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Constitution as an Instrument of National Salvation

## Benjamin Rush: Observations on the Fourth of July Procession in Philadelphia *Pennsylvania Mercury*, 15 July 1788 (excerpts)

Observations *on the* Fœderal Procession, on the FOURTH of JULY, 1788, in the city of PHILADELPHIA; in a letter from a gentleman in this city to his friend in a neighbouring state.

*My dear Friend*, Herewith you will receive an account of our late procession in honor of the establishment of the Fœderal Government. It was drawn up by Judge Hopkinson, a gentleman to whose patriotism, ingenuity, and taste, our city is much indebted for the entertainment.

To this account I cannot help adding a few facts and remarks that occur[r]ed during the day, and which were of too minute or speculative a nature to be introduced in the general account published by order of the committee of arrangement. . . .

The Clergy formed a very agreeable part of the Procession—They manifested, by their attendance, their sense of the connection between religion and good government. They amounted to seventeen in number. Four and five of them marched arm in arm with each other, to exemplify the Union. Pains were taken to connect Ministers of the most dissimilar religious principles together, thereby to shew the influence of a free government in promoting christian charity. The Rabbi of the Jews [Jacob Raphael Cohen], locked in the arms of two ministers of the gospel, was a most delightful sight. There could not have been a more happy emblem contrived, of that section of the new constitution, which opens all its power and offices alike, not only to every sect of christians, but to worthy men of *every* religion. . . .

I must not forget to mention that the weather proved uncommonly favourable to the entertainment. The sun was not to be seen till near two o'clock, at which time the procession was over. A pleasant and cooling breeze blew all day from the south, and in the evening the sky was illuminated by a beautiful Aurora Borealis. Under this head another fact is equally worthy of notice. Notwithstanding the haste with which the machines were made, and the manner in which they were drawn through the streets, and notwithstanding the great number of women and children that were assembled on fences, scaffolds and the roofs of houses, to see the procession, *no one* accident happened to any body. These circumstances gave occasion for hundreds to remark that “Heaven was on the federal side of the question.”

It would be ungrateful not to observe, that there have been less equivocal signs in the course of the formation and establishment of this government, of heaven having favoured the federal side of the question. The union of twelve states in the *form* and of ten states in the *adoption* of the Constitution, in less than ten months, under the influence of local prejudices, opposite interests, popular arts, and even the threats of bold and desperate men, is a solitary event in the

history of mankind. I do not believe that the Constitution was the offspring of inspiration, but I am as perfectly satisfied, that the union of the states, in its *form* and *adoption*, is as much the work of a divine providence, as any of the miracles recorded in the old and new testament were the effects of a divine power.

'Tis done! We have become a nation. — America has ceased to be the only power in the world, that has derived no benefit from her declaration of independence. We are more than repaid for the distresses of the war, and the disappointments of the peace. The torpid resources of our country already discover signs of life and motion. We are no longer the scoff of our enemies. The reign of violence is over. Justice has descended from heaven to dwell in our land, and ample restitution has at last been made to human nature, by our New Constitution, for all the injuries she has sustained in the old world from arbitrary governments—false religions—and unlawful commerce.

But I return from this digression, to relate one more fact, from which I derived no small pleasure, or rather triumph, after the procession was over. It is that out of seventeen thousand people, who appeared on the green, and partook of the collation, there was scarcely one person intoxicated, nor was there a single quarrel or even dispute, heard of during the day. All was order, all was harmony and joy. These delightful fruits of the entertainment are to be ascribed wholly to no liquors being drank on the green, but BEER and CYDER. I wish this fact could be published in every language, and circulated through every part of the world, where *spirituous liquors* are used. I wish further, that a monument could be erected upon UNION GREEN, with the following inscription, with which I shall conclude my letter:

IN HONOR of AMERICAN  
BEER and CYDER.

It is hereby recorded, for the information of strangers and posterity, that 17,000 people assembled on this green, on the 4th, of July, 1788, to celebrate the establishment of the constitution of the United States, and that they separated at an early hour, without intoxication, or a single quarrel.—They drank nothing but Beer and Cyder. Learn, reader, to prize those invaluable FEDERAL liquors, and to consider them as the companions of those virtues that can alone render our country free and respectable.

Learn likewise to despise

SPIRITUOUS LIQUORS, as

*Anti-fœderal*, and to consider them as the companions of all those vices, that are calculated to dishonour and enslave our country.

Since writing the above I have been informed, that there were two or three persons intoxicated, and several quarrels on the green, but there is good reason to believe that they were all occasioned by spirituous liquors, which were clandestinely carried out, and drank by some disorderly people, contrary to the orders of the day.

I have only to beg your pardon for the length of this letter, and to assure you of the great regard with which, I am your sincere friend and humble servant, — —.

Philadelphia, 9th July, 1788.

To — —, Elizabethtown, New-Jersey.

P.S. I had like to have forgotton to inform you of two important facts that have occurred since the procession. 1st. It has been the happy means of uniting all our citizens in the government, and 2d. it has made such an impression upon the minds of our young people, that “foederal” and “union” have now become part of the “hous[e]-hold words” of every family in the city.

A small anecdote connected with the effects of the procession shall finish my postscript.

A worthy German who carried the standard of one of the trades, when he came home, desired his wife to take care of the flag 'till the next time he should be called upon to carry it, “and if I die, (said he) before I can have that honor again, I desire that you would place it in my coffin, and bury it with me.”

1. In his last speech to the Pennsylvania Convention on 12 December 1787, Rush considered “the origin of the proposed system, and fairly deduced it from heaven, asserting that he as much believed the hand of God was employed in this work, as that God had divided the Red Sea to give a passage to the children of Israel, or had fulminated the ten commandments from Mount Sinai!” Rush was sharply criticized for this speech, possibly forcing him to retract “this new species of *divine right*” in favor of the position he takes in this sentence.

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