

MARYLAND GAZETTE.

[XVth Year.]

WEDNESDAY, JULY 26, 1809.

[No. 3263.]

Episcellany.

From the Edinburgh Review.

de la Conscription, ou Recueil Chronologique des Lois et des Arrêtes du Gouvernement, des Décrets Impériaux relatifs à la loi des Conscrits, à leur remplacement, à leurs dispenses de service, &c. depuis l'an X. jusques et compris l'an XIV. Avec des Tableaux, &c. 8vo. pp. 270. Paris, 1806.

(Continued from our last.)

THE grand characteristic of the present administration of France, is relentless severity. A host of informers secures fidelity of the executive officers. Cases of most signal and barbarous rigour, of which we have already given a few examples, crowd the daily gazettes of the empire, and even the journals of Paris, into which they are ravenously and awkwardly thrust, in order to quicken the impulse of fear. The columns now before us might warrant the inference, that those trials which the weakness and depravity of nature have rendered indispensable to all civilized communities, are, in France, exclusively occupied with one species of delinquency, hitherto unknown to the rest of the world. The *Escroquerie en matière de conscription*, or the extortion of money from those liable to service, under fraudulent promises of procuring them an exemption. Ager in this "great nation" is haunted by the spectre of the police; but the native is seduced, by another "foul fiend," still more insidious, and threatening him with more degrading visitations. We have it from good authority, that a traveller frequently meets, on the high roads, and particularly in the vicinity of the great cities, 20 or 30 of those wretched beings, denominated refractory conscripts, guarded by a body of gendarmerie, coupled together with a rope attached to the leader's tail, as a badge of disgrace!

And to persons of this description, who hate and despise their government—to the great body of professional men, and of drooping merchants and manufacturers, who educate their children with care and tenderness, and who find no compensation in the splendour of the imperial diadem, for the degradation of their own order, and the loss of domestic comfort, the conscription appears the maximum of human suffering, the most odious of all wrongs, and the most vexatious of all injustices. The Lycees, or public schools, the seminaries of ecclesiastical noviciate, the universities of law and physic, are all subject to the visits of the recruiting officer, and forced to surrender up their pupils, without exception of genius or taste, at a period of life when the morals are in a state of oscillation—when the character of the frame itself is scarcely determined, and the understanding but in the first stages of development. Parents are not only made to suffer the pains of a separation under such circumstances, but are condemned to the inexpressible grief of seeing the principles and manners of their children exposed to total wreck, in the infectious communion of the common soldiery—the meanest and most profligate of mankind. The impression of a British seaman is doubtless a revolting spectacle; but falls far short of the scene of real distress, exhibited at the balloting of a conscription, when the parents or friends of the conscript are indulged, as is often the case, in drawing his ticket from the fatal urn. The piercing shrieks and tumultuous acclamations alternately uttered on these occasions, by a people to whom nature has allotted such vivacity of character, wholly overpower the feelings of a spectator, and conduct him, irresistibly, to the conclusions we have adopted, concerning the spirit with which the imperial dispensations are obeyed.

We by no means condemn, but indeed cordially approve, a scheme of levies which would summon, inexorably, all ranks to the defence of the state, and compel the opulent to make ample pecuniary retribution for the loss of their personal service in foreign operations.

But the French conscription, as must be already apparent, rests upon quite another basis; and, under the garb of equality, acts with a most partial and vexatious pressure. Men of large fortune, the least respectable of the community of France at this moment, either monopolize the substitutes, or corrupt the inspecting officers, and thus disentangle themselves from the trammels of the law. The parasites of the court, by intrigue and favour, secure the same immunity to themselves and their friends. The great military and civil dignitaries of the empire are privileged *ex officio*; and this exemption will be gradually extended to all whose zeal is useful to prop the greatness of the ruling power. The burden, then, falls with accumulated weight upon the class of persons whom we have mentioned in a former page; and a still greater evil is inflicted, by thus confounding them with the dregs and lees of the community. Feelings and habitudes should be consulted in every general act of legislation; and in this instance, the distress and inconvenience occasioned to the lower orders, bear no proportion to the misery inflicted on the higher and middling ranks of the people. It is unnecessary, too, to have recourse to so comprehensive a plan of compulsion, for the creation of a force adequate to all the purposes of ordinary warfare. Louis XIV, when at war with the whole of the north of Europe, maintained an army of 300,000 men, principally made up by voluntary levies; and under the last unfortunate monarch of that name, the forces of the kingdom, recruited in the same manner, amounted to 200,000; of which Paris alone furnished annually 6000, although it now yields but 1400 for the conscription.

