

ON THE AMERICAN GENIUS.

There is not a country on the face of the globe, to which nature has been more bountiful than to the United States. The felicity of our situation, and the diversified blessings we enjoy, have been the theme of panegyric, until it is no longer possible to advance a new idea, or to modify an old one, so as to give it an appearance of novelty. Without entering on a minute repetition of those advantages of soil, climate, productions, and remoteness from the eastern continent, which seem to promise us an eternity of happiness; I shall confine my present remarks to those moral causes which are intimately connected with the character of a nation.

Europeans have sometimes accused America of a poverty of genius and weakness of intellect, which place her much behind the ancient world; and even the enlightened Buffon has adopted the idea that nature is more feeble in her efforts in the western than in the eastern hemisphere. The charge itself is a proof that European sagacity is still far from having attained its perfection. It could only have been dictated by an illiberal preference of the soil on which we have been accidentally cast, and a contempt for all other nations whose habits, manners and improvements, are not similar to those of our own country. A philanthropist will pause before he consents to obliterate the fairest portion of our planet—and a philosopher will forget that he has any other country than the globe itself, while he pierces with ardent gaze the mysteries of nature. If we cast our eyes over the map of America, we shall perceive that nature has not merely consulted its convenience or happiness in the distribution of her favors; she has done more; she has put forth all her strength, and erected monuments to her own glory. She has worked on a scale of grandeur and magnificence, before which the boasted prodigies of Europe hide their diminished heads. Where will Europe shew her Andes which have their snow-capped summits above the clouds? Where are her Amazon and La Plata which would be regarded as fabulous, did not authentic history attest them? Where will she exhibit lakes of Canada, which connected with each other and with the ocean bind all the northern part of this great continent in one indissoluble commercial chain? The most enthusiastic admirers of European excellence must shrink from this comparison; and so far must acknowledge, that nature is here at least as bold in her sketches and as vigorous in her productions as on the eastern continent.

When these truths present themselves to our minds with irresistible force—we are we conclude that the hand which has lavished such unequalled favors, has generously withheld the more estimable endowments of the mind and the heart? Has a paradise been given to degenerate souls, who are insensible to its charms? Is not the mind of the American sufficiently expanded to take in these vast objects in all their magnitude and sublimity? I will not insult my countrymen by addressing the question to them. I perceive a glow of indignation on every cheek, and while I write, I feel it difficult to suppress my own. But it will be a more instructive task to examine the basis of these exalted pretensions—to say the just tribute of deference and homage to European superiority, if it should be established by investigation; or to refer to the insulated American the honors which nature has conferred upon him, but which human ignorance has vainly endeavored to obscure.

It has been a question of endless speculation among the curious, at what time America was peopled, and whether her inhabitants are her own offspring, or emigrants from the old continent. If we are to suppose America coeval with the world, and that she became peopled as soon as the other parts of the earth, we may be asked with triumph, upon what principle we are to account for her vast inferiority in intellectual improvement? Why did the adventurous bands of enlightened Europe, who first explored our shores, find the native American ignorant and ferocious? Upon the supposition of equal talents and equal advantages of soil and climate, we may be asked what right we have to expect an equal progression in the arts and sciences in any given time? The same causes must always produce the same effects. If the American genius has been equal to the European, I thought in the same lapse of years to have explored as many sciences, invented as many arts, and humanized and polished manners in an equal degree.

