A Briton
Gazette of the State of Georgia, 13 December 1787

As I have been a constant reader of your paper during my residence in this place, I hope I may be indulged with the liberty of making a few observations to you upon some late publications which have appeared in your *Gazette*. As you may be surprised that I should defer the communication of some of my sentiments to so late a period, and attribute the delay to a slowness of perception, I will candidly confess the real cause. When the Georgian first presented himself to public view, I felt an inclination to congratulate this country upon the production of so astonishing a genius, and a disposition to display the excellence and justice of his remarks; but I was afraid that some sturdy Farmer, who was accustomed to *cutting, mauling,* and *splitting,* might rib-roast me and tear me to pieces. However, when I read your last paper and observed that a pious Citizen, who seems to detest those who *blaspheme*, had asked what *in the name of God* has the Georgian been guilty of, I felt myself emboldened by the piety of the invocation and determined to atone for my silence by endeavoring to place in a clear light the merit of the Georgian.

He has discovered a quickness of penetration, and a fertility of invention, that is rarely equalled. He has evinced himself to be a watchful guardian of the rights and liberties of the people. He has warmly espoused the interest of the lower class of citizens and has exerted himself to prevent them from being oppressed. He has showed a disposition to adhere to those rigid principles of frugality without which a republican government cannot long exist. And, lastly, he has proved himself to be a decided enemy to all laws and measures that may tend to curb the spirit of the enterprising. I have now sketched the principal traits of his character, and I defy the greatest bookworm in the community to produce one more finished. He may ransack the annals of history and draw forth his Cincinnatuses, his Gracchi, his Camilluses, and other distinguished patriots, but where will he find one in whom is united such an assemblage of excellencies? As it is a common practice with controversialists to accuse their opponents with using bare assertions only, I shall, to avoid this imputation, prove everything which I have advanced in favor of the Georgian. His acuteness and penetration is evinced by the readiness with which he detected the schemes of the wisest and most designing men in America, notwithstanding the artful and mysterious veil with which they were enveloped. His powers in the art of ratiocination are not less conspicuous from the ease with which he has proved the fallacy of certain principles in government which our Magi hoped to render as durable as time. But what must give every man of discernment the most exalted idea of the powers of his mind is that he could in a few days form a system of government infinitely more perfect than that which the ablest heads on the continent

had employed three months in fabricating. His strict attention to the rights of the people is evident from his opposition to the imposition of *taxes and excises*, and to the establishment of tribunals, of which last he appears wonderfully qualified to be a judge. Lest I should be thought enthusiastic in my admiration of the Georgian's abilites, I will in this place acknowledge that I think he has been guilty of one error, and that he has been led into it by his watchfulness. He thinks it improper to allow Congress to have jurisdiction over territory of ten miles square but would confine them to one-fourth of that space. I think the alteration in this case would be more dangerous than the original proposition, for it is well known that some of the most absolute princes in Germany do not possess a dominion of greater extent than five miles square, and it is generally observed in that country that their tyranny increases with the diminution of their principalities. I would not therefore allow Congress a single foot. His attachment to the industrious part of citizens is evident from his aversion to the federal court of appeals to which he supposes that every tailor who has patched a pair of breeches, or every blacksmith who has driven a nail in a horse's shoe, may be dragged before he can recover payment for these necessary operations. Here, Mr. Johnston, I must confess that, although I have read the newly proposed Constitution attentively several times, I did not perceive that such an appeal could be allowed between citizens of the same state, and therefore that much danger need not be apprehended from the court of appeals. However the stress which is laid on this part of the Constitution by the Georgian is a proof of his superior attention and nicer discernment. The economy he has exhibited in curtailing the salary of the President and the pay of the members of Congress will strongly recommend him to every true republican. Men who are actuated by vain and aristocratical motives will assert that they should live with sufficient splendor to support the dignity of the Union, that they should entertain ambassadors, consuls, strangers and citizens of distinction; but such an ostentatious display of expense ought not be encouraged. What true American does not pant for such times as those in which an envied Curius subsisted upon herbs cooked by himself? Who does not admire the native simplicity of manners that prevailed at Sparta, when citizens of all ranks lived upon broth made of beans? And who can refrain from praising the august assembly of Batavian legislators, who sitting on the grass made a wholesome repast from the coarse fare which each one had brought in his budget? There is no necessity of resorting to former times to furnish us with examples of serviceable economy. Many of the *ablest* men both in Holland and Germany feed very plentifully upon sauerkraut, the cost of which for a whole year's subsistence cannot amount to more than ten or twelve pounds. Why then should we allow the President more than four thousand dollars per year? It is well known that the inferior classes of people endeavor to imitate those who are more elevated. Unless, therefore, frugality is established among the rulers of a country, it will never prevail among the subordinate ranks of citizens. The last trait which I remarked in the character of the Georgian was that he was averse to all such measures as would tend to restrain the enterprising. This is evident from his opposition to the suspension of the privilege of the writ of *habeas corpus*—an opposition that was surely well founded, for, if such a suspension was ever allowed, such worthy characters as [Daniel] Shays and [Adam] Wheeler[1] might be forced into a prison, confined there till their trial, and at length be hung for attempting to introduce a *desirable* reformation in government. It may not be out of order to remark here that the Georgian has, with admirable foresight, given perpetuity to his system by insisting that the writ of *habeas corpus* shall remain inviolate *forever*. I hope, Mr. Johnston, that I have now

