1837

A Lecture on Government

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A LECTURE ON GOVERNMENT.

BY PROFESSOR B. TUCKER.

Delivered before the Students of William and Mary College, March 6th, 1837.

William and Mary College, March 6th, 1837.

Dear Sir:—At a meeting of our fellow students, the pleasing duty was assigned us, of requesting for publication a copy of your very eloquent address, delivered before them this day. Your compliance with this request will be truly gratifying to us, and to those whom we represent.

With sentiments of profound respect,
We remain your ob're serv'ts,
T. H. MORRIS,
M. BANISTER,
W. P. MUNFORD,
E. P. PITI',
JOHN M. SPEED.

Judge B. Tucker.

Williamsburg, March 7th, 1837.

Gentlemen:—Your polite and flattering note of yesterday is just received. I beg you to accept my grateful acknowledgments of this new proof of the unmerited favor with which my imperfect services are received by the sons of my venerable alma mater. I shall take pleasure in complying with the substance of your request. My reasons for not fulfilling it to the letter, will, I trust, be justly appreciated by you.

It is now two years since I first formed a resolution no more to tax the partial kindness of my young friends with the publication of anything that I might write. But at the same time that I decline for this reason a direct compliance with your application, I propose to use it as an apology for giving to the press the lecture of which you ask a copy. Recommended by your approbation, which the Editor of the Southern Literary Messenger will probably regard as an augury of public favor, I make no doubt it will be acceptable to him. To him, therefore, it is my purpose to send it, with a copy of your note. In that flourishing periodical its circulation will be as extensive as your partiality or my own vanity can desire, and far more so than any intrinsic value of its own can deserve.

With high respect and sincere regard,
I remain, gentlemen,
Your friend and ob't serv't,
B. TUCKER.

To Messrs. T. H. Morris, M. Banister, W. P. Munford, E. P. Pitt, and John M. Speed, Committee, &c.

ADDRESS.

Gentlemen:

The subject of government is that which is to occupy our attention through the course of lectures on which we are about to enter. To recommend it to your attention, to impress you with a sense of its importance, and to lay before you an outline of my plan, is the purpose of this discourse.

To perform the task proposed, we must investigate the philosophy of government. We must inquire into those particulars in the nature of man, which render society necessary to him, and those circumstances which render government necessary to the purposes of society. We must examine the relations which man bears to man in a state of nature, the modifications of these relations effected by society, and the duties arising from them which are to be enforced by government.

Pursuing this investigation, we may hope to arrive at just ideas of the proper ends and objects of government. May we not farther hope to obtain some lights which may aid us in deciding what are the best means of attaining these ends? If such hopes be reasonable, then there is no subject connected merely with the temporal welfare of man that so much demands examination—none which promises so rich a reward to the patient and candid investigator. But he who would secure it, must come to his task with a mind duly prepared to receive the teachings of reason, and to follow her guidance whithersoever she may lead.

Why else is it that a subject, which, during six thousand years, has occupied the thoughts and researches of men able and wise in their generations, has so long remained shrouded in thick darkness? If that be true, which all of us believe, and of which most of us entertain no doubt, then, during the whole of that time, this darkness has been never penetrated but by occasional gleams, calculated rather to dazzle and bewilder than to enlighten. And why is it, but that the investigation has been conducted almost exclusively by practical statesmen, engaged in the actual business of government, and pledged by their prejudices and by their interests to ancient errors and inveterate abuses? Would we but bethink us that the science of civil polity and jurisprudence is a branch of that great system of moral government by which the author of all things rules the universe, we should feel that it becomes us to approach the subject with awe. Whether we propose to ourselves to minister in this great system, or content ourselves with investigating its principles, we should come to our task as to the performance of a holy function. The bias of faction and of interest must be shaken off; the aspirations of ambition must be restrained; the pride of opinion must be renounced, and we must hold ourselves prepared alike to defy the "sultus instantis tyranni," and to disregard the "citius ardo prava juventum."

Hence, gentlemen, the philosophy of government is a study most appropriate to the season of unprejudiced and uncorrupted youth, and to academic shades, never disturbed by the clamors of faction. The frown of power has no terrors here; the temptations of ambition have no allurements for us. To us who teach, and to you who learn, there is nothing so desirable as the discovery of truth; and to the search of this we can here address ourselves with a single-minded zeal, of which we, in other circumstances, and you, perhaps, in after life, might be incapable.

