



ON POLITICAL NICKNAMES

Country Man A Citizen

LETTER I.

To the Editor.

If your readers have not been much edified, they have been much amused, Mr. Editor, by the observations you have inserted about *fasting*; you have kept up the shuttlecock of controversy pretty well among ye. The result seems to be, that if a man has not got money enough in his pocket to buy a dinner, he will do well to fast for the good of the public. I cannot help thinking, however, that you have been a little too squeamish on the subject, for if we can beat the French by eating our dinner at supper time two or three times a year, or save the necessity of ten or twelve thousand troops by creating a few Sabbaths extraordinary, it would be a very cheap way of carrying on the war, and a man must have a great propensity to good eating who would object to it. No offence I hope Mr. Editor: these are hard times, and we ought to go to work as frugally as possible. But I sat down to write to you on a different subject; one that puzzles me daily; and I have therefore determined to seek for information from some of your more learned readers.

I am a plain country man, Mr. Editor; I love to take my glass and my pipe with my neighbours, and when we have discussed the common news of our township, the weather, and the appearance of the crops, we naturally fall upon the more general topic of POLITICS:

I do not pretend to understand much about the matter, however I join in the conversation, and have hitherto endeavoured to support my opinions, such as they are, by what is usually called argument and reasoning: but whether these are not the right sort of weapons, or from my unskilfulness in the use of them, they have seldom proved adequate in my hands to the purpose of confutation or conviction, when used against persons well read in the newspaper politics of the day. My adversaries of this description, generally obtain a decisive advantage by the dexterous use of certain NICKNAMES, to which, as I do not understand the precise meaning of them, I am unable to reply.

Some practical inconvenience I remember to have suffered from this mode of attack during the war. I pretty well understood the question between us and Great Britain. I knew that if we were governed without our consent, or taxed without our consent, there might be no limit to coercion or taxation, but the will of those who taxed or governed us. But in the course of the war the terms WHIG and TORY, came in vogue; and I found that when used by the prevailing partizans for the time being, all argument and reasoning gave way before these conquering appellations. So, friend as I was to the cause of American Independence, yet being somewhat too idle, too peaceable, and too domestic to engage in or approve the violent measures of any party, I became suspected as a Tory by the Whigs, and would have been hung as a Whig by the Tories, had the latter unfortunately succeeded. Under one or other, or both of these undefined appellations, the opulent and the peaceable were almost certain to be classed according to the prevalence of their more active neighbours on either side. I felt experimentally at that time the truth of the proverb, "give a dog an ill name, and hang him."

During the interval of peace that succeeded I felt no inconvenience on this head. I thought and I found that it was enough for a man to be a good citizen, to merit and obtain the esteem of his neighbours: the disputes about the present constitution, though warm, did not operate so unpleasantly as the contests of opinion during the war.

Of late, however, I find, that if I enter into any political discussion, I am completely interdicted from every thing like argument by the application of certain new fangled words, partly of our own growth, and partly of foreign importation; and the more indefinite and unintelligible they are, the more powerful seems to be their influence. Some of them, I am informed, are of Greek, some of French, some of English, and some of American production; but from the quarrels, the rancour, the violence and the injustice they occasion, I am inclined to ascribe to them a much *lower* origin, and to believe that Satan himself imported them from his own country.

I will not pretend to define or describe an Aristocrat, a Democrat, a Jacobin, a Sans-Culot, a Frenchman, an Anarchist, a Revolutionist, a Leveller, a Disorganizer, a Regicide, a Liberticide, &c. &c. or even a Federal, an Antifederal, or a Friend of Government; for I am utterly unable to fix their boundary lines, or trace their shades of difference; and I make perpetual blunders when I attempt to apply them to my neighbours. Jacobinism and Democracy, I, for some time, suspected were the names of certain contagious, malignant fevers; for our doctor (a friend of government as he calls himself) often declared the country was terribly *infected* with them and required to be well *purged*; that if he was Mr. Adams he should know what to *prescribe*; that such inflammatory humours required *drastic* remedies and plentiful *venesection*[†]; and seemed much averse to visit any patient whom he supposed to have them. All I can find out with certainty on this subject is, that whatever the true meaning of these names may be, the most hot-headed, the most ignorant, the most interested, and those who have been suddenly raised from indigence to opulence, are the most ready to apply them.

