

# On the Spirit of Patriotism

Henry St. John Bolingbroke

**My Lord,**

1736

You have engaged me on a subject which interrupts the series of those letters I was writing to you; but it is one, which, I confess, I have very much at heart. I shall therefore explain myself fully, nor blush to reason on principles that are out of fashion among men, who intend nothing by serving the public, but to feed their avarice, their vanity, and their luxury, without the sense of any duty they owe to God or man.

It seems to me, that in order to maintain the moral system of the world at a certain point, far below that of ideal perfection (for we are made capable of conceiving what we are incapable of attaining), but however sufficient upon the whole to constitute a state easy and happy, or at the worst tolerable: I say, it seems to me, that the author of nature has thought fit to mingle from time to time, among the societies of men, a few, and but a few of those, on whom he is graciously pleased to bestow a larger proportion of the ethereal spirit than is given in the ordinary course of his providence to the sons of men. These are they who engross almost the whole reason of the species, who are born to instruct, to guide, and to preserve; who are designed to be the tutors and the guardians of human kind. When they prove such, they exhibit to us examples of the highest virtue, and the truest piety: and they desire to have their festivals kept, instead of that pack of anchorites and enthusiasts, with whose names the calendar is crowded and disgraced. When these men apply their talents to other purposes, when they strive to be great and despise being good, they commit a most sacrilegious breach of trust; they pervert the means, they defeat as far as lies in them the designs of providence, and disturb in some sort the system of infinite wisdom. To misapply these talents is the most diffused, and therefore the greatest of crimes in its nature and consequence; but to keep them unexerted, and unemployed, is a crime too. Look about you, my Lord, from the palace to the cottage; you will find that the bulk of mankind is made to breathe the air of this atmosphere, to roam about this globe, and to consume, like the courtiers of Alcinous, the fruits of the earth. *Nos numerus sumus et fruges consumere nati*. When they have trod this insipid round a certain number of years, and begot others to do the same after them, they have lived; and if they have performed, in some tolerable degree, the ordinary moral duties of life, they have done all they were born to do. Look about you again, my Lord, nay look into your own breast, and you will find that there are superior spirits, men who show even from their infancy, though it be not always perceived by others, perhaps not always felt by themselves, that they were born for something more, and better. These are the men to whom the part I mentioned is assigned. Their talents denote their general designation; and the opportunities of conforming themselves to it, that arise in the course of things, or that are presented to them by any circumstances of rank and situation in the society to which they belong, denote the particular vocation which it is not lawful for them to resist, nor even to neglect. The duration of the lives of such men as these is to be determined, I think, by the length and importance of the parts they act, not by the number of years that pass between their coming into the world, and their going out of it. Whether the piece be of three, or of five acts, the part may be long: and he who sustains it through the whole may be said to die in the fulness of years; whilst he, who declines it sooner, may be said not to live out half his days.

I have sometimes represented to myself the vulgar, who are accidentally distinguished by the titles of king and subject, of lord and vassal, of noblemen and peasant; and the few who are distinguished by nature so essentially from the herd of mankind, that (figure apart) they seem to be of another species, in this manner. The former come into the world and continue in it like Dutch travellers in a foreign country. Everything they meet has the grace of novelty: and they are fond alike of everything that is new. They wander about from one object to another, of vain curiosity, or inelegant pleasure. If they are industrious, they show their industry in copying signs, and collecting mottoes and epitaphs. They loiter, or they trifle away their whole time: and their presence or their absence would be equally unperceived, if caprice or accident did not raise them often to stations, wherein their stupidity, their vices, or their follies, make them a public misfortune. The latter come into the world, or at least continue in it after the effects of surprise and inexperience are over, like men who are sent on more important errands. They observe with distinction, they admire with knowledge. They may indulge themselves in pleasure; but as their industry is not employed about trifles, so their amusements are not made the business of their lives. Such men cannot pass unperceived through a country. If they

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retire from the world, their splendour accompanies them, and enlightens even the obscurity of their retreat. If they take a part in public life, the effect is never indifferent. They either appear like ministers of divine vengeance, and their course through the world is marked by desolation and oppression, by poverty and servitude: or they are the guardian angels of the country they inhabit, busy to avert even the most distant evil, and to maintain or to procure peace, plenty, and the greatest of human blessings, liberty.

