

William Carlton

WILMINGTON GAZETTE.

[VOLUME IX.]

PUBLISHED (WEEKLY) BY ALLMAND HALL.—TUESDAY, JULY 23, 1805.

[No. 449.]

FROM THE VERMONT JOURNAL.

MR. ELLIOT,
TO HIS CONSTITUENTS.

Letter VIII.

THE constitution of the United States is the most illustrious monument of human wisdom that has existed in any age or nation. It combines energy with liberty; the great desideratum of the most celebrated statesmen of ancient and modern times. The provision of the constitution which renders attainable such amendments as time and experience may require, is one of its most estimable characteristics. But an instrument so sacred should be touched with a gentle hand. It is time for every theorist, and few have been more ardent theorists than myself, to sacrifice the visions of his imagination upon the altar of national union.

Many of the greatest and best men in Virginia were opposed to the adoption of the constitution. Could this circumstance be considered as a reproach, it would not be applicable to Virginia alone; it was the case in a large majority of the states. Opposition generally speaking, proceeded from the best of motives, from an attachment to liberty, and from a fear, that were the constitution adopted, "liberty would be but a name to adorn the short historic page of the halcyon days of America." But there were peculiar features in the constitution which rendered it peculiarly obnoxious to Virginia. The states were to be equally represented in the Senate, an important branch of the government, a two edged sword, placed in the avenue to the sovereignties of the individual states, and checking equally the President and the representatives of the people, should they attempt to exceed their constitutional limits. Many of the greatest men of Virginia thought it radically wrong that the small state of Rhode-Island should have an equal voice in the Senate with the largest state; and as that idea still prevails in Virginia, and that state possesses a great and increasing influence over the small states, it is reasonable to conclude that those who think the constitution wrong will endeavour to make it right, as soon as they obtain the power. Nothing else can be expected so long as "man is man." Although jealousy has been considered by many as a republican virtue of the first order, we ought not, however, to indulge a groundless jealousy; nor ought we to accuse any portion of the union of a design to change the constitution, without unquestionable evidence. Upon this subject my mind has been perfectly convinced, and I always express with true republican freedom, opinions of correctness, of which I feel a perfect conviction.

The sentiments of the celebrated Patrick Henry, of Edmund Randolph, of Mason, and many other distinguished Virginians, respecting the constitution, are on record, and the record cannot be obliterated. The equality of suffrage in the Senate was a prominent objection. The mind even of the great Washington harboured a strong prepossession in favor of the large states. I have been told by a venerable member of the convention which formed the constitution, that Washington was decidedly of opinion that the small states took too high ground, and that nothing but the indispensable necessity of forming a constitution previously to the dissolution of the convention, induced him to support what he considered as too great a concession on the part of the large states. Various publications of a recent date, under the signature of the venerable patriot, Edmund Pendleton, inculcated the propriety of several important alterations of the constitution; and there is every reason to believe that those publications were correct indications of the general sentiments of Virginia. Mr. Eppes, a member of Congress from that state, in the address to his constituents, in consequence of which he obtained his election, announced his determination to advocate several very important alterations of the constitution, one of which should have for its object the reduction of time for which the Senators are elected, and also, if my recollection be correct, to render them liable to be recalled by the state legislatures. Mr. Breckenridge, a native of Virginia, and a distinguished member of the Senate, declared in the debate upon the late amendment that nothing could be more aristocratic in his opinion, than the election of the Senators for six years; but that he wished not to connect an alteration of the constitution in that respect, with the amendment then under consideration. Another able member of the Senate declared in my presence, that nothing could be clearer than that it is totally wrong to have a Senate at all in a republican government. Many republicans, of other states as well as Virginia have declared to me that very important amendments of the constitution must and will take place in a few years. One member from Virginia in the presence of several members of both political parties, told me, that the time for which the Senators are elected must be reduced to two years; that this alteration would soon be agitated; that it would be a test by which to

try the republicans; and that no member could be considered as a true republican who should oppose it. I have ascertained that a very great proportion of republicans in Congress are of opinion that the constitution is too aristocratic, that the small states possess too great weight, that the judiciary is by far too independent, and that the following alterations of the constitution must be made, as soon as the public mind can be prepared for them.

1. To reduce the time for which the Senators are elected to two years. This would soon render the senators from the small states the mere tools of the large states, and would lead to the total destruction of the senate.

2. To carry the election of President to the people at large. This would destroy all the remaining weight of the small states, as states; in the election of President. The weight of Vermont relative to Pennsylvania, in that election, is now in the ratio of 60 to 20; it would then be only as 4 to 18.