objects both of pity and amazement. "Un des spectacles les plus extraordinaires de Paris," said a distinguished personage of that capital to a stranger, "c'est celui des jeunes conscrits, qui font leurs exercices dans les Champs Elysées. Les vainqueurs du monde ne sont que des enfans."

For the great majority, even of the better classes of conscripts, it is almost impossible to obtain proxies. When the physical requisites are not wanting in the principal, the government, indeed, studiously discourages substitution. The acknowledged hardships, and indeterminate duration of the military service, tend, moreover, to enhance so enormously the price of the few who are found to possess all the requisite qualifications, that they fall exclusively to the share of the rich. More than 200*l.* is frequently given for a substitute, a sum which, according to the rates of living in France, is much more considerable than with us; and far beyond the means of multitudes, who, in that country, with the habits of refined society, maintain an exterior of tolerable ease. Of this class are the *amnestied* emigrants and old proprietaries, who enjoy, under the new dynasty, something of the abstract right, and but little of the benefits of *postliminium*; and who, in the bitterness of mortified pride, and the sadness of pining recollection, struggle to uphold a decent establishment with small fragments of their former estates. The revolution has, on the whole, had the effect of an Agrarian law. And the equalization of fortunes is, at this moment, among the most prominent vestiges which the tempest has left behind, for the instruction of the world; a consequence over which, in obedience to the dictates of reason, we should perhaps exult. But it is not easy to contemplate, without feelings of strong sympathy, the numbers of impoverished families and decayed gentlemen, who, wrestling with memory and destiny, under a perpetual recurrence of painful comparisons and hopeless wishes, exhibit, throughout France, striking monuments of the instability of human affairs, and salutary examples to the privileged orders and corrupt governments of other countries.

To persons of this description, who hate and despise their government—to the great body of professional men, and of drooping merchants and manufacturers, who educate their children with care and tenderness, and who find no compensation in the splendour of the imperial diadem, for the degradation of their own order, and the loss of domestic comfort, the conscription appears the maximum of human suffering, the most odious of all wrongs, and the most vexatious of all injustices. The Lycees, or public schools, the seminaries of ecclesiastical noviciate, the universities of law and physic, are all subject to the visits of the recruiting officer, and forced to surrender up their pupils, without exception of genius or taste, at a period of life when the morals are in a state of oscillation—when the character of the frame itself is scarcely determined, and the understanding but in the first stages of development. Parents are not only made to suffer the pains of a separation under such circumstances, but are condemned to the inexpressible grief of seeing the principles and manners of their children exposed to total wreck, in the infectious communion of the common soldiery—the meanest and most profligate of mankind. The impression of a British seaman is doubtless a revolting spectacle; but falls far short of the scene of real distress, exhibited at the balloting of a conscription, when the parents or friends of the conscript are indulged, as is often the case, in drawing his ticket from the fatal urn. The piercing shrieks and tumultuous acclamations alternately uttered on these occasions, by a people to whom nature has allotted such vivacity of character, wholly overpower the feelings of a spectator, and conduct him, irresistibly, to the conclusions we have adopted, concerning the spirit with which the imperial dispensations are obeyed.

We by no means condemn, but indeed cordially approve, a scheme of levies which would summon, inexorably, all ranks to the defence of the state, and compel the opulent to make ample pecuniary retribution for the loss of their personal service in foreign operations.

But the French conscription, as must be already apparent, rests upon quite another ba-

One of the most extraordinary spectacles of Paris is that of the young conscripts who perform their exercises in the *Champs Elysées*. The conquerors of the world are nothing but children!

