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Alfredus

Exeter *Freeman's Oracle*, 8 February 1788

To the FARMER.

SIR, When your address to the Printers of the Freeman's Oracle, occasioned by my strictures on your address to your brother-farmers, came from the press, I expected to have found in it an elaborate attempt to invalidate the force of the arguments, with which I had endeavour'd to counteract the baneful tendency of that publication. But how great was my disappointment when I found it contained nothing but a few boyish rhetorical flourishes—several accusations and hard names—a long tale of *a cock and a bull*, not at all to your purpose—a quotation on the subject of the military profession, quite as impertinent—and a threat of a *further combing*! When you quited argument for such wretched declamation, you judged right in concluding that I was too conscious of the goodness of my cause to imitate you. But, Sir, when you betook yourself to black-guarding you should have reflected that it is a game at which two can play.

I shall not, however, so far descend from the dignity of a gentleman as to make use of approbrious words and expressions; nor shall I (though like you I level at random) throw any such filth as will defile a General's uniform, a Judge's robe, or a Clergyman's gown. But should you meet with some things in this short epistle that may not be perfectly pleasing, I beg you will remember that retaliation is just, and thank yourself for provoking it.

Lest you should think you have fairly knock'd me down by throwing so respectable an author at my head, on the subject of the military profession, permit me to observe that the quotation is just like an overloaded musquet, which when discharged will either burst or recoil, to the great hazard of him, who fires it. Observe, Sir, where the force of the expression lies—"The profession of a soldier, *taken merely and singly as a profession*, is justly an object of jealousy." When considered as a security against inimical powers situated in the vicinity, the case is entirely different. While the present state of hostility between neighbouring nations continues, troops will ever be necessary for the defence of frontier settlements, dock-yards, sea-ports, &c. Whatever may *possibly* be the consequence of annually voting such an army as these compose, the public security requires and will warrant our investing Congress with authority to do it. There is but one circumstance that can ever necessitate any other standing troops in times of peace, and that is the opposition that factious and licentious subjects will make to the execution of a firm and energetic government, when inconsistent with their interests and views.

You accuse me, Sir, with being unfriendly to the liberties of the people, because I have not so high an opinion of the advantages of a *trial by jury* in civil cases, under their present establishment, as you have. To this charge I plead *not guilty*. As an evidence of your attachment to

the liberties of your country, you say you have *borne* arms in their defence. I have not only *borne* but *used* arms in the same cause. If you expect, therefore, that I shall, upon that evidence, allow your claim to the title of a Patriot, be careful how you dispute mine. When you have favoured the public with your dissertation upon the advantages of juries in *civil cases*, under *their present regulation*, I may possibly entertain different ideas of them. Till then I must abide by my former sentiments.

You also charge me with impudence in presuming to write in favor of the Constitution. Will you be kind enough to inform us, “Young Gentlemen,” at what age we may begin to express our sentiments on political matters? Is all knowledge confined in grey heads? Was not Hercules competent to manly deeds even in his cradle? And have not some gentlemen of *twenty* more sagacity and skill in the sciences of policy and government than others, who have grown hoary in public business? If I am young and inexperienced, are You Sir, a Solon, a Sydney, or a Franklin? Or in other words, have you seen the devil? But perhaps you may.

In the third place you charge me with criticizing your *words* and snarling at your *sentences*. You mistake me, sir; I criticized only your *arguments*; and as to snarling I am not conscious of having been guilty of it. 'Tis true I ridiculed your hobby-horse, and a more despicable beast I do not remember to have seen; but then I never suggested that you were not *properly mounted*. I will even do you the justice to confess that the *steed* of his *caparison*, the *knight* and his *arms* were admirably matched.

I have read, sir, the *nervous reasonings of a Brutus* and the *ingenious sentiments of a Candidus*: and I am not surprized that their sophistry lies too deep for your penetration to detect. Their abilities I revere; but cannot help lamenting that genius should be so prostituted and ingenuity so grossly misapplied. Had you examined both sides of the question, like an honest candid enquirer after truth, you might have found all their objections fully obviated. I have no great opinion of the place or fare to which you doom those, who after reading these writers can lay their hands on their hearts and say that it is best for us to adopt this Constitution; but, Sir, so great has ever been my detestation of low and vitious companions and my attachment to the society of the virtuous and respectable, and such is my opinion of this system, that, under its administration, I should not hesitate to prefer *Nova-Scotia*, *clams* and *potatoes*, with the friends and supporters of it, to setting on thrones, in the best country on earth, with the generality of its opposers, under any form of government they would ever establish.

You affect, Sir, to treat me with great contempt. What a pity it is you do not know how to express the passion. But those who know the difficulty of *expressing* what they do not *feel* will readily excuse you. Contempt and resentment are altogether incompatible; and the same object cannot excite them both at the same time. A sullen silence indicates the former—scurrilous language demonstrates the latter. Of this you have made a liberal use. Instead of imitating the good-natured procedure of *Uncle Toby*, you take your example from the conduct of *Dr. Slop* towards *Obadiah*, in the case of the bag of instruments; and when your leisure permits you to give me the second combing, I expect *Ernulphus's* curse at full length will make a part of it.

Pray, my good Sir, how do you treat an untaught Puppy, that interrupts your sage political reflections by his unseasonable salutations, as you are riding to market? Do you dismount and tie your horse; and then by throwing stones, clubs, cow-dung, &c. at the simple animal, accompanied with hideous intimidating yells, endeavour to drive him back into his kennel? Or do you

pass on without so much as returning his civilities with a *get out you whelp!* The latter undoubtedly; or you would demonstrate that of the two you was much the most stupid puppy. But which of these opposite methods of procedure have you observed with regard to me? Had you published a second address to your brethren without taking any notice of my answer to your first, you would have given a proof of contempt, which I confess would have mortified me. But, Sir, the part you have taken discovers a consciousness that you have unexpectedly received an attack, which you know not how to repel.—Upon the whole, I apprehend some people will suspect that, instead of an insignificant puppy, you considered me as a sturdy mastiff that had rudely seized you by the heel with a design to dismount you—and that you supposed the best method of defence would be (in imitation of honest Teague) to *give me a bad name and bravely run away*.

Before I quit You, Sir, give me leave to offer you a word of advice. Old heads are not always the repositories of wisdom; nor do “Young Gentlemen” always deserve the contempt in which you affect to hold them. You may therefore find your interest in paying some attention to it. You call yourself a Farmer—You must therefore be better acquainted with the instruments of husbandry than with the utensils of a Barber. Your promising me a further combing implies that you have given me one already. From this specimen all the world must pronounce you an arrant bungler. For this reason, should you think me worthy of a farther chastisement, I would advise you to give me literally a *threshing*; for you will certainly wield a *flail* with much more dexterity and effect than you can ever handle a *Pen*.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. XXVIII: New Hampshire (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2017), 106–9.