This reasoning it is at first sight specious and imposing; but cannot withstand the least of rigid enquiry. I shall assume the hypothesis most disadvantageous to my position;—that America is as old and has been as long peopled as Europe, Asia, or Africa. I shall also make the comparison, with the most enlightened part of the old world. When I select Europe for this purpose, it ought not however to be forgotten, that the arts and sciences have not originated with her, but have sprung up in Asia; from thence have been transplanted to the southern parts of Europe, and by very slow degrees have spread themselves into more northern climates. It is also worthy of remark, that those countries into which the sciences were first received, where they were most patronized, and flourished with richest luxuriance, are now the gloomy residence of want, ignorance and despotism. Whoever has observed the progress of the human mind, must have perceived that its first struggles with ignorance are always more painful and difficult, than its subsequent efforts. The steps by which we ascend from discovery to discovery, from science to science, are short, gradual, natural, and easy. But to leap at once from absolute ignorance even to the humblest rudiment of knowledge, is indeed an Herculean task, and more frequently results from lucky accident, than any effort of the mind. This remark, which is here applied to the general progress of mankind in the career of improvement, is exemplified and fully established by their advances in every particular science. Until the beginning of the eighteenth century, the world had adopted the ideas of Aristotle on all metaphysical subjects, & it would have been blasphemy to have doubted their orthodoxy. Locke explored the inlets of the understanding, and explained some of its processes; and what has been the consequence? Within the course of one century a galaxy of illustrious philosophers have arisen, who seem to have left scarcely any thing to be discovered hereafter. For many ages astronomers had vibrated from one absurdity to another, which were all at length swallowed up in the vortex of Descartes; a greater absurdity than all the rest. Newton appeared; recalled the mind from its devious eccentric track; gave it a projectile impulse and taught it to move in the orbit of truth. The World has not since produced a Newton; but a thousand humble followers have arisen, who have carried the science of Astronomy beyond the utmost limits, which even his ethereal genius could reach. These examples are sufficient to establish the position, that the first step in the progress of the human mind is the most difficult, and that when this is attained, all the rest will naturally follow.

If these propositions are correct, it will follow that when we compare two nations with each other, we should first enquire whether their situations have been equally auspicious to their gaining this first step, and whether no untoward circumstances have occurred to retard their progress afterwards. I shall endeavour to shew, that the superiority which Europe has enjoyed over savage America, results in fact, from the fortuitous circumstances which attended her first settlement, by which she was enabled both to make an earlier advance in science and to pursue her discoveries to a greater extent.

Greece was inhabited by savage and barbarous tribes, when the Phœnicians, a people of Asia, sent forth colonies who took up their abode within her bosom. These colonies carried with them the arts of the mother country, which were indeed very inconsiderable in themselves, but highly important as I have already shewn, as they related to the future progress of their possessors. We know but little of Phœnicia, or whether she derived her knowledge from others or gave birth to it herself. But whatever was the mode by which she acquired it, we may presume that it resulted from nearly the same causes which conspired to preserve, enlarge and ripen it, after it was transferred to the Greeks. As this period is more within the compass of history, our conclusions from it will be more just and accurate, than from any prior *E. a.*

These colonists, small in number, surrounded by numerous bands of hostile barbarians; and unable to occupy an extensive territory, contracted themselves within the walls of cities, together with a small margin of land around them. As population increased, this land became insufficient for their support, and hence they resorted to commerce as a mode of procuring subsistence; hence many turned their enquiries into the walks of literature, and gave to Greece her splendid pre-eminence over the nations of antiquity. Greece lost her liberties, but retained her science. The barbarians who came to despoil her of her wealth, carried off also a more precious treasure, of whose value they were unconscious, the seeds of learning and the sublime speculation of ethics, which required only time to germinate and mature. The ruffled flower faded and expired; but its sweets were boarded up by the industrious plunderers, to become the sources of a more permanent delight. The human mind, which had flowed like a majestic river through the favoured soil of Greece, & dispensed its blessings around, now changed its channel, and by this melancholy allusion, left its ancient bed a naked, dreary, and sterile desert. It happened, fortunately for Europe, that all the countries into which literature was introduced after the ruin and subjugation of the Grecian states, were limited like them in extent of territory, abounding in inhabitants, and condensed within the

dimensions of a single city. The necessary consequence of populous communities, is that a division of labour should take place, which infallibly leads to excellence in all the arts which embellish life, as well as in those which minister to the wants of man. The Arcadian scenes of rural life may be the residence of peace, simplicity, innocence and happiness; but it is in the collision of towns, that the human energies are called forth, and the human mind swells into gigantic stature. It is in towns that the arts and sciences receive their birth; and there also they are carried to perfection. Rome assumed the wreath of the muses which had been plucked from the brow of Greece; and she in her turn resigned it to the Northern barbarians who have founded the present political societies of Europe. From this rapid review of the progress of learning, it appears, that Europe was peculiarly happy, first, in having received the germs of literature from another country; and secondly, in having them deposited in cities, which like hot beds quickened their growth.