3. That the judges shall be appointed for a few years only. Continment is here unnecessary.

Possibly there may be no just ground for my alarm upon this subject, but although I may be too credulous I am certainly sincere in my fears. Should no attempt be made to alter the constitution, I shall be willing to be considered, not only as a weak alarmist, but a visionary politician.

Much is said of a plot to divide the Union. It is imputed chiefly to the federalists, but attempts have not been wanting to implicate the northern republicans. I have expressed myself in favor of a union of the people in the northern states in general sentiment, for the purpose of securing to us our due weight in the councils of the nation, and for preserving instead of destroying the constitution; but I wish that union to take place upon republican principles, and no other; upon the genuine principles of the constitution alone. Were the northern states as well united as the southern, we should not be so unreasonable as to desire more than our due degree of political weight, and that the southern states would be willing to allow us, for they must dread a dissolution of the union equally with ourselves. No person in the United States can more ardently desire the preservation of the union than myself. I shall always be prepared to spill the last drop of my blood in its support. I believe the only way to preserve the union is to preserve the constitution. May both be preserved! May the constitution and the union be perpetual!

These are the sentiments of a Vermont republican, who without aspiring to pre-eminence will never consider himself inferior to the republicans of Virginia. My little farm of fourteen acres is cultivated by the labour of my own hands; my brethren of the south possess hundreds of slaves scattered over thousands of acres. Speculatively the Virginian may be a better republican than I am; but his republicanism is certainly not quite so practical as mine.

JAMES ELLIOT.

P. S. Since writing the above letter, some of the alterations of the constitution which I had ventured to predict, have been moved in Congress by Mr. Randolph, of Virginia, and Mr. Nicholson, of Maryland, and are made the order of the day for the first day of next session. I am also possessed of evidence to prove that some of Mr. Randolph's most able supporters in congress have boldly avowed their hostility to the constitution in all its essential parts.

It is possible that my alarm upon this subject may be a vain one. I hope that it is so. But in the alternate triumphs of the two great parties in our country, I have seen enough to convince me that party spirit is capable of every species of delusion and violence, in the support of favorite measures; and I sincerely believe that we are in danger of witnessing a political tempest, fraught with ruin to the rights of the small states. It is known to every member of congress from the northern states, that the majority of Virginia statesmen, entertain opinions, in reference not only to constitutional principles; but to the great interest of commerce which are at variance with the sentiments of men of all parties of this quarter of the union. In these opinions our Virginia brethren are honest. They have sketched for themselves the system which they think would best promote the prosperity and glory of the union, and they will support that system with energy. Our own declaimers who resort to the farewell address of the great Washington, for denunciations against those who "misrepresent the opinions and aims of other districts," act unjustly in assuring those who represent correctly the sentiments and views of politicians in other quarters. I have made this correct representation under the strongest impressions of duty. And jealous as I am of Virginia, I will support, as an individual a Virginia candidate for the office of President, so long as that state shall present to our view the man, qualified above all others, for that station. As the present president will probably decline a third election, I am induced to believe that Mr. Madison and Mr.

Randolph will be candidates for the next presidency. In that event the people of the northern and middle states will consult their own interest and that of the union, by supporting Mr. Madison. Attached to the constitution from its infancy, his administration would be guided by its principles—and it is to be hoped that the chariot of the sun will never be committed to the guidance of a second PHAETON. In other words, it is hoped that genius and eloquence, combined with habits of cool reflection and profound investigation, will ever be considered as forming superior pretensions to the presidency, to genius and eloquence alone.

J. ELLIOT.

Letter IX.

That part of the constitution of the United States which allows to the people of the southern states, a representation in congress and in the election of the president, for their slaves, (for it is not a representation of slaves) is the only part of that instrument which I consider as materially objectionable; and I shall not be deterred from an expression of my sentiment upon the subject by the foolish outcry about an imaginary dissolution of the Union. I have often said that I wish not to see the subject again agitated, in the form of an amendment to the constitution. Every one knows it must be unavailing. But it may still be useful that the operation of that part of the constitution should be better understood by the people than it has been hitherto. Information can do no harm in a republican government; the more the people know, the greater the probability of preserving the constitution.