From the observation, that superiority of parts is often employed to do superior mischief, no consequence can be drawn against the truth I endeavour to establish. Reason collects the will of God from the constitution of things, in this as in other cases; but in no case does the divine power impel us necessarily to conform ourselves to this will: and therefore from the misapplication of superior parts to the hurt, no argument can be drawn against this position, that they were given for the good of mankind. Reason deceive us not: we deceive ourselves, and suffer our wills to be determined by other motives. Montaigne or Charron would say, '*l'homme se pipe*' 'man is at once his own sharper, and his own bubble'. Human nature is her own bawd, says Tully, *blanda conciliatrix et quasi lena sui*. He who considers the universal wants, imperfections, and vices of his kind, must agree that men were intended not only for society, but to unite in commonwealths, and to submit to laws. *Legum idcirco omnes servi sumus, ut liberi esse possimus*. And yet this very man will be seduced by his own passions, or the passions and examples of others, to think, or to act as if he thought, the very contrary. So he who is conscious of superior endowments, such as render him more capable than the generality of men to secure and improve the advantages of social life, by preserving the commonwealth in strength and splendour, even he may be seduced to think, or to act as if he thought, that these endowments were given him for the gratification of his ambition, and his other passions; and that there is no difference between vice and virtue, between a knave and an honest man, but one which a prince, who died not many years ago, asserted, 'that men of great sense were therefore knaves, and men of little sense were therefore honest'. But in neither of these cases will the truth and reason of things be altered, by such examples of human frailty. It will be still true, and reason will still demonstrate, that all men are directed, by the general constitution of human nature, to submit to government; and that some men are in a particular manner designed to take care of that government on which the common happiness depends. The use that reason will make of such examples will be only this, that since men are so apt, in every form of life and every degree of understanding, to act against their interest and their duty too, without benevolence to mankind, or regard to the divine will, it is the more incumbent on those who have this benevolence and this regard at heart, to employ all the means that the nature of the government allows, and that rank, circumstances of situation, or superiority of talents, give them, to oppose evil, and promote good government; and contribute thus to preserve the moral system of the world, at that point of imperfection at least, which seems to have been prescribed to it by the great creator of every system of beings.

Give me leave now, my Lord, to cast my eyes for a moment homeward, and to apply what I have been saying to the present state of Britain. That there is no profusion of the ethereal spirit to be observed among us, and that we do not abound with men of superior genius, I am ready to confess; but I think there is no ground for the complaints I have heard made, as if nature had not done her part in our age, as well as in former ages, by producing men capable of serving the commonwealth. The manners of our fore-fathers were, I believe, in many respects better: they had more probity perhaps, they had certainly more show of honour, and greater industry. But still nature sows alike, though we do not reap alike. There are, and as there always have been, there always will be such creatures in government as I have described above. Fortune maintains a kind of rivalry with wisdom, and piques herself often in favour of fools as well as knaves. Socrates used to say, that although no man undertakes a trade he has not learned, even the meanest; yet every one thinks himself sufficiently qualified for the hardest of all trades, that of government. He said this upon the experience he had in Greece. He would not change his opinion if he lived now in Britain. But however, such characters as these would do little hurt, generally speaking, or would not do it long, if they stood alone. To do great hurt, some genius, some knowledge, some talents in short, natural or acquired, are necessary: less indeed, far less than are required to do good, but always some. Yet I imagine, not the worst minister could do all the mischief he does by the misapplication of his talents alone, if it were not for the misapplication of much better talents than his by some who join with him, and the non-application, or the faint and unsteady exercise of their talents by some who oppose him; as well as the general remissness of mankind in acquiring knowledge, and in improving the parts which God has given them for the service of the public. These are the great springs of national misfortunes. There have been monsters in other ages, and other countries, as well as ours; but they have never continued their devastations long, when there were heroes to oppose them. We will

suppose a man imprudent, rash, presumptuous, ungracious, insolent and profligate, in speculation as well as practice. He can bribe, but he cannot seduce; he can buy, but he cannot gain; he can lie, but he cannot deceive. From whence then has such a man his strength? From the general corruption of the people, nursed up to a full maturity under his administration; from the venality of all orders and all ranks of men, some of whom are so prostitute, that they set themselves to sale, and even prevent application? This would be the answer, and it would be a true one as far as it goes; but it does not account for the whole. Corruption could not spread with so much success, though reduced into system; and though some ministers, with equal impudence and folly, avowed it by themselves and their advocates, to be the principal expedient by which they governed, if a long and almost unobserved progression of causes and effects, did not prepare the conjuncture. Let me explain it and apply it, as I conceive it. One party had given their whole attention, during several years, to the project of enriching themselves, and impoverishing the rest of the nation; and, by these and other means, of establishing their dominion under the government and with the favour of a family, who were foreigners, and therefore might believe, that they were established on the throne by the good will and strength of this party alone. This party in general were so intent on these views, and many of them, I fear, are so still, that they did not advert in time to the necessary consequences of the measures they abetted; nor did they consider, that the power they raised, and by which they hoped to govern their country, would govern them with the very rod of iron they forged, and would be the power of a prince or minister, not that of a party long. Another party continued sour, sullen, and inactive, with judgments so weak, and passions so strong, that even experience, and a severe one surely, was lost upon them. They waited, like the Jews, for a Messiah, that may never come; and under whom, if he did come, they would be strangely disappointed in their expectations of glory and triumph, and universal dominion. Whilst they waited, they were marked out like the Jews, a distinct race, hewers of wood and drawers of water, scarce members of the community, though born in the country. All indifferent men stood as it were at a gaze: and the few, who were jealous of the court, were still more jealous of one another; so that a strength sufficient to oppose bad ministers was not easy to be formed. When this strength was formed, and the insufficiency or iniquity of the administration was daily exposed to public view, many adhered at first to the minister, and others were since gained to his cause, because they knew nothing of the constitution of their own, nor of the history of other countries; but imagined wildly, that things always went as they saw them go, and that liberty has been, and therefore may be preserved under the influence of the same corruption. Others perhaps were weak enough to be frightened at first, as some are hypocritical enough to pretend to be still, with the appellations of Tory and Jacobite, which are always ridiculously given to every man who does not bow to the brazen image that the King has set up. Others again might be persuaded, that no fatal use at least would be made of the power acquired by corruption; and men of superior parts might and may still flatter themselves, that if this power should be so employed, they shall have time and means to stop the effects of it. The first of these are seduced by their ignorance and futility; the second, if they are not hypocrites, by their prejudices; the third, by their partiality and blind confidence; the last, by their presumptions; and all of them by the mammon of unrighteousness, their private interest, which they endeavour to palliate and to reconcile as well as they can to that of the public: *et caeca cupiditate corrupti, non intelligunt se, dum vendant, et venire.*

