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APPEAL TO THE CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES.

[continued.]

But we wish to examine a little further this distinction which Mr. Adams relies upon, between a political party and its leaders. From the nature of representative government, it results, that, in conducting the business of their legislative and popular assemblies, some individuals will be found to take a more active and conspicuous part than the rest, and will be regarded as essentially influencing public opinion, whilst they are generally themselves merely impelled by its force. But this influence, in whatever degree it may exist, is temporary, and is possessed by a constant succession of different persons. Those who possess it for the time being, are called *leaders*, and, in the course of ten years, they must amount to a very numerous class. Their measures and political objects must necessarily be identified with those of their whole party. To deny this is to pronounce sentence of condemnation upon popular government. For, admitting it to be true, that the people may be occasionally surprised and misled by those who abuse their confidence, into measures repugnant to their interests and duty, still, if the majority of them can, for ten years together, be duped, and led hoodwinked to the very precipice of treason, by their perfidious guides, 'without participating in their secret designs, or being privy to their existence,' they show themselves unfit for self-government. It is not conceivable, that the federal party, which at that time, constituted the great majority of Massachusetts, will feel themselves indebted to the President of the United States, for a compliment paid to their loyalty, at the expense of their character for intelligence and independence.

It is in the above sense only, that a free people can recognize any individuals as leaders; and in this sense, every man, who is conscious of having enjoyed influence and consideration with his party, may well deem himself included in every opprobious and indiscriminate impeachment of the motives of the leaders of that party. But it would be arrogance to suppose himself *alone* intended, when the terms of the accusation imply a confederacy of many. And while, on the one hand, it would betray both selfishness and egotism to confine his demand of exculpation to himself: so, on the other, it is impossible to unite in one application *all* who might justly be considered as his associates. It follows then that any persons, who, from the relations they sustained to their party, may apprehend that the public will apply to them charges of this vague description, may join in such numbers as they shall think fit, to demand an explanation of charges, which will probably affect some of them, and may affect them all—The right, upon the immutable principles of justice, is commensurate with the injury, and should be adapted to its character.

Again, who can doubt that the public reputation of high minded men who have embarked in the same cause and maintained a communion of principles; is a common property, which all who are interested are bound to vindicate as occasion may require—the present for the absent—the living or the dead—the son for the father.

If any responsible individual at Washington should declare himself to be in possession of unequivocal evidence, that the leaders of certain States in our confederacy, were now maturing a plot for the separation of the States, might not the members of Congress, now there, from the States thus accused, insist upon a disclosure of evidence and names? Would they be diverted from their purpose by an evasion of the question, on the ground that, as the libeller had not named any individuals, so there was no one entitled to make this demand? or would they be satisfied with a misty exculpation of themselves? This cannot be imagined. They would contend for the honor of their absent friends, of their party, and of their States. These were among our motives for making this call. We feel an interest in all these particulars, and especially in the unsullied good name of friends and associates, who, venerable for eminent talents, virtues and public services, have gone down to the grave unconscious of any imputation on their characters.

Mr. Adams admits our right to make severally, the inquiries which have been made jointly; though in a passage eminent for its equivocation, he expresses a doubt whether we can come within the terms of his charges. On this remarkable passage, we submit one more observation. As Mr. Adams declares that he well knew, from unequivocal evidence, the existence of such treasonable designs, he must have known whether the parties who addressed him were engaged in those designs. Why then resort to the extraordinary subterfuge, that if the signers of that letter were not leaders, then the charges did not refer to them?

There is then no right on the part of Mr. Adams to prescribe to the injured parties, (and all are injured who may be comprehended in his vague expressions) the precise form in which they should make their demand. And his refusal to answer that which we have made, is like that of one who having fired a random shot among a crowd, should protest against answering to the complaint of any whom he had actually wounded, because they could not prove that his aim was directed at them.

Another reason assigned by Mr. Adams for his refusal to name the individuals whom he intended to accuse, is that it might expose him to a legal prosecution. He certainly had not much to apprehend in this respect from any of the undersigned. As he had originally announced that he had no legal evidence to prove his charge, and the undersigned had nevertheless called on him to produce such as he did possess, he must have been sufficiently assured that their purpose was not to resort to a court of justice, but to the tribunal of public opinion; and that they had virtually precluded themselves from any other resort.

