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Civis

Pennsylvania Packet, 19 September 1788

The publication of the proceedings of a late meeting at Harrisburg has afforded to me, and probably to many others, an agreeable disappointment. From what we had heard of the disposition of the people who promoted the meeting, there was reason to expect a result widely different from that which their proceedings exhibit. The moderation they have shewn on this occasion does honor to those who were assembled, and entitles the measures they have recommended to attention and respect. However widely some of them may have heretofore strayed from the line of sound policy, and good citizenship in their conduct concerning the Federal Constitution, they had, or imagined they had, sufficient cause for the opposition they gave. If in the manner of doing it passion should be supposed to have unduly interposed its influence, candid reflection on the occurrences shortly after the promulgation of the plan of government, may extenuate, though it may not excuse the fault. But however this may be, they have now made a conciliatory advance, which ought to be met and cherished by those from whom they have differed in opinion, as well for the sake of promoting harmony in the state, as to give fair operation to the plan of confederation. For although in a free government, the *will* of the majority may, and ought to predominate, a wise and prudent majority will nevertheless calculate and conduct their measures in as conciliating a manner as is consistent with the dignity and energy of government, and cautiously avoid giving unnecessary cause of irritation or disgust to the minority. Success naturally produces moderation, complacency and dignity in cultivated minds. These effects are therefore expected to be found in the conduct of a majority; and when it is otherwise they generally diminish their own strength, by adding to that of the minority, and not unfrequently change places with them. I wish, therefore, as one of the majority, to see our public measures so conducted as to leave no ground for prejudice itself to generate alarms upon, and in such manner as may be most likely to improve the *acquiescence* of the minority into *approbation*.

A large proportion, probably a majority of those who have assented to the ratification of the new Constitution in its present form, are desirous that it should be amended in some parts as early as such amendments can be made without impeding its operation, or hazarding its being destroyed, by being wholly submitted to the arbitration of another general convention. The amendments proposed are but few, and pointed to particular parts, which may be subjected to revision by a general convention, without danger to the general principles or vital parts of the Constitution, and without impeding its organization and operation in the mean time. Several of the most considerable of the states have accompanied their adoption with an instruction to

procure amendments as early as possible. As the convention of Pennsylvania omitted this accompaniment to their ratification on a supposition, it is imagined, that their power was limited to the mere adoption or rejection of the instrument laid before them, the Assembly, who are expressly authorised by the Constitution itself to propose amendments, are now requested to do it. Whether they will comply with this request or not, is with them to determine.

May wisdom govern their choice!

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