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Campaign Against the Critics of the Constitution > Alexander Hamilton Attacks New York
Governor George Clinton

Aristides

New York *Daily Advertiser*, 10 September 1787

To the EDITOR of the DAILY ADVERTISER.

SIR,

“When the administration of government is confided to improper hands, the strength and dignity of the state will be impaired, and a train of calamities must ensue.”

In the New-York Journal of yesterday, a very sensible Citizen, under the signature of a Republican, has come forward with a justification of his Excellency the Governor’s conduct, or rather his *silence*, against the pointed animadversions of a valuable citizen on the 21st of July; and by the selection of a poetic witticism, has dubbed one of our representatives in the Convention at Philadelphia, the author of them. Without stopping to dispute whether he is or not, I shall readily admit that the patriotism and manly spirit which have rendered this gentleman so eminently distinguished, appear sufficiently to justify the conjecture. I believe, indeed (and if I am right, why should it be concealed) that the author of the strictures alluded to, is Col. Alexander Hamilton—and what name in the State more worthy of credit? But before I proceed, let me recollect that the Republican has given me a lesson of caution and humility, and here I must profit by it. He has prefaced, that his acquaintance with Governor Clinton is too slight to enable him to judge of his sentiments on public measures, and acknowledges very frankly, that he is not *intimate enough* (I have no doubt but they will be better acquainted by and by) with his Excellency, to determine whether what has been asserted of him in the paper of July the 21st, be true or false.—In like manner with the gentleman, when speaking of the Governor, I have not the honor of much personal acquaintance with Col. Hamilton—scarcely any, but such as his public virtues have furnished me with; but it must be conceded, that an *unanswered attack* against a very influential officer, who sees clearly, and pursues industriously, his own interest, is strong evidence, that his Excellency *was not misrepresented* by that gentleman’s publication; and whether his design was ostensibly, or *really* to obviate any wrong impressions which this conduct of the Governor might make on the public mind, must be judged of in a great measure, by the opinion which the public have formed of the *man*. That his Excellency has long been viewed as *secretly hostile* to such measures as were conceived absolutely necessary to the *support of a substantial Federal Government* cannot be denied—and if the animadversions alluded to are true, (and they remain uncontroverted) men will be disposed to consider him as *openly opposed* to any change

which the wisdom of the present Convention may recommend—If this should prove to be the case, the Republican will please to observe, that I sport no opinions concerning the Governor's motives, and they are the less necessary since his friend appears so fertile of imagination, that this deficiency will be easily supplied.

The Republican's whole strength appears to be centered in his third paragraph, which I acknowledge he has handled in a very ingenious manner—He tells us, "In order to establish the charge against his Excellency, the most conclusive evidence ought to have been produced," &c.—Here, and elsewhere, pretty clearly, he admits culpability, but quibbles a good deal about the inexplicity of the testimony, and upon the whole, rather seems inclined to consider it as a personal and slanderous attack, than a *noble* and *patriotic alarm*.—Whether upon the whole, the Republican thinks the charge sufficiently established against the Governor; or, whether if it was proved beyond all controversy, *he* would admit it to be fraught with evil consequences, I cannot tell; but I may venture to assure him, that his Excellency knows, with more than tolerable certainty, the author, who publicly accused him of *expressing such sentiments* respecting the business and probable issue of the present Convention, as would, when disseminated throughout the State, have a powerful and direct tendency to pre-occupy the public mind, in a manner little calculated to give efficacy to the counsels of that great patriot band. If therefore he was innocently accused, why not apply an easy and certain remedy—the occasion to himself was interesting—the mode was easy—the antagonist every way his equal, *save one*. The fact, after all that has been said in his defence, remains undisproved; and its influence alarming; tho' I hope not undiminished.

I believe the Republican has a very exact knowledge of the rights and duties of Citizenship, and I presume from thence that he will admit, that a Chief Magistrate, from whose example each descending rank should learn obedience, is himself *most bound*. The reason is obvious:—the extent of his power renders the effects of his errors more diffused and dangerous, and, in the same measure that *they* are influential, I conceive *him* to be culpable. In my turn, I grant that his Excellency, both as Governor and as a free citizen, has an undeniable right to give an opinion on any public measure; and his authority, in cases of real danger and emergency, extends much farther: But at the same time I contend, that when such opinions are judged, by the enlightened part of the community, to be pregnant with pernicious consequences, they ought to be combated; and that citizen who, under such circumstances, feels himself impelled, from pure principles, to warn the people of impending danger, deserves well of the public. I concur most heartily in opinion with the Republican, when he says, "In governments conducted by *intrigue and deception*, and where ignorance is their chief support, *candor* will be arraigned as a vice; and reservedness, or *silence*, as the case may be, will be tortured, as is common enough, into wisdom and sagacity. While at the same time I admit, that the Republican has discovered himself to be a man of considerable penetration, I dispute the great postulata by which he endeavors to justify the Governor, and fix reprehension on Col. Hamilton, tho' they discover some *logical strength*, yet they, at the same time, shew much *political weakness*. Let us look at his own words. "The only evil (says he) that could possibly result, must arise from the *promulgation* of the Governor's sentiments on the present posture of public affairs; for, in this instance (mark his delusive inference) *if they were not known they could not influence*." Alas! the good gentleman appears little versed in the various modes, by which influence is communicable. The influence which even

a great man's *silence* will communicate on *some occasions*, will speak loudly, and spread its contagion far and wide. Has the Republican ever cast his eyes over this state, and taken a view of the men in the different counties, who are in office? Does he know aught of the system of *connections and dependencies*? Has he considered the two distinct and strongly marked political classes, which obtain in it in common with the other States of the Union (for the sake of perspicuity I shall stile them Federal and Anti-Federal) and of whom, generally speaking, are they composed? The first I will venture to name:—they are the Clergy—the respectable body of Merchants—the intelligent, *independent* Country Gentlemen—and almost every citizen of discernment and public spirit. The second—but they are not of *my* acquaintance: I shall therefore leave the Republican to fill up the chasm; and, when he has completed his portraiture, and the motley group are honestly delineated, I shall crave permission to ask him one question:—Will the Republican think it necessary to play off much reasoning *with them*? His good understanding will tell him at once—that a few industrious coadjutors,—a *journey on horseback*,—and the whiff of a pipe, will save a world of trouble and anxiety, and answer the purpose equally as well. I should have followed the Republican a little farther, but he plunges himself into such a torrent of historical misapplication and invective, that I judge it improper to pursue him. I shall therefore conclude with observing, that the honorable citizen, against whom the Republican has levelled his poetry and wit, stands too highly in the estimation of his fellow-citizens, either to have his feelings or his fame injured, by the strongest efforts of jealousy, or the most envenomed shafts of malice. And I believe the generous part of the community will read, with abhorrence, a pointed attack against a gentleman, who is not only absent, but in the exercise of a most important duty, by which he is devoting, to a thankless people, a great portion of that time, which might be employed more profitably for himself and family; and joining the strength of his abilities with those other great characters, which the present awful conjuncture so evidently requires.

Friday, Sept. 7th.

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