

A Rhode-Island Man, *Newport Mercury*, 25 February 1788

Mr. PRINTER, I have read with attention the various publications on the subject of our new government, and have been pleased with the fine reasoning and good sense with which they generally abound; and even those which have nothing else to recommend them, among which perhaps <this> piece of mine will be numbered, are so many strong, <and timely> proofs, of the perfect freedom of our country.—When I read the strong, clear reasoning of Wilson, <and> Ames and others, with the ingenuous representations of Washington, I seem to turn to Cicero and Pitt, and <— —> they ever spoke better than that; or what I mean <as it> is a still higher honor, when I read the doings of Massachusetts and Connecticut, I fancy myself in an assembly of Swifts noble Houyhnhnms. I have endeavored with the most rigid impartiality to compare the <strengths> and defects of the new constitution, while the ingenuity of its opponents has had no small share in persuading me of its propriety, for to me it seems impossible that <nothing> but truth, can triumph against such able and <eloquent> adversaries, what knowledge, what candour, what eloquence, what absurdity, is displayed in the <letter> of Randolph, after giving the most just and mournful detail of what we have suffered for want of a supreme controlling power, and declaring that a continuation of <that> defect must be attended with multiplied mischiefs, <he> concludes with an absurdity, of which human nature <— —> is capable, that the adoption of a constitution framed <with so> much care, by men of the first abilities, for the attainment of an end which he himself allows to be the <most> desirable, should still be procrastinated, while we <approach> the confines of civil discord from the partial <impulses> of particular States.

Let us attempt to enumerate the probable advantages <that> will attend the establishment of this constitution,—<in> the first place, the way will be laid open to British subjects to recover their debts, and the posts on our frontiers <given> up, or, at least, the British will be left without <excuse>—in the next place, Congress will have power to make <its own> laws of navigation, and thereby either exclude <— — — — —> — — — — or procure their countrymen> the beneficial employment of carrying their own produce to market, an object of great magnitude this, as <giving> bread to thousands who now languish for want of business; nor need Mr. Lee be concerned for his tobacco.⁷ New-England can find hands and vessels sufficient to carry all the southern produce to market—in the next place Congress may lay such duties on manufactures of <leather>, iron and wood, that no smith, saddler, shoemaker <carpenter>, shall want employment.—In the next place Congress, when they are known to have power to fulfil <their> engagements, may, by a tax of no more than half a <copper> a head, keep one hundred and fifty stout rangers <on> the frontiers to chastise the lurking Indians and horse <stealers>, and thereby greatly facilitate the sale and settlement of that fine, vast country, sufficient to pay the national debt,—in the next place when Congress shall have power to make every member of our continent from Nova Scotia to Florida do his duty, by contributing his proportion by easy yearly payments, the public debt may be <diminished>, until it is finally paid or brought within such <a> manageable compass as to give no concern, and an <inexhaustible> source of wealth may be found in the iron mines of our continent, the erection of iron-works in an effectual manner being frequently far

beyond the undertakers <purse>, whereby what has been laid out is wholly lost but government being able, might, from time to time, lend <small> sums on good security, at low interest, on the <certificate> of an able engineer of the suitableness of the place, <whereby> the price of iron might be greatly reduced, probably so as to under sell every nation, when we consider <the> vast forests, mines and rivers of Vermont, Kentucky and Ohio with its branches.—But even for home use we <can> hardly have too much iron, when we consider that <it is> principally if not wholly to this, that the <civilized owes> his superiority over the savage man, every country that abounds in wrought iron, from its great use in building, in subduing and pulverizing the ground, in forming every thing to the use of man, must be rich, while on the <contrary> every people that wants [i.e., needs] it must be poor, in the <next place> when it shall be known that Congress possesses <power> to direct the arms of the United States to any particular point, it will be such a discouragement to foreign invasion or domestic insurrection, that in all probability <we> shall never experience any,—In the next place when a <lasting> and uniform government shall be established, great numbers of wealthy people from the crowded and oppressed <nations> of Europe will settle with us, and assist in paying <our> public debt.—Now let us consider the objections that are laid against it, it is said to be a consolidation, <and — —> if by consolidation is meant the union of several <smaller> societies into one supreme council for the sake of uniformity, efficiency, and dispatch,—it is confessed the constitution is and was meant to be so far a consolidation of the powers of the United States;—The supremacy of the General Assembly of the State of Rhode-Island over the several towns and town meetings <is> just such a consolidation of the various towns, as the new constitution is of the United States,—and there is no argument against a union of States, but what is equally forcible against a union of towns in our General Assembly, for our Assembly has a sovereign unlimited power; but let us suppose for a moment this doctrine was put in practice by dissolving our Assembly and restoring sovereignty and independence to the towns, their power of refusing state taxes would soon be sanctified by pretended reason, and each town would prove, by endless arguments that they had been ever over taxed, and least they should pay too much, would take care to pay nothing, town taxes would soon be thought inconvenient and tyrannical, and therefore abolished, we should soon enjoy the blessed freedom of savages, we should be free from the fees of sheriffs and judges, every man would judge his own cause and execute his own judgment, if my neighbor kills my pigeons, I kill one of his children, I fall next, and retaliation goes on until each family is extinct, <that is just> the case among savage tribes, this <is> the happy <tendency> of cautiously keeping our power in our own <hands>, but Judge Blackstone says, that to suppose a government without a supreme controlling power some where lodged, is the highth of political absurdity—<why> may not supreme power be as secure from abuse in <the> Congress, as in a General Assembly of Massachusetts, Rhode-Island, or any other State,— in order to reconcile us to <the power> proposed for Congress, let us consider that <— — — —> the direction of honesty and prudence <— — — — — — — —>; but what security have we that Congress <— — — —> its power? why truly we have <— — — — — — — —> Congress must be an inhabitant <— — — — — — — —> that he must be a land-holder so <— — — —> never <— —> any law without being obnoxious <— — — —> its operation.> Whoever

