

Solon, junior, *Providence Gazette*, 12 July 1788

Mr. CARTER, When the Athenian Sage [Solon] presented his celebrated code of laws to his countrymen, he was asked, “*Whether it was the best he could frame?*” To this question he replied—“*No—but it is the best my fellow-citizens are capable of receiving at this time.*”

If choosing for ourselves only be difficult in some instances, the difficulty will increase upon our hands when others are concerned also in the choice; and as in the former case we many times acquiesce without a perfect liking, so much more ought we in the latter.

From the necessity of living in the world, after sufficient enquiry, we see people fix to some spot, whether they are perfectly suited in their seat or not; for it would be preposterous for a man to resolve to go out of the world, because no particular place in it exactly suited his fancy: And unless a man prefers the life of a savage, where strength of nerves, and muscular force, are the supreme law, there is as great a necessity of consenting to some form of government, as there is of living at any particular place.

Here it will be agreed by every man, that if his own particular will must prevail, he must either live wholly alone, or the wills of all others must yield to his. In the former case, he would become a *recluse*; in the latter, a *despot*.

The public will or laws, therefore, in a well-ordered State, must be the result of the mutual concessions of the private wills of the citizens—in this manner sacrificing to the common good.

The necessity of this spirit of accommodation will more clearly appear in every attempt to unite States remote in situation, and in some cases clashing in their interests. It must be as chimerical, in such an attempt, to expect that the will of each State can prevail, as it would be, in the former case, to expect that the will of each individual could prevail. In both cases, while the subject is on the anvil, and in discussion, the individuals of the States have a right to publish and enforce their wills by all lawful means: And, could I add without giving offence, I would say, it is their *bounden duty* so to do: But after the vote has been taken—the die is cast.—

The principles of republicanism have taught us, that all men are on an equal footing with respect to life, liberty and the acquisition of property—that their votes are therefore equal—and that the voice of the majority is decisive. The contrary doctrine would give *the few* a right to lord it over *the many*—and leave us forever afloat—without any criterion of decision.

Notwithstanding the opposition, conducted in many States to the honour of human nature, against the New Federal Constitution, we find that ten States have ratified it—on what principles this has been carried does not belong to me to determine.

The world has been informed, that the Sages who met in the Federal Convention, after four months attendance, and the most laborious discussion of the subject, could not agree in opinion—that their doings were the result of mutual concessions—that scarcely a member was pleased with every part—and yet nothing else could be done.—In this critical posture of affairs, we find the greatest men in the world, with tears in their eyes, candidly yielding to each other for the good of their dear country.

July 7, 1788.

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