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Opposition to the Constitution's Provisions Concerning Slavery

Plain Truth

Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*, 7 November 1787

FRIEND OSWALD, Thy correspondent, *Timothy Meanwell*, is a weak man. I would in charity hope, that the very unworthy motive which appears to actuate him, is rather the consequence of imbecility in his brain than corruptness in his heart: and I am the more inclined to think of him in this compassionate manner, as I find his invention fails, even his scurrility, which is a feeble imitation of some of his silly predecessors. How often alas! has the public been nauseated by the paltry witticisms against my signature!

I shall not trouble thee with any more personal observations on this poor man; but it may not be amiss to shew how falsely and how weakly he has quoted that part of the new constitution which is supposed to relate to the slave trade. The constitution saith, that, this importation “shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the year 1808.”—This is thus represented by TIMOTHY; “mark these words (saith he) *shall not be prohibited*,” and thence he draws this wise conclusion, that, the new government (notwithstanding this importation is already prohibited in at least 10 of the states) hath “*established slavery for 21 years*.” Suppose this federal compact had said that Congress should not prohibit theft; would that abolish the state laws and establish theft in Pennsylvania?—If friend TIMOTHY were in that case to reason in such a manner, and to act accordingly, I fear he would discover his error, under the discipline of the wheel-barrow.¹

As to the grand question, friend Oswald, it is not necessary to say much about it, for so persuaded am I of the good sense of the people throughout these states, that I will venture to predict the success of the new plan.

All the good citizens of America (a few demagogues excepted) agree in these plain and self evident positions.

1. We wanted a reform, and could not long continue as a nation without one.
2. Whatever the reform might be, it was not in the nature of things possible to have any that would uniformly suit the various situations, habits and interests, of all the states.
3. Mutual concession, or separation then became an unavoidable alternative.
4. In forming a Convention there could not be found in America a set of men, of more integrity, of more political knowledge whose attachment to their country had been more severely tried; and perhaps it will not be disputed when I say, a more august body never convened any where.
5. America would not have been more faithfully represented if all the people had met.
6. This Convention debated 4 months, before it produced the form of government now offered; and a man must be weak indeed to suppose, that every objection that is now made, was not there considered, supported, opposed, and either given up for wise reasons, or refuted.

7. Government being a human institution can never be perfect.

8. The new constitution is as perfect as it can be, since the wisdom and virtue of America were concerted into one focus to produce it.

9. To shew the integrity of the Convention, the result of their deliberations is referred for confirmation to the public at large.

It is therefore incumbent on the people of this continent to ask themselves the question.— Shall we rise into one respectable nation, or sink into thirteen factions?

The reasoning part is over; decision is now the object; and that the happiness of this country is involved in that decision, I defy all the wiflings in America to prove inconsistent with PLAIN TRUTH.

1. The wheelbarrow was a reference to an aspect of the penal system of Pennsylvania. Prisoners were released from jail to work on public improvements and some of them used wheelbarrows.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. XIV: Commentaries on the Constitution, Public and Private [2] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1983), 519–20.