Suppose, Mr. Editor, as the country is not very rich, that a licence be necessary for the present vocabulary, and a good round Tax laid on the future importation of these outlandish words; the person first using them to be deemed the importer and liable to the

[†] Puncturing a vein in order to withdraw blood or infuse fluids; also known as a phlebotomy.

duty? If we go on as we have done of late years, they might be made to produce a very pretty revenue.

I have been sometimes tempted to form my own opinions, when these terms have been liberally bestowed, by the rule of the Clown in Germany, who being asked what benefit he could derive from attending the Latin disputations in the Divinity Schools, when he did not understand a word of the language, "I can always find out (says he) "who has the best of the argument by "observing who first gets into a passion." So have I generally found, that disputants in politics, who abound most in the argument of nicknames, have little else to support their opinions. I remember a story, Mr. Editor, not inapplicable to the present subject, respecting nicknames of another description, of whose import I must confess myself equally ignorant.

Three pastors of congregations in the neighbourhood of Boston, joined on the road one Sunday as they were riding to their respective places of preaching. They naturally conversed of the state of religion among their flocks, and while thus engaged they were overtaken by a Farmer. "I am much chagrined (says one of them) to find that some of my congregation are strongly inclined to *Arminianism*; good works are a broken reed, and I fear they are too much relied on. I wish I had no more to complain of (says the second) than yourself, but a more dangerous doctrine has made its appearance among my people, they are tinctured with the heresy of *Socinianism*. Socinianism! Bad indeed (says the first) I pray God you may succeed in getting rid of it. So do I too (says the third) but I have a still more baneful opinion to contend with in the course of *my* duty; what (cried the two first) worse than Socinianism? Yes, my friends, it is with *Deism* that I have to combat." They looked at each other with astonishment: they joined in common lamentation: a more dreadful evil could not happen: a more terrible enemy they could not encounter. "I really am not acquainted, Gentlemen (says the Farmer), with the difficulties you have to deal with, for I do not well understand what these *Isms* are; I dare to say they are very bad things, but I am much mistaken if there be not a worse *Ism* than either of them in our township." "What—worse than Socinianism!

Worse than Deism! Impossible; Sir, you cannot surely mean *Atheism?*" "No indeed, Gentlemen, says the Farmer, I have a notion it must be still worse than that, it is the *Rheumatism.*"

Tell me, Mr. Editor, if a man be a good Citizen, a good American, a good Republican, working his farm, supporting his family, obeying the laws, paying his taxes, and taking his glass in good humour with all the world, should he be hunted down as an Aristocrat, or sneered at as a Tory, or kicked out of company as a Jacobin, or have some of these hard favoured *Isms* thrown at his head if he cannot subscribe to the infallibility of his opponent? Some information on this subject would oblige a plain

COUNTRY MAN.

LETTER II.

SIR,

The author of a letter in your paper a week or two ago, complains of certain nicknames whose meaning he does not understand; and no wonder, for in this case as in many others, the original import of the words is lost, and they have derived from Ignorance and Design, new and different significations. Every body must have noticed something of this in the familiar phrases of common language; when some damned honest fellow, swears that the Madeira is devilish good, or the girl monstrous pretty, or when a young lady admires a lapdog for being so vastly small, and declares him prodigious handsome, it is evident that these are incongruities of expression which nothing but the licence of colloquial familiarity could tolerate.

