

Winchester Virginia Gazette, 7 March 1788

Messieurs BARTGIS and Co. The Freedom of the PRESS is the unalienable Right of a free Government particularly when matters of the greatest moment demand the serious attention, and free discussion of the citizens.

Your giving a place to the following lines in your entertaining paper, will oblige Your most obedient, humble servant, A VIRGINIA PLANTER.

My dear Countrymen, I beg my intrusion upon your time and patience may be taken in good part, while you read a few sentiments, proceeding from the greatest anxiety of mind, respecting the Federal Constitution, which I have perused impartially, and from the examples of the introduction of the most arbitrary Forms of Government, we may venture to declare this plan to be replete with shackles for the free born sons of America.—Every intelligent person must know, that all the world is now groaning in a Hell of Slavery (America and Switzerland excepted) whereby it becomes absolutely necessary to consider the way and means by which they were brought into that infernal state. Can we produce an instance of one nation that ever recovered from a cursed state of vassalage, to the enjoyment of the just and indubitable rights of mankind?

Are there none in trust that will postpone the adoption of this plan, while the people may reflect coolly upon a system of Government, lest they should subject themselves and millions yet unborn, to a state of political d—n?

Are there none in power, with influence sufficient to prevent the direful catastrophe? or, are the frowns and vengeance of Heaven to be thus poured upon us? nay, we may rather conclude, that it is a tryal of our patriotism, and if we tamely submit to the yoke, we justly merit all the evil consequences resulting therefrom: but, if there are too few in the laudable opposition, What can Cato do

Against a world, a base degenerate world,
That courts the yoke, and bows the neck to Cæsar.

Addison,

And did the Commonwealth of Rome ever recover their liberty from under the tyranny of Cæsar and his successors? no, notwithstanding the virtuous struggles of Cato and a few, they are ever since, through a variety of changes, broiling in a Hell of Slavery, without the least glimpse or hope of deliverance from so d—ble a state.

Similar to this will be the fate of America, if the Federal Constitution should be adopted and ratified in its present form. The powers granted to Congress are boundless in some instances of the utmost consequence to the people, particularly their interference with the internal police of the States; their power of embarrassing the freedom of their own election; their taxing the people without immediate representation; their power of raising an army for two years, which may be lengthened to any term for pretended reasons, which never failed to be done, as a

principal step to tyranny; their power of legislation blended with that of the execution of their own laws, without controul.

Many more may be mentioned of a fearful nature, but if the above were all, they are enough in the hands of men, to answer every purpose of making themselves absolute tyrants, and the people beasts of burden.

The dangers from the above powers, are best known and verified, by attending to the introduction of slavery to all other nations. Pray give place one moment for a cool reflection, and consider, whether any man, or set of men, vested with unlimited power in any instance, who did not exercise it to the plague and torment of the people; to the destruction of every idea of common justice and humanity.

What cannot Congress do with an army at their heels, the revenue in their pockets and with the full and absolute disposal of the militia? How do other nations fare in that predicament? History is replete with answers to the question, that they are groveling in the dark regions of slavery, and there they must remain until their own virtue work out their own deliverance, which is impossible, because, slaves and those who submit to slavery, and tyrants, have no idea of virtue, honor, or common justice.

These are hard sayings; disagreeable to despots and their sycophants; but, not so painful to the community as the excruciating pains of a Hell of Slavery; they are stubborn truths that never bend without violence.

How can we think of transmitting these fetters to posterity? What dishonour will it reflect upon us? Will they not curse the authors and abettors of their misery? Do we not stand indebted to transmit the same, and, if possible, more liberty to posterity, than our fathers handed down to us?

Cannot Congress rank with the Princes of the earth, without stooping so low as to govern slaves? nay, they will exult in the government of freemen as the greatest honor under the Heavens. What can reflect greater infamy, than to rank with tyrants, those blood sucking cannibals, who prey insatiably and incessantly upon the vitals of their miserable, wretched, politically d—d subjects.

The advanced age of the world has taught us, that the best of men are under the necessity of restraint, in every situation and circumstance respecting power. Power has altered the mildest and most affable characters, into the most abandoned cruelty and savage temper. History abounds with innumerable instances of those who, previous to their being cursed with power, appeared as ornaments to human nature. Power is dangerous in the hands of men. Power alters all things, but God. The purpose of delegating power to men, is for the happiness and safety of the community, but with the want of proper limitations, it always proves to be a curse. I have often thought it a paradox in politics, how a few hundred of rulers can ruin the state of

million[s] of subjects into a perfect Hell; the reason is, the few rulers are a junto, acting in close concert.

Devil with Devil damn'd

Firm concord holds. *Milton.*

While the people are like a rope of sand, vicious, ignorant and unconnected, lay themselves open to all the insults, injustice and barbarity, they please to inflict upon them.

It is with the utmost concern I hear of the precipitancy and rashness of the populace in some of the United States, inadvertantly insisting for the speedy adoption of the Federal Constitution. Exactly similar to this was the mad frenzy of the populace of Rome, and many other nations, who inconsiderately cast themselves over the most dangerous precipice, into irretrievable ruin. Virginia has hitherto exhibited a good degree of moderation (some few instances excepted.) She has not yet pass'd the Rubicon, as some States have. As she is not the least in the grand Confederacy, may her wisdom, candor, and love of liberty, shine over the Union in the choice of a convention, whose virtue and abilities may be equal to so arduous an undertaking.

Several personages in Congress will commend the freedom I take, to recapitulate the evils that may and will result from the present form of the Federal Constitution; to speak the truth, without just cause of offence, is the right of every free citizen. I am conscious of the approbation of every intelligent, honest man, and of the concurrence of every friend of America, to preserve that liberty inviolate, which we hold at the expence of so much blood and treasure.

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