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From the Enquirer.

THE VINDICATION OF VIRGINIA.

No. II.

The American States had effected by their combination, what they would in vain have expected from their separate efforts. They had united their councils and their arms in the support of their common rights; and the exertions of all, had succeeded in securing the liberties of each. They had waded hand in hand though all the calamities of a long and sanguinary war; they had exhausted a large treasure, and much of the best blood of their respective inhabitants in this perilous pilgrimage; but they had at length arrived at the land of promise. They had raised themselves from the humble condition of British colonies, to the elevated rank of free and independent states. Each had acquired for the others the inestimable priviledge of crowning their united exertion and their common victory by the formation of free & provident constitutions. Would it not have been ridiculous for them, instead of enjoying all the blessings which were thus profusely spread before them; instead of generously contending which should best secure their free constitutions by a wise and vigilant policy; to enter into the useless controversy of which state had made the greatest exertions during the revolution, and which had deserved the greatest merit for the victory they had jointly obtained? If the circumstances of the times had inspired in some a greater zeal, or imposed upon others a stronger necessity of contributing more than their proper quota to the war, of what mighty moment, was it that the proportionate merit of each state should have been accurately adjusted? To have ascertained the pecuniary expenditures of the different states might have been the dictate of sound policy; because they had no other scale to calculate the proportion of the public debt which each of them should be called upon to discharge. But how would the public interest have been promoted by counting up the drops of blood which each had generously shed for the common welfare; of bringing into the field of comparison all the heroes and politicians who had successively adored the annals of our country; and of entering into the elaborate, fruitless, and querulous enquiry, whether the southern, western, or northern inhabitants had most highly deserved the meed of heroic achievement or enlightened policy? Surely the ambition of any one state would have been sufficiently contented with allowing to others, and wearing on its own honoured brow, a single leaf of the laurel, without claiming the exclusive honour of the victorious wreath. This was the obvious duty which every consideration of strict justice, or an enlightened love of our country should have contributed to have imposed upon them; and which all the sympathies of the American character, nurtured by a common war and federal government would have inclined them to observe. Twenty years had passed over without producing any systematic attempt to investigate the relative merits of the states during the revolutionary war; and the disgraceful effort to interrupt this liberal disposition has been reserved for the period of the few last months.

Let all the honors of this attempt be given to those federalists of the northern states who have anxiously aspired to a dissolution of the union. They have called in all the ungenerous arts of misrepresentation to assist them in the execution of their schemes. They have not been contented with asserting that the southern states had adopted a set of interests unfavorable to the interests of the northern inhabitants; and that Virginia was at the head of this southern confederacy. Their exertions have taken a wider range. They have laboured to bring the most profound contempt upon her national character, by casting into shade all the virtues which have ever been attributed to her inhabitants, & by drawing at full length all their imperfections. They have contrived to delineate a picture, which should combine the wildest ambition with the most contemptible cowardice and inactivity. They have thought it necessary to the success of their schemes, that the state of Virginia should appear "shorn of all the beams," with which her revolutionary exertions had entitled it and which had hitherto given it such distinguished lustre in the American constellation. They have turned over the pages of the American history for the purpose of proving that her exertions during the revolution were not commensurate with her own resources, or equal to the exertions of her sister states. Far be it from me to detract from the well-earned honors of the other states, acquired during the revolution. Far be it from me to say that their achievements have been eclipsed by those of my own countrymen, yet I may without prejudice or vanity express my belief, that they do not possess superior lustre in the annals of our country. To settle this point, let us once more resume these historical documents. Let us enquire, not whether Virginia has made greater exertions and deserved higher glory than the other states; but whether she has not contributed an equal effort to the consummation of American independence. Let us examine this subject in regard to her political measures, and to her military exertions.