From the period of the emission of assignats, in the year 1790, until 1801, the sale of national domains in France produced upwards of 100 millions sterling. These domains were principally made up of the confiscated property of emigrants, and served to defray the public expenses in the first years of the revolution. [*Ramel, Histoire des Finances de la République.*] Even in 1803, this sale continued, and produced about eighteen millions of francs. [*Comptes Generaux du tresor public.*]

And to persons of this description, who hate and despise their government—to the great body of professional men, and of drooping merchants and manufacturers, who educate their children with care and tenderness, and who find no compensation in the splendour of the imperial diadem, for the degradation of their own order, and the loss of domestic comfort, the conscription appears the maximum of human suffering, the most odious of all wrongs, and the most vexatious of all injustices. The Lycees, or public schools, the seminaries of ecclesiastical noviciate, the universities of law and physic, are all subject to the visits of the recruiting officer, and forced to surrender up their pupils, without exception of genius or taste, at a period of life when the morals are in a state of oscillation—when the character of the frame itself is scarcely determined, and the understanding but in the first stages of development. Parents are not only made to suffer the pains of a separation under such circumstances, but are condemned to the inexpressible grief of seeing the principles and manners of their children exposed to total wreck, in the infectious communion of the common soldiery—the meanest and most profligate of mankind. The impression of a British seaman is doubtless a revolting spectacle; but falls far short of the scene of real distress, exhibited at the balloting of a conscription, when the parents or friends of the conscript are indulged, as is often the case, in drawing his ticket from the fatal urn. The piercing shrieks and tumultuous acclamations alternately uttered on these occasions, by a people to whom nature has allotted such vivacity of character, wholly overpower the feelings of a spectator, and conduct him, irresistibly, to the conclusions we have adopted, concerning the spirit with which the imperial dispensations are obeyed.

Notwithstanding the familiarizing experience of the past, and the certain expectation of the future, every new conscription spreads consternation through all the families of the empire. From the commencement of the war against Prussia, until the termination of the campaign in Poland, three several levies were raised; the last of which, proposed in the spring of 1807, created a sensation that is not to be adequately described. Although all correspondence relative to the position of the armies was rigorously interdicted, and no letters suffered to pass without scrutiny, it was impossible wholly to conceal, at least from the public of Paris, the dreadful mortality which afflicted the march, and the incredible hardships inseparable from the movements of the troops, labouring under a scarcity of provisions, and the unaccustomed rigours of a northern winter. A third conscription was generally viewed as an undertaking much too bold for the internal administration, situated as it then was, and particularly, at a moment when a belief was current, among all ranks, that the emperor would be unable to extricate himself from the embarrassments in which he was supposed to be involved. The government appeared sensible of the hazard; and in order to prepare the public mind for the event, caused their intention to be announced in whispers through the circles and three thousand coffee-houses of the capital. The effect was every where visible, even to the eye of a cursory observer. An impression of terror upon the countenances of those, who either were themselves exposed to the danger, or shuddered at the prospect of new revolutionary alarms; of suspicion, and joy but half disguised, in the lowering brows of the turbulent and disaffected, constantly on the alert to improve the concurrence of opportunity, and who hailed this desperate expedient, as a confirmation of their hopes relative to the perils of the army. The orator of the government, Renaud St. Jean D'Angely, shed tears of real or affected sorrow, as he stated the necessity of the measure; and the senate received it, contrary to their habit, in silent acquiescence, and with every indication of reluctance and dismay. In order to allay the general feeling, it was found advisable to qualify the new call for 80,000 men, by a clause which enacted, that they were *then* to be merely organized, and retained within the limits of the empire, as a national guard. Circumstances enabled them to adhere to this condition, which, we need not add, would have been violated, if the armies had sustained a defeat, or the campaign been protracted to a more distant term. It was the established practice of the Romans, in their foreign wars, to maintain an army in Italy, ready to march in case of disaster. And a recourse to the same policy was indispensable for the French commander, to recall victory, had she deserted his standard, and to drive his antagonist to the conclusion of an ignominious peace, by intimidating him with the shew of new and inexhaustible assailants.