According to this representation, which I take to be true, your Lordship will agree that our unfortunate country affords an example in proof of what is asserted above. The Dutch travellers I spoke of, men of the ordinary, or below the ordinary size of understanding, though they are called by caprice, or lifted any other way into power, cannot do great and long mischief, in a country of liberty; unless men of genius, knowledge, and experience, misapply these talents, and become their leaders. A ministerial faction would have as little ability to do hurt, as they have inclination to do good, if they were not formed and conducted by one of better parts than they: nor would such a minister be able to support, at the head of this trusty phalanx, the ignominious tyranny imposed on his country, if other men, of better parts and much more consequence than himself, were not drawn in to misapply these parts to the vilest drudgery imaginable; the daily drudgery of explaining nonsense, covering ignorance, disguising folly, concealing and even justifying fraud and corruption; instead of employing their knowledge, their elocution, their skill, experience and authority, to correct the administration and to guard the constitution. But this is not all: the example shows a great deal more. Your Lordship's experience as well as mine will justify what I am going to say. It shows further, that such a conjuncture could not be rendered effectual to preserve power in some of the weakest and some of the worst hands in the kingdom, if there was not a non application, or a faint and unsteady exercise of parts on one side, as well as an iniquitous misapplication of them on the other: and I cannot help saying, let it fall where it will, what I have said perhaps already, that the former is a crime but one degree inferior to the latter. The more genius, industry, and spirit are

employed to destroy, the harder the task of saving our country becomes; but the duty increases with the difficulty, if the principles on which I reason are true. In such exigencies it is not enough that genius be opposed to genius, spirit must be matched by spirit. They, who go about to destroy, are animated from the first by ambition and avarice, the love of power and of money: fear makes them often desperate at last. They must be opposed therefore, or they will be opposed in vain, by a spirit able to cope with ambition, avarice, and despair itself: by a spirit able to cope with these passions, when they are favoured and fortified by the weakness of a nation, and the strength of a government. In such exigencies there is little difference, as to the merit or the effect, between opposing faintly and unsteadily, and not opposing at all: nay the former may be of worse consequence in certain circumstances than the latter. And this is a truth I wish with all my heart you may not see verified in our country, where many, I fear, undertake opposition not as a duty, but as an adventure: and looking on themselves like volunteers, not like men listed in the service, they deem themselves at liberty to take as much or as little of this trouble, and to continue in it as long, or end it as soon as they please. It is but a few years ago, that not the merchants alone, but the whole nation, took fire at the project of new excises. The project was opposed, not on mercantile considerations and interests alone, but on the true principles of liberty. In Parliament, the opposition was strenuously enough supported for a time; but there was so little disposition to guide and improve the spirit, that the chief concern of those who took the lead seemed applied to keep it down; and yet your Lordship remembers how high it continued against the projector; till it was calmed just before the elections of the present Parliament, by the remarkable indolence and inactivity of the last session of the last. But these friends of ours, my Lord, are as much mistaken in their ethics, as the event will show they have been in their politics.

