

EXAMEN. CHAP. IX.

THERE is no desire more generally implanted in our nature, than that of Liberty; it is common to barbarians, as well as the most polite nations: for as we are born free, we think we have a right to continue so. To this unconquerable Spirit of independency, the world is obliged for so many great men: this first gave birth to Republican Governments, which constitute a sort of equality amongst mankind, and re-establish them in their native freedom.

Machiavel in this Chapter lays down very good and commendable rules for the conduct of such as are advanced to Sovereign power by the free consent of the principal Citizens in a Common-wealth: and indeed it is almost the only case in which he will allow a man to act with common honesty. But unfortunately, it is a case that very seldom or never happens. The Republican Spirit ever jealous to excess of its liberty, presently takes alarm at the least circumstance that seems to threaten it with chains, and will not bear to admit even so much as the very idea of a Master. Many States in Europe have shaken off the yoke of Tyrants for the sake of independency, as might easily be shewn: but it would be a difficult matter to produce an example of any one that has been free and afterwards voluntarily submitted to Slavery. Many Republics, it is true, in course of time, have relapsed into Despotism; and it seems to be a misfortune that at last must inevitably happen to all. For how is it possible that any Republic should be able to support itself for ever against so many enemies as are perpetually undermining its liberties? How can it restrain the ambition of powerful and aspiring men whom it fosters in its bosom? How guard against the seductions and secret practices of its neighbours, as well as the corruption of its own members, whilst private interest is so predominant in the World? Can it expect always to come off with Victory and success in the wars which it must of necessity be engaged in? or to prevent those conjunctures so fatal to liberty, those critical and hazardous moments which sometimes prove so favourable to wicked and bold men? If its troops are commanded by perfidious or cowardly Generals, it must fall a prey to its Enemies: and if it has brave and enterprizing Officers at the head of them, they will become dangerous in times of peace, after they have been accustomed to war.

Almost all Republics raised themselves out of an abyss of servitude to the highest pitch of Liberty; and almost all of them have tumbled