It is not easy to convey a just idea of the state of Paris during this period of uncertainty and alarm. We believe, that there never has existed, with a vast majority of its inhabitants, a serious reliance on the stability of

the present government. And we are credibly informed, that no doubt was then entertained of its immediate dissolution, if the armies had been broken and dispersed. We are told, that the proportion of idle, profligate and desperate adventurers, whom the revolution has ingenerated, or accident collected in Paris, is truly astonishing; and that there is still to be found, among the literati of every class, and even in the deliberative assemblies, a numerous body, with a marked predilection for republican institutions. The first were, and are, ripe and eager for any change; and the latter, equally prepared to re-assert their favourite opinions, and co-operate in the subversion of a government, by which they are held in contempt, and reduced to a most abject and contumelious servitude. As Paris, together with the rest of the empire, was left almost destitute of troops, the danger was only to be counteracted by quickening the vigilance, and multiplying the terrors of their domestic inquisition. Among the anomalies of the human character that confound all general reasoning, there is none more incomprehensible than the empire which this tribunal exercises over the whole nation. A people, of all others, the most mercurial in their temper—the most thoughtless in their levity, the most ungovernable in their fury; under the influence of this power, lose the distinguishing features of their character; and on subjects connected with the public weal, display the vigilance of habitual fear, and all the sobriety and reserve of consummate prudence. They know and observe, as it were instinctively, the precise limits assigned to the range of language; and, conscious that a mysterious ubiquity is one of the attributes of this searching police, discipline, accordingly, the tongue and the countenance, even in their domestic seclusion. Whoever has had occasion to know the present state of Parisian society will be struck with the prophetic accuracy of the following description, as applied to the aspect it wore at the period of which we are speaking. "Non alius magis anxius et pavens civitates gens adversum proximos, congressus, colloquia, nota ignotaque aures vitari, etiam muta atque inanima tecum et parietes circumspiciantur. Unde plena omnia suspitionem et vix secreta domuum sine formidine. Sed plurimum trepidationis in publico. Ut quemque nuntium fama atulerat animum vultumque conversi, ne dissidere dubiis, ne parum gaudere prosperis viderentur," &c. "Coacti vero in curiam senatus, arduis rerum omnium modus, ne contumax silentium, ne suspecta libertas." [*Tacit. Hist. Lib. i.*]

In the midst of dissimulation and fear, public festivals were multiplied, in order to give an air of confidence to the administration at home; and an unusual degree of splendour brightened the court of the empress, who remained in Paris, and took a principal share in these mummeries of despotism. Her majesty was constantly glittering before the public eye, either at the brilliant *cercles* of the Tuilleries, the numerous and magnificent fêtes of the Luxembourg & the Garde-Muble, or in the theatres, at the meanest of which she condescended to assist, and to inhale the incense of the multitude. The bulletins announcing the most brilliant successes were kept back regularly for some days, and rumours of disaster intentionally circulated, that the grateful intelligence might produce the greater sensation. These, and other contrivances, however, we are informed, had but little effect in quickening the sluggish loyalty of the body of the people. That emulation of servitude, which is so signally conspicuous in the public bodies, great officers, and "mercenary Swiss" of state; and to which, under all absolute governments, the higher ranks have evinced so disgraceful a propensity, is but little seen among the lower classes of France; who manifest, for the most part, a chilling indifference to the personal exhibitions of the imperial family, and appear to have lost, in this respect, all the characteristic fervency of their nation.

These trembling anxieties, and humble precautions, will probably appear strange to those who only view at a distance the gigantic frame of this tremendous government, and have not reflected on the various dangers which precipitate the fall of a power founded in force. History shews, with what rapidity of descent old and deeply rooted establishments have sometimes fallen to the ground; and the circumstances of the French capital, in 1806, may warrant the presumption, that a system, resting only, as it were, on the surface, by its own oppressive weight—with no prescriptive authority—with few artificial barriers—with no titles to veneration or love—might have been struck down by the first gust of adversity. The alarm which was evidently felt, while it gilds the future with a ray of hope, practically illustrates a great maxim, which cannot be too often inculcated upon