The service of our country is no chimerical, but a real duty. He who admits the proofs of any other moral duty, drawn from the constitution of human nature, or from the moral fitness and unfitness of things, must admit them in favour of this duty, or be reduced to the most absurd inconsistency. When he has once admitted the duty on these proofs, it will be no difficult matter to demonstrate to him, that his obligation to the performance of it is in proportion to the means and the opportunities he has of performing it; and that nothing can discharge him from this obligation as long as he has these means and these opportunities in his power, and as long as his country continues in the same want of his services. These obligations then to the public service may become obligations for life on certain persons. No doubt they may: and shall this consideration become a reason for denying or evading them? On the contrary, sure it should become a reason for acknowledging and fulfilling them, with the greatest gratitude to the Supreme Being, who has made us capable of acting so excellent a part, and of the utmost benevolence to mankind. Superior talents, and superior rank amongst our fellow creatures, whether acquired by birth, or by the course of accidents, and the success of our own industry, are noble prerogatives. Shall he who possesses them repine at the obligation they lay him under, of passing his whole life in the noblest occupation of which human nature is capable? To what higher station, to what greater glory can any mortal aspire, than to be, during the whole course of his life, the support of good, the control of bad government, and the guardian of public liberty? To be driven from hence by successful tyranny, by loss of health or of parts, or by the force of accidents, is to be degraded in such a manner as to deserve pity, and not to incur blame: but to degrade ourselves, to descend voluntarily, and by choice, from the highest to a lower, perhaps to the lowest rank among the sons of Adam; to abandon the government of men for that of hounds and horses, the care of a kingdom for that of a parish, and a scene of great and generous efforts in public life, for one of trifling amusements and low cares, of sloth and of idleness, what is it, my Lord? I had rather your Lordship should name it than I. Will it be said that it is hard to exact from some men, in favour of others, that they should renounce all the pleasures of life, and drudge all their days in business, that others may indulge themselves in ease? It will be said without grounds. A life dedicated to the service of our country admits the full use, and no life should admit the abuse, of pleasures: the least are consistent with a constant discharge of our public duty, the greatest arise from it. The common, the sensual pleasures to which nature prompts us, and which reason therefore does not forbid, though she should always direct, are so far from being excluded out of a life of business, that they are sometimes necessary in it, and are always heightened by it: those of the table, for instance, may be ordered so as to promote that which the elder Cato calls *vitae conjunctionem*. In the midst of public duties, private studies, and an extreme old age, he found time to frequent the sodalitates, or clubs of friends at Rome, and to sit up all night with his neighbours in the country of the Sabines. Cato's virtue often glowed with wine: and the love of women did not hinder Caesar from forming and executing the greatest projects that ambition ever suggested. But if Caesar, whilst he laboured to destroy the liberties of his country, enjoyed these inferior pleasures of life, which a man who labours to save those liberties may enjoy as well as he;

there are superior pleasures in a busy life that Caesar never knew, those, I mean, that arise from a faithful discharge of our duty to the commonwealth. Neither Montaigne in writing his essays, nor Descartes in building new worlds, nor Burnet in framing an antediluvian earth, nor Newton in discovering and establishing the true laws of nature on experiment and a sublimer geometry, felt more intellectual joys, than he feels who is a real patriot, who bends all the force of his understanding, and directs all his thoughts and actions, to the good of his country. When such a man forms a political scheme, and adjusts various and seemingly independent parts in it to one great and good design, he is transported by imagination, or absorbed in meditation, as much and as agreeably as they. and the satisfaction that arises from the different importance of these objects, in every step of the work, is vastly in his favour. It is here that the speculative philosopher's labour and pleasure end. But he who speculates in order to act, goes on, and carries his scheme into execution. His labour continues, it varies, it increases; but so does his pleasure too. The execution indeed is often traversed, by unforeseen and untoward circumstances, by the perverseness or treachery of friends, and by the power or malice of enemies: but the first and the last of these animate, and the docility and fidelity of some men make amends for the perverseness and treachery of others. Whilst a great event is in suspense, the action warms, and the very suspense, made up of hope and fear, maintains no unpleasing agitation in the mind. If the event is decided successfully, such a man enjoys pleasure proportionable to the good he has done; a pleasure like to that which is attributed to the Supreme Being, on a survey of his works. If the event is decided otherwise, and usurping courts, or overbearing parties prevail; such a man has still the testimony of his conscience, and a sense of the honour he has acquired, to soothe his mind, and support his courage. For although the course of state-affairs be to those who meddle in them like a lottery, yet it is a lottery wherein no good man can be a loser. he may be reviled, it is true, instead of being applauded, and may suffer violence of many kinds. I will not say, like Seneca, that the noblest spectacle which God can behold, is a virtuous man suffering, and struggling with afflictions: but this I will say, that the second Cato driven out of the forum, and dragged to prison, enjoyed more inward pleasure, and maintained more outward dignity, than they who insulted him, and who triumphed in the ruin of their country. But the very example of Cato may be urged perhaps against what I have insisted upon: it may be asked, what good he did to Rome, by dedicating his whole life to her service, what honour to himself by dying at Utica? It may be said, that governments have their periods like all things human; that they may be brought back to their primitive principles during a certain time, but that when these principles are worn out, in the minds of men, it is a vain enterprise to endeavour to renew them: that this is the case of all governments, when the corruption of the people comes to a great pitch, and is grown universal: that when a house which is old, and quite decayed, though often repaired, not only cracks, but totters even from the foundations, every man in his senses runs out of it, and takes shelter where he can, and that none but madmen continue obstinate to repair what is irreparable, till they are crushed in the ruin. Just so, that we must content ourselves to live under the government we like the least, when that form which we like the most is destroyed, or worn out; according to the counsel of Dolabella in one of his letters to Cicero. But, my Lord, if Cato could not save, he prolonged the life of liberty: the liberties of Rome would have been lost when Catiline attacked them, abetted probably by Caesar and Crassus, and the worst citizens of Rome; and when Cicero defended them, abetted by Cato and the best. That Cato erred in his conduct, by giving way too much to the natural roughness of his temper, and by allowing too little for that of the Romans, among whom luxury had long prevailed, and corruption was openly practised, is most true. He was incapable of employing those seeming compliances that are reconcilable to the greatest steadiness, and treated unskilfully a crazy constitution. The safety of the commonwealth depended, in that critical conjuncture, on a coalition of parties, the senatorian and the equestrian: Tully had formed it, Cato broke it. But if this good, for I think he was not an able, man erred in the particular respects I have ventured to mention, he deserved most certainly the glory he acquired by the general tenor of his conduct, and by dedicating the whole labour of his life to the service of his country. He would have deserved more if he had persisted in maintaining the same cause to the end, and would have died I think with a better grace at Munda than at Utica. If this be so, if Cato may be censured, severely indeed, but justly, for abandoning the cause of liberty, which he would not however survive; what shall we say of those, who embrace it faintly, pursue it irresolutely, grow tired of it when they have much to hope, and give it up when they have nothing to fear?

