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Adjournment of the New Hampshire Convention

Samuel Tenney to Nicholas Gilman Exeter, N.H., 12 March 1788 (excerpt)

... Some of your correspondents have probably given you an account of the proceedings of our Convention, with which I think you must be much mortified. That New Hampshire, which will gain more by the establishment of the New Constitution than any State in the Union, should be the first to reject it (which would undoubtedly have been the case had the question been put) is too humiliating to any person who has the least regard for the reputation of the State; especially when the principles are known upon which the opposition is founded. These I do not hesitate to pronounce, *ignorance* stopping its ears to instruction, *prejudice* shutting its eyes against the light, & the *most unblushing rascallity*. The Convention consisted of 106 members: of these about forty were from the beginning decidedly in favor of the constitution. At the close of the debates fifteen or sixteen of those, who were chosen & sent to oppose it, had their objections so far removed that they were disposed to shift sides; but did not dare counteract the sentiments of their constituents. These we must allow to be candid & honest men—but what shall we think of the remaining forty? My opinion is this, that the only objection of thirty of them is that, if the Constitution takes place, they must make some provision for discharging their debts: & that the creditors of the public will finally receive their just demands. How the important question will be decided next June is uncertain. Should nine or ten States have adopted it, I think the dishonest views of some members must yield to a manly ambition of having a place in good company. As to those who went home with their minds enlightened & their judgments rectified, it is generally supposed they will either convert their constituents to the true Faith, and obtain permission to vote according to the dictates of their consciences, or nobly refuse attending the adjournment.

The debates were conducted with much candor & good nature. The President [i.e., John Sullivan], Judge [Samuel] Livermore, Mr [John] Pickering, Dr [Samuel] Langdon, Judge [Josiah] Bartlet, & some others did themselves much honor by the clearness & force of their arguments in favor of the articles objected against. The best speaker in the opposition was a baptist Parson [William] Hooper. He may be a good *Divine* & *Shoemaker*; but he is ignorant in politics, & so *emmail'd* (if I may be allow'd to use a word unauthorized by *Johnson*) in self-conceit as to be unassailable by the force of reason. But the *Bull-dog* of the flock, or rather of the *herd*, was a *poor puppy* of an *Atherton* [i.e., Joshua Atherton]. He had with, infinite study, stuff'd his pericranium with all the objections against the constitution, that have been published between the St. Croix & St. Mary's. These, with as much labor, he whined out; & (I am ready to believe) did not know when they were completely obviated. So little was he esteem'd by those of his own party that it was no uncommon thing for many of them to leave the house in disgust when he commenced a wretched harrangue. ...

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