

Subjects of this state, and whatever might be the rule before these acts passed, they now make the law of the land, and cannot be departed from, without acting in such an inconsistent manner, as we apprehend, would strike at the dignity of legislature, and involve the imputation of our considering, certain persons, as our subjects, for the purposes of punishment, and burthen, and at the same time as British subjects, forfeiting the very property burthened, upon their tenure of which, as subjects of this state, the right to punish is founded. These absentees, our laws consider as subjects of this state; being subjects, a law to deprive them of their estates, for their past conduct, however culpable, cannot as we conceive be reconciled to that constitution, which we have sworn to maintain, and will most religiously support, which reprobates in the strongest terms, and upon the best principles, every idea of a retrospective law. These people are small in number, and cannot possibly have any influence in this state; none of those, who have acted against us, would dare to return and hazard a trial under our law, if notice was given them in the manner proposed by our bill; especially as even an acquittal would restore them to an estate, incumbered with a treble tax, which they could only hold by taking the oath to our government, and they would be farther distinguished from the more virtuous citizens of the state by an incapacity to elect, or be elected into any office whatsoever. These burthens and restrictions, with the reflection, that their conduct would be narrowly watched, would ever prevent their being dangerous, should any of them, urged by want, or struck with penitence, come to this country under an act upon the principles of our bill. We have not the smallest attachment to the absentees, or any of them, on the contrary, we do and shall for ever reprobate and detest, a desertion of this country, and our virtuous cause, either from motives of base fear, or more criminal attachment to tyranny; but however strong our resentment may be against the vices of these men, we cannot commit a violation of our constitution to punish them, nor can we acting under it deny justice to the meanest wretch.

These are objections to your bill so far as it would affect the absentees; objections, which we conceive, cannot be removed,