On the investigation to which I now invite your attention, we must prepare ourselves to enter with tempered ardor, with regulated enthusiasm, with patient hope; looking for the reward of our labors to Him, who never denies the light of truth to them that diligently seek it.

Man is emphatically a social animal. Other creatures are solitary or gregarious, according to the impulse
of instincts, which make them find pleasure in the presence of others of their kind, or cultivate a surly satisfaction in secluded loneliness. But man is social from necessity. The very laws of his nature impose society upon him, as one of the conditions of his existence. He is social in the same sense in which we say of some animals, that they are of the sea—of others, that they are of the earth or air. Society is the very element in which he must live; and the water is no more necessary to the fishes of the deep than society is to man.

He enters into life in circumstances that impose this necessity upon him. Other animals bring with them into the world a covering to shelter them from the inclemencies of the season; the faculty of locomotion is acquired in a few hours; the power of obtaining and the instinct which directs in the choice of food, are imparted long before the care of the mother is withdrawn; and, from the moment of their birth, the parent brute is in condition to cater for her offspring, and to defend or hide them from danger. But with man the case is widely different. Whole years, with all their vicissitudes of heat and cold, and parching drought, and drenching rain, must pass away, before he acquires strength to escape or to endure without perishing an exposure, even of a few hours, to either of these extremities. In the state of absolute helplessness in which he enters into life, his mother is hardly less helpless than himself, and both must perish did not the institutions of social life connect them with others to whom their existence is never so precious, as when in this precarious condition. To these institutions the father owes the means of identifying his offspring, who thus become the objects of that instinct of parental love which, in the brute creation, the mother alone is seen to display.

Do I go too far then, when I assert that society is essential to the preservation of the human species, and that man cannot be supposed to have ever existed out of a social relation? Or must I compliment the lord of creation by throwing a veil over that state of piteous helplessness, in which the inhabitants of an ant-hill might make him their prey?

How erroneously do they judge, who would, for this, undervalue the dignity of human nature. When God gave man “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth,” he gave him, as the charter of this gift, as the means of establishing and extending and perpetuating this dominion, the very helplessness which I have described. In this, man’s weakness is his strength; for this it is which makes the strength of all the strength of each. This season of dependent weakness, prolonged until the senses have acquired their perfection—till the affections have begun to bud—till the dawn of thought has broken up the darkness of his mind—makes him for a long time the constant recipient of benefits, which the infirmities and cravings of his nature teach him to prize and to receive with gratitude and love. It is by this fostering process that the heart is warmed to a sense of inextinguishable obligation, and puts forth those filaments which cling to the breast that feeds and cherishes him, with a tenacity that no time can relax, and no violence can sunder. The mother thus becomes a connecting link among those, who are alike the objects of her tender care; and the enduring ties which bind man to his kind are spun from the fine and delicate fibres, which, in the prolonged interchange of good offices, are shot forth from heart to heart.

Originating thus in the weakness of man, the primary end and object of society is security. To war against the dangers that assail, to guard against the dangers that threaten—to destroy, or drive to a distance, every thing by which security might be invaded—is the purpose for which men must first be supposed to have associated themselves together. Here is the inducement to accomplish that conquest over the brute creation to which man was ordained by his Maker.

In the prosecution of this, some races of animals have been annihilated—some are driven to hide themselves from the face of man in the depths of the forest, and in the caverns of the earth—and others of more tame and tractable tempers have been subdued to the uses of the lord of creation.

Thus was security obtained; but though these enemies were subdued or destroyed, their place was taken by another, more formidable than all the rest. Man became the enemy of man. The social union, which had sprung from a sense of common danger, had ceased with its cause; but a new danger thus arose, which did but bind together those who yet remained united, more strongly than before.

It would thus appear, that, under whatever circumstances society has been formed, the prevailing inducement to it must have been a desire of security. We may be disposed to reject this idea as disparaging to the character of the bold and intrepid being that man, in the infancy and in the rudest states of society, has generally shown himself. But there are dangers at which the heart of the hero quails like that of the veriest coward. The danger that threatens the domestic fireside, the prattling urchins, the nursing mother, and her tender babe, is one to which the brave are, perhaps, more sensitive than other men. To leave them alone and exposed, without protectors, without friends, while the hunter, in pursuit of the necessary means of subsistence, plunges into the wilderness, and for weeks and months together pursues his prey, would never be endured. The very wildness of his life, apparently most foreign to the social state, would make society the more necessary to his peace of mind.

