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A True Friend

Virginia Independent Chronicle, 14 November 1787
(excerpt)

. . . We have seen how much our predilection, prejudices and customs, have favored the skill and endeavors of the British to keep us under their subjection; let us now examine what use we have made of our liberty as sovereign states. Far from having a fixed and combined plan of commerce for the thirteen states, analogous to that of the nations, with whom we are or wish to be connected, and conforming our regulations, to their exemptions, privileges and prohibitions, so as to maintain an equal balance of the advantages which they offer us, and keep for themselves our several legislative powers, have passed acts to cross and oppose one another reciprocally! Being disunited and rivals, the European nations, and principally Great Britain, have preserved all their advantages, and still keep us under the slavery of their prohibitive laws.

At the time that Great Britain withdrew her assistance and her credit, and demanded reimbursements, some states drove away the lenders and destroyed the general confidence, by opposing the uniform tax, which congress wanted to establish, to pay the arrears of the money borrowed during the war, and for the extinction of capitals since that time, the European nations have seen nothing in us but divided states, legislative powers jealous, contradictory and faithless. Even the owners of large capitals among us, have sent their pecuniary fortunes to foreign countries; the scarcity of specie is become extraordinary by these causes united together; the distrust is become general, and from thence all our evils have originated. The interest on money has risen to an enormous rate; all transactions upon trust have been ruinous for the person who asked for credit; what would have been looked upon as usury and punishable, is become legal and authorised by the circumstances. Our public funds have fallen into contempt; our most sacred engagements loose the 4-5ths of their value, and as a state of constraint and distress ends by the corruption of the principles of honor and delicacy among nations, as well as among individuals. Some legislative powers have passed acts contrary to the treaty of peace and to the general foederation; others have emitted paper money, which the creditors were forced to receive, notwithstanding its depreciation. The course of justice has been stopped by riotous mobs, and even in this state where the citizens has acquired the character of being mild, generous and honest, the public jails have been broke open; the office of titles and records has been burned, and in all the public papers, and even in the house, the question whether an instalment of debts, paper money, or a deduction of the 4-5ths of public debts shall be established, is seriously debated, and they seem to hesitate only on the choice of those means. The planter accuses the merchan[t] of

being the cause of his distress; the latter complains of the former; the state is in confusion, and is threatened with a total ruin.

In perceiving, dear countrymen, the causes of our distresses, and seeing clearly that we have turned against ourselves, the immense advantages which our independence should have procured us, you also feel at the same time the inefficaciousness of the remedies, which these writers propose you in the public papers. Instead of tracing back to the origin of our evils, and from reinstating the confidence and credit, which alone can revive our agriculture, our marine, our commerce, and our finances, they would end by their entire ruin, were we to follow their advices of infidelity and dishonesty, by breaking our engagements. They are like these ignorant physicians, who without knowing and seeking into the nature of the disease, improperly apply a violent remedy, which occasions an immediate death. Our true physicians are those whom we have assembled in Convention, and not those obscure writers who in great part are our enemies. That assembly of wise and learned men, presided by a hero, has duly examined the source of our evils proceeding from a want of union, strength, regularity and unanimity in the government, which excluded credit, help, confidence, and reputation, as well within as without the states. She has seen our agriculture suffer for want of advances, our commerce and our marine sinking before it has taken a rise, as much by our jealousies between states, as by the struggle against the nations more experienced and more constant in their principles of trade. Finally, she presents us her work, the result of her patriotic labors, not as a perfect thing, which it is only in the power of the divinity to accomplish, but as what suits best the present critical and pressing circumstance.

We must expect that this new constitution will meet with contradictions, and in the number, with some antagonists, who under the veil of the love of the public good, and liberty, will endeavor to raise doubts and fears, either to hinder or delay its execution. It lays in our power to distinguish a few, and to discover their secret motives. Some addicted either by inclination, or by interest to British connections, and to the former dependence, will remove as much as possible whatever is contrary to it; others will apprehend to see the functions and the perquisites of their offices diminished; others will fear that good order and regulations once established, will lead to the payment of public and private debts; others will be humbled to see that the state assemblies, shall be confined to interior regulations, when Congress will be invested with the great objects of general administration; others will lament that it will be no more in their power to pass acts contradictory to those of the fœderation, and prohibitive laws to cross the interests and commerce of the other neighbouring states; others will raise our fears and jealousy on the advantages that some states will find, and on the too great powers granted to Congress, as if they were not all to draw their natural advantages from this association, and as if we had reason to apprehend reunited and balanced powers, which we give and take at our will and pleasure; and lastly, some few others will find it difficult to reconcile themselves to this simple and natural idea, of thirteen provinces making but one state, whose glory and prosperity will necessarily effect that of the parts which composes it intimately, and which was the original and sublime plan of the fœderation, which we have but very imperfectly executed.

I therefore invite you, my dear countrymen, to make use of your natural knowledge, and of the lessons of the time past, and to guard against such writers. Read, and reflect on the new constitution; it secures us inviolably our rights and prerogatives as a republican nation, preciousy preserving the nature of a government purely democratical. By the nomination of our represen-

tatives, without distinction or inheritance, it will procure us the order, strength and unanimity indispensable for a nation. Let us benefit of the consideration we enjoy amongst the other confederate states, and of the confidence they repose in our wisdom, and let us decide by our example those that may hesitate to adopt.

We may flatter ourselves that with labour and œconomy, it will render us in a short space of time a happy, powerful, and recommendable people.

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