposes, employ the additional influence derived from their offices, to increase the number of their adherents and instruments.

We apprehend that the people generally are little aware of the number and strength of this powerful body, or of their almost resistless influence and controul over the suffrages and elections. The number of men dependant upon the Post-Office establishment alone, including post-masters, deputies, clerks, contractors, agents, carriers and others, amounts to more than thirty thousand. The numbers employed under the other departments, especially that of the Treasury, are also immense: and considering, on the one hand, the willingness of Government to enlarge the sphere of their Patronage; and on the other, the greediness of individuals to obtain offices, even the most insignificant, it may reasonably be supposed that offices have been, from time to time, and will continue to be, unreasonably multiplied. Should the project, which has been partially adopted, of applying the surplus revenues to the purposes of internal improvements, be carried to the extent which it may be, there will no longer be any bounds to the patronage of Government. We have nothing to say here upon the subject of the constitutionality of that project. We speak only of its effects in connexion with the subject before us. If the surplus revenue can be so disposed of, there can be no bar to the exaction of additional revenue to any amount, by direct taxation or otherwise, to be applied to the same purposes. And who can calculate the power of a political engine by which entire States may be moved with ease—at least so long as they enjoy the exclusive benefit of the revenues drawn from other States!

The numbers of those interested in State offices are, of course, much greater. And, however we may regret it, we must be aware that state and national politics, parties and influences, have got to be but too closely connected. The immense patronage possessed by the general government has been found, in every State, greatly to influence, and in most of them, finally to control the state elections and politics.

Thus is created and organized an army of civil officers, an hundred times more numerous, and a thousand times more efficient and formidable than any military army that could be embodied in this country, with views hostile to its freedom. And the discipline of the military is not more strictly enforced than is that of the civil host. Whoever steps out of the ranks of the latter immediately is deprived of his office. Their whole efforts are concentrated and directed to the same point and object—the furtherance of their own, exclusive po-



litical interests. The course laid down for them may be right or may be wrong: but they have no power of choosing for themselves. If, in the opinions of any of them, that course be ever so wrong, or ever so injurious to the public welfare, still they are compelled to preserve it: For they will not sacrifice their own, immediate, individual interests to any considerations of the public good. Nor is the public service the primary object in the selections of these hosts of officers. On the contrary, one half, or nearly one half of the people are excluded by party; and upon the same principle of action, the selections from the other half are made with a view to the strength of the party. And thus we find that the men who obtain offices are generally those busy, forward, intriguing politicians whose claims, boldly asserted, cannot be safely overlooked; however unqualified they may be to perform the duties of the offices they demand: While better men, in all respects better qualified for the public service are passed by without notice.

And this powerful political body is not more strong in its numbers and discipline than it is in its means of sustaining itself. All its members, in addition to their personal exertions and influence, will very readily contribute a portion of their pay to secure to themselves the continued enjoyment of the residue. Or, should any of them be backward in doing so, their compeers will be sure to coerce them to pay their quotas. The political uses to which the thousands of postoffices, with which the whole United States are thickly studded over, may be put, should that immense establishment ever be prostituted to such uses; as it certainly may be; must be apparent to every man. And should the numberless local paper money banks be gained: and we know that great party uses are already made of them, and may be certain that there will be a great struggle of parties to obtain the control of such an engine: And should the equally numberless political printing presses, all of which are in the service and many of them in the pay of one party or another, and too many of which are employed in misinforming and misleading the public mind—should these also be brought into combination and co-operation with the postoffice establishment—then will the free people of this country become sensible of a pressure, under which it will be happy, shall they be able to bear up.

The maxims of policy which the leading political men of all parties have openly adopted and practised upon, are in direct hostility to the interests of the people, and tend inevitably to the subversion of their rights. Some of those maxims are—that every man who claims to act according to his own convictions of right and wrong; and will not agree to go thoroughly with a party, ought to be discountenanced by all parties: That every man is bound to support the measures of his party and approve of their nominations to office, however fully convinced he may be that those measures are unwise and injurious to the public interest; or that the men proposed for offices are wholly unfit to be trusted with them: That, in politics, the end justifies the means; or, in other words, that in politics, honesty is *not* the best policy. It is an alarming fact that such pernicious doctrines as these are openly avowed and justified by men who, in their private concerns hold a high standing in the community. Doctrines which approach very near to the noted maxim of Machiavel, that "*men ought never to commit crimes by the halves.*"

These truths are obvious and we see them exemplified in the progress of all parties. Can we then be blind to the consequent, self-evi-



dent truths—that an aristocracy of office and power ; such as exists in this, and must necessarily exist in every Republic ; attaches itself to the democracy of the country mainly, if not solely, for the purpose of self-aggrandizement :—That it will continue to court and flatter that democracy so long as it needs its support and fears its strength : and that while most profuse in its professions of devotedness to the will and service of the people ; it is incessantly laboring to strengthen its own hands by increasing the number of its dependants and multiplying the instruments of its power.

If these things are plain to our view, can we not also see that if the great right of suffrage, upon which the welfare and existence of the commonwealth, as a republic depends—the only power which the sound part of the community possess of protecting themselves from the encroachments of ambition : if this power is put into the hands of that class of people which, though it contains some wholesome citizens, embraces at the same time all the loose and floating ; all the dependant and mercenary population—all those who having little or nothing at stake themselves ; care little or nothing for the rights of others—people, who in voting exercise no judgment of their own nor have any wish to form any ; taking their impulses and directions from their leaders, and ready to fight their battles, not merely by voting, but by every species and excess of brawling and violence to which those leaders may instigate them. Can we not see that to put power into such hands, instead of adding to the number of real freemen, would be to multiply the instruments whereby ambition may enable itself to set those freemen at defiance. Some idea of the character of the new made voters may be formed from the fact, that the whole increase of population in this State, probably amounting to ten or twelve thousand, during the last ten or twelve years ; this whole increase has been in the manufacturing districts, including the town of Providence as their centre : What a spectacle would our freemen's meetings exhibit should they ever be filled by hosts of mercenary voters ! Even now, we know that angry feelings, looks and language, and sharp disputes are but too much indulged in. And in many places where free suffrage prevails we constantly hear of affrays, violence and even bloodshed. Each party spiriting on its reckless retainers to get possession of the polls and to intimidate its opponents. And the consequence is that great numbers of sober minded, peaceable freemen are disgusted with such scenes and keep away from the polls where they know they will be abused and insulted for exercising the rights of freemen.

We ought to recollect that all the evils which may result from the extension of suffrage will be evils beyond our reach. We shall entail them upon our latest posterity without remedy. Open this door and the whole frame and character of our institutions are changed forever.

It is not safe for any nation to flatter itself that it will always be wiser and better than all others have been. The Athenian and Roman Republics, great, renowned, and proud of their liberties as they were, were subverted, one after the other, and enslaved, by the instrumentality of this same engine of universal suffrage. The moment that was introduced, the brokers of offices and sellers of their country publicly spread their tables upon which they counted out their bribes to the voters.

*For the Committee—*

B. HAZARD.

*House of Representatives, }  
June Session, A. D. 1829. }*