Duration in office has been mentioned as the second requisite to the energy of the executive authority. This has relation to two objects: To the personal firmness of the Executive Magistrate in the employment of his constitutional powers; and to the stability of the system of administration which may have been adopted under his auspices.—With regard to the first, it must be evident, that the longer the duration in office, the greater will be the probability of obtaining so important an advantage. It is a general principle of human nature, that a man will be interested in whatever he possesses, in proportion to the firmness or precariousness of the tenure, by which he holds it; will be less attached to what he holds by a momentary or uncertain title, than to what he enjoys by a durable or certain title; and of course will be willing to risk more for the sake of the one, than for the sake of the other. This remark is not less applicable to a political privilege, or honor, or trust, than to any article of ordinary property. The inference from it is, that a man acting in the capacity of Chief Magistrate, under a consciousness, that in a very short time he must lay down his office, will be apt to feel himself too little interested in it, to hazard any material censure or perplexity, from the independent exertion of his powers, or from encountering the ill-humors, however transient, which may happen to prevail either in a considerable part of the society itself, or even in a predominant faction in the legislative body. If the case should only be, that he might lay it down, unless continued by a new choice; and if he should be desirous of being continued, his wishes conspiring with his fears would tend still more powerfully to corrupt his integrity, or debase his fortitude. In either case feebleness and irresolution must be the characteristics of the station.

There are some, who would be inclined to regard the servile pliancy of the executive to a prevailing current, either in the community, or in the Legislature, as its best recommendation. But such men entertain very crude notions, as well of the purposes for which government was instituted, as of the true means by which the public happiness may be promoted. The republican principle demands, that the deliberate sense of the community should govern the conduct of those to whom they entrust the management of their affairs; but it does not require an unqualified complaisance to every sudden breese of passion, or to every transient impulse which the people may receive from the arts of men, who flatter their prejudices to betray their interests. It is a just observation, that the people commonly intend the public good. This often applies to their very errors. But their good sense would despise the adulator, who should pretend that they always reason right about the means of promoting it. They know from experience, that they sometimes err; and the wonder is, that they so seldom err as they do; beset as they continually are by the wiles of parasites and sycophants, by the snares of the ambitious, the avaricious, the desperate; by the artifices of men, who possess their confidence more than they deserve it, and of those who seek to possess, rather than to deserve it. When occasions present themselves in which the interests of the people are at variance with their inclinations, it is the duty of the persons whom they have appointed to be the guardians of
those interests, to withstand the temporary delusion, in order to give them time and
opportunity for more cool and sedate reflection. Instances might be cited, in which a conduct of
this kind has saved the people from very fatal consequences of their own mistakes, and has
procured lasting monuments of their gratitude to the men, who had courage and magnanimity
enough to serve them at the peril of their displeasure.

But however inclined we might be to insist upon an unbounded complaisance in the executive
to the inclinations of the people, we can with no propriety contend for a like complaisance to
the humors of the Legislature. The latter may sometimes stand in opposition to the former; and
at other times the people may be entirely neutral. In either supposition, it is certainly desirable
that the executive should be in a situation to dare to act his own opinion with vigor and
decision.

The same rule, which teaches the propriety of a partition between the various branches of
power, teaches us likewise that this partition ought to be so contrived as to render the one
independent of the other. To what purpose separate the executive, or the judiciary, from the
legislative, if both the executive and the judiciary are so constituted as to be at the absolute
devotion of the legislative? Such a separation must be merely nominal and incapable of
producing the ends for which it was established. It is one thing to be subordinate to the laws,
and another to be dependent on the legislative body. The first comports with, the last violates,
the fundamental principles of good government; and whatever may be the forms of the
Constitution, unites all power in the same hands. The tendency of the legislative authority to
absorb every other, has been fully displayed and illustrated by examples, in some preceding
numbers. In governments purely republican, this tendency is almost irresistible. The
representatives of the people, in a popular assembly, seem sometimes to fancy that they are
the people themselves; and betray strong symptoms of impatience and disgust at the least sign
of opposition from any other quarter; as if the exercise of its rights by either the executive or
judiciary, were a breach of their privilege and an outrage to their dignity. They often appear
disposed to exert an imperious control over the other departments; and as they commonly
have the people on their side, they always act with such momentum as to make it very difficult
for the other members of the government to maintain the balance of the Constitution.

It may perhaps be asked how the shortness of the duration in office can affect the
independence of the executive on the legislative, unless the one were possessed of the power
of appointing or displacing the other? One answer to this enquiry may be drawn from the
principle already remarked, that is from the slender interest a man is apt to take in a short lived
advantage, and the little inducement it affords him to expose himself on account of it to any
considerable inconvenience or hazard. Another answer, perhaps more obvious, though not
more conclusive, will result from the consideration of the influence of the legislative body over
the people, which might be employed to prevent the re-election of a man, who by an upright
resistance to any sinister project of that body, should have made himself obnoxious to its
resentment.
It may be asked also whether a duration of four years would answer the end proposed, and if it
would not, whether a less period which would at least be recommended by greater security
against ambitious designs, would not for that reason be preferable to a longer period, which
was at the same time too short for the purpose of inspiring the desired firmness and
independence of the magistrate?

It cannot be affirmed, that a duration of four years or any other limited duration would
completely answer the end proposed; but it would contribute towards it in a degree which
would have a material influence upon the spirit and character of the government. Between the
commencement and termination of such a period there would always be a considerable
interval, in which the prospect of annihilation would be sufficiently remote not to have an
improper effect upon the conduct of a man endued with a tolerable portion of fortitude; and in
which he might reasonably promise himself, that there would be time enough, before it arrived,
to make the community sensible of the propriety of the measures he might incline to pursue.
Though it be probable, that as he approached the moment when the public were by a new
election to signify their sense of his conduct, his confidence and with it, his firmness would
decline; yet both the one and the other would derive support from the opportunities, which his
previous continuance in the station had afforded him of establishing himself in the esteem and
good will of his constituents. He might then hazard with safety, in proportion to the proofs he
had given of his wisdom and integrity, and to the title he had acquired to the respect and
attachment of his fellow citizens. As on the one hand, a duration of four years will contribute to
the firmness of the executive in a sufficient degree to render it a very valuable ingredient in the
composition; so on the other, it is not long enough to justify any alarm for the public liberty. If a
British House of Commons, from the most feeble beginnings, from the mere power of assenting
or disagreeing to the imposition of a new tax, have by rapid strides, reduced the prerogatives of
the crown and the privileges of the nobility within the limits they conceived to be compatible
with the principles of a free government; while they raised themselves to the rank and
consequence of a coequal branch of the Legislature; if they have been able in one instance to
abolish both the royalty and the aristocracy, and to overturn all the ancient establishments as
well in the church as State; if they have been able on a recent occasion to make the monarch
tremble at the prospect of an innovation attempted by them; what would be to be feared from
an elective magistrate of four years duration, with the confined authorities of a President of the
United States? What but that he might be unequal to the task which the Constitution assigns
him?—I shall only add that if his duration be such as to leave a doubt of his firmness, that doubt
is inconsistent with a jealousy of his encroachments.