My Lord, I have insisted the more on this duty which men owe to their country, because I came out of England, and continue still, strongly affected with what I saw when I was there. Our government has approached, nearer than ever before, to the true principles of it, since the Revolution of one thousand six hundred and eighty eight: and the accession of the present family to the throne, has given the fairest opportunities, as well as the justest reasons, for completing the scheme of liberty,

and improving it to perfection. But it seems to me, that, in our separate world, as the means of asserting and supporting liberty are increased, all concern for it is diminished. I beheld, when I was among you, more abject servility, in the manners and behaviour of particular men, than I ever saw in France, or than has been seen there, I believe, since the days of that Gascon, who, being turned out of the minister's door, leaped in again at his window. As to bodies of men, I dare challenge your Lordship, and I am sorry for it, to produce any instances of resistance to the unjust demands, or wanton will of a court, that British Parliaments have given, comparable to such as I am able to cite to the honour of the parlement of Paris, and the whole body of the law in that country, within the same compass of time. This abject servility may appear justly the more wonderful in Britain, because the government of Britain has, in some sort, the appearance of an oligarchy. and monarchy is rather hid behind it than shown, rather weakened than strengthened, rather imposed upon than obeyed. The wonder therefore is to observe, how imagination and custom (a giddy fool and a formal pedant) have rendered these cabals, or oligarchies, more respected than majesty itself. That this should happen in countries where princes, who have absolute power, may be tyrants themselves, or substitute subordinate tyrants, is not wonderful. It has happened often: but that it should happen in Britain, may be justly an object of wonder. In these countries, the people had lost the armour of their constitution: they were naked and defenceless. Ours is more complete than ever. But though we have preserved the armour, we have lost the spirit of our constitution: and therefore we bear, from little engrossers of delegated power, what our fathers would not have suffered from true proprietors of the royal authority. Parliaments are not only, what they always were, essential parts of our constitution, but essential parts of our administration too. They do not claim the executive power. No. But the executive power cannot be exercised without their annual concurrence. How few months, instead of years, have princes and ministers now, to pass without inspection and control? How easy therefore is it become to check every growing evil in the bud, to change every bad administration, to keep such farmers of governments in awe, to maintain and revenge, if need be, the constitution? It is become so easy by the present form of our government, that corruption alone could not destroy us. We must want spirit, as well as virtue, to perish. Even able knaves would preserve liberty in such circumstances as ours, and highwaymen would scorn to receive the wages and do the drudgery of pickpockets. But all is little, and low, and mean among us! Far from having the virtues, we have not even the vices of great men. He who had pride instead of vanity, and ambition but equal to his desire of wealth, could never bear, I do not say to be the understrapper to any farmer of royal authority, but to see patiently one of them (at best his fellow, perhaps his inferior in every respect) lord it over him, and the rest of mankind, dissipating wealth, and trampling on the liberties of his country, with impunity. This could not happen, if there was the least spirit among us. But there is none. What passes among us for ambition, is an odd mixture of avarice and vanity. the moderation we have seen practised is pusillanimity, and the philosophy that some men affect is sloth. Hence it comes that corruption has spread, and prevails.

I expect little from the principal actors that tread the stage at present. They are divided, not so much as it has seemed, and as they would have it believed, about measures: the true division is about their different ends. Whilst the minister was not hard pushed, nor the prospect of succeeding to him near, they appeared to have but one end, the reformation of the government. The destruction of the minister was pursued only as a preliminary, but of essential and indispensable necessity to that end. But when his destruction seemed to approach, the object of his succession interposed to the sight of many, and the reformation of the government was no longer their point of view. They divided the skin, at least in their thoughts, before they had taken the beast, and the common fear of hunting him down for others made them all faint in the chase. It was this, and this alone, that has saved him, or has put off his evil day. Corruption, so much, and so justly complained of, could not have done it alone.