Mr. Adams suggests another objection to naming the parties accused, on account of the probable loss of evidence, and the forgetfulness of witnesses after the lapse of twenty years.

He undoubtedly now possesses all the evidence that he had in October last, when he published his statement. If he then made this grave charge against certain of his fellow-citizens, with the knowledge that there was no evidence by which it could be substantiated, where was his sense of justice! If he made it without inquiring, and without regarding, whether he had any such evidence or not, intending, if called upon, to shield himself from responsibility by suggesting this loss of documents and proofs, where was then his self-respect?

But did it never occur to Mr. Adams that the parties accused might also in this long lapse of time have lost the proofs of their innocence. 'He has known for twenty years past that he had made this secret denunciation of his ancient political friends;' and he must have anticipated the possibility that it might at some time be made public, if he had not even determined in his own mind to publish it himself. He has therefore had ample opportunity, and the most powerful motives, to preserve all the evidence that might serve to justify his conduct on that occasion. On the other hand, the parties accused, and especially those venerable patriots, who, during this long interval have descended to the grave, 'unconscious of guilt', and ignorant that they were even suspected, have foreseen no necessity, and had no motive whatever, to preserve any memorials of their innocence.' We venture to make this appeal to the conscience of Mr. Adams himself.

Mr. Adams in one passage appeals to the feelings of the undersigned and intimates his surprise that they should have selected the present moment for making their demand. He did them but justice in supposing that this consideration had its influence on their minds. Their only fear was that their appeal might be considered as an attack on an eminent man, whom the public favor seemed to have deserted. But the undersigned had no choice. Their accuser had selected his own time for bringing this subject before the world; and they were compelled to follow him with their defence, or consent that the seal should be set on their own reputations, and on those of their deceased friends forever. We said, with truth, that it was not our design nor wish to produce an effect on any political party or question. We were not unaware that our appeal might lead to such measures as would seriously affect either Mr. Adams or ourselves in the public opinion. But whilst we did not wish for any such result, so neither were we disposed to shrink from it.

The necessity of correcting some mistakes in a letter of Mr. Jefferson, which had been lately published, is assigned by Mr. Adams as the reason for his publication. If that circumstance has brought him before the public at a time, or in a manner injurious to his feelings, or unpropitious to his political views and expectations, we are not responsible for the consequences. We would observe, however, that it would have been apparently a very easy task to correct those mistakes, without adding this unprovoked denunciation against his native State.

Finally, Mr. Adams declines all further correspondence with us on this subject; and even intimates an apprehension that he may have already condescended too far, and waved 'even the proprieties of his situation,' in giving us such an answer as he has given.

He very much misapprehends the character of our institutions and the principles and spirit of his countrymen, if he imagines that any official rank, however elevated, will authorise a man to publish injurious charges against others, and then to refuse reparation and even explanation, lest it would tend to impair his dignity. If he is in danger of such a result in the present instance, he should have foreseen it when about to publish his charges in October last. If 'the proprieties of his situation' have been violated, it was by that original publication, and not by two great condescension in answer to our call upon him, for an act of ample justice towards those who felt themselves aggrieved.

We have thus examined all the reasons by which Mr. Adams attempts to justify his refusal to produce the evidence in support of his allegations; and we again appeal with confidence to our fellow citizens throughout the U. States for the justice of our conclusion, that no such evidence exists.

The preceding observations suffice, we trust, to show that we have been reluctantly forced into a controversy, which could not be shunned, without the most abject degradation; that it was competent to us to interrogate Mr. Adams, in the mode adopted, and that he declines a direct answer for reasons insufficient, and unsatisfactory; thus placing himself in the predicament of an unjust accuser.

Here, perhaps, we might safely rest our appeal, on the ground that it is impossible strictly to prove a negative. But though we are in the dark ourselves, with respect to the evidence on which he relies, to justify his allegation of a 'project,' at any time; to dissolve the Union, and establish a nothern confederacy, (which is the only point to which our inquiries were directed,) it will be easy by a comparison of dates, and circumstances founded on his own admissions, to demonstrate (what we know must be true) that no such evidence applies, to any man who acted, or to the measures adopted in Massachusetts, at, and posterior to the time of the embargo. The project itself, so far as it applies to those men and measures, and probably altogether, existed only in the distempered fancy of Mr. Adams.