It happens accordingly, that not only do we never find man dissociated from his fellows, but in that rude state in which he is incapable of being moulded into extended and civilized society, he is bound to the members of his petty tribe with a fervor of enthusiasm to which those of larger communities are strangers. They are necessary to him; for, but for them, the wolf or the tiger might invade his hut, or his race might be swept from the face of the earth by the incursion of a hostile tribe.

At this day, and viewing ourselves as members of a society, whose widely extended territory makes it altogether improbable that the horrors of war will ever be brought home to our firesides, we may be disposed to undervalue the security which we enjoy. It is danger which makes men sensible of its importance, and, in the total absence of that, we almost scorn to think of it as one of the elements of our happiness. But, think of it
as we may, it is that which gives their value to all the rest; for, without it, there can be nothing we can call our own. What prompts us to "add field to field and house to house," and to lay broad and deep the foundations of our prosperity? It is security. We know that

What makes men every where eager to strengthen that sacred tie on which the happiness of life depends, and to render it indissoluble? It is the desire of security. Why else are men willing thus to bind themselves irrevocably to a choice of which they may repent?

A little reflection will lead us to see that the same desire of security must have been mainly influential to induce men to submit themselves to the restraints of government. If it be true, and I trust I have shown that it must be so, that society of some sort is one of the very conditions of our existence, then society must always have been found among men under all circumstances. But the ends which render society necessary, might be accomplished by small associations. There is, therefore, no warrant for supposing large ones, antecedent to the institution of government. Among savages, we find none but petty tribes, composed of a few individuals, who may be supposed to have become united by the ties of blood and marriage, or by the offices of friendship. Indeed, there is something exclusive in such associations; and while we see the individual man irresistibly impelled to connect himself with his fellow man, we find that so soon as the society which necessity prescribes has been formed, a spirit of repulsion manifests itself toward all similar associations.

Looking, then, to the nature of man, and the circumstances in which he was placed in the world, we shall see mankind scattered over the face of the earth, not as insulated individuals, but in clustering groups, united by the necessities of nature, by the ties of kindred, and the reciprocal experience of benefits. We shall see each of these groups assuming a sort of collective personality, and soon learning to look with jealousy or envy on others. Of such connections or associations, not yet bound together by any tie that constitutes a government, permit me to speak by the name of bands or societies.

It must unavoidably and frequently happen, that between individual members of such bands, and individuals of some other band, collisions would arise. Whenever these should be of such a nature as to provoke mortal hostility, it would be generally found that the members of each would make common cause with their associate, whether to vindicate his quarrel, to redress his wrongs, or to defend his life. Hence, fierce and bloody contests would arise. Each of these would leave behind it the germ of other strifes, and, unless some remedy were found, extermination to one or both would often be the consequence.

It could hardly fail to happen, that in some such case a parley might lead to an agreement of the parties to submit the controversy to the arbitration of their respective friends, with an understanding that the associates of him who should be found to have done the wrong should punish, or force him to repair it. The satisfaction to all parties, which would generally result from the adoption of such a plan, would soon lead them to resort to it habitually, not only for the adjustment of controversies with the members of another band, but for the settlement of domestic difficulties.

Here, then, would be the infancy of government, developed from those embryo associations which the infiniteness of man's nature makes necessary to his existence. You will see that governments, originating from such causes, must, from the nature of the thing, be uniformly characterized by certain features, which we find, in point of fact, to be common to all governments, and the uniform existence of which cannot be accounted for so well on any other theory. The very ends and objects of such governments would require three things:

1. That each individual should be responsible to his own society, alone, for any wrongs done to the members of that, or any other society.

2. That each society should be responsible collectively to other societies for wrongs done by its members to other societies, or their members.

3. Hence, thirdly, would arise the duty of obedience from each individual to that society, thus made answerable for him, and securing him from all responsibility but to itself.

This is the protection to which allegiance is the reciprocal and correlative duty; and in this reciprocity, we find the origin of the inseparable connection between allegiance and protection. The two are mutually cause and consequence of each other. Let the responsibility of the community for the individual be once established, and his duty of obedience to the community will follow as a necessary consequence.

On the other hand, let it be admitted that he is bound to obey, and they who command must, of course, be responsible for the results of his obedience.

From the combined action of both principles, it will follow, that the individual being responsible to the community, and the community responsible for the individual, he cannot be responsible to any other authority.

