

THE PROSPERITY OF A STATE DETERMINED BY THE EDUCATION OF ITS YOUTH.

By *Science*, a nation is enabled to profit by the advantages of its natural situation. It avails little that the soil of a country is rich, if the art of cultivation is unknown to the inhabitants. It avails nothing, that her shores are capable of being connected with every climate, through the medium of intervening seas or oceans, while science has never taught the construction of vessels, nor the art of directing them. Without this knowledge, there is comparatively little use in the rivers, by which a country is intersected; nor can the advantages of them be fully realized, till all vincible obstacles to navigation are actually overcome, and neighboring streams are made to unite their waters.

The sciences of chemistry and mineralogy, lately introduced into our country, and now cultivated with so much ardor and success, cannot fail, by their influence on medicine, agriculture and the arts, to produce consequences of great national importance. The nature of man on the one side, and of soils and climates on the other, remains the same in every age. It is knowledge—it is cultivation that produces the change. To this are we to ascribe it, that in our own country, where, two centuries ago, wild beasts and savages were contending for the empire of an unmeasured desert, there are now civil institutions, commerce, cities, arts, letters, religion, and all the charities of social and domestic life.

Whatever civil compact they may seem fit to adopt, an enlightened people will not trust themselves to calculate, with minuteness and confidence, the greatest degree of political prosperity that may be enjoyed, nor the least degree of restraint that may be necessary. It will not escape them, that no human foresight can extend to all emergencies, which a series of years may produce; and that time may develop, in any political constitution, traits, either more or less valuable, than were apparent to its original authors. It is a well known truth in mechanics, that the actual and theoretical powers of a machine will never coincide. Through the flexibility of one part, the rigidity of another, and the roughness of a third, the result may disappoint those fond hopes, which seemed to rest on the firm ground of mathematical calculation. The judicious artist will not, however, on this account, be willing to reject, as worthless, a structure of splendid and complicated mechanism, of solid materials, in the formation of which, much labor, experience and ingenuity have been employed.

It is a remark, not less important because frequently made, that an indifferent constitution may be so administered, as to render a nation happy, and that, without a good administration, the best political institutions will fail of accomplishing that purpose. Now, as the manner in which government will be administered in any nation, can never be foreseen, a discerning people will not confidently anticipate, as their perpetual portion, the highest degree of prosperity which their form of government seems calculated to secure. Nor will they fix their eyes so intensely on the evils which may be felt at any period, as to forget the imperfection of all human establishments, and that, under a new form of government, may be concealed important disadvantages, which experience alone can bring to light. Rejecting alike the character of inconstancy, turbulence, and despondency, they will neither tamely yield to abuses, nor subvert their political institutions on account of them.

As an enlightened people will know how to value their rights, they will place those in office, who, by their ability, knowledge and integrity, are entitled to such distinction. To obtain their suffrages, it will not be enough, that a man professes his attachment to order, religion, or liberty. He must have more solid ground, on which to establish his claims to public favor. In knowledge and wisdom is doubtless implied a spirit of discernment. To enjoy the confidence of a wise people, there must therefore be a consistency of character, a uniform regard to moral principle and the public good. They will clearly perceive, that the civil interests of millions cannot be secure in the hands of men, who, in the more confined circle of common intercourse, are selfish, rapacious, or aspiring.

An enlightened regard to self-interest and a religious sense of responsibility, will, in this case, lead to the same practical result. In exercising the right of freemen, the man of religion experiences no conflict between his duty and his inclination. Towards the dishonest, profane, ambitious and profligate, he feels—

"The strong antipathy of good to bad."

He has no wish to behold, arrayed in robes of office, men, whose largest views do not extend beyond the limits of mortal life, and whose deportment and conversation indicate neither love nor reverence for the Author of their being.

In very popular governments, where the elective franchise is widely extended, it is, doubtless, impossible that candidates for public office should be personally known to all, whose suffrages they receive. How generally soever knowledge is diffused, all the members of a large State cannot be brought within the sphere of mutual observation. In this case, resort must be had to the best sources of information. But it should not be forgotten, that a portion of the same intelligence and virtue, required in rulers, is necessary in giving information concerning candidates. An honest and well informed freeman will rely on none but well-informed witnesses.

A nation distinguished by a union of wisdom, knowledge, and the fear of God, is morally certain of having its government well administered, not only for the reason just assigned, but because the tone of morals, existing in such a nation, will operate as a powerful restraint, if, by any casualty or deep dissimulation, persons of yielding virtue should be placed in office.

Public opinion constitutes a tribunal, which few men, and least of all, those who are in pursuit of popular favor, will dare to set at defiance. It is scarcely possible, that a people, truly wise and virtuous, should have a government badly administered. Whenever the majority of a community complain of their rulers, they implicitly utter reproaches against themselves, for having placed their destiny in the hands of men, with whom it is insecure. If their reproaches are long continued, it is good proof that their own morals exhibit no very striking contrast with the morals of those whose profligacy they condemn. In popular governments, the virtues and vices of rulers must flourish or wither with those of the people.

Those intellectual and moral qualities, so essential to the permanent prosperity of a State, can be promoted extensively in no other way than by education, early begun and judiciously prosecuted. The youth in a community have, long since, been compared to the spring. The loss of these would be like striking out from the year, the vernal months. If there be no vegetation in the opening year, what shall support life during the time of autumn and winter? Or what, if there be a luxuriant vegetation, but no salutary or nourishing plant? What if "thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockles instead of barley?"

That education may do much, both for the intellectual and moral improvement of a nation, cannot be called in question. If the Spartan discipline was found adequate to its object, during many centuries, though it counteracted some of the strongest affections of our natures; if parental, filial, and even conjugal tenderness could be extinguished or smothered under a political constitution, which formed but one family, of a whole State, what might not be done by pursuing, with perseverance, a plan of education, concerted with just views of the human character, and under the influence of that glorious light, which Christianity has shed on the destiny of man!

The active powers of the soul must either be suppressed or directed. If they are suppressed, their possessor loses, in a considerable degree, his rank in the moral world. If they are not suppressed, they must be directed by knowledge and moral principle.

The importance of early instruction was felt by the wisest nations of antiquity: "What," says an author,* speaking in the name of the Grecian sages, and profoundly versed in their writings, "What are the solid foundations of the tranquillity and happiness of States? Not the laws which dispense the rewards and punishments; but the public voice, when it makes an exact retribution of contempt and esteem. The laws, in themselves impotent, borrow their power solely from manners. Hence results, in every government, the indispensable necessity of attending to the education of children, as an essential object of training them up in the spirit and love of the constitution, in the simplicity of ancient times; in a word, in the principles which ought ever after to regulate their virtues, their opinions, their sentiments, and their behaviour. All who have meditated on the art of government, have been convinced that the fate of empires, depended on the education given to youth."

This subject did not escape the notice of the Athenian legislator.

* Abbe Bartholemi Travels of Anacharsis III, 329