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Valerius
Richmond *Virginia Independent Chronicle*
23 January 1788 (excerpt)

To the Honorable RICHARD HENRY LEE,
member of Congress for the state of VIRGINIA.

Sir, Presuming on the importance of your political character, and the *supposed* weight which your name might, perhaps, carry with it, you have produced to the consideration of the public, through the medium of a *friend*, your collected objections to the new plan of confederation. Disdaining the clandestine mode of conveying information under a fictitious signature, you have boldly given your *name* to the public, and with a peculiar air of importance, you thought the *channel* of a pamphlet was more respectable and better suited to the dignity of your letter, than that of a newspaper. The purpose, which you had in view, was judiciously conceived. For, a man of your sagacity and experience must have known, that a literary reputation, it is immaterial, whether it is justly acquired or not, sometimes supplies the place of genius, and a *great name*, on many occasions, makes up for a deficiency of argument. I confess myself pleased with the spirit, which you have shewn on this occasion; but, I suspect, sir, that there are some persons who will be perhaps so *uncharitably* disposed as to attribute the voluntary publication of your *name*, to something more than *spirit*. Personal resentments, and above all, an irascible disposition, wounded by repeated disappointments of a public nature, may perhaps, be supposed, by your *enemies*, to be the secret causes of your violent opposition to the fœderal constitution. Be this as it may, I might, probably, have been tempted to follow *your* example, and even annex *my name* to this address, if I was not deterred, by seeing the very little attention, and respect, which a *printed letter*, though recommended by the Honorable signature of Richard Henry Lee, receives from the Public.

It is not, sir, my intention to dissect your letter, nor apply to every argument, or rather *paragraph*, in your celebrated epistle. This would be a task, as tedious, as it would be disagreeable. The triumphs of victory, even over so respectable a personage as yourself, would scarcely recompence me for the fatigues and disgusts, which I should suffer in obtaining it. In political, as well as military contests, very little honor can be acquired, or laurels gained by defeating a weak and defenceless adversary. For, you must, sir, permit me to tell you, however disagreeable the language may be to a man of your *delicate* feelings and *sacred regard* to truth, that your letter, though published with so much formality, is but one continued series of "strong assertion without proof, declamation without argument, and violent censures without dignity or moderation."

I am, sir, a plain, unlettered man; I pretend not to an extensive knowledge in the many sciences of government. I have, scarcely, the reading of an obscure individual. But, the little knowledge, which I do possess, and I sincerely thank the *good being* for that little—effectually secures me from being carried away by the *haughty* overbearance of *great names*, and may, perhaps, enable me to detect the errors, and unravel the sophistry of even so *consummate* a politician as yourself.

In the begining of your letter, you assert, that the proposed fœderal constitution is defective; that amendments are necessary, and that to make these amendments, another convention ought to be called. Nay, you have gone fa[r]ther. To save *this convention* a great deal of deliberation and debate, and the *United States* much additional and unnecessary expence, you have graciously been pleased to point out the defects, and, without application, magisterially propose suitable amendments. What astonishing condescension! How generously patriotic! It is most *devoutly* to be wished, that your grateful county would liberally reward you at *some future period*, for this unsolicited kindness, and rest assured, sir, I should not interpose to stop your exaltation.

I am not, sir, a blind and enthusiastic admirer of the new constitution. I feel myself equally removed from that *puerile* admiration, which will see no fault, and can endure no change, and that *distempered* sensibility, which is, tremblingly, alive *only* to perceptions of inconveniency. I do not believe, that the constitution is absolutely perfect; but I am sure, sir, you have not convinced that it is defective. It is from the perceptible and long observed operation; from the regular progress of cause and effect, that imperfections in free governments are to be discovered, and adequate remedies applied. It appears to my understanding, clear beyond a doubt, that experience *only* can teach us the pernicious tendency of *that* new system of government, which you, in your *political visions*, have been pleased to discover. Permit me, now, to ask you a few simple questions. Have you considered the peril, and perhaps, the impracticability of calling another convention? Do you think it possible to obtain another conventional representation, which promises to collect more wisdom, and produce firmer integrity, than the last? Have you compared the fœderal constitution, not with models of speculative perfection, but with the actual chance of obtaining a better? Are you certain, that the defects, which you have discovered, really exist, and that the amendments, which you propose, would be adopted? And, pray! sir, why might not all your *boasted* amendments be as liable to objections as the defective parts, which you have, with such peculiar sagacity discovered in the fœderal constitution? As the doctrine of infallibility is rapidly declining, even in the *papal* dominions, perhaps you intend to transplant it into the uncultivated wilds of America, or else revive it in your own person. But, believe me, sir, it will not thrive in the American soil; neither will the sanction of *your* name procure it an implicit reception among *us*. . . .

Dec. 1787.

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