'This design' (he says) 'had been formed in the winter of 1803—4, immediately after, and as a consequence of, the acquisition of Louisiana. Its justifying causes, to those who entertained it were, that the annexation of Louisiana to the Union transcended the constitutional powers of the Goverment of the U. States. That it formed in fact a new confederacy to which the states, united by the former compact, were not bound to adhere. That it was oppressive to the interests, and destructive to the influence of the northern section of the confederacy, whose right and duty it therefore was, to secede from the new body politic, and to constitute one of their own. The plan was so far matured, that a proposal had been made to an individual, to permit himself at the proper time, to be placed at the head of the military movements, which it was foreseen would be necessary for carrying it into execution.' The interview with Mr. Jefferson was in March, 1808. In May Mr. Adams ceased to be a Senator. In the winter of 1808—9 he made his communications to Mr. Giles. In August 1809 he embarked for Europe, three years before the war; and did not return until three years after the peace—and he admits the impossibility of his having given to Mr. Jefferson information of negotiations between our citizens and the British, during the war, or having relation to the war—condescending to declare, that he had no knowledge of such negociations.

The other measures, to which Mr. Adams alludes, were of the most public character; and the most important of them better known, in their day, to others, than they could be to him, residing in a foreign country; and if the chain by which these measures are connected with the supposed plot shall appear to be wholly imaginary, these measures will remain to be supported, as they ought to be, on their own merits. The letter from the Governor of Nova Scotia, as will presently be seen, is of no possible significance in any view, but that of having constituted *the only information* (as he says) which Mr. Adams communicated to Mr. Jefferson at the time of his first, and only confidential interview. It was written in the summer of 1807, this country being then in a state of peace. The Governor's correspondent is to this hour unknown to us. He was not, says Mr. Adams, a 'leader of the Federal party.' The contents of the letter were altogether idle, but the effect supposed by Mr. Adams to be contemplated by the writer, could be produced only by giving them publicity. It was communicated to Mr. Adams without any injunction of secrecy. He has no doubt it was shewn to others. Its object was, he supposes, to accredit a calumny, that Mr. Jefferson, and his measures, were subservient to France. That the British government were informed of a plan, determined upon by France, to effect a conquest of the British Provinces on this continent, and a revolution in the government of the United States, as means to which, they were first to produce a war between the United States and England. A letter of this tenor was no doubt shown to Mr. Adams, as we must believe upon his word. The discovery would not be surprising, that British as well as French officers, and citizens, in a time of peace with this country, availed themselves of many channels for conveying their speculations and stratagems, to other innocent ears as well as to those of Mr. Adams, with a view to influence public opinion. But the subject matter of the letter was an absurdity. Who did not know, that in 1807, after the battle of Trafalgar, the crippled navy of France could not undertake to transport even a single regiment across the British Channel? And if the object was the conquest of the British Provinces by the United States alone, how could a revolution, in their government, which must divide, and weaken it, promote that end?

The folly of a British governor in attempting to give currency to a story which savours so strongly of the burlesque, can be equalled only by the credulity of Mr. Adams, in believing it calculated to produce effect; and if he did so believe, it furnishes a criterion by which to estimate the correctness and impartiality of his judgment concerning the weight and the application of the other evidence which he still withholds, and from which he has undertaken with equal confidence to 'draw his inferences.' After the adjustment of the diplomatic preliminaries, with Mr. Giles and others, Mr. Adams communicated NOTHING to Mr. Jefferson, but the substance of the Nova Scotia letter. If Mr. Adams had then known and believed in the 'project,' (the 'key' to all the future proceedings) it is incredible that it should not have been deemed worthy of disclosure—'at that time, and on that occasion.'

In this connexion we advert for a moment to the temper of mind, and the state of feelings, which probably gave rise to, and accompanied this communication of Mr. Adams. Circumstances had occurred tending to embitter his feelings, and to warp his judgment.