Political measures.—All the colonists from England had brought with them the same spirit and kind political freedom, which has ever animated in some degree the inhabitants of that country, and which the British constitution is in some respects calculated to inspire. They brought with them the important maxim that the legislative power of the country at least should be conferred on men of their own choosing, and that the right of passing laws for the settlement of financial arrangements should belong to this elective body, uncontrouled by the legislature of the mother country. If we look into the charters of the different colonies, or if we examine the specific instructions given by the English proprietors to their agents in America, we shall find that either the right is expressly given, or provisions are laid down for the election of the House of delegates, or a House of burgesses, or a general court, or a legislature under some name or other. We shall find too that the right of laying taxes upon themselves accompanied by fewer or more modifications in the different colonies, was originally reserved or subsequently obtained, by this representative body. When the colonists of Great Britain had settled in these states, their remote situation from the native country and the independence of their new pursuits must have contributed to cherish this independent spirit, and to increase their vigilant regard for the right of governing themselves. It is no wonder therefore, that the earliest history of the British colonies has recorded so many proofs of the free and jealous temper of their inhabitants. As far back as the year 1650, "the Virginians refused to submit" to the British power, "till articles of surrender had been agreed upon, by which it was stipulated among other things that "the general assembly, as formerly, shall convene and transact the affairs of the colony. Virginia shall be free from all taxes, customs and impositions whatever, and none shall be imposed on them without the consent of the General Assembly."* Pursuing the historical chain of events, and passing by among other incidents the parliamentary act of 1796, for laying an impost upon sugar and other produce for the plausible purpose of raising a revenue towards defraying the necessary expenses of defending the British colonies; an act which the Massachusetts Assembly first took into consideration, and to attempt whose repeal they solicited the best exertions of their agent in London; we arrive at the celebrated stamp act. This act was intended to try the relative strength of the British government & her colonies. The ministry publicly declared "that it was intended to establish the power of Great Britain to tax the colonies."† The political affairs of this country had never witnessed a more critical æra. Had the the colonies submitted to the operation of this stamp act, they would have acknowledged the authority of Great Britain to tax them in all cases whatsoever. From the settlement of financial arrangements, the House of Commons might have proceeded to make laws for them in all cases whatsoever. Instead of seeing ourselves the most free and gallant nation upon earth, we might at this day have dragged the dishonorable chain of the lowest vassal of Great Britain. Resistance to the stamp act or unconditional submission thus became the obvious and only alternatives which were presented to our countrymen. In those "times which tried men's souls" did the virtue and energy of Virginia sleep? Did she consult the indolent policy of leaving other states to assert their common priviledges? Or did she listen to the seductive voice that would have persuaded her to conciliate the affection, of the English ministry by a passive obedience? No. She boldly stept forward in the hour of danger. The genius of Patrick Henry suggested the energetic expedient which was to save the colonies from servitude and ruin. It was none of those imperfect piddling expedients, which might relieve them from a temporary embarrassment; such as instructing an agent in London to petition for redress of grievances. It consisted in a bold annunciation of the fundamental principles of our governmernment. The Journals of the House of burgesses have registered the resolutions of Mr. Henry. Under date of May 30, 1765, we find the Virginia Legislature declaring that every attempt to vest the power of laying taxes and imposts in any other person or persons whatsoever than the general assembly, is illegal, unconstitutional and unjust; that the inhabitants of a colony are not bound to yield obedience to any such law or ordinance; and that any person, who shall vindicate the usurper of such power, by speaking or writing shall be deemed an enemy to the colony. The impression, which these resolutions made upon the public mind was correspondent to their noble spirit. "Mr. Hutchinson gov. of Massachusetts tells his correspondent, "nothing extravagant appeared in the papers, till an account was received of the Virginia resolves." Mr. Hughes writes "the fire began in Virginia:" Governor Barnard, "the publishing the Virginia resolutions proved an alarm bell to the disaffected:" another, in his letter to Mr. Secretary Conway, from New York, "the resolves of the assembly of Virginia gave the signal for a general outcry over the continent."‡—Can any act of the Virginia legislature be found upon their records, which does not breathe the persevering spirit, and which did not serve to fortify the courage of their countrymen? When the resolution passed the House of Commons, for transporting to the mother country every inhabitant of Massachusetts Bay, whom the governor might suspect to be guilty of treason, in order that he might be tried "within the realm, pursuant to the statute of the 35th year of Henry VIII," were the Virginians found absent from the post of sacred duty and general patriotism? The Massachusetts assembly was not in session when the resolutions reached America: but the Virginia house of burgesses entered upon the subject, with all their wonted zeal. Their resolves of the 16th May, 1769, solemnly declared that "sending any person, residing in the colony, and suspected of any crime whatsoever to places beyond the sea, to be tried, is highly derogatory of the rights of British subjects." They unanimously entered into a private association which they recommended to all merchants, gentlemen and others, to subscribe "against importing any goods taxed," and many other articles.

