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Alexander White

Winchester *Virginia Gazette*, 29 February 1788 (excerpts)

To the CITIZENS of VIRGINIA.

(Continued from our last.)

. . . You whose situation in life hath not enabled you to become acquainted with those things, consider who were the promoters, and who the framers of the Federal Constitution. Congress recommended and 12 States concurred in the appointment of delegates. It will not be alledged that any thing was intended but your peace and happiness in this stage of the business, consequently the members chosen by the different assemblies were such as they believed would promote those laudable designs. Does history afford an instance of an assembly of men thus chosen, acting so diametrically opposite to the design of their appointment? or of any body of men premeditate[d]ly endeavouring to enslave their country, unless they themselves were to be tyrants? Human nature, in its most depraved state, is incapable of it; nor could any thing short of the jaundiced eye of faction entertain the idea. Can you then suspect the Federal Convention, the members of which stand fair in point of reputation, notwithstanding the most virulent abuse of party rage in the State where they sat. But when you remember that among them was a Washington, whose hair has become grey and eyes dim in watching over your safety;¹ whose disinterested patriotism has raised him above the reach of panegyrick; and a Franklin, whose philosophical and political abilities have procured him the admiration of the world; who has already lived beyond the usual period allotted to men, and is gently descending to the grave, with the weight of years and of honors.

Is it possible that a Washington and a Franklin could conspire to enslave their country? To that indignation which the bare suggestion must raise in every generous breast, I refer the answer. Do you really believe that you cannot choose men who will faithfully promote your happiness in the discharge of the duties of their respective offices? If so, on what do you found your opinion? On your own feelings, the suggestions of your own hearts. It cannot be on the general conduct of mankind. I have called upon the opposers of the federal system to produce an instance of rulers chosen by the people, who had enslaved them; and rest satisfied it cannot be done; the impracticability of Congress effecting such a measure has likewise been made apparent. . . .

1. White probably refers to a statement made by General George Washington on 15 March 1783 at Continental Army headquarters at Newburgh, N.Y., to a group of officers who were threatening to use force against Congress in order to obtain their back pay. Washington formally addressed the officers, intending to squelch the movement. At the end of his address, as he began to read a letter from a delegate to Congress, he fumbled with his eye glasses and

stated: “Gentlemen, you must pardon me. I have grown gray in your service and now find myself growing blind.” This moving speech put an end to the Newburgh Conspiracy.

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