But these perversions of meaning are innocent; intended for no harm, they produce none; while the instances your correspondent complains of, are more serious. Three of the words he specifies are now in common use by the adherents of the prevailing party in this country, as terms of the most virulent and contemptuous reproach; *Democrat*, *Jacobin* and *Anti-Federalist*. The two former we have borrowed, with their modern significations, from the government party of England; the last we have found in our own country, and clothed it with meaning fit for the use to which we put it.

Democracy, the government of the people: *Democrat*, a friend to the government of the people; in opposition to *Monarchy*, wherein one man claims the government by hereditary right; and to *Aristocracy*, where a few persons arrogate the same privilege, to the exclusion of the people at large.

Mr. Pitt has lately declared in the House of Commons in England, that "the man who holds forth the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, is an enemy to mankind." In this country the prevailing party seem to be of the same opinion, for a term more opprobrious in their acceptance of it, can hardly be applied than *Democrat*. But I should be glad to know what Mr. Pitt and these gentlemen must think of the government of America, and the founders of its constitution? A constitution, built upon the principle of the Sovereignty of the people, and whose rulers are chosen for limited periods, by and at the will of the people? If such a government be not Democratic, I know not what is; nor can any citizen use the term Democrat in this country, as a term of reproach, without indirectly abusing the constitution under which he lives, and which he has sworn to support. Let the tools of Mr. Pitt, and the ignorant admirers of the British Monarchy, (the most corrupt and corrupting government of Europe) abuse Democracy; but surely it ill-becomes an American to follow the example.

Jacobin. At the commencement of the French revolution, many of the most active inhabitants of Paris, finding the politics of the day become gradually so interesting, formed themselves into clubs to discuss the important questions that perpetually arose between the court and the people. Some of them hired for this purpose the room formerly occupied by the religious society of the *Jacobins*. Others the hall of the *Cordeliers*, others (as the *Feuillans*) met in other places, taking their denominations chiefly from the place of their meeting. The Jacobins were originally composed of the earliest, the most disinterested, the most learned of the leaders of the revolution: of Brissot, Condorcet and Guadet; of Petion, Vergniaud, Gensonnè, &c. La Fayette originally belonged to them; he seceded in consequence of some reflections on his public conduct; he repented, and again applied for admittance, but was rejected. Such men would naturally

attract the lovers of liberty and of learning; and those who, without being so, desired to be thought such. The popular eloquence, the well-managed violence, and the intrigues of Robespierre and a party who joined him, unfortunately drove off in disgust the more respectable persons above mentioned, and by degrees they and the liberties of the country, fell victims to the low cunning of Robespierre by means of that society.

Hence the term *Jacobin* may imply a member of a society so called when it was the most respectable in Europe for talents and integrity, or a member of the same society when it became the most depraved and obsequious instrument of a diabolical leader. Yet, by the prevailing party in this country, the term is indiscriminately applied as synonymously reproachful with *Democrat*, to all persons who prefer the principles of the American government, and rejoice in the extension of those principles. It is indeed generally used against those persons who are supposed to wish well to the French cause in Europe; as every friend to the principles of the American government ought to do; for the principles of the French government itself, and of those it establishes elsewhere, are precisely the same with our own. —I say the French cause in Europe; I know that there is said to be a party in favour of the French in this country against this country; but I know too that the slightest proof has never been adduced of this; I have never had in private or in public the least reason to believe this, and I set it down among the many impudent, unblushing calumnies so plentifully propagated by the obsequious adherents of the powers that be. Those who could so impudently invent the tale of the Tub, the tale of the Incendiaries, the tale of the ship Ocean, the tale of the Taylors, &c. within one half year, are fully equal to the discovery of a French partizan, in every one who opposes the opinion of themselves, or those whom they think it their interest to swear by.