When I say that I expect little from the principal actors that tread the stage at present, I am far from applying to all of them what I take to be true of the far greatest part. There are men among them who certainly intend the good of their country, and whom I love and honour for that reason. But these men have been clogged, or misled, or overborne by others; and, seduced by natural temper to inactivity, have taken any excuse, or yielded to any pretence that savoured it. That they should rouse therefore in themselves, or in any one else, the spirit they have suffered, nay helped to die away, I do not expect. I turn my eyes from the generation that is going off, to the generation that is coming on the stage. I expect good from them, and from none of them more than from you, my Lord. Remember that the opposition in which you have engaged, at your first entrance into business, is not an opposition only to a bad administration of public affairs, but to an administration that supports itself by means, establishes principles, introduces customs, repugnant to the constitution of our governments, and destructive of all liberty; that you do not only combat present evils, but your

posterity; that if attempts to entail these evils upon you and you cease the combat, you give up the cause: and that he, who does not renew on every occasion his claim, may forfeit his right.

Our disputes were formerly, to say the truth, much more about persons than things; or at most about particular points of political conduct, in which we should have soon agreed, if persons, and personal interests had been less concerned, and the blind prejudice of party less prevalent. Whether the Big-endians or the Little-endians got the better, I believe no man of sense and knowledge thought the constitution concerned; notwithstanding all the clamour raised at one time about the danger of the Church, and at another about the danger of the Protestant succession. But the case is at this time vastly altered. The means of invading liberty more effectually by the constitution of the revenue, than it ever had been invaded by prerogative, were not then grown up into strength. They are so now; and a bold and an insolent use is made of them. To reform the state therefore is, and ought to be, the object of your opposition, as well as to reform the administration. Why do I say as well? It is so, and it ought to be so, much more. Wrest the power of the government, if you can, out of hands that have employed it weakly and wickedly; ever since it was thrown into them, by a silly bargain made in one reign, and a corrupt bargain made in another. But do not imagine this to be your sole, or your principal business. You owe to your country, to your honour, to your security, to the present, and to future ages, that no endeavours of yours be wanting to repair the breach that is made, and is increasing daily in the constitution, and to shut up with all the bars and bolts of law, the principal entries through which these torrents of corruption have been let in upon us. I say the principal entries; because, however it may appear in pure speculation, I think it would not be found in practice possible, no nor eligible neither, to shut them up all. As entries of corruption none of them deserve to be excepted: but there is a just distinction to be made, because there is a real difference. Some of these entries are opened by the abuse of powers, necessary to maintain subordination, and to carry on even good government, and therefore necessary to be preserved in the crown, notwithstanding the abuse that is sometimes made of them; for no human institution can arrive at perfection, and the most that human wisdom can do, is to procure the same or greater good, at the expense of less evil. There will be always some evil either immediate, or remote, either in cause or consequence. But there are other entries of corruption, and these are by much the greatest, for suffering of which to continue open no reason can be assigned or has been pretended to be assigned, but that which is to every honest and wise man a reason for shutting them up; the increase of the means of corruption, which are oftener employed for the service of the oligarchy, than for the service of the monarchy. Shut up these, and you will have nothing to fear from the others. By these, a more real and a more dangerous power has been gained to ministers, than was lost to the crown by the restraints on prerogative.

There have been periods when our government continued free, with strong appearances of becoming absolute. Let it be your glory, my Lord, and that of the new generation springing up with you, that this government do not become absolute at any future period, with the appearances of being free. However you may be employed, in all your councils, in all your actions, keep this regard to the constitution always in sight. The scene that opens before you is great, and the part that you will have to act difficult. It is difficult indeed to bring men, from strong habits of corruption, to prefer honour to profit, and liberty to luxury, as it is hard to teach princes the great art of governing all by all, or to prevail on them to practise it. But if it be a difficult, it is a glorious attempt; an attempt worthy to exert the greatest talents, and to fill the most extended life. Pursue it with courage, my Lord, nor despair of success.

--- *deus haec fortasse benigna*  
*Reducet in sedem vice.*

A Parliament, nay one house of Parliament, is able at any time, and at once, to destroy any corrupt plan of power. Time produces every day new conjunctures: be prepared to improve them. We read in the Old Testament of a city that might have escaped divine vengeance, if five righteous men had been found in it. Let not our city perish for want of so small a number: and if the generation that is going off could not furnish it, let the generation that is coming on furnish a greater.

We may reasonably hope that it will, from the first essays which your Lordship, and some others of our young senators, have made in public life. You have raised the hopes of your country by the proofs you have given of superior parts. Confirm these hopes by proofs of uncommon industry and application, and perseverance. Superior parts, nay even superior virtue, without these qualities, will be insufficient to support your character and your cause. How many men have appeared in my time who have made these essays with success, and have made no progress afterwards? Some have dropped, from their first flights, down into the vulgar crowd, have been distinguished, nay heard of,



no more! Others with better parts, perhaps with more presumption, but certainly with greater ridicule, have persisted in making these essays towards business all their lives, and have never been able to advance farther, in their political course, than a premeditated harangue on some choice subject. I never saw one of these important persons sit down after his oration, with repeated hear-hims ringing in his ears, and inward rapture glowing in his eyes, that he did not recall to my memory the story of a conceited member of some parlement in France, who was overheard, after his tedious harangue, muttering most devoutly to himself, *Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam!*

