

Columbus, *Newport Herald*, 17 January 1788

That every thing will work together for our good, is a truth applicable in politics as well as in morals; for though vice may prevail, and impious men bear way, yet we may presume that if we faint not in a continuance of well doing, the disorders of society will be so directed by HIM who governeth every event, as to produce the greatest national happiness. How unbecoming then, is it the dignity of a virtuous man to despair, even when assailed by the most virulent perverters of justice!—how disgraceful to the character of a christian, to relinquish a well grounded trust, and bemoan, for whom does he labour and bereave himself of rest!—yet such is the frailty of human foresight that present prospects too often bound the mind.

When insurrections reared its hydra head in a neighbouring state,¹ and fraud usurped the seat of justice in another;—in the first, government was vibrating between a laudable firmness and base pusillanimity; in the latter, industry threw away her implements of labour as the garb of servitude, or to secure the salvage of her earnings from the further wrecks of Know Ye's;—while the widow already bitterly wounded, embraced the parchment conveying her dower and her orphans legacy, as the corps of her last earthly friend:—Painfully aggravated were these evils inasmuch as they were perpetrated by those whom we once dignified with the title of brethren,—illegally prepared were we to support so base degeneracy, having but just terminated a long and bloody war, and flattered ourselves, that every principle essential to a rising republic was fixt as the eternal hills,—but had we attended to the history of ancient and modern nations, which have figured on the earth, we should have found that none ever was established in peace and order, without repeated struggles and severe conflicts;—examine the progress of Britain, in attaining her zenith of glory in 1763, and this remark will be verified in all her gradations;—but let us turn to scenes that we have been more conversant in, those in which we were the actors.—How arduous were they?—without, a powerful and implacable enemy; within, lurked vultures preying on our vitals;—yet that Being who led our ancestors into this new land, who caused the wild places to become fruitful, and the savages to give way for their peace, also crowned us with a victor's prize of independence and liberty;—thus flushed with honours, thus elated with liberty, we laid aside our virtues with our swords, to revel in pleasure, but we were soon checked in this ruinous career; heaven wisely permitted anarchy and fraud to ravage our country, to correct us of our degeneracy, to resuscitate our pristine virtues and draw us from the apathy of unmanly ease and luxurious effeminacy.

What would have been the fate of Massachusetts had not Shays aped a Massinello,² and arrayed himself in all the pomp of military prowess to overturn the fair fabric of order and justice, before he had counted his strength?—had he continued to a later period sowing the seeds of sedition by his flattering lies;—that Commonwealth would have fallen to as contemptible an usurper as ever disgraced the era of a republic.

Had the partizans of fraud in this state, disguised their paper bubble under greater appearances of integrity,—had they emitted a smaller bank, and made it a tender only for

executions, they might have deceived the people so as to have gained it a currency, and under plausible pretences, would have palmed the public with aggregated sums until the quantity had depreciated its value to that of the rags which formed it; then it would have produced the *wished-for* bankruptcy among all men of property, to the emolument of the indolent and the abandoned. In addition to so remediless an evil that we should have felt here, our Sister States would have been dupes to this iniquitous system, for they were giddy after an emission of paper, but our zeal disclosed the fallacy and was a constant pharos to them to avoid the reef of national perfidy. Had this State, while prosecuting its present *system*, sent delegates to the continental convention; had they, agreeably to the requisition, recommended a convention to consider the new constitution, and unanimously ratified it, the other States would have felt some new jealousies; for if Troy had reason "*to fear the Greeks even when they offered presents,*"³ how much more would those States which have adopted the new constitution had to fear that there was some *latent fraud*, some *dangerous innovation in order and justice* if Rhode-Island had adopted it, and thus, from hasty prejudices, they would have rejected the only basis of national honor. Our present federal government, already a shadow, would then have lingered out but a few days or months to the pity of surrounding spectators, when the drama of liberty would have been closed for ever, whilst a Shays would have arisen to tyrannize over our species and degrade our name.

But the clouds are vanishing, anarchy trembles at her fate, and her antifederal sons find their satannic maxim "Divide et impera"⁴ to be fruitless and unavailing.

Experience hath diffused so convincing proofs of the impotence of our present form, that no wiles nor machinations can longer delude, the dormant virtues are revived, and the spirit of the day opes a flattering prospect of closing it with honor.

1. A reference to Shays's Rebellion in Massachusetts, 1786–87.

2. Masaniello (Tommaso Aniello, c. 1620–1647), a fisherman, led a successful tax revolt in Naples against Spanish rule. His success caused insanity and he was soon murdered by either Spanish authorities or his own disappointed followers.

3. Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book II, line 49. "Whatever it is, I fear Greeks even when they bring gifts."

4. Latin: Divide and conquer.

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