You will see plainly in this sketch the outline of the few features which are common to all governments. You will see in it the source of that peculiar authority called sovereignty, the reason of its exercise, and the tests of its existence.

On this subject of sovereignty so much has been said, and so little is understood, that I am particularly pleased with the theory I have suggested; because it will render us familiar with a notion of government well calculated to preserve us from a confusion of ideas concerning sovereignty, so common and so perplexing.

I am aware that another theory has found favor with most writers. I speak of the patriarchal, as it is called. If by this it be meant that in the earliest ages there was always recognized a sort of authority in the parent over his children, and a mysterious tie connecting these together, it affirm's no more than is true of all men in all times and countries. To say that this existed before the existence of any other society, is but to affirm what the very idea of our common origin necessarily implies. In this sense the proposition embraces, in the beginning, the whole human race then in existence, and does but import that they continued united together until they fell out among themselves. That they did so fall out is certain—and in all after times we find mankind united together in associations in which, doubtless, the tie of blood was an element, but plainly
only one of many elements of union, embracing individuals of various families and races.

If we look for the testimony of history, we find, indeed, in scripture, instances of what we call familiarly patriarchal associations. But we have clear evidences of society, of some sort, antecedent to these. Moreover, the oldest and most authentic of them all is, certainly, not a case of a father exercising authority over his children or his kindred. It is the case of Abraham. We find him, on one occasion, at the head of three hundred and eighteen trained troops. Were these his own? We are expressly told so. Were they his descendants, the progeny of numerous wives? He was at that time childless; nor did he until afterwards become the father even of the misbegotten Ishmael. Were they his kindred? By no means; for, in the beginning of his career, God had said to him, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." He did so, taking only his wife, "and Lot his brother's son." We then have the history of his separation from Lot; and between that event and the birth of Ishmael, comes the history of his successful expedition, at the head of his own people, to rescue Lot from the king of Elam.

Now, what do we see in this corresponding with the idea of a patriarchal government, in the strict sense of the government of a father over his children? Nothing at all—but much to show that society and something like government already existed on some other basis, and nothing that does not well coincide with the theory that I have suggested.

I have said that I am desirous to recommend this theory to you, because it perfectly coincides with the results which we find throughout the world. If this theory be true, it explains how it is that all governments are established on the three great principles I have laid down. But whether these principles thus originated or no, of thus much we may be sure, that, however governments differ from each other, they all have these things in common. 1. That each individual is responsible to his own community for his acts. 2. That the community is responsible to all the world for the acts of its members; and 3. As a consequence of these, that the individual member is responsible to none but his own community.

I have already remarked, that the device intended to guard against collisions with other tribes, and to ensure the reparation of wrongs done by the members of one to the members of another, would soon be applied to the no less important object of preserving domestic peace, and enforcing justice between the members of the same tribe. Such application completes the idea of government, and supplies all that is wanting to perfect the sketch of those few particulars, in which all governments are found to resemble each other.

If we may know the tree by its fruits, we may judge from the universality of these principles of government, and of these alone, that the evils they are intended to remedy are those which have led to the establishment of governments. To this day they are the primary objects of all political institutions. To the accomplishment of these objects the frame of every government is shaped; and by the common consent of all enlightened nations, we do not impute the character of a body politic to any society in which these things do not receive a strict, faithful and scrupulous attention. Thus we see that those associations which make light of the responsibility of the collective whole for the acts of the members, and are occasionally found countenancing the wrongs done by individuals to the members of other states, are not recognized as properly belonging to the commonwealth of nations. By some states they may indeed be employed and countenanced as instruments of annoyances to an enemy, and by all they may be tolerated and endured for reasons of state. This, to the reproach of Europe, has been long true of the Barbary Powers. But we have lately seen, that when the forbearance of France was exhausted, or when her views were directed to a different policy, the power of Algiers was crushed, and her political existence blotted out, without a word of remonstrance from any other state. Even the characteristic jealousy of the aggrandizement of France, which England has always cherished, could not make her so insensible to her own honor as to prompt a single measure in order to prevent the annexation of that principality to the French dominions. Could a decent pretext for interference have been found, oceans of blood would have been shed, before France would have been permitted to secure to herself so important a port on the Mediterranean. The consequence attached to Gibraltar Minorca and Malta, in most European wars, makes this unquestionable.