Mr. Adams, just before the time of his interview with Mr. Jefferson, had voted for the embargo. He had been reproached for having done this on the avowed principle, 'of voting, and not deliberating,' upon the Executive recommendation. He had been engaged with his colleague in a controversy on this subject. His conduct, as he affirms, and as was the fact, had been censured, in terms of severity, in the public press. The Legislature of Massachusetts had elected another person to succeed him in the Senate of the United States; and had otherwise expressed such a strong and decided disapprobation of the measures which he had supported, that he felt compelled to resign his seat before the expiration of his term. These might be felt as injuries, even by men of placable tempers. It is probable that his feelings of irritation may be traced back to the contest between Jefferson and the elder Adams. It is no secret, that the latter had cherished deep and bitter resentment against *Hamilton*, and certain other 'leaders of the federal party,' supposed to be Hamilton's friends. It would not be unnatural that the son should participate in these feelings of the father. When Mr. Adams visited Mr. Jefferson, and afterwards made his disclosures to Mr. Giles and others, having lost the confidence of his own party, he had decided, 'as subsequent events doubtless confirmed,' to throw himself into the arms of his father's opponents. But there was a load of political guilt, personal and hereditary, still resting upon him, in the opinions of the adverse party. No ordinary proof of his unqualified abjuration of his late politics would be satisfactory;—some sacrifice, which should put his sincerely to the test, and place an impassable barrier between him and his former party, was indispensable. And what sacrifice was so natural, what pledge so perfect, as this private denunciation! Nor does the effect seem to have been miscalculated or overrated. Mr. Jefferson declares that it raised Mr. Adams in his mind. Its eventual consequences were highly, and permanently advantageous to Mr. Adams. And though he assured Mr. Giles, that he had renounced his party, without personal views; yet this 'denial' considering that he had the good fortune to receive 'within a few months,' the embassay to Russia, 'connected with other circumstances,' which ended in his elevation to the presidency, does indeed, according to his own principles of presumptive evidence, require an effort of 'the charity which believeth all things,' to gain it 'credence.'

To these public and indisputable facts, we should not now revert, had Mr. Adams given us the names, and evidence, as we requested; and had he forborne to reiterate his injurious insinuations. But as they now rest wholly upon the sanction of his opinion, respecting evidence which he alone possesses, we think it but reasonable to consider, how far these circumstances may have heated his imagination, or disturbed his equanimity, and given to the evidence, which he keeps from the public eye, an unnatural, and false complexion.

We proceed then to a brief examination of the alleged project of 1803—4—of the Northern Confederacy.

In the first place, 'We solemnly disavow all knowledge of such a project, and all remembrance of the mention of it, or of any plan analogous to it, at that or any subsequent period.' Secondly, While it is obviously impossible for us to controvert evidence of which we are ignorant, we are all well assured it must be equally impossible to bring any facts which can be considered evidence to bear upon the designs or measures of those, who, at the time of Mr Adams' interview with Mr. Jefferson, and afterwards during the war, took an active part in the public affairs of Massachusetts.

The effort discernible throughout this letter, to connect those later events, which were of a public nature, and of which the natural and adequate causes were public, with the mysterious project, known only to himself, of an earlier origin and distinct source is in the last degree violent and disingenious.

The cession of Louisiana to the United States when first promulged, was a theme of complaint and dissatisfaction; in this part of the country. This could not be regarded as factious or unreasonable, when it is admitted by Mr. Adams that Mr. Jefferson and himself entertained constitutional scruples and objections to the provisions of the treaty of cession. Nothing, however, like a popular excitement grew out of the measure, and it is stated by Mr. Adams that this project 'slumbered' until the period of the embargo in December 1807. Suppose then for the moment (what we have not a shadow of reason for believing, and do not believe) that upon the occasion of the Louisiana Treaty, 'certain leaders,' influenced by constitutional objections, (admitted to have been common to Mr. Jefferson, Mr. Adams and themselves) had conceived a project of separation, and of a Northern Confederacy, as the only probable counterpoise to the manufacture of new states in the south, does it follow that when the public mind becomes reconciled to the cession, and the beneficial consequences of it were realized, (as it is conceded by Mr. Adams, was the case) these same 'leaders,' whoever they might be, would still cherish the embryo project, and wait for other contingencies, to enable them to effect it? On what authority can Mr. Adams assume that the project merely 'slumbered' for years, if his private evidence applies only to the time of its origin.