Eloquence, that leads mankind by the ears, gives a nobler superiority than power that every dunce may use, or fraud that every knave may employ, to lead them by the nose. But eloquence must flow like a stream that is fed by an abundant spring, and not spout forth a little frothy water on some gaudy day, and remain dry the rest of the year. The famous orators of Greece and Rome were the statesmen and ministers of those commonwealths. The nature of their governments and the humour of those ages made elaborate orations necessary. They harangued oftener than they debated: and the *ars dicendi*, required more study and more exercise of mind, and of body too, among them, than are necessary among us. But as much pains as they took in learning how to conduct the stream of eloquence, they took more to enlarge the fountain from which it flowed. Hear Demosthenes, hear Cicero thunder against Philip, Catiline and Anthony. I choose the example of the first rather than that of Pericles whom he imitated, or of Phocion whom he opposed, or of any other considerable personage in Greece; and the example of Cicero rather than that of Crassus, or of Hortensius, or of any other of the great men of Rome; because the eloquence of these two has been so celebrated that we are accustomed to look upon them almost as mere orators. They were orators indeed, and no man who has a soul can read their orations, after the revolution of so many ages, after the extinction of the governments, and of the people for whom they were composed, without feeling at this hour the passions they were designed to move, and the spirit they were designed to raise. But if we look into the history of these two men, and consider the parts they acted, we shall see them in another light, and admire them in an higher sphere of action. Demosthenes had been neglected, in his education, by the same tutors who cheated him of his inheritance. Cicero was bred with greater advantage: and Plutarch, I think, says that when he first appeared the people used to call him, by way of derision, the Greek, and the scholar. But whatever advantage of this kind the latter might have over the former, and to which of them soever you ascribe the superior genius, the progress which both of them made in every part of political knowledge, by their industry and application, was marvellous. Cicero might be a better philosopher, but Demosthenes was no less a statesman: and both of them performed actions and acquired fame, above the reach of eloquence alone. Demosthenes used to compare eloquence to a weapon, aptly enough; for eloquence, like every other weapon, is of little use to the owner, unless he have the force and the skill to use it. This force and this skill Demosthenes had in an eminent degree. Observe them in one instance among many. It was of mighty importance to Philip to prevent the accession of Thebes to the grand alliance that Demosthenes, at the head of the Athenian commonwealth, formed against the growing power of the Macedonians. Philip had emissaries and his ambassadors on the spot to oppose to those of Athens, and we may be assured that he neglected none of those arts upon this occasion that he employed so successfully on others. The struggle was great, but Demosthenes prevailed, and the Thebans engaged in the war against Philip. Was it by his eloquence alone that he prevailed in a divided state, over all the subtlety of intrigue, all the dexterity of negotiation, all the seduction, all the corruption, and all the terror that the ablest and most powerful prince could employ? Was Demosthenes wholly taken up with composing orations, and haranguing the people, in this remarkable crisis? He harangued them no doubt at Thebes, as well as at Athens, and in the rest of Greece, where all the great resolutions of making alliances, waging war, or concluding peace, were determined in democratical assemblies. But yet haranguing was no doubt the least part of his business, and eloquence was neither the sole, nor the principal talent, as the style of writers would induce us to believe, on which his success depended. He must have been master of other arts, subserviently to which his eloquence was employed, and must have had a thorough knowledge of his own state, and of the other states of Greece, of their dispositions, and of their interests relatively to one another, and relatively to their neighbours, to the Persians particularly, with whom he held a correspondence, not much to his honour: I say, he must have possessed an immense fund of knowledge, to make his eloquence in every case successful, and even pertinent or seasonable in some, as well as to direct it and to furnish it with matter whenever he thought proper to employ this weapon.

Let us consider Tully on the greatest theatre of the known world, and in the most difficult circumstances. We are better acquainted with him than we are with Demosthenes; for we see him nearer, as it were, and in more different lights. How perfect a knowledge had he acquired of the Roman constitution of government, ecclesiastical and civil; of the original and progress, of the