It is only then in those associations which hold themselves responsible for the conduct of their members, that the law of nations fully recognizes a national character, a complete political personality. The correlative of this, as I have shown, is the duty of obedience on the part of each member to the community; and his exemption from all other responsibility, from which it is at once the right and the duty of the state to protect him. Deny this right, and you take away the consideration of his obedience. Remove this obligation, and you free the state from all responsibility for the acts of one whom you do not permit her to command and control. The converse of this reasoning is equally just, and will prove, that by disallowing any one of the three grand principles of political association of which I have spoken, you abolish all the rest; you dissolve the cement of political society; you loosen its foundations; you break down the whole into one shapeless ruin, and remit its members to a state of rude nature.

Here, then, you find the true idea of sovereignty. This it is that places on the elevated platform of perfect equality, every political society, however constituted, and of whatever magnitude. The republic treats on equal terms with the monarchy; the petty canton with the wide spread empire; for each brings to the negotiation the same unquestioned right to command the obedience of its people, and each frankly pledges the same unreserved responsibility for their acts.

It would seem from what has been said that, in order to fulfill the purposes for which societies have been erected into governments, the attention of those who frame and of those who administer them, should be primarily directed to two great objects. Of these, the first is to preserve peace by such regulations as may prevent or redress or punish the wrongs of our own people to other nations, and to place ourselves in a condition to exact the like respect for our rights. The second is to order matters at home with a due regard to the equal
rights of all, securing to each citizen the tranquil enjoyment of life, liberty and property, providing remedies for all injuries, prescribing punishments for all crimes, and enforcing all these regulations by a well arranged system of jurisprudence. A government which accomplishes these ends, and affords a reasonable security for their accomplishment in future, is a good government. We may have occasion hereafter to consider the wisdom of comprehending other objects within the scope of its operations, and we may come to conclude that its energies may be wisely employed in their accomplishment. But for the present we may confidently assume, that such a government as I have supposed is good, no matter how adopted, nor by whom prescribed; and that one which does not secure these important points is bad, though in the formation of it the most ingenious theories that were ever devised for the perfection of government, should have been faithfully studied and adopted.

I beg you not to understand me as insinuating that there is no choice among the various theories of government. Far from it. The very object of our present researches is to ascertain which is best among the different theories to which the ingenuity of man, in all ages, has given birth. I would only persuade you to look to the beauty and symmetry of any proposed system, nor to its origin, but to its adaptation to the proper and necessary ends of government. We should ask ourselves, “is it like to effectuate these things?” If so, it is worth a trial. But experience alone can decide whether it will effectuate them; and if, being tried, it fails to do so, then, whether imposed by force, or adopted by free choice; whether the creature of circumstances, or the work of Solon, and Lycurgus, and Numa; whether prescribed by the authority of one, or adopted by the unanimous voice of millions, it is bad, and worthy of condemnation. In the language of a great master of political philosophy, “a government of five hundred obscure country curates and pettifogging attorneys, is not good for twenty-four millions of people, even though it were chosen by forty-eight millions.”

The world has seen many instances of governments devised on theoretical principles, mainly with a view to the security of equal rights. How these have succeeded, history and the present abject condition of those countries which were the subjects of those experiments, show but too plainly. With the circumstances which attended the rise and progress and downfall of Rome, which led her from freedom to despotism—which raised her to the utmost height of power, and plunged her into the lowest abyss of degradation, we are all familiar. We read too of Greece, the cradle of liberty and the birthplace of art, science and literature—and we see her, for near two thousand years, doomed to wear the chains of domestic usurpation or foreign tyranny.

Is it then true, that that which is good in theory is bad in practice? Far from it. The truths taught by these examples, although humbling to the pride, and discouraging to the hopes of man, are not yet so disheartening as such a conclusion would be. But they teach us to act and to judge with caution. They teach us to distinguish between means and ends. They teach us that present enjoyment is not permanent security; and above all, they teach us that “the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.” They show us the danger as they are beautiful and plausible, are calculated to lull vigilance into fatal slumber; and lead us to suspect, that a certain degree of deformity, and slight aberrations from theoretical perfection, may produce in themselves no mischiefs which are not more than counter-balanced by the salutary difference of the system, and jealousy of its administrators, which they are calculated to provoke.