The opposition to the measures of government in 1808 arose from causes which were common to the people not only of New England but of all the commercial states, as was manifested in New York, Philadelphia, and elsewhere. By what process of fair reasoning then can that opposition be referred to, or connected with a plan, which is said to have originated in 1804, and to have been intended to embrace merely a 'northern' confederacy! The objection to the Louisiana treaty was founded on the just construction of the compact between sovereign states. It was believed in New England, that new members could not be added to the confederacy beyond the territorial limits of the contracting parties without the consent of those parties. This was considered as a fair subject of remonstrance, and as justifying proposals for amendment of the constitution. But so far were the Federal party from attempting to use this as an additional incentive to the passions of the day, that in a report made to the Legislature of 1813, by a committee of which Mr. Adam's 'excellent friend, Josiah Quincy was chairman, (Louisiana, having at this time been admitted into the Union) it is expressly stated, that 'they have not been disposed to connect this great constitutional question with the transient calamities of the day,' from which it is in their opinion very apparently distinguished both in its cause and consequences. That in their view of this great constitutional question, they have confined themselves to topics and arguments drawn from the constitution, 'with the hope of limiting the further progress of the evil, rather than with the expectation of immediate relief during the continuance of existing influences in the natioal administration.' This report was accepted and thus the 'project,' instead of being used as fuel to the flame, is deliberately taken out of it, and presented to the people by the leaders' as resting on distinct considerations from the 'transient calamities,' and for which present redress ought neither to be sought, or expected.

To the embargo imposed in December, 1807, nearly all the delegation of Massachusetts was opposed. The pretexts for imposing it were deemed by her citizens a mockery of her sufferings. Owning nearly one third of the tonnage in the United States, she felt that her voice ought to be heard in what related to its security. Depending principally on her foreign trade and fisheries for support, her situation appeared desperate under the operation of this law, in its terms perpetual. It was a bitter aggravation of her sufferings to be told, that its object was to preserve these interests. No people, at peace, in an equal space of time, ever endured severer privations. She could not consider the annihilation of her trade as included in the power to regulate it. To her lawyers, statesmen, and citizens in general, it appeared a direct violation of the constitution. It was universally odious. The disaffection was not confined to the federal party. Mr. Adams, it is said, and not contradicted, announced in his letters to the members of Congress, that government must not rely upon its own friends. The interval from 1807 to 1812 was filled up by a series of restrictive measures, which kept alive the discontent and irritation of the popular mind. Then followed the war, under circumstances which aggravated the public distress. In its progress, Massachusetts was deprived of garrisons for her ports—with a line of sea coast equal in extent to one-third of that of all the other maratime States, she was left during the whole war nearly defenceless. Her citizens subject to an incessant alarm:—a portion of the country invaded and taken possession of as a conquered territory. Her own militia arrayed, and encamped at an enormous expense, pay and subsistence supplied from her nearly exhausted treasury, and reimbursement refused, even to this day.

Now, what, under the pressure and excitement of these measures, was the conduct of the federal party, the 'devoted majority,' with the military force of the State in their hands;—with the encouragement to be derived from a conviction that the Northern States were in sympathy with their feelings, and that government could not rely on its own friends? Did they resist the laws? Not in a solitary instance. Did they threaten a separation of the states? Did they array their forces with a show of such disposition? Did the Governor or people of Massachusetts in any one instance swerve from their allegiance to the union. The reverse of all this is the truth. Abandoned by the national government, because she declared, for reasons which her highest tribunal adjudged to be constitutional, to surrender her militia into the hands of a military prefect, although they were always equipped, and ready and faithful under their own officers; she nevertheless clung to the union as to the ark of her safety; she ordered her well trained militia into the field, stationed them at the points of danger, defrayed their expenses from her own treasury, and garrisoned with them the national forts. All her taxes and exercises were paid with punctuality and promptness, an example by no means followed by some of the states, in which the cry for war had been loudest. These facts are recited for no other purpose but that of preparing for the inquiry, what becomes of Mr. Adams, 'key,' his 'project,' and his 'prostulates.' The latter were to all intents and purposes, to use his language, 'consummated.'

