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Alfredus (F) Essays

A Farmer

Exeter Freeman's Oracle, 1 February 1788

Messieurs PRINTERS, When a man enters the list of your correspondents, and publishes his sentiments to the world, with a design for the public good, I read him with candor; and like a bee on the flower, extract the most useful parts; and if for want of information, or a slip of the pen, he should publish any thing not quite so agreeable, I had rather cast a vail over it than any thing else.—But when a man (like Alfredus) enters for the sake of critisizing upon a few words, and snarling at every sentence, because they are not entirely agreeable to his wish, I generally treat him, as I do the Puppy, which barks with a great deal of impudence, at every traveller; and with the good humour of Uncle Tobey, I say to him, go, Poor Devil, Go, return to thy cell, there is room enough in this world for both of us.

I wish young gentlemen, would not be quite so anxious, to crowd down this Constitution. If they are not Quacks in Law, Physick, or Speculation, they may be in politicks: But, leave it to old and experienced hands to decide, who can look to the end of things. It calls to my mind, an observation made in a grand council held at New-York, when our army was about evacuating the city; it was warmly urged to set fire to the city, as it might prove a temporary advantage to the British troops; after some altercation, an old sage arose and addressed himself as follows; I am surprised to hear the sentiments of so many wise and worthy gentlemen, to burn the city of New-York, that has cost so much time and treasure to erect. But however, war has not ripened your minds to that maturity which is necessary to look to the end of things. If we burn the city, how many hundreds of worthy inhabitants shall we distress and many wholly ruin, who have only left the city to escape the dangers of war, and perhaps may return again in a few months. If the British troops burn it let them take the curses of an innocent people: for my part I can see no more reason, for burning the city, than that a wealthy farmer should burn his Barns, because the rats have got into them.¹ And on my part, I can see no more reason for adopting the Constitution as it now stands, upon the General conversation, that if we dont adopt this we shall never have any, than that a man should quit his house, and expose himself, and his family to the inclemency of the weather, because his house may take fire, in the night, and burn them up.

As to the lofty strains of a Wilson, he has never entered into the spirit of the Constitution, so far as has come to my knowledge, he has in my opinion, kept aloof, on the surface, and with a great deal of falacy set forth the difficulties that attended forming the Constitution; those difficulties, will always arise where the views are not intended for the general good.

But let Mr. Wilson, and his lofty strains, go off, with a puff of wind, and soar above the clouds in an Air Balloon, he seems better calculated for that region than to make laws for a free people.

There is the nervous² reasonings of a Brutus, and the ingenious sentiments of a Candidus;³ they have opened the sore and probed it to the bottom; if any man, after reading their strictures upon the Constitution, can lay his hand upon his heart, and say it is best for us to adopt it, I shall in return pronounce, that he ought to be a slave forever, and will freely doom him to the cold and dreary regions of Nova-Scotia, there to wind up his days on clams and potatoes.

My friends and fellow farmers, I intended here to have made an end, and left Alfredus, with all his impudence to return peaceably to his cell, where I sent him in the first paragraph — But when I came to read over his piece a second time couched in such language, it made me shudder to see how abusively he has treated our juries, the grand palladium of liberty. I will for your observation copy his sentiment, it appears to be written with blood. These are his words — “*What are the advantages of this boasted Trial by Jury, and on which side do they lie, not certainly on the side of justice, for one unprincipled juror, secured in the interest of the opposite party, will frequently divert her course, and in four cases out of five, when injustice is done, it is by the ignorance or knavery of the jury.*” — This is a bold stroke, my friends, and shows you at once the disposition of Mr. Alfredus, that he is no friend to your liberties. I shall make no further observation on this particular, but when a leisure hour offers, I will give him a further combing for his insolence to the juries. Then we may see who wants the medicine to cure the *Hypocondriac*. In the mean time I shall advise Mr. Alfredus to examine his Apothecaries shop and take a little *Hypocacuana* and a few pills for fear he should get past recovery.

As to armies I shall conclude with a quotation from a celebrated author, viz. “In free states, the profession of a soldier taken merely, and singly as a profession, is justly an object of jealousy, and an army though they are voted yearly, soon get engrafted to, and become a part of the Constitution.”]

1. Suggestions were made that New York City should be burned to prevent the occupying British forces from using its buildings for winter quarters. In response to a letter from General George Washington, Congress on 3 September 1776 resolved that “especial care [be] taken, in case he should find it necessary to quit New York, that no damage be done to the said city by his troops, on their leaving it.” A massive fire destroyed much of New York City during the British occupation on the night of 21 September 1776.

2. At this time the word “nervous” meant strong, vigorous, or robust.

3. Believed to have been written by Benjamin Austin, Jr.

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