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Ezra Stiles: Diary

New Haven, Conn., 24 December 1787 (excerpt)

Honorable Abraham Baldwin of Augusta in Georgia spent the evening with me.

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We conversed on the new Constitution formed by the Convention, on which I have formed this as my opinion: (1) That it is not the most perfect constitution yet. (2) That it is a very good one, and that it is advisable to adopt it. However (3) That tho much of it will be permanent and lasting, yet much of it will be hereafter altered by future revisions. And (4) That the best one remains yet to be investigated.

When the Convention was proposed I doubted its expediency. (1) Because I doubted whether our wisest men had yet attained light enough to see and discern the best, and what ought finally to prevail.¹ (2) Neither did I think the people were ripe for the reception of the best one if it could be investigated. And yet (3) I did not doubt but time and future experience would teach, open, and lead us to the best one. And tho we have got a much better one than I expected, and a very good one, yet my judgment still remains as before. I think there is not power enough yet given to Congress for firm government. Neither can I see how far it is safe to surrender the powers of the states to the imperial body, without (1) prostrating the sovereignty of the particular states, (2) without laying the foundation of the President's growing up into an uncontrollable and absolute monarch. And yet I think the last as well guarded as possible; and I know not whether it is possible to vest Congress with laws, revenues, and army and navy without endangering the ruin of the interior powers and liberties of the states.

1. In his diary on 6 June 1787, Stiles had written that the Constitutional Convention "embosoms some of the most sensible and great characters in America; all of them excellent."

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