general reasons and particular occasions of the laws and customs of his country; of the great rules of equity, and the low practice of courts; of the duty of every magistracy and office in the state, from the dictator down to the lictor; and of all the steps by which Rome had risen from her infancy, to liberty, to power and grandeur and dominion, as well as of all those by which she began to decline, a little before his age, to that servitude which he died for opposing, but lived to see established, and in which not her liberty alone, but her power and grandeur and dominion were lost? How well was he acquainted with the Roman colonies and provinces, with the allies and enemies of the empire, with the rights and privileges of the former, the dispositions and conditions of the latter, with the interests of them all relatively to Rome, and with the interests of Rome relatively to them? How present to his mind were the anecdotes of former times concerning the Roman and other states, and how curious was he to observe the minutest circumstances that passed in his own? His works will answer sufficiently the questions I ask, and establish in the mind of every man who reads them the idea I would give of his capacity and knowledge, as well as that which is so universally taken of his eloquence. To a man fraught with all this stock of knowledge, and industrious to improve it daily, nothing could happen that was entirely new, nothing for which he was quite unprepared, scarce any effect whereof he had not considered the cause, scarce any cause wherein his sagacity could not discern the latent effect. His eloquence in private causes gave him first credit at Rome, but it was this knowledge, this experience, and the continued habits of business, that supported his reputation, enabled him to do so much service to his country, and gave force and authority to his eloquence. To little purpose would he have attacked Catiline with all the vehemence that indignation and even fear added to eloquence, if he had trusted to this weapon alone. This weapon alone would have secured neither him nor the senate from the poniard of that assassin. He would have had no occasion to boast, that he had driven this infamous citizen out of the walls of Rome, abiit, excessit, evasit, erupit, if he had not made it before-hand impossible for him to continue any longer in them. As little occasion would he have had to assume the honour of defeating without any tumult, or any disorder, the designs of those who conspired to murder the Roman people, to destroy the Roman empire, and to extinguish the Roman name; if he had not united by skill and management, in the common cause of their country, orders of men the most averse to each other; if he had not watched all the machinations of the conspirators in silence, and prepared a strength sufficient to resist them at Rome, and in the provinces, before he opened this scene of villainy to the senate and the people: in a word, if he had not made much more use of political prudence, that is, of the knowledge of mankind, and of the arts of government, which study and experience give, than of all the powers of his eloquence.

Such was Demosthenes, such was Cicero, such were all the great men whose memories are preserved in history, and such must every man be, or endeavour to be, if he has either sense or sentiment, who presumes to meddle in affairs of government, of a free government I mean, and hopes to maintain a distinguished character in popular assemblies, whatever part he takes, whether that of supporting, or that of opposing. I put the two cases purposely, my Lord, because I have observed, and your Lordship will have frequent occasions of observing, many persons who seem to think that opposition to an administration requires fewer preparatives, and less constant application than the conduct of it. Now, my Lord, I take this to be a gross error, and I am sure it has been a fatal one. It is one of those errors, and there are many such, which men impute to judgment, and which proceed from the defect of judgment, as this does from lightness, irresolution, laziness, and a false notion of opposition; unless the persons, who seem to think, do not really think in this manner, but serving the public purely for interest, and not for fame, nor for duty, decline taking the same pains when they oppose without personal and immediate reward, as they are willing to take when they are paid for serving. Look about you, and you will see men eager to speak, and keen to act, when particular occasions press them, or particular motives excite them, but quite unprepared for either: and hence all that superficiality in speaking, for want of information, hence all that confusion or inactivity, for want of concert, and all that disappointment for want of preliminary measures. They who affect to head an opposition, or to make any considerable figure in it, must be equal at least to those whom they oppose; I do not say in parts only, but in application and industry, and the fruits of both, information, knowledge, and a certain constant preparedness for all the events that may arise. Every administration is a system of conduct: opposition, therefore, should be a system of conduct likewise; an opposite, but not a dependent system. I shall explain myself better by an example. When two armies take the field, the generals on both sides have their different plans for the campaign, either of defence or of offence: and as the former does not suspend his measures till he is attacked, but takes them beforehand on every probable contingency, so the latter does not suspend his, till the opportunity of attacking presents itself, but is alert and constantly ready to seize it whenever it happens; and in the mean time is busy to improve all the advantages of skill, of force,

or of any other kind that he has, or that he can acquire, independently of the plan and of the motions of his enemy.

In a word, my Lord, this is my notion, and I submit it to you. According to the present form of our constitution, every member of either house of Parliament is a member of a national standing council, born, or appointed by the people, to promote good, and to oppose bad government; and, if not vested with the power of a minister of state, yet vested with the superior power of controlling those who are appointed such by the crown. It follows from hence, that they who engage in opposition are under as great obligations, to prepare themselves to control, as they who serve the crown are under, to prepare themselves to carry on the administration: and that a party formed for this purpose, do not act like good citizens nor honest men, unless they propose true, as well as oppose false measures of government. Sure I am they do not act like wise men unless they act systematically, and unless they contrast, on every occasion, that scheme of policy which the public interest requires to be followed, with that which is suited to no interest but the private interest of the prince or his ministers. Cunning men (several such there are among you) will dislike this consequence, and object, that such a conduct would support, under the appearance of opposing, a weak and even a wicked administration; and that to proceed in this manner would be to give good counsel to a bad minister, and to extricate him out of distresses that ought to be improved to his ruin. But cunning pays no regard to virtue, and is but the low mimic of wisdom. It were easy to demonstrate what I have asserted concerning the duty of an opposing party. and I presume there is no need of labouring to prove, that a party who opposed, systematically, a wise to a silly, an honest to an iniquitous, scheme of government, would acquire greater reputation and strength, and arrive more surely at their end, than a party who opposed occasionally, as it were, without any common system, without any general concert, with little uniformity, little preparation, little perseverance, and as little knowledge or political capacity. But it is time to leave this invidious subject, and to hasten to the conclusion of my letter before it grows into a book.

I am, my Lord, etc.

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