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Agricola's Opinion

Poughkeepsie *Country Journal*, 1 April 1788 (excerpts)

How do you country people intend to vote at the election for Delegates, said I to Agricola on meeting him with a news-paper in his hand, in one of my excursions to the mountains. The aged farmer pulled off his spectacles, and after a short pause which seemed to denote the solemnity of his mind, he answered me nearly to the following effect. "I have determined to give my voice for a federal list, notwithstanding my known attachment to some of those who have already been proposed by the other party. I was for some time very much against the constitution. I swallowed too hastily the jealousies which have been distilled into the minds of the prejudiced and unwary. I was myself frightened without giving time for the proper reflections; for, 'I AM A POOR MAN, AND I HAVE THE FEELINGS OF A POOR MAN.' But sir, I at last read the constitution for myself. I determined not to take other people's word any more about it. I have read it, and read it again—I have paused and seriously reflected. I find it *improves on a reading*. I do not find many things in it which they told me were there. Truly sir, I do not see in it those features of a monster. I can rather see in its countenance the benevolence and wisdom of patriots. . . .

. . . If we undertake to amend for ourselves, as some very good men among us strongly insist on, I see great difficulties in the way. The other states must all agree with us, or it will be good for nothing. The six states which have already adopted the constitution, must undo what they have done, and acknowledge that we are wiser than they. These things are *hardly to be expected*.

"But if we first ratify, and then propose such amendments as many people wish for, I am persuaded we can have a speedy revision in the safe way pointed out by the constitution. Whether the other States may conceive all those amendments which we may recommend to be proper ones, is very uncertain. But it is exceedingly probable that all will be disposed to conciliatory steps, when the great object is obtained. If we even fail in our attempts to get a constitutional amendment, still we have the government remaining, which is capable of redressing our wrongs, and of doing us honor as an enlightened and rational collection of freemen—a government which is not only adorned with the images of intelligence and freedom, but which I trust will brighten on a free disquisition, as it has all the settled distributions of power, and all the real and substantial checks which are requisite to combine together the safety and energy of a genuine republic. I, sir, am firmly persuaded that a government *not quite* perfect is better than *no government at all*, or better than running the hazard of losing it until we can get one entirely to *every body's mind*. I think this point is clear. I think it cannot be contradicted. I am therefore determined to vote for those who are for adopting the constitution."

I made a low reverential bow to the worthy old gentleman, and thanked him most heartily for his instruction, and left him with very deep and serious impressions on my mind of his gravity, wisdom and goodness.

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