

PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

THE probable consequences of the late revolution in France, with regard to that Country, and the rest of Europe, are more difficult to ascertain, than the causes from which it has arisen. The world is perhaps not yet old enough, to enable us to decide, what will be the result of a situation, never yet exactly paralleled in any part of its history.

I am aware, that it is the opinion of many, that as often as the subjects of a despotic government, who have far advanced in luxury, and the vices of opulence, attempt to throw off the yoke, they must, after a few convulsive efforts, fall back under the rod of tyranny. Such efforts (these people think) are like the adventitious strength and spirits, that are sometimes communicated to the natural body during the paroxysms of a disease; the causes of which are no sooner removed, than the constitution sinks down to its usual tone.

These persons lay it down as a maxim, That a certain portion, both of knowledge and virtue, is necessary to constitute and maintain freedom. Tho' destitute of these qualities, men may, indeed, subvert an established government; but without moderation and virtue, laws can have no authority. Incapable, therefore, of submitting to law, they must be controuled by power. A mercenary and mutinous soldiery will always be ready to become the instrument of despotism, in the hands of the person, who is most disposed to gratify their avarice, or indulge their licentiousness.

Such observations, they suppose, are illustrated and confirmed, by the many feeble and irregular efforts made, under the Roman Emperors, to recover the ancient constitution of the Republic. In such a state, the more frequently attempts are made to procure freedom, the more heavily must the people feel the weight of oppression. Opposition irritates power; insurrection provokes cruelty. Every new commotion, that is suppressed, adds fresh vigor and acrimony to the power of despotism.

So far as the present state of France resembles that of ancient Rome, so far will the argument be conclusive. The slightest observation will, however, discover a very wide difference between the one and the other. In some of the great cities of France, a few individuals may be arrived at a state of venality, and corruption of manners, incompatible with independence. This, however, is far from being the case with the great body of the people. In vir-

tue, industry, and knowledge, these latter no more resemble the idle, extravagant, and debauched citizens of Rome, than the kingdom of France resembles an empire, which comprehends the whole of the then-known world. The instructions, delivered by the people of France to their Representatives in the National Assembly, are a faithful portrait of their sentiments. They form a collection of the most interesting state-papers that were ever written. They recommend the forming of high-ways and canals; the improvement of agriculture, and encouragement of commerce; a provision for the administration of justice: They point out the most salutary restraints on arbitrary power; on the expenditure, and application of the national revenue: They are dictated with a spirit unparalleled in history; a spirit at present universal in France. They prove incontestably, that the sun of liberty and science has arisen in the land, by which the clouds of despotism must be finally dispelled. Accidents, perhaps may occur, which, for a while, may prevent these effects; but follow they unavoidably must. So long as the present habits and sentiments of the nation continue, so long it must free. The maxim, 'That all government is founded on opinion,' is undeniably just. Amidst opinions, therefore universally favourable to liberty, despotism cannot possibly subsist.

To these considerations we may add, that the science of government is now better understood, than it was in ancient times. The experience of three thousand years has greatly improved human knowledge and arts, and of which jurisprudence makes an important branch. The invention of printing has diffused knowledge more generally, than it could possibly have been in earlier periods of the world. That information, of which mankind were then in possession, could by no means be so easily acquired by every individual, as at present. The idea of representation, that happy expedient by which freedom is perpetuated in modern times, was not formerly understood. By this invention, a whole community may concur in framing the laws by which it is governed, without being endangered by those tumults and commotions, that are inseparable from large assemblies. The institution of trials by jurors, which, in all free states, is justly regarded as the great palladium of liberty, is also another blessing, unknown to ancient Greece and Rome. By these subsidiary contrivances, liberty may be preserved in a country, amidst a smaller proportion of virtue, than could