‖ This spirited conduct animated the despairing, and communicated new courage to the bold; and the assemblies of several states quickly imitated the illustrious example. When the English ministry, unconscious of the danger which hovered over the empire, or unawed by its approach, still pursued their rash projects, and compelled the colonies to enter into new measures of defence, and combine their efforts in the common cause, Virginia again appeared in the front of opposition. In the beginning of March 1773, the House of burgesses appointed a committee of eleven persons who should maintain a correspondence with "her sister colonies" on all the subjects which related to the common cause. It was on this occasion. that the legislature of Massachusetts paid a just tribute of respect to the exertions of the Virginians. "They came to several resolves and were careful in the first, to speak highly in praise of Virginia. They appointed a committee of fifteen members, and directed them to "prepare a circular letter to the Speakers, requesting them to lay the same before their respective assemblies, in confidence that they will comply with the wise and salutary resolves of the House of Burgesses of Virginia."**—Let us pass by all the intermediate and subordinate measures, which gave birth or vigor to the revolution, and let us approach that splendid epoch, from which we may date our first existence as a free and independent nation. The declaration of independence had been long meditated and canvassed by the citizens of our country, but it was destined to assume an official form in the legislature of Virginia. On the 15th of May 1776, "when there were present 112 members, it was resolved unanimously, that their delegates should be instructed to propose to Congress, that the United Colonies be by that respectable body declared free and independent states." On June 15th, the New Hampshire representatives unanimously agreed to join the other colonies in the same declaration.†† On July 31, the Massachusetts Assembly passed a similar resolution.‡‡ It was on June 7th 1776, that the first motion was made in Congress for a declaration of independence, by Richard Henry Lee, one of the delegates from Virginia; and it was on the 4th of July that this celebrated instrument, ascribed to the pen of Thomas Jefferson, was agreed to and adopted. Let the northern federalists then review the long series of revolutionary measures, let them examine the records of the state assemblies and of Congress, and then let them produce if they can a single important question, on which Virginia deserted the great polar principles, that had directed her political progress. I would even extend the terms of my challenge further, and call upon them to produce a single state, whose political measures have manifested a purer, more vigorous and more persevering opposition to the usurpations of Great Britain, than those of this respectable and much vilified state.

MILITARY EXERTIONS.

The history of past times, enables us to ascertain with much more precision, the relative merits of the different states in the cabinet than in the field. We have a complete register of the first in the records of their state assemblies and of Congress. By comparing the different dates when political measures were first proposed, and the majorities by whom they were adopted, we can easily determine which state had first perceived the danger, and which was the most resolute in opposing it. But the operations of the war have been recorded with much less distinctness and precision.

The historians of the revolution have generally been satisfied with giving a satisfactory view of the consequences of each military manœuvre, of the officers who conducted it, and sometimes of the particular regiments who were engaged in its execution. But they have not always stopt to inform us, what was the number and the valor of the troops from the different states, nor what proportion of the success and defeat of each operation was due to various lines of the army. Had even the most minute account been preserved of their separate exertions, had the number, and the courage of the troops from each state been faithfully recorded, and their pecuniary expenditures been accurately adjusted, we should still have been unable to calculate the military spirit and active patriotism of our different countrymen. The war frequently shifted its ground. The army of the invaders often varied the points of attack, and sometimes the northern and sometimes the southern quarter of the union came within the rage of its fury—Wherever the scene of the war was laid, the exertions of that neighbourhood or that state were necessarily the greatest. The provincial militia, embodied for the purpose of defending their own frontiers, flew to the scene of immediate danger; and even the regular army, who were composed of troops from the different states, and whose duty it was to march to different parts of the country, wherever there was an enemy to meet, generally enlisted a certain number of provincial troops in the state which demanded their assistance. It would not have been surprising then, that the money and troops advanced by each state should have varied in the different periods of the revolution, according as the theatre of war receded from, or came within their respective frontiers. Except a few petty insurrections which arose from the machinations of Lord Dunmore, and the desultory invasions of the Indians on the western frontiers; Virginia did not experience many of the dangers of war, until many other parts of the Union had been exposed to its ravages. Thus, even if its exertions were found unequal at the commencement of the revolution to those of her sister states; if she had exhausted less blood and treasure in the defence of their common liberties, we should ascribe the disproportion rather to the circumstances of the times than to any want of military ardour or enlightened patriotism. We shall not, however, place her conduct during the war on this foundation only. She can advance much higher pretensions to military merit. A slight sketch of the operations of the war will clearly demonstrate, that the conduct of her officer and regular troops, did not a little contribute to the triumphs of the revolution.