But, however we may cheer ourselves to our task, by indulging a hope that mankind, made wise by repeated error, may at last detect the great aevum on which the adaptation of government to its proper objects depends, the fulfilment of that hope is hardly to be expected in our day. The history of the world shows us all nations, that have ever tasted of liberty, passing through the same appointed cycle, and, at longer or shorter periods, returning to the same points. During the first few years that follow the establishment of freedom, the experience of its advantages and blessings commend it to the hearts of men, and make it an object of almost idolatrous devotion. But the prosperity which accompanies it is too apt to debauch the mind. The sure rewards of industry, activity and enterprise, make the pursuit of gain the prevailing habit, and the love of gain the master passion of the people. It is through this passion that the demagogue successfully assails them: he corrupts them with the spoils of the treasury; he tempts them with the plunder of the rich; he engages them in the service of his profligate ambition; he gilds the fetters he prepares for them; and teaches them to wear them as the badges of party, and the trappings of distinction, until, familiar with their weight, they permit them to rivetted on their limbs.

The season, during which this process is going on, is the season of tumultuary elections, the reign of mobs and anarchy and lawless violence. It is the season when leaders, drunk with ambition, and a rabble, drunk with flattery and alcohol, unite to plunder and oppress the middle classes, and shout the praises of parties and demagogues.

This cannot last. The spoils which purchase the vote and the shout and the bludgeon of the laborer, de­bauch him into habits of wastefulness and sloth. The aristocrat becomes weary of his trade—the operative impatient of his toil; the sources of wealth and prosperity are dried up, and the plundered hoards of avarice, and the rifled stores of provident benevolence, are soon exhausted. The means of supplying the wants of the countless multitude begin to fail, and their clamors assume a tone which warns their leader of approaching danger. The evil supplies its remedy. The mercenary voter affords the proper material for the mercenary soldier; and the habits of wastefulness and debauchery which disqualify him for every other occupation, do but fit him for that. Improvidence and sloth have made him feel the want of bread, and the paltry stipend of the soldier becomes an irresistible bribe. Happy they who are forward to secure it, and who, armed and organized, are equal to the task of curbing and chastising the petulant temper of the multitude, their late associates! Then commences the long reign of military despotism—the empire of the sword. The duration of this is indefinite, and not liable to be determined by any change in the condition of society, produced by its own operation. Its tendencies are all to degrade and abuse,
and degradation and abuse may be carried no farther. In this "lowest depth there is no lower deep." The only hope of change is from the "ignes viae" of the human mind, springing up with elastic recoil proportioned to the depth of its fall, and "in its proper motion reascending up to its native state." But the operation of such a state of things is to quench this fire, and repress its upward tendencies. Hence it is, that history, no where shows us a direct transition from military despotism to free government. But there is no state of life worth raising a candidate for empire, minions, some wiser prince, some Trajan Adilin, of things so subject to partial changes, afflicting the individual, but rather aggravating than redressing the wrongs of the oppressed. The Janissaries will sometimes rebel against the Sultan; the Pretorian bands, impatient for new largesses, may raise up a candidate for empire, whose success may amply reward their services. Such things no otherwise affect the great body of the people, than as they are fatal to the property and lives of all who may become involved in them.

But to the ruler himself they are of the last importance; and when Tiberius and Nero and Caligula and Otho, and Vitellius and Domitian have received the punishment of their crimes at the hands of their own minions, some wiser prince, some Trajan Adrian, or Antonine, perceives the necessity of creating a new order of men to stand between him and the sword of the mercenary. The materials for this will be sought among the valiant, the good, and wise, on whom ample and permanent benefits will be bestowed—the enjoyment of which, depending on the life and power of the donor, will make them faithful in his defence. The establishment of such an aristocracy is seen to be necessary by him, who, not dizzy and drunk with the giddy height of his elevation, looks down from the lofty column of autocratic power, on the blank expanse spread out below in one dead level of abject degradation. He sees nothing to break the force of the storms which every wind of Heaven directs against his throne. He feels it continually shaking on its narrow base; and he feels the want of something to screen him from the blast, and of buttresses to prop and support him against its fury. If he is wise to choose his materials; if he selects the members of this aristocracy from among those whose public services, whose valor, whose virtue, whose wisdom, or whose descent from men so distinguished, has already gained them favor with the soldiers and the people, he will want nothing but time to establish himself and his posterity firmly on the throne. But to such a work time is indispensable. The life of one man is too short to perfect it; and its accomplishment depends upon a succession of princes aiming to effect the same purpose by the same means.

