

TRANSCRIPTION OF ESSAY ON DESPOTISM GEO/ADD/32/1055+ : Here using the version that runs from page 27 [1055] to page 37 of the pdf.

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When we examine the Annals of the World from the beginning of Government unto this day, we shall find the generality of Nations groaning under the Yoke of Despotism; the reason is evident, Man in his own Nature is ever aiming at Despotic power, from the love of pleasure; & therefore covets a sufficient authority to force all others to contribute to that happiness he wishes to arrive at; this of course makes the desire of governing them natural.

Men are either govern'd by Laws & establish'd Constitutions, or by Arbitrary Will; in the first case our Dominion is not so absolute, nor does the Subject lye under such a necessity to please, besides a Regal Government demands in the Prince a thorough knowledge of the People, this cannot be acquir'd without great labour & Study, but that is the bane of pleasure & revolts the natural idleness [NEW PAGE] that attends us; Absolute Power removes this difficulty, dispenses from all application & fatiguing attention, & reduces Men to a servile compliance to our Will; in this Government as Aristotle observes there can exist but one freeman all the rest are Slaves.

In the most moderate Monarchy, in the free-est Republic, there are seperate interests either proceeding from the inequality of Men, their different Views, ambition & c. this furnishes opportunities of dividing Citizens, & by that means of humbling the power both of the Nobility & People; besides in a long tract of Years many occasions offer that Kings generally seize with avidity.

Division once among the People, the Sword of Tyranny must forever glitter before their Eyes, to debase their minds & depress them more & more; a manly Virtuous turn becomes highly criminal, & a feeble effeminacy gets the name [NEW PAGE] of Heroism; Tacitus tells us that under the Reign of Domitian, Virtues were sentences of death, & the Virtuous Man that did not Counsel a crime was still forc'd to join in it.

We must distinguish two sorts of Despotism, one establish'd by the force of Arms over a Virtuous Nation that suffers it impatiently, of which Greece gives us many examples; the other is the work of time, Luxury & effeminacy; with regard to the first it cannot last long, the free & independant Spirit cannot be long without some opportunity of shaking it off, not so with the latter where in every Revolution the Chains remain, tho another Master holds them.

Dreadful are the effects attending this enormous power not only for the People, but for the Prince who covets it, fear & distrust are the common attendants of Tyranny, violence & an arm'd force are the only methods to reduce every thing [NEW PAGE] under the Arbitrary Will of the Sovereign; but these methods grown habitual revolt mankind, & excite them to vengeance, & gradually banishes from their minds all other ideas of justice, except force itself.

The People are not so quick in laying down this doctrine, but the Military ketch it, they become sensible that no part of the State can resist them, & the Prince himself detested by his Subjects, owes to them his safety & power; when once the Army feel their own consequence, discipline & controul is at an end; therefore to command over Slaves a Despotic Prince will ever find himself oblig'd to obey an imperious, turbulent Army, & whoever shall advise Princes under the pretext of maintaining their Authority to use Arbitrary power, is at once the worst of Fathers, Citizens, &

Subjects, & happy were it to themselves if Kings were ever deaf to such counsels, & that they saw their true interest in [NEW PAGE] submitting their own will; for this is not only the method to reign in Peace & Prosperity, but to transmit the Scepter to their posterity, which becomes otherwise a very precarious measure; few Princes however have ever seen or will see this in its proper light, the false lustre of Sovereign power, idleness, & pleasure screens from their eyes the many perils that surround them, will continually carry it over every other consideration, & the History of all times informs us that all Governments sooner or later came to Despotism.