The situation of America was the reverse of all this. A country of unbounded extent; possessing spontaneously every species of wholesome aliment; its forests filled with those animals which invite man to the chase; these apparent advantages of nature are the real causes of the retardation of the human intellect in America. None of those causes existed which could compel the American to take the first steps towards improvement; and men are only to be driven from ignorance by the strong arm of necessity.

America, it is true, was occupied, like ancient Greece, by inhospitable and ferocious tribes. But this circumstance could only induce them to remove farther from each other, which an unbounded continent enabled them to perform, without limitation. Nor should it be forgotten, that uniform experience tells us, that there is a certain fascination in the wild and unrestrained state of nature, which would forever deter men from the yoke of civilization, did not necessity entame them.

RUSSIA AND FRANCE.

[From a late London paper.]

The paper of which the following is a translation has been universally circulated throughout all those parts of Germany which have not yet fallen under the yoke of France. On the continent it has been considered as a kind of *semi-official* answer to the petulant observations which appeared in the official paper of the French government, under the head of "Constantinople." The reasoning and the important facts which it embraces, have created a very great sensation among the northern powers.

There is no reason why the formation of an army of 5 or 6,000 Russians, in the republic of the Seven Islands, should give rise to much political conjecture. Such a measure is undoubtedly a very inferior part of that general system which Russia thinks it incumbent on her to follow at this moment. The attention of the political world should not be directed to an expedition of 6000 men; it is his whole of the system that we are to look to.

Twelve months are scarcely elapsed, since Alexander the first, ordered that 111,000 men should be raised in the empire; and that levy has been so effectually executed, that they are, at this day, formed into regiments, and perfectly disciplined. This levy has increased the Russian military force to upwards of 400,000 soldiers, and 60,000 seamen. Add to these 50,000 irregular troops, which are already embodied, and 100,000 more, which may be assembled in a short time, consisting of Kalmucks, Bashkiers, and the different hordes of Tartars, every man of whom, upon the promise of being allowed to plunder, would gladly enrol himself; with such a force of its command, can it be asked, if Russia has a right to the character she assumes, in an age when the power of the strongest is the only one that is respected?

It must be acknowledged, morally speaking, that it is to France that Russia is indebted for the brilliant situation which she now occupies, and which cannot be denied to be of the very first order. The period from whence this commanding and prominent position was occupied by Russia, may be dated from the commencement of that system of tyranny and injustice, which France has established; a system of invasion, of rapine, and of oppression, which has been exercised wherever its power could reach; and above all, since it became apparent, that its ambitious views were directed to no less an object than the attainment of universal monarchy. Since that time, Russia has become the shield of the weak, and Alexander seated on his throne, has assumed the character of the protector and arbiter of empires. Can France compel her to lay aside this dignified character? Let her not deceive herself in imagining the can. Russia is not in the situation of an actor, who puts on the purple to play the part of a king; she is not an *upstart*, who appears what she really is not; the attitude of the *lion* befits her, because she possesses both his force and his dignity; she is a colossal power, whose eyes have been unsealed by the faults of others, and viewed, in her true light, a colossus of the most valuable description.

Whether Russia will unite herself to Prussia or to Austria, whether she at-

taches herself to England, or stands alone, the result always be respectable, and among the first order of powers—respectable, as long as she shall follow a system of justice and disinterestedness, and that, confident in her strength, she shall openly resist a plan of universal despotism, and lay open to the world the violation of rights the most sacred; that impious violation, which has been so well defcribed in the strong but temperate note, which was presented at Ratisbon.