When, in the providence of God, such a succession is vouchsafed to any people, it results in the establishment of a limited monarchy, based on a virtuous aristocracy, enfeoffed to the multitude below by the benefits which flow down from it, and shed their balm on hearts bruised by past oppressions; and heal the wounds the sword of the mercenary had inflicted, and refresh the waste places which his capacity had made desolate.

But the gratitude of the nobles for the favor of the prince, and that of the people for the patronage of the nobility, is not of long duration. A generation or two gives the character of established right to that which at first was gratuitous bounty: the great baron, when called on to show the title deeds of his estate, displays his sword, and on return receives the same answer from his subordinate vassal. Hence, jealousies arise; hence, ill will takes the place of grateful attachment; and the same causes which sunder the baron from the prince above him, and the vassal below, tend to unite both in common cause against him. This tendency indeed is counteracted by the pride of place and birth, and generations may pass away before a prince is found who can bring himself to subdue this feeling to his interest; to "enfeoff himself to popularity," and, by his favor to the people, to purchase their co-operation against the power of the nobility. But let a monarch appear, who proclaims himself the people's king—who foments their discontent against their immediate superiors, and encourages resistance to their authority, seeking to detach the vassal from his former holdings, and by favor and flattery to bind him immediately to the throne. The natural consequence of this coalition will soon be seen in the degradation of all that intervenes between the crown and the lowest populace. The privileges of rank and rank itself will be abolished; the rights of property will be threatened and invaded; and, finally, the lofty pillar of royal authority will alone remain of all the fabric of government. But how long will it remain? If the props and buttresses of aristocracy were necessary to support it, while predominating over a wide waste slumbering in the calm of despotism, how shall it stand without them, when all the elements of society are tossing in wild confusion around it? It cannot stand. The next moment sees it fall with fearful crash, and its fragments, together with the wrecks of aristocratic power, are scattered abroad to fertilize the earth, and enrich its cultivators.

Then again comes liberty—to a people not prepared to enjoy and cherish it, a single moment of wild and frightful anarchy—well exchanged for the despotism which presently follows. Here we find ourselves at the close of the cycle, returning after a long series of ages of revolution and convulsion, of oppression and blood and rapine, to the point from which we first set out.

In the various phases of political society, as seen in its progress through these mutations, we perhaps catch glimpses of all the forms in which government is capable of being moulded. Unfortunately, of those which we would wish to perpetuate, we have little more than glimpses, while those aspects on which it is impossible to look without horror, we have full leisure to contemplate and study. For, in considering the causes which lead to these various changes, it is lamentable to observe, that that which is good is ever pregnant with a principle of self-destruction, while all the tendencies of evil are of a nature to perpetuate it, and can only be corrected by counteracting causes.

There is certainly little in this thought to encourage us in our researches. Yet our only hope of success depends on our bearing this thought continually in mind. Could we certainly know what form of government was best for the happiness of man in its present operation, we should have accomplished but half our task, unless we can devise some means to counteract that tendency to change, which makes the history of all that is excellent in human institutions, but the history
of things that have been. Does it not seem that theoretical perfection involves so much of the principle of change and self-destruction, as to lead us to doubt whether it may not be necessary to surrender something of what, in itself, is good for the sake of preserving and securing the rest?

I have little doubt that this is true, and that our best hopes of discovering that scheme of things which will most conduce to the permanent welfare of society, depend upon the relinquishment of some present advantages, as the price of stability and security for those that we retain.

If then, in looking through the history of man in all ages, we can fix upon some one form of government, which for the time being has been most favorable to happiness, and to the development of those moral and intellectual qualities, of which happiness is the natural fruit and deserved reward; if we find the recurrence of that form uniformly attended by the recurrence of the like desirable consequences; and if we can then devise certain changes and modifications, which without detracting materially from such results, shall be calculated to prevent any further change, we shall have accomplished all that the political philosopher can propose to himself.

I believe that the framers of the constitution of Virginia (and here, alas! I speak of that which has been, not of that which is) made as near an approach to the discovery and practical application of this arcanum, as any statesman that ever lived. The devisers of the federal constitution had before them a more difficult task; but they went to it with the same general views and purposes, and executed it in a manner that well deserves the admiration of mankind.

