DISCOURSES CONCERNING GOVERNMENT,

BY Algernon Sidney,

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the intention of this Statute could be no other than to secure men Sect. 16.

of Persons and Possessions, and so to increase the number of those who might be

and taking away the Crown to be in the Parliament, as to remove all

Sect. XXXVI.

The general result of a Nation cannot be called a Rebellion.

A

S Impostors seldom make lies to pass in the world, without

putting false names upon things, such as our Author endeavours

to pervert the People they ought not to defend their Liberties,

by giving the name of Rebellion to the most just and honourable actions

that have been performed for the preservation of them; and to aggra-

vate the matter, not to tell us that Rebellion is like the fin of

withcraft. But those who seek after truth, will easily find, that

there can be no such thing in the world as the rebellion of a Nation

against its own Magistrates, and that rebellion is not always evil.

That this may appear, it will not be amiss to consider the word, as

well as the thing understood by it, as it is used in an evil sense.

The word is taken from the Latin \textit{rebellare}, which signifies no more

than to renew a way. When a Town or Province had bin subdued

by the Romans, and brought under their dominion, if they violated

their faith after the settlement of Peace, and invaded their Masters

who had spared them, they were said to rebel. But it was more

abused to apply this word to the People that rose against the

Doomsday, Kings or other Magistrates, than to the People or any

of those Nations who had no dependence upon them; for all the cir-

cumstances that should make a Rebellion were wanting, the word

implying a superior army in them signifies nothing, it is, as well as the

breach of an established Peace. But the very private man singly

taken to be subject to the commands of the Magistrate, the whole body

of the People is not so; for he is by and for the People, and the People

either by nor for him. The objection due to him from private

men is grounded upon, and meditated by the General Law; and

that Law regarding the welfare of the People, distinct for the inter-

rest of one or a few men against the publick. The whole body

therefore of a Nation cannot be led to any other obedience than is

confident with the common good, according to their own judgment;

and having never bin subdued or brought to terms of peace with their

Magistrates, they cannot be said to revolt or rebel against them, to

whom they owe no more than seems good to themselves, and who are

nothing of or by themselves, more than other men.

Again, the thing signified by rebellion is not always evil; for the

every subject of it must acknowledge a superiority in those who

have subdued them, and rebellion do imply a breach of the peace,

yet that superiority is not infinite; the peace may be broke upon just
grounds,
Discourses concerning Government.

CHAP. III. grounds, and it may be neither a crime nor infamy to do it. The Privatorius had bin more then once subdued by the Romans, and had as often rebelled. Their City was at last taken by Plautius the Con-ful, after their Leader Tiberius and great numbers of their Senate and People had bin killed: Being reduced to a low condition, they sent Ambassadors to Rome to desire peace; where when a Senator asked them what punishment they desired, one of them answered, The same which they defers who think themselves worthy of Liberty. The Senate then demanded, what kind of Peace might be expected from them, if the punishment should be remitted: The Ambassadors answered, if the terms you give be good, the Peace will be offered by us faithfully and perpetually; if bad, it will soon be broken. And the terms were accepted with the fervency of the answer; yet the best part of the Senate approved it as a worthy of a man and a freeman; and conceiving that no Man or Nation would continue under an unsteady condition longer than they were compelled by force, said, They only were fit to be made Romans, who thought nothing valuable but Liberty. Upon which they were all made Citizens of Rome, and obtained whatever they had defied.

I know not how this matter can be carried to a greater height; for if it were possible, that a People retreating oppression, and violating their own Liberty, could commit a crime, and incur either guilt or infamy, the Privatorius did, who had bin ten years subdued, and often pardoned; but even in the judgment of their Conquerors, whom they had offended, the resolution they professed of standing to no agree-ment imposed upon them by necessity, was accounted the highest testimony of such a virtue as rendered them worthy to be admitted into a Society and equality with themselves, who were the most brave and virtuous people of the world.

But if the patience of a conquered People may have limits, and they who will not bear oppression from those who had forced their Lives, may defers praise and reward from their conquerors, it was madness to think, that any Nation can be obliged to bear whatever their own Magistrates think fit to do against them. This may seem strange to those who talk so much of conquests made by Kings; Immunities, Liberties and Privileges granted to Nations; Oaths of Allegiance taken, and wonderful benefits conferred upon them. But having already said as much as is needful concerning Conquests, and that the Magistrate who has nothing except what is given to him, can only dis pense out of the public Stock such Franchises and Privileges as he has received for the reward of Services done to the Country, and encouragement of Virtue, I shall at pre sent keep my self to the two last points.

Allegiance signifies no more (as the words ad legem declare) than such an obedience as the Law requires. But as the Law can require nothing from the whole People, who are masters of it, Allegiance
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Chap. III. are manifest evidences of their Pride, Avarice, Luxury and Cruelty.

France in outward appearance makes a better show; but nothing in this world is more miserable, than that people under the fathery care of their triumphant Monarch. The best of their condition is like Aces and Maid-Cardinals, to work and fight, to be oppressed and flailed for him; and those among them who have any understanding, well know, that their industry, courage, and good success, is not only unprofitable, but destructive to them; and that by increasing the power of their Masters, they add weight to their own Chains. And if any Prince, or succession of Princes, have made a more modest use of their Power, or more faithfully discharged the trust reposed in them, it must be imputed peculiarly to them, as a testimony of their personal Virtue, and can have no effect upon others.

The Rights discourses of Kings are not grounded upon Conquest; the Liberties of Nations do not arise from the Grants of their Princes; the Oath of Allegiance binds no private man to more than the Law directs, and has no influence upon the whole Body of every Nation; Many Princes are known to their Subjects only by the injuries, injuries, and mischiefs brought upon them; such as are good and just, ought to be rewarded for their personal Virtue, but it can confer no right upon those who way relish them; and whoever pretends to that merit, must prove it by his Actions: Rebellion being nothing but a renewal of War, can never be against a Government that was not established by War, and of it fell is neither good nor evil; more than anything it is War, but just or unjust according to the cause or manner of it. Besides, Rebellion which by Samuel is compared to Wickedness, is not of private men, or People against the Prince, but of the Prince against God: The Injuries are often said to have rebelled against the Law, Word, or Command of God; but the they frequently opposed their Kings, I do not find Rebellion imputed to them on that account, nor any ill character put upon such actions. We are told also of some Kings who had been debased, and afterwards rebelled against God, and other Kings; but their cause is not blamed, and we have some reason to believe it good, because Abrahams took part with those who had rebelled. However, it can be of no prejudice to the cause I defend: for the it were true, that those debased Kings could not justify their actions against the person who had debased them; or that generally no King being once vanquished, could have a right of Rebellion against his Conqueror; it could have no relation to the actions of a people vilifying their own Laws and Liberties against a Prince who violates them; for that War which never was, can never be renewed. And if it be true in any case, that hands and swords are given to men, that they only may be Slaves who have no courage, it must be when Liberty is overthrown by those, who of all men ought with the utmost industry and vigor to have defended it.

That this should be known, is not only necessary for the safety of Nations, but advantageous to such Kings as are wise and good. They who know the frailty of human Nature, will always distrust their own