Russia, it must be admitted, can never be a considerable gainer by indulging a desire of conquest.—She is extensive enough already; her boundaries are such, that she need not wish for any alteration in them; but they may be a gainer, and so may Europe, by the consequences of any war that the plain dealing and foresight of her sovereign may induce him to declare.

Alexander is naturally of a mild and amiable disposition, but in whatever concerns the principles of justice, he is decided almost to obstinacy; and they know him but little, who imagine that the note to the Diet of Ratisbon, was suggested by Markow, and his adherents, inveterate as their hatred is supposed to be.

What are the great dangers to which a war with France would expose the Russian empire? It does not follow that the Russian army is to march to Paris No, nor can the French reach Petersburg, Moscow, or the Crimea, since they are not able to detach a single ship, the whole of their navy being blockaded and confined to their ports. As to battles and marches, brave as the French are, they are but men like others; they cannot exceed the limits which the laws of nature have placed to human efforts.

Will it be said that the commerce of Russia will be affected by a rupture with France? Certainly not. None directly. What does she import from thence? Articles of luxury, which are prohibited. It is true, she receives wine from France; but with that article she is at present plentifully supplied; and even if she were not, she could do without it, as she did during the former rupture.

Will it be asserted that France could do infinite mischief to Russia, by the troubles that her emissaries could excite in the interior of the country? Of all the errors in political calculation, this would be one of the greatest. The people of Russia are those which approach nearest to a state of nature, except the savages; and they are the only people in the universe who neither know how to read or write, but still they are not barbarians. They know no government but their own, which they fear and respect. They honor their sovereign with the title of a God upon earth. They have no other civilization than the practical one which their sovereigns thought useful and necessary to introduce. Masons, carpenters, joiners, locksmiths, armorers and artificers of all sorts, and all excellent in their kind, are to be found in Russia in abundance, and still they know not how to read or write. The strangers who reside in Russia are regarded by the natives as a parcel of leeches, who absorb their wealth. After this description, let the emissaries and instigators of France attempt to excite division in that country, and they will find that the government, with a single blast, can eradicate them.

It is certainly true that the population of Russia, compared with its extent, is rather small; but this, however, admits of some explanation. In the first place, the population is not equally distributed through the empire; and again, there are parts of Russia which are absolutely uninhabitable. Besides, where is the necessity of augmenting the population of the country? It is the duty of a sovereign to make his people happy, but it is not so clear that it is his duty to increase the number of them. In a moral point of view, war is assuredly a very great calamity; but in a political consideration it is sometimes a necessary evil, and much good results from it.

The Russian force at this moment paid and provided, and actually under arms, is even more than sufficient to encourage their sovereign to declare war.—It is said that the military strength of this country is embattled on the Persian and Tartarian frontiers; quite the contrary. On the whole line between the Caspian and the sea of Ochory, there are only 7 or 8000 men, and there is no necessity for a man more, if we look to the situation of the country, the number of forts, the immense deserts, and the disposition of the contiguous countries. In time of peace between the Caspian and the Black Sea, there may be about 12 or 13,000 men; but at present there are from 20 to 25,000, on account of the peculiar circumstances of the hostility which is carried on in that vicinity.—There are more over 25 or 30,000 troops on the frontiers of Sweden; and notwithstanding all these deductions, there are still 300,000 well disciplined and hardy troops between the Black Sea and the Baltic. One hundred thousand of such gallant and hardy men, if once landed in Italy would not be so easily conquered, as some of the French politicians are pleased to suppose. Let them only bring to their recollection the gallant achievement of a handful of Russians, who in the last war, in one campaign, drove all Italy and Lombardy before them, and they will find that the most renowned French generals were defeated one after another, and that, even at Zurich, Russia gained admiration, not

withstanding the faults of her chiefs, and the backwardness of her arms.

