

The clerk of the house of delegates delivers the engrossed bills No. 86, 87 and 88, with the paper bills thereof; which engrossed bills were severally endorsed; "By the house of delegates, December 19, 1800: Read and assented to.

"By order,

W. HARWOOD, clk."

The following message was prepared, read, agreed to, and, with the paper bills No. 86, 87 and 88, sent to the house of delegates by the clerk.

BY THE SENATE, DECEMBER 19, 1800.

GENTLEMEN,

WE decline to recede from the principle of our first amendment to your bill, entitled, An act to alter such parts of the constitution and form of government as relate to voters and the qualification of voters. And we regret that your message of this day is of such a nature as to make it necessary for us to offer any further observations on this occasion. Discussions on subjects of this kind seldom produce conviction in either branch of the legislature. The question, what qualifications ought to entitle a person to suffrage? furnishes scope for the most diffusive and endless dissertation. Such discussions are never desired by us, and are particularly inconvenient at this late period of the session. We consider society to be instituted for the promotion of the general felicity.—And in our community we believe that object will be best promoted by a strict adherence to the principle before quoted by us from the bill of rights, and by making the right of suffrage depend upon the concurrence of the three requisites therein stated, viz. property in, a common interest with, and an attachment to, the community. This we intended, and thought we had effected by our first amendment. Can a person, who has no assessable property whatever, be considered as possessing, within the meaning and spirit of the bill of rights, the two first of those requisites? Or can the mere circumstance of a year's residence in the county, (the qualification proposed by you,) be viewed as any conclusive evidence of the last?

We do not oppose your principle from an apprehension of its producing very extensive and serious evils at the present day, but we extend our views to future times, when an immense increase of population may and will take place in our country, and when a considerable proportion of that population will probably be, as we find it in all other countries, destitute of property, and without sufficient virtue and knowledge to resist the arts, the corruptions and the impositions of ambitious men, desirous of raising themselves to power, even on the ruins of public liberty and happiness. These apprehensions are not visionary. They are founded upon the experience of past ages. That liberty is the common and natural right of all men, no good man will deny. But we do not consider natural liberty, and the right of suffrage, as the same thing. The latter is an adventitious right, derived not from a state of nature, but society. Admitting all men to be equally free by nature, it does not follow, that in all circumstances they should equally participate in the affairs of government. Prudent legislatures will adopt those provisions on that subject which are best calculated to secure the freedom, safety and happiness of society.

How far the constitutional provision, with respect to the right of suffrage, adopted by every state in the union, except one, may merit the name of error, or how far it may be consistent with delicacy for one branch of the legislature in a single state to brand it with that epithet, we submit to your serious reflection. For ourselves we must declare, that had the weight of example been as powerful against our opinions, we should have been much inclined to doubt their correctness.

Permit us to conclude, with correcting a misapprehension you have taken up with respect to a part of our message. We did not say that we meant not to exclude any person now constitutionally entitled to suffrage. Our assertion was, that you had exercised, in the first part of your bill, the power of deprivation to an extent beyond which we did not design to carry it. In this position we conceive ourselves to have been correct, as we are well assured there is not a citizen in the state possessing thirty pounds worth of property, in the meaning of our present constitution, who might not, under the operation of our amendments, be admitted to the right of suffrage.

By order,

W. S. GREEN, clk.

The clerk of the house of delegates delivers a bill, entitled, An act for the payment of the journal of accounts, endorsed; "By the house of delegates, December 19, 1800: Read the first and second time by especial order and will pass.

"By order,

W. HARWOOD, clk."

And the journal of accounts, endorsed; "By the house of delegates, December 19, 1800: Read the first and second time and assented to.

"By order,

W. HARWOOD, clk."

Which were severally read the first time and ordered to lie on the table.

The bill for the payment of the journal of accounts, was read the second time by especial order and will pass.

The journal of accounts was read the second time and assented to.

The following message was prepared, read, agreed to, and, with the bill for the payment of the journal of accounts, sent to the house of delegates by the clerk.