Laws unconstitutional in the public opinion, had been enacted. A great majority of an exasperated people were in a state of the highest excitement. The legislature (if his word be taken,) was under the 'management of the leaders.' The judicial courts were on their side, and the juries were, as he pretends, contaminated. A golden opportunity had arrived 'Now was the winter of their discontent made glorious summer.' All the combustibles for revolution were ready. When, behold! instead of a dismembered Union, military movements, a northern confederacy, and British alliance, accomplished at the favorable moment of almost total prostration of the credit and power of the national rulers, a small and peaceful deputation of grave citizens selected from the ranks of civil life, and legislative councils, assembled at Hartford. There, calm and collected, like the Pilgrims from whom they descended, and not unmindful of those who had achieved the independence of their country, they deliberated on the most effectual means of preserving for their fellow citizens and their descendants the civil and political liberty which had been won and bequeathed to them.

The character of this much injured assembly has been subjected to heavier imputations, under an entire deficiency not only of proof, but of probability, than ever befel any other set of men, discharging merely the duties of a committee of a legislative body, and making a public report of their doings to their constituents. These imputations have never assumed a precise form; but vague opinions have prevailed of a combination to separate the Union. As Mr. Adams has condescended, by the manner in which he speaks of that convention, to adopt our countenance those imputations on its proceedings, we may be excused for making a few more remarks on the subject, although this is not a suitable occasion to go into a full explanation and vindication of that measure.

The subject naturally resolves itself into four points or questions:

First the constitutional right of a state, to appoint delegates to such a convention:

Secondly, the propriety and expediency of exercising that right at that time:

Thirdly the objects intended to be attained by it, and the powers given for that purpose by the state to the delegates; and

Fourthly, the manner in which the delegates exercised their power.

As to the first point, it will not be doubted that the people have a right 'in an orderly & peaceable manner to assemble to consult upon the common good;' and to request of their rulers 'by the way of addresses, petitions or remonstrances, redress of the rongs done them, and of the grievances they suffer.' This is enumerated in the constitution of Marachusetts among our natural essential and unalienable rights; and it is recognised in the constitution of the United States; and who then shall dare to set limits to its exercise, or to prescribe to us the manner in which it shall be exerted? We have already spoken of the state of public affairs and the measures of the general government, in the year 1814, and of the degree of excitement, amounting nearly to desperation, to which they had brought the minds of the people in this and the adjoining states. Their sufferings and apprehensions could no longer be silently endured and numerous meetings of the citizens had been held on the occasion in various parts of the country. It was then thought that the measures called for in such an emergency, would be more prudently and safely matured and promoted by the government of the state, than by unorganized bodies of individuals strongly excited by what they considered to be the unjust and oppressive measures of the general government. If all the citizens had the right, jointly and severally, to consult for the common good, and to seek for a redress of their grievances, no reason can be given why their legislative assembly, which represents them all, may not exercise the same right in their behalf. We nowhere find any constitutional prohibition or restraint of the exercise of this power by the state; and if not prohibited, it is reserved to the state. We maintain then, that the people had an unquestionable right, in this as well as in other modes, to express their opinions of the measures of the general government, & to seek 'by redresses, petitions or remonstrances,' to obtain a redress of their grievances and relief from their sufferings.

If there was no constitutional objection to this mode of proceeding, it will be readily admitted that it was in all respects the most eligible. In the state of distress and danger which then oppressed all hearts, it was to be apprehended as before suggested, that large and frequent assemblies of the people might lead to measures inconsistent with the peace and order of the community. If an appeal was to be made to the government of the United States, it was likely to be more effectual, if proceeding from the whole state collectively, than from insulated assemblies of citizens; and the application in that form would tend also to repress the public excitement and prevent any sudden and unadvised proceedings of the people, by holding out to them the prospect of relief through the influence of their state government. This latter consideration had great weight with the legislature; and it is believed to have been the only motive that could have induced some of the delegates to that convention to quit the seclusion to which they had voluntarily retired, to expose themselves anew to all the fatigue and anxiety, the odium, the misrepresentations, calumnies and unjust reproaches, which so frequently accompany and follow the best exertions for the public good.

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