Thus much for the situation of the Tyrant himself, how dreadful are the effects of Despotism with regard to the unhappy People; let us run over some of the principal ones, & take the Turkish Government for an example; the first sad consequence is the extreme ignorance of all in Office, a Turkish Vizir can have no proper idea of Justice, he is ignorant of its public utility, for to be just & Virtuous [NEW PAGE] one must know the respective duties of Prince & Subject, & also the reciprocal engagements that unite the Members of a Society; to acquire this knowledge there must be thought, but who dares think under an Arbitrary Government, the intrigues of a Seraglio, idleness, want of custom & the very danger of thinking, soon drive away the power of doing it, for few People reflect in Countries where they must carefully suppress their thoughts, interest will never push a Man in Turkey to application; he who seeks the post of Vizir does it to pay servile Court, & thus to share the power of his Sovereign, if He succeeds he enters into Office without any principle of administration, of Justice, without any idea of the public welfare, or the duty of the Citizen; most of what has been said if the Vizirs is applicable also to the Sultans, quitting prison for the Diadem [NEW PAGE] supremely ignorant, surrounded by People not more enlighten'd than themselves, whose interest it is to keep them forever in the same infant State they first appear'd in. One observation naturally arises here in our mind, that the Prince of ever so free a Country may by Supreme indolence & aversion to thought, business, & trouble find himself in the very situation of an unhappy Turkish Emperor, like him surrounded by Persons whose private interests must make it desirable that every part of necessary knowledge be kept from him, that He be not appriz'd of what passes in the Nation over which Providence has plac'd him; such a Prince is as ignorant of the principles of Government, of the happiness or misery of his Subjects, as a Turkish Sultan, or Persian Sophy; yet there is still one remarkable difference between them, the Despotical Prince can hardly find instruction were he to [NEW PAGE] desire it, but he who governs a Free & generous People has but to open his doors & truth will enter, has but to shake off an indolence unworthy of a Man much more of a Prince, & the Book of Knowledge will be open before him; but to return to our Subject.

From what we have said it might be imagin'd that tho a Turkish Vizir may have no temptation to instruct himself, yet some Virtuous Citizens may be push'd from motives of public good to advise him, could such a Man exist amongst a Nation of Slaves, were he bold enough to offer advice, a Vizir far from hearing him, would probably condemn him to the severest punishment; besides in these unhappy Regions ignorance, Vice & Vilany are as much the objects of praise, as Virtue is in others; while whatever merits the epithets of Noble, Virtuous, or public spirited [NEW PAGE] is either ridicul'd or punish'd; the Persians no doubt in the midst of all their Luxury treated the Spartan frugality with contempt, call'd their courage fierceness, & their noble love of Liberty brutal pride; even in Europe the Country of Freedom, tho we admire the generous actions of the Antients on account of the concurring testimony of all past ages, were it not for that many of the noblest efforts of the human mind would pass with us for mere folly, our very admiration proceeds from prejudice, were it otherwise we should endeavour to imitate those actions we admire, we are struck with the sentiments of a Lacedaemonian who passing by the Walls of Corinth ask'd what Women inhabited

that Town, he was answer'd the Corinthians, he reply'd those Cowards don't know that the only Ramparts invincible against an [NEW PAGE] Enemy are Citizens determin'd to die; where have we a General like Antiochus who blush'd at a Victory got by chance, & not owing to his own Valour; he shed tears on defeating the Galatians whose rout was owing to their fear of the Elephants, & dress'd a Trophy in the field of battle to those Conquering Animals not to himself; we cannot read of this without praising him, but we certainly do not feel the sensations in as necessary to produce the same effects.

We have mention'd several terrible consequences of Depotism, we now come to the last which is the short duration of such an Empire, for such a Government not only renders the Citizens Vilainous to one another, but certainly deprives them of all Courage to resist an Enemy; to this was owing the rapid progress made by the Greeks & Romans in Asia, two or three good Princes may indeed raise a Nation to a great pitch of grandure, but [NEW PAGE] many such cannot be expected, therefore this glory is of short duration, & sooner or later an Empire of Slaves will certainly undergo the Yoke of a bold & Free People; if from particular circumstances there is no such powerful Enemy to apprehend, bad Government is enough to destroy it, to depopulate & change it into a Desart; a lethargic languor runs through every part, the Citizens sunk with Luxury, Idleness, & Effeminacy, prognosticate approaching ruin; tho every thing appears calm, the State is in a deep consumption, & the present quiet is the forerunner of certain ruin.