proved satisfactorily everything which I have advanced in favor of the Georgian; I will, however, go one step farther and assert that the style and manner of reasoning which he uses is the most judicious which could have been adopted, for the reader is often so entirely confounded by his manner of expression that it is impossible even to attempt a refutation of his principles. It is true some objections have been made to his manner of writing, but they were not well founded. His enemies say that he does not argue dispassionately, but they take an unfair way of proving it; they say that, whenever a man writes with a serious design to influence the minds of people, he either addresses their reason or their passions; they then assert he is serious, and that he does not address the reason, and so conclude that he treats his subject passionately. His friends, though, by a little transposition in the syllogism, draw a different conclusion; they admit the first proposition and then say that he speaks with great coolness, and from thence infer that he appeals to the reasoning faculty. Some wags, indeed, have adopted the mode of reasoning both of his friends and his enemies, and conclude that he neither addresses the passions nor the understanding, and consequently that he speaks nonsense. This, though, is the effect of envy. As I am speaking of the style of the Georgian, I am naturally led to animadvert upon the severe attack which has been made upon him by one of our Farmers. He accuses him of introducing foreign idioms into his composition. Admitting the truth of the accusation, has the Georgian been guilty of any crime? Did not the celebrated Dr. [Samuel] Johnson intersperse many Latinisms and Graecisms in his writings and has not the Georgian an equal right to mingle Gallicisms and Germanicisms in his productions? Besides, there are many citizens of America who are not natives of it that are highly interested in the adoption or rejection of the lately proposed Federal Constitution; and therefore if he could, by a happy peculiarity of composition, have rendered his work at once intelligible to Americans, French-men, Spaniards, and Germans it would have been highly meritorious. One of the greatest miracles that is recorded is the preaching of the Apostles with cloven tongues, by which means they were at once understood by many of the most dissimilar people on earth. I shall take my leave of the Farmer when I have made one more remark, and that is that he can be no friend to Georgia, or he would not insinuate that this country had not the honor of producing so great a personage as the Georgian. I now turn with pleasure from the mauling Farmer to congratulate the Georgian upon the appearance of our common friend the Citizen. I cannot help regretting though that this writer had not adopted my plan of establishing by fair reasoning the justice of the Georgian's observations; for some calumniators have observed that he has fallen into the error which he has attributed to others, that of railing at writers instead of developing the excellencies and exposing the defects of the Federal Constitution. He has though amply atoned for this omission by his *suppository* case. Had he thumbed every lexicon, dictionary, glossary, or vocabulary that was contained in the Alexandrian library, or that is now to be found in the Vatican, he could not have selected any word that in its *application* would have so completely *prostrated* the Farmer as this said suppository. You know, Mr. Johnston, that a suppository is a hard glyster, and before the benevolent Citizen could enforce his injection, he might find it necessary to throw the Farmer upon his face, which is as defenseless a posture as any in which a man can be placed, and while he was thus situated, blowing and working his hands and feet, like a captive turtle on the seashore, the Citizen might have administered his medicinal and purifying suppository. Some have imagined that, by a *suppose-tory* case, he wished it to be *supposed* that the Farmer was a *Tory*. This conjecture does not appear improbable, for, if this sup-

position should prevail generally, it would force the whole current of the popular odium upon the head of the Farmer.

I have now finished, Mr. Johnston, what I intended to say; but so many severe things have been lately said about names that I am puzzled for a signature. I believe it will be best to tell the truth and shame the devil. Fortunately policy and my interest concur to enforce this maxim, for, if I should be supposed to have assumed a fictitious character, it will not lower me in the estimation of the people; I therefore acknowledge myself to be A BRITON.

P.S. It may be supposed that I have espoused the principles of the Georgian, because I am mortified at the separation of this country from Great Britain, and wish America to remain in her present languid and contemptible situation; but my impartiality will be confessed when I mention that large sums of money are due to me in this country, and that I am convinced as soon as the proposed Federal Constitution is adopted I shall no longer be defrauded by payments in paper money.

1. Wheeler was one of the leaders of Shays's Rebellion in Massachusetts during 1786–87.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. III: Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1978), 254–59.