

ATHENS, May 23d, 1817.

TO B. HALL, Esq.

SIR—Your rage for writing places correction at defiance, and you have boldly ventured one more proof upon the public that the sportiveness of your pen is at the sacrifice of your judgment, and if it were not a misapplication of the term, I would say, at the expence of your feelings.—From the caution with which you commence your second voyage, something whispers me you are prepared for a longer cruise than the one which preceded your last summer's unlucky wreck. But it is my purpose to put a period to the necessity of any further progress, at least in the mode you have selected, and to that end I give you the opinion of a writer, whose principles, if you be the republican you have so often boasted, you can never too much admire; that when "characters of private (or public) men are insulted or injured, a double remedy is open to them, by action and indictment. If, through indolence, false shame, or indifference, they will not appeal to the laws of their country, they fail in their duty to society, and are unjust to themselves. If from an unwarrantable distrust of the integrity of Juries, they would wish to obtain justice by any mode of proceeding more summary than a trial by their peers, I do not scruple to affirm, that they are in effect greater enemies to themselves than to the libeller they prosecute."

The inference which it is designed you should draw from this quotation, I presume, is too plain to need further explanation. It is perhaps now due to you to give the reasons for such a course. The trial by newspaper is even worse than that by battle, for he who is boldest in assertion and ranges the widest of truth is the surest of success—what hope then would be left to me in the present controversy? Besides, the disputants too frequently not only render themselves ridiculous, but by "adding one invective to another," often "reach the extremities" of passion, where reason and folly lose their distinction. But I have a more serious reason for the direction which I wish to give to our affair, than any mentioned. Your address "To the People of Georgia" in August last, must be fairly considered as a wanton attack upon the whole community, at least those who differed in opinion, not from you, for I will do you the justice to say, that he who holds both sides of a question has no opinion at all, but from those whom you are pleased to term your friends, and who were the supporters of the compensation law—when therefore a whole people were enjoying the quiet, and until then an undisturbed right, if not to complain, at least to think as they pleased on a subject which so nearly concerned them; you could not but suppose that some one of them would attempt to answer sentiments designed to unsettle the proper relation between the representative and the constituent, and calculated to place the right of opinion at the feet of the former. You could not but suppose that, when you were mingling with your odious doctrines, expressions of abuse still more obnoxious, such as that "cunning and designing men" were deceiving the people—"insidious and designing economists, brawling demagogues, political apostates, tories and federalists" were endeavouring to "sneak" into office; when you were branding "presenting grand juries, boasting gentlemen, resolution forming committees and recommending judges" with motives and designs as unworthy and impure as your own; and all too uttered without the least distinction of persons, or regard to honest opinion, furnished and fashioned to fit every character who might unfortunately differ from your friends, you could not but suppose, I say, that some one of such an insulted & outraged community, would dare to present such a shameless and flagrant violation of all order and decency. Governed then by an honest in-

dignation, "Modestus" was a person, who for one could not brook such arrogance—and you had, faithful to your usual want of discretion, blindly and indiscriminately levelled your shafts against an unknown public; you had no right to expect an answer but from an unknown character. Instead then of your complaining that an act of justice was denied you in withholding the name of the author of Modestus, that writer but for a voluntary act of his own, prompted by a consideration which shall now be nameless, would have had a juster claim upon the secrecy of the Editors than any right which you could possibly assert.—For I maintain that you could have answered all the purposes of public expectation, or private feeling, by addressing your present letter to Modestus, that you might have accomplished by addressing it personally to me. Such a piece was expected and Modestus was then prepared to give that satisfaction which you have in a spirit of illiberality demanded, but which in reason you cannot expect, from another character. Your affected solicitude and importunate perseverance to obtain a disclosure of the author, could produce no other suggestion in the mind of that author, than that you intended something more than a news-paper altercation; hence the reply you received; and perhaps something more may yet be intended after trying the *strength* of the proofs before the public:—for you must excuse me if I state, that every thing is to be expected from a malice which the force of time cannot appease, and which has grown and flourished under an eight months duration; so that after being harassed under an unprofitable ink-shed warfare, I may be doomed to all the tortures of a long and tedious prosecution—I prefer and am willing to meet the latter at once, and it will not, I trust, be considered a vain boast of confidence to declare, that under a valuable provision but lately known to our laws, that the "truth may be given in evidence," I have nothing to fear.

You state, that I cannot think it improper for you to call for an investigation of the truth of my assertions—I candidly own I do not, and I hope, you will, in a similar sentiment of candour, own that I have sent you to the best of all possible tribunals, the trial by Jury, to obtain that result: there a definite opinion will be made up, but before the public we shall end where we began, for no decision will be made at all.

You have been careful to inform the public that "frequent applications" were made to obtain my name, doubtless intending to leave the impression, that I dreaded the correctness of my statements; it is true, but that fact I presume was unknown to you; some suspicion did and will attach itself to the testimony which goes to support them, for I will frankly own, I have no better reliance than your own confessions, an indiscretion from which I might not easily be relieved, but for the aid of a well known maxim, that in some cases even the worst men may be believed.

There is not a little humor in your affectation of discontent at my talent for ridicule, for although you may think I never had a better subject for its operation, yet I deny you have ever felt its effects from me, unless indeed "one of those shocking sort of truths, which as they scarcely can be pardoned in private, ought never to be uttered in public," may come under your idea of that term. The scriptures may and have been abused, and the character you give to ridicule may be applied to any other quality, when carried beyond its proper province; its peculiar office is to employ tender sarcasm and delicate invective upon every legitimate subject; under this view of it, even if I possessed the talent, to the degree which you seem willing to admit, I hope I never should be guilty of such folly as to select an object for its use, upon whom, from the nature of his nerves or the character of his intellects, it would be a criminal waste of its refinements, to bestow it, where it could neither be felt nor understood.

It is true, but I utterly deny by any agency of mine, that your reputation has passed into contempt, such perhaps as no honest man would wish to experience; but which for the usefulness of the example no good man can deplore. It must however be apparent that your murmurs are not justified by the extent of your suffering or the value of your loss: for when you reflect that the misfortunes of accident produce louder complaints than those of design, and that yours are entirely voluntary and have been created and persevered in with a selfishness peculiarly your own, your groans should be concealed even though your agonies were greater.

Far be it from me to rob the unfortunate of any source of comfort whatever, & I rejoice that in the grandeur of his character, and the color of his distresses, you have found in the melancholy fate of Socrates, a parallel case with your own; perhaps the violence of your passions may serve to increase the extravagance of your fancy, and you may therefore vainly imagine, you are a great man "struggling with the storms of fate." If that idea offer any consolation to your bosom, you are at liberty to clasp the phantom and politically perish with the delusion: but your country shall have it to boast, that it gains as much as it loses by your fall; for though your principles are beyond the hope of reform, they are at least out of the reach of imitation.

AUGUSTIN S. CLAYTON.

* NOTE BY THE EDITORS.—It is due to Mr. Clayton to state, what was made known by us to Mr. Hall two weeks ago, that we had been written to by Mr. C. early in April to give up his name as the author of *Modestus*, but the letter conveying that authority did not come to hand; it was doubtless destroyed, with hundreds of others, by the post-boy, whose repeated robbery of the mail about that time is well known. The author, in disclosing his name, has acted with much candor; the motive that influenced his conduct does him honor, and although he does not choose to reveal it, in justice to him and to our own feelings, it shall be known. It was done at our request, to prove to some of Mr. Hall's friends how unworthily they had acted, in imputing to us, for withholding the name of the author, motives as illiberal as they were unfounded.