All this serves to prove that a declaration of war, on the part of Russia against France, would be sufficiently formidable to encourage the Germanic empire, now crushed by the latter power, to occupy the troops of France, and by that means to afford an opportunity to Italy, to Switzerland, to Spain, to Portugal, to Holland, and to Hanover, to shake off the gallic yoke. As to the project of invading England, it is an absolute chimera, a castle in the air, which can never be successful; and even were it so, it must prove destructive to the rest of the world. England is at this moment at the highest point of elevation, she can never decline, if she continues where she is, for higher she cannot be. But how can England, who only exists by her industry and her trade, preserve her present situation, unless by upholding the balance of the world? It is then the obvious interest of Russia to assist England, who, by its system, should be friendly to all nations; and to repress France, the selfish principles of whose government are inimical to the greater powers of Europe, and oppressive to the smaller.

PORTSMOUTH N. H. January 15.

On Sabbath morning departed this life, the Honorable WOODBURY LANGDON, Esq. after a tedious illness. The death of this firm advocate for the rights of man will be greatly regretted by his extensive acquaintance throughout the United States, and his friends in the most respectable nations abroad.

BOSTON, January 17.

Spanish War.—WE can state, on the authority of letters from Madrid, as late as November 8th, that the British minister had left the Spanish Court; and that no doubt existed of a war between the two countries.

The Spanish frigate La Vengeance, is arrived at Cadiz, and the frigate L'Anphitrite at Corunna, both from America, with 6,300,000 dollars. Another frigate, La Sabina, with seven millions, was expected.

NEW YORK, January 22.

On Sunday afternoon, a ferry boat coming from Ryers', Staten-Island, loaded with wood, and having several passengers on board, was unfortunately caught in the ice during a calm, and as it feared she has drifted to sea, as she was seen between the narrows and the Hook at dark, still entangled in the ice. There is every reason to believe from the snow storm during the ensuing night, that all on board have perished.

A report is circulated in the eastern papers, stating that the Sampson, from this city for St. Domingo, has foundered at sea, and every soul perished. No authority is given for the report, nor is it credited in this city.

A merchant in this city has received letters from London of the 17th November, by an arrival at New Bedford. They contain no political intelligence, and are silent as to the name of the vessel by which they are forwarded. We shall probably receive, by this day's eastern mail, European advices, which must be late and may be important.

During the whole of yesterday the ice completely blocked up the Narrows from Staten Island to Long Island, and a great part of the Bay to Governor's Island. The east and north rivers were also closed by the ice during most of the day. A frost so extremely intense, and of so long a continuance, has not been experienced here since the year 1780.

ALEXANDRIA, January 23.

At an election held on Monday last, for Directors of the Bank of Alexandria, the following gentlemen were chosen:—

Samuel Craig, John Dunlap, Charles Simons, Richard M. Scott, William Herbert, John Jenney, J. Thompson, John Dundas, Richard Conway.

And at a meeting of the directors, Wm. Herbert was rechosen President, and Geo. Gilpen a director, to fill the vacancy occasioned by the election of Mr. Herbert.

A Saddle Horse,

Wanted to purchase a good Saddle Horse—Apply to the printer. January 25. d5c

Coffee, Molasses, Beef, &c.  
150 bags first quality St. Domingo Coffee,  
45 barrels enjaily to drawback  
6 hds. of coffee  
150 barrels Beef  
50 barrels Apples  
For sale by  
JOSHUA & GEO. WARD,  
101, Bowler's wharf.  
January 25. d5c

Notice

THE Stockholders in the Chesapeake Insurance Company are hereby informed, that an election will be held at their office, 77, Baltimore-street, on Monday, the 4th day of February next, at 10 o'clock, A. M. for thirteen Directors for the ensuing year, agreeably to the act of incorporation.  
January 25. d9c

Notice

ALL persons having claims against the estate of James W. Shivers, late of the city of Baltimore, deceased, will be pleased to bring them in for settlement; and all those indebted to the said estate, will make payment, without delay, to the subscribers, who are legally authorized to receive the same.  
DARROLL & RICAUD,  
Bowler's wharf.  
January 14. d5c