

MEMORIAL.

To the Honorable General Assembly of the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, to be holden at Newport, on the first Wednesday in May, A. D. 1829.

Being assured that the legislators of a Republican State, are not unwilling to listen to a dispassionate appeal from the people, when "peaceably assembled to petition Government for a redress of grievances,"—agreeable to the Constitution of our beloved country; we are impelled by a sense of duty to ourselves; and a still more important duty to posterity, to address your Honorable Body on the subject of Suffrage. By an existing law of Rhode-Island, we are all of us aware that a very large as well as respectable portion of the free citizens; who are at all times willing and prepared to render their utmost aid and assistance in support of government, and have uniformly contributed towards its support, when called on for that purpose; are totally excluded from a participation in the Elective Franchise, and are denied not only the name, but the privileges of Freemen. Subject to taxation for the amount of their personal estates, they have cheerfully submitted, and without complaint, have paid whatever sums have been assessed against them toward supporting the government—men and citizens, they have always been ready at the call of that government to jeopard their lives in its defence, and in the defence of our common country in the hour of peril.

We had believed that in the war of Independence, those who fought, were struggling for the equal rights of all, indiscriminately: that the Declaration solemnly and deliberately made by the delegates of the Sovereign People of this State as well as the others which now belong to the Union, and unanimously adopted by all; was in no respect merely nominal, nor, in any part inefficient and without force and meaning: but that the "self evident truths," (therein enumerated) declaring "all men to be created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; and that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just power from the consent of the governed;" were political axioms so well understood and established, that no doubt could exist in the minds of men respecting the right of those who are called on to assist in sustaining the Republic, to participate in the management of its affairs.

Taxation without representation, has ever been considered unjust and oppressive. In our State, we respectfully submit, if this be not the case. Perhaps many instances may and now actually do exist, where those who govern, do not derive their just power from the consent of the governed." These plain principles promulgated in the Declaration of Independence, we are firmly persuaded, should be held sacred and inviolable forever.

Your Memorialists beg leave further to suggest, that the Federal Constitution enjoins it on the "United States to guarantee to each State in the Union, a Republican government." In their belief, no

government can properly be termed Republican, where the Sovereignty is not acknowledged to exist in the People, and especially in a numerical majority of that people—not in a part, but in the whole. The laws of Rhode-Island, however, exclude a large portion of respectable, intelligent and efficient citizens, composing in fact, a majority of the free white male citizens, over the age of 21, from the rights of Suffrage; the only means through which a people can peaceably and lawfully exercise that sovereignty which is vested in them. It is, therefore, with deference, submitted to the will and consideration of your Honorable body, whether or not, our State, under her existing laws, possesses a Republican form of government.

The provisions of the law admit to the elective franchise the eldest sons of freemen at the age of twenty-one years; at the same time excluding others who are equally or better qualified in all respects except the circumstance of being the first born of a Freeholder. This we cannot recognize as consistent with the plain principles of republicanism; it is founded on principles purely anti-republican, known only in the oppressive codes of monarchy and aristocracy, and is deemed by us to be decidedly unjust and unequal.

Satisfied that the same encouragement ought to be given by government to the enterprising mechanics of our little commonwealth, on whom we rely for a large share of the comforts of life, and whose avocations do not necessarily require of them to become proprietors of the soil; as is granted to other classes of the community; we do most sincerely request that some provision may be made in their behalf admitting them to the rights of Suffrage.

The population of our country will unquestionably increase with her age, and the extension of her prosperity. Consequently the number of those excluded from the rights of Suffrage in Rhode-Island, will be enlarged. The time may come when her whole soil will not be sufficient to make voters of a majority of her actual population. Much therefore, is to be considered as to the expediency of some immediate provision to prevent future uneasiness, discord and political ebullitions in the State. We conceive it due to posterity, that this inquiry should now be made.

Impressed deeply with these views and sentiments, we do most respectfully and earnestly solicit your

Honorable body to take into consideration the propriety of altering the existing laws of our State, respecting suffrage, and of extending, by new regulations, the right to all the free white male inhabitants, over the age of 21, within the same, whose property is subject to taxation, or who are liable by law to do military duty in defence of their government and country.

Or in such way to extend the right of Suffrage, as may seem to your body most consistent with that immutable principle in a republican form of government, which places the sovereign power in the hands of the people.

Barney Merry
 Aaron Sayles
 Jonathan Baker
 Oliver Smith
 Albert Leys
 Joseph A. Scott
 Peter Rose
 Seymour Forbes
 Clark Sunderland
 Edwin Howland
 James J. Harrington
 Luther Woodward
 Gideon Gray
 Sabius Allen
 Joshua R. Clark
 Avery Gillman