Antifederalist. At the formation of the present Federal Constitution, there were (as may well be supposed) differences of opinion as to the principles of Union. The minority were termed Antifederalists on that occasion; the majority with Mr. Hamilton took the name of Federalists. But among the persons now termed Antifederal I

have never heard an opinion, I have seen no publication, I know of no fact, which can authorise any man to believe, much less to assert, that they are *opposed to the Union* whether as a party or individually. I think I know as much of them in private life as any reader of this paper, and I solemnly declare I know no proof of this accusation. They are said to oppose the measures of government, and this is given as a proof of disaffection to the Union; but may not a man be well affected to the Union who disapproves of the British treaty, a French war, a standing army, or a navy to protect a few merchants in the carrying trade? On the *contrary*, there *is* probable evidence that the party called Federal are hostile to the Union; that they despise and calumniate the State Governments, and that they wish them merged in a Government like the French, One and Indivisible. These sentiments, in language the most opprobrious to the State Governments, have been publicly advocated by *Fenno* and *Cobbett*, the newspaper editors of the Federal Party.

There certainly are violent men on both sides: there certainly are in this country some men, even of consequence, who are favourers of monarchy; there may be others, too apt to think that the French Directory, like the King of Great Britain, can do no wrong. I hope such persons are few on either side.—Putting them therefore out of the question, I think the two parties in this country, most improperly termed *Federal* and *Antifederal*, may be described as follows.

Those who think the power of the Executive ought rather to be increased than diminished—who are fearful lest liberty should run into licentiousness, and would rather abridge than extend the rights of the people—who doubt about the practical expediency of a Republican Government, and begin to think a limited monarchy more tolerable than was heretofore supposed—who would strengthen the General at the expence of the State Governments, and stretch the meaning of the Federal Constitution to extend the powers of the President and Congress—who laugh at the efficiency of a militia—who are advocates for a standing army and a permanent navy as absolutely necessary, not only to repel aggressions from abroad, but to quell insurrections at home—who think the Commerce of the Country of sufficient importance to be protected at the expence of a

foreign war supported by taxes paid by the Farmer, on whom alone all taxes fall—who make (the executive officers of government who have jobs and places to bestow) synonymous with the constitution, and condemn as enemies of the one, all who may disapprove the measures of the other—who think it dangerous to investigate the characters and opinions of the public servants unless under the strong controul of sedition laws—who regard aliens, particularly republican aliens, with distrust, and are apprehensive that the best constitution in the world is in perpetual danger from a handful of foreigners who come hither purposely to adopt it—such persons for the most part call themselves FEDERALISTS. Grades of difference there may be, but such are the leading features of the party so called.

Others there are, who are cautious of entrusting or extending power unless evidently necessary to the happiness of the people—who are jealous of reposing unlimited confidence in persons of superior station—who think the public character of every public man a fair object of discussion, of praise or of censure—that restraint upon investigation, like the late sedition laws, imply a dread of it—that “men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil”—that a sincere friend to the Constitution and the Country, may sometimes disapprove the opinions and measures of the officers of government—that the Commercial is not of equal importance with the Agricultural interest of America—that temporary depredations upon our vessels of trade by either of the contending powers, is not a sufficient reason for plunging us into the evils of a foreign war, the domestic dangers of a standing army, the temptation to contest which a navy will induce, or the expence of any of them at a period of acknowledged poverty—who regard an alien flying from the tyranny of Europe as a friend, and rejoice in the accession of wealth and industry, from whatever quarter it may come—who believe the best way to make a man, a good citizen, is to give him a stake and interest in the country—who love the principles of our own Constitutions, and rejoice at the downfall of political superstition in Europe—who neither adopt nor use political Nicknames for

party purposes, but glory in the appellation of REPUBLICANS. These persons however are *usually* called Antifederalists.

Such, in my sincere opinion, is not an unfair description of the general characters of each party; but so strangely are these denominations applied, and so vague are party accusations, that I pretend not to be accurate myself when my authorities are so inaccurate in the use of the words. But I have attended pretty closely to parties here, and I know not where to find a better account than I have given. Your readers must judge for themselves.

A CITIZEN.