votes for an unpopular <--- ---> his place, and mix again with <the mass of the people> loaded with disgrace and popular <odium.> A member of Congress under the new constitution <will hold> an office on board of a ship, of which <--- ---> → extravagant bills to carpenters, smiths, caulkers, and riggers. he loses his part, if careless of the tackle, if <he> makes long passages, wastes the provision, or <--> the ship, he is ever part loser in point of <-->, and doubly so in point of reputation, his partners and employers have every possible security for his faithful administration, that the constitution is equal and impartial appears from the southern critics supposing it partial to the northern States, while the northern politicians think it partial to the south, and that nothing better can ever be agreed on out of Congress or by way of convention is in the highest degree probable, from what <was> shrewdly observed by one who signs himself Philanthropos,⁹ that hardly any two of its adversaries agree on the parts that they wish to have amended; therefore, if this plan is rejected, we have the greatest reason to fear that another will never be agreed on, and that the United States in the midst of every natural advantage that human nature can wish or enjoy, will remain a poor, weak, divided people. But all concur that Congress should have more power, that something like this constitution is wanted, in short, that it should not be rejected but amended, why then may <not> the sincere, the honest, the ingenuous enemies of the constitution in its present form, consistent with all that anxiety and care they express for their constituents and posterity, consent to its adoption and trust to its being amended as speedily and effectually by the same men under the denomination of Congress as that of convention, by this means those powers in which all agree, might be immediately exerted, to the unspeakable profit of the public in regulating trade, and the exceptionable parts repealed as soon as the people shall be persuaded of their impropriety, I consider the new constitution as a large solid building, reared by the ablest architects, according to the rules of art and good taste, for the accommodation of a large family, and equally calculated for duration and convenience; but so contrived, that after the family shall have moved in, it may be altered with infinite ease whenever a majority of the family should require a change—The <completion < of the fabric was announced and the family called on to take a view, all parties confessed they wanted <the> house and the major part approved the work, declaring they could expect nothing more perfect from such a number of designers, who had <such> a variety of interests to accommodate, and determined to move in; while the minority were loud in their objections,—a party declared it was <--> without any apartment <of> organization,—a second, who had studied building <and> house-keeping in Virginia, declared in a long <--- --->, that they could not live in it with safety, <unless the> cooks and bakers were responsible and liable <to be> hanged, if they did not roast and bake to the taste of the family—a third said, there should have been a <--> press framed with it—a fourth said that so large a house could not stand without a steeple,—a fifth objected to its being so contrived as to oblige the tenants of the manor to furnish provisions, declaring that the only sure way for the house to prosper was to trust to manna, quails, and a compliance with requisitions—a sixth said, it was too expensive,— a seventh said, it was not large enough, a party circulated with great earnestness that the designers had placed all the panes of glass upside down—a ninth said, he thought all these faults trivial, but that he had observed

something in it truly abominable, which was, that they had so contrived the doors that a Turk, or a Jew might go in and out like a Christian,—a tenth said, such a house should be three square like a cocked hats as that is nearly the shape of the United States,— the eleventh said, it should have been round, because that figure contains the greatest space within a given line,—a twelfth said, that such an house should have been a regular polygon, with thirteen sides, one fronting to every State, except Rhode-Island,—a thirteenth declared, that he had <— —> building all night long by the north star for <— — — —> and that he was clear that it did not front <due north> by an angle of two minutes, which consideration <alone> was sufficient to reject it,—a fourteenth objected <to> hiring servants for two years, insisting that the safer way was to engage them every morning, this man was extremely attached to old custom, always ballancing his grist with a stone—a fifteenth, who had practised oeconomy in Virginia, after relating in a very handsome discourse, how much they had suffered for want of shelter, and how much more they were likely to suffer, very gravely advised them to lie out doors all winter, and if no alteration should be agreed on <— —> in the spring, what made this advice the more surprising was, that no two critics placed their <blame> on <the same> point, and, therefore, were as little likely to <agree> on their amendments as the parson's parishioners were to concur in the time when he should pray for rain. These, with numberless other objections, too tedious to mention, were heard with great patience and good humour by the majority, and confuted with superior mechanical reasoning.— When the family moved in, the apartments were light, warm, and clean, and on trial required much fewer alterations than were expected by its most sanguine admirers; among the male-contents, those who <some time> had been to school in Boston and Connecticut, who like Roman gladiators fought with vigour and skill until overpowered by numbers, and yielded with a grace and decorum that gave them as much credit, if not as much pleasure, as a victory—by degrees the minority all came in, and when time had softened the asperity of opposition, they frankly owned they were glad they were out voted, all which was very agreeable to one who signs himself, A RHODE-ISLAND MAN.

Published in Volume XXIV of *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution, Rhode Island*, Vol. 1, edited by John P. Kaminski, Charles H. Schoenleber, Gaspare J. Saladino, Richard Leffler, Jonathan M. Reid, Margaret R. Flamingo, Patrick T. Conley, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2011.