It is certainly true that the rich planter in the southern states who possesses 50 slaves, has thirty-one times the political weight in our national government than is possessed by the farmer or merchant of New-England. He does not directly give so many votes, but the states is allowed them, and as one of the constituents of the representative and elector of the district, he possesses all that consequence. At the same time he contributes much less than his proportion to the support of government, for the labouring slaves contribute nothing of consequence upon which a duty is paid;—and what the master does contribute is earned for him by the labour of slaves, while the farmer and every man of business in the northern and middle states pays his taxes with the sweat of his own brow. It will be said that comparisons of this kind are invidious. It is false.—Truth and correct information, so far from meriting that character, are always honourable and useful. With very considerable labour I have made some calculations upon this subject, to which I shall receive the thanks of every honest man in the district, and which will certainly give rise to reflections of a most interesting nature.

Whole number of persons in the United States in 1790 3,893,635
Deduct slaves, 694,280

3,199,355
Three fifths of the slaves 416,568

Whole No. represented 3,615,993
Giving 106 representatives and a fraction of 18.923.

But by the loss of fractional parts of the ratio of representation in the apportionment of the several states, the actual numbers was only 106.

Of 694,280 slaves, the state of Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, North-Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, contained 645,023 three fifths of which number is 387,012—which divided by 33,000 (and not calculating fractional parts in the apportionment to the state, which would not in this case amount to one member) gives as the slave representation of the southern states agreeably to the census, eleven members and a fraction of 24.012.

Whole number of persons in the United States in 1800, exclusive of Tennessee, Ohio, and the Territories, 5,140,208

Tennessee 13,584 103,602
Ohio 45,365
Indiana 133 5,641
Mississippi 3,489 8,850

17,208 165,458 165,458
In other states slaves 875,325 5,305,666

Tot. slav. 892,433 na & Mississippi
Deduct in Ind. unrepresented 14,491

& Mis. 3,624 5,291,175

888,809 deduct slav. 888,809

4,402,368

Three fifth of slaves 888,809

4,935,646

Giving 149 representatives and a fraction of 18.640. But by the loss of the fractional parts, &c. the number is only 142.

By the second census, of 888,809 slaves, the same states contain 837,992, three fifths is 499,794, giving 15 representatives and a fraction of 4.794.

I shall divide the United States into the three great natural divisions of northern, middle and southern states. The northern receive no advantage, the middle but a trifle, if any, and the southern a very important advantage, from the representation for slaves.

The following table exhibits the decrease of slaves in the northern and middle, and their increase in the southern states, for ten years.

New-Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode-Island, Connecticut and Vermont contained in 1790—Total 1,809,522; slaves 3,886. In 1800, total 1,233,011; slaves 1,339. New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware, in 1793, total 1,017,726; slaves 45,371. In 1800, total 1,464,017; slaves 40,894. Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, North-Carolina, South-Carolina and Georgia, in 1790, total 1,866,387; slaves 645,923. In 1800, total 2,437,231; slaves 832,992. The slaves in the northern states have decreased from 3,886 to 1,329, almost in the ratio of 2 and 3. In the middle states from 45,371 to 40,894 in that of nearly one ninth. Increase in the southern from 546,033 to 832,992, nearly one third of the original number, or in the ratio of 832 to 645.

Rhode-Island has decreased from 948 to 38 Connecticut from 2,764 to 951, New-York nearly stationary. Pennsylvania and Delaware have decreased a little, and Maryland made a small increase. Virginia has increased in the ratio of 345 to 292. Kentucky in that of 40 to 12. North-Carolina in that of 133 to 100. South-Carolina in that of 146 to 107. Georgia has doubled her number. The increase gives 4 members of Congress and as many electors of President to the southern states.

The increase of the whole number of persons represented has been as 49 to 38, that of slaves for which their matters are represented as 53 to 41; that of free men as 44 to 31. Let us calculate upon the same ratio for ten years to come. Increase the number of persons represented from 49 to 65; slaves from 53 to 68—free men from 44 to 60, round numbers; there will be in ten years more than 19 representatives for slaves. But if we calculate as we may with probability, upon a much larger increase, upon the creation of the new states in Louisiana, and the importation and propagation of slaves in that country, in 30 or 40 years there will be between 30 and 40 representatives in congress for slaves and as many electors of President.

But another very gloomy part of the picture remains to be unfolded.

In the last ten years the whole number of persons in the northern or eastern states has increased only in the proportion of 12 to 16, in the middle as 14 to 10, in the southern nearly as 24 to 18. Free people in the eastern as 12 to 10; slaves in the southern as 83 to 64—Free people in the southern states from 1,221,364 to 1,604,230. Free people in the eastern states in the ratio of one fifth only of the original number; those in the southern states in that of nearly one third; slaves about in the same proportion