In considering then, what government should be, abstractedly from its tendency to change, and devising the cheapest and most efficient means of restraining that tendency, we shall find ourselves following in great measure the footsteps of the authors of our institutions. In marking those changes which have taken place, we must mark their fitness to the great end originally proposed, and especially their tendency to promote or counteract the further progress of innovation. We may thus discover what progress we have made in performing that political cycle, which it may be our destiny, as it has been that of every other people, to accomplish. We may discover whether there is any hope that we may escape its fulfilment, and even though we may conclude that we cannot retrace our steps and turn back the appointed course of events, it may be of service to ascertain the means of checking the car of destiny in its fatal career, and postponing the evil day when the history of the liberty and happiness of Virginia shall but furnish school-boy's themes in distant lands. The sun of freedom seems fated to pursue its westward course around the globe, carrying with it the blessings of art and science, and virtue and religion, to lands never yet warmed by its rays; and finally, perhaps, to shed its full glory on the same classic scenes which first glowed under its kindling beams. In that day, when the statesman of the future Greece or Rome shall look back through thousands of years to the history of what his country once had been, his eye may rest midway on the page that records the virtues and triumphs of Washington, the mild wisdom of Franklin, the eloquence of Henry, and the political sagacity of Jefferson. These he will collate with Solon, and Lycurgus, and Thales, and Miltiades, and Cimon, and Aristides, and Demosthenes; with Numa, and Camillus, and Cincinnatus, and Cicero, and Cato; and while, in their enduring fame, he finds assurance of the high rewards that await his own labors in the cause of freedom and virtue, his heart will bleed at the thought that his labors themselves, like theirs, shall fade away, and leave his countrymen nothing but the sad remembrance of blessings wasted by abuse, lost by supineness, and forfeited by crime.

Do you, my young friends, propose to add your names to that bright constellation, which revolving around the steady pole of virtue and truth, shall never dip below the horizon, but while the world shall stand, and long after the sun of our glory shall be set forever, will continue to shed its melancholy light on your benighted country? Do you propose to add yourselves to the number of those to whose tombs, in future ages, the Muse shall point, reproaching your descendants with their degeneracy? Or, turning aside from the pursuit of truth and the cultivation of virtue, will you familiarize your lips with the cant of the demagogue or courtier, and qualify yourselves to minister to the licentiousness of the people, or the pride, vanity and ambition of their rulers?

If the latter is your choice, I advise you to avoid this place. You will hear nothing here which shall prepare you to play the part of parasite or demagogue, the flatterer of prince or people. I dare not indulge the hope that your nobler aspirations will derive any essential aid from my suggestions, but I can, at least, promise you that my best endeavors shall be faithfully exerted to search out the truth and lay it plainly before you. Nor shall I profess a treacherous indifference to the choice which you shall make, between what is popular and what is true. However agreeable it may be to cherish our own prejudices; however polite it may seem to cultivate and flatter the prejudices of others, I shall never cease to endeavor to convince you that such are not the means of true happiness or true honor.

That "echo of folly and shadow of renown," which is the short-lived reward of the demagogue, who goes to his grave dreaming of fame, and straightway is forgotten, I trust will have no charms for you. Do what you will, so long as you retain a love of truth and honor, you will be easily outstripped in the race of vulgar popularity, by men every way your inferiors, who have but divested themselves of any inconvenient regard for these troublesome and cumbersome principles. While you are working out the complex problem of expediency and right, men who think only of the expedient, will already have chosen their part, and accomplished their purposes, leaving you no other honor but that of being esteemed half a fool, because not wholly a knave.

But, gentlemen, in the faithful pursuit of political truth; in the diligent study of political philosophy, a high and sure reward awaits you. For speculate as we may, we have an interest in what the world shall think of us when we are no more, though of that, he who lived a thousand years ago, and he who died but yesterday, alike know nothing. But such is the nature of man.

"For, from his birth the sovereign maker said,
That not in humble, nor in brief delight,
Nor in the fading echoes of renown,
Power's purple robes, nor pleasure's flowery lap,
The soul should find enjoyment.
For why was man so eminently raised
Above the fair creation? why ordained
Thro' life and death to dart his piercing eye,
With thoughts beyond the limit of his frame?
But that the Omnipotent might send him forth,
In sight of mortal and immortal powers,
As on a boundless theatre to run
The high career of justice; to exalt
His generous aim to all diviner deeds;
To chase each partial purpose from his breast;
And thru' the mists of passion, and of sense,
And thru' the tossed kids of chance and pain,
To hold his course unaltering, while the voice
Of Truth and Virtue up the steep ascent
Of nature, calls him to his high reward,
The approving smile of Heaven.