

A Friend to the Rights of the People: Anti-Fœderalist, No. I, Exeter Freeman's Oracle, 8 February 1788 (excerpt)¹

To the Inhabitants of NEW-HAMPSHIRE.

The grand topick of the day is the New-Constitution, much has been said for, much has been said against it by able writers—On one side, it is warmly asserted, that the liberties of the people, are sufficiently secure, as it now stands—On the other it is urged with equal vehemence, they are not, amendments must be made—a Bill of Rights prefixed, or we are undone; so that it is very difficult, for common people to know what is right, any thing that may serve to throw light upon the subject, may be very useful at this juncture. Both sides, it appears to me, so far as I have had opportunity of reading, have kept the Constitution too much out of view. There seems to be a necessity of a more particular and impartial examination of the thing itself, which is the bone of so much contention.

If the plan of Federal Government, proposed for our consideration and acceptance, is secure, and well expressed in all its branches, then it will appear so upon a candid explanation, and no man ought to oppose it; or say any thing privately or publickly to prejudice any person against it; no good citizen would, in so doing, he would manifest himself to be an enemy to his country and posterity; and would deservedly be dispised by all the virtuous part of the community.—But if there are a number of things insecure, and of dangerous tendency in the Constitution itself, they may be made to appear upon fair and faithful examination; and no wise man would wish to rest the vast weight of national government upon a sandy foundation, which may give way, and let the fair structure of liberty, erected at such an infinite expence of blood and treasure, fall into ruins. . . . My design therefore is to quote, and make some remarks upon some of the most capital propositions. . . .

Remark 9. Upon the discarding [of?] all religious tests, Art. 6. clause 3.—But no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office, or public trust under the United States, according to this we may have a Papist, a Mahomatan, a Deist, yea an Atheist at the helm of Government: all nations are tenacious of their religion, and will have an acknowledgment of it in their civil establishment; but the new plan requires none at all; none in Congress; none in any

member of the legislative bodies; none in any single officer of the United States; all swept off at one stroke contrary to our state plans.—[But?] will this be good policy to discard all religion? It may be said the meaning [is?] not to discard it, but only to show [that?] there is no need of it in public officers, they may be as faithful without as with—this is a mistake—when a man has no regard to God and his laws nor any belief of a future state; he will have little regard to the laws of men, or to the [most?] solemn oaths or affirmations; it is acknowledged by all that civil government can't well be supported without the assistance of religion; I think therefore that so much deference ought to be [paid?] to it, as to acknowledge it in our civil establishment; and that no man is fit [to?] be a ruler of protestants, without he [can?] honestly profess to be of the protestant religion.—To conclude I have now given my sentiments freely and honestly upon this important subject; if it serves to throw any light upon it, I have my desire and should be heartily glad, that the respectable Convention to set at Exeter upon the decisive question, might [have?] all that has been said for, and all that has been said against the Constitution laid before them, that they may have the fullest means of information possible and if, after judiciously and candidly weighing every argument, it is their judgment that it will be for the [greatest?] good of the community to adopt, let them adopt it; but if not let them reject it; and let us make another trial for a new plan, that may in more respects be agreeable, and better secure the liberties of the subjects.

1. William Plumer's copy of this issue at The Boston Athenæum Library has "Thos Cogswell" written above the pseudonym at the end of the essay. The last column on the second page of the only extant issue of this newspaper is run into the gutter, thus causing many words toward the end of the essay to be conjectural.

Cite as:

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