The commander in chief of the continental forces was unanimously selected from her inhabitants. The glorious issue of the war has sufficiently determined how well General Washington deserved that distinguished honor.—At the battle of Brandywine, when the American troops were so severely pressed by the British army under Sir William Howe, the Virginia line acquired considerable honor. "The whole brigade," (says Gordon‖‖) "exhibits such a degree of order, firmness and resolution, and preserves such a countenance in extremely sharp service, as would not discredit veterans." In the next page of this historian we find "that Gen. Greene has been rather dissatisfied with Gen. Washington's omitting to take special notice of Weeden's brigade, in general orders for its bravery."—The battle of Princeton is associated in the mind of every Virginian, with the heroic valour and unfortunate fate of Gen. Mercer. We need not blush at the conduct of our troops, in the action at Germantown.—The victory of Gen. Morgan and his celebrated riflemen over Lieut. Col. Tarlton at the battle of the Cowpens, throws a new lustre upon the Virginian name. By this victory "the desponding friends of America in the southern states were reanimated; and enjoyed a seeming resurrection from the dead."*** In the action at Guilford Court-house, where Gen. Greene acquired such distinguished reputation, the Virginia Continentals and militia constituted the greater part of the army, and deserved at least an equal share of the honor. When Lord Cornwallis invaded their state, he experienced an opposition too fatal to his cause, and he found himself compelled to resign at York-Town his reputation with his sword to the commander in chief of the American army.

But why pursue any further this historical investigation? Why expatiate any longer upon the political measures or the military atchievments of Virginia? Why continue the invidious office of discriminating between the distinguished worthies of the different states? Why should we dwell upon the atchievments of a Washington, a Mercer or a Morgan, when we are equally willing to incorporate with our affections the illustrious services of Hancock and Adams, Gates and Greene, Montgomery and Warren? Let such odious distinctions be confined to those federalists of the north, who wish to erect their petty interests upon the dissolution of the union. Let it be the exclusive province of such men to indulge their over-flowing mortification in the following strains; "The inhabitants of this part of the country know too well what Virginia courage is, to quake at its resentment."†††

"The time will come when a foreign enemy will menace this country. Perhaps the day is not far off; for the people are rich enough, and the government pusillanimous enough to invite an invader. How shall we then be protected? By the southern states? Take away those whites who must remain to watch over the slaves, and how many will there be to act against the enemy?—Officers enough?—Yes, the South is the seat of our privileged orders. But soldiers? As before, in the yeomanry of the Northern States. Who fought the battles of Independence? Who freed Virginia and the Carolinas from the British troops when aided by their slaves? It was the men of the North—the now destined vassals of the South."‡‡‡

* *Bland's enquiry into the rights of the British colonies.*

† *Gordon's history of the American Revolution, Vol. 1. page* 125.

‡ *Ibid, page* 149.

‖ *Ibid page* 184.

** *Ibid p.* 228.

†† *Ib. vol.* 2. *p.* 84.

‡‡ *Ib. p.* 88.

‖‖ *Ib. vol.* 2. *p.* 240.

*** *Ib. p.* 162.

††† *Hartford (Conn.) paper.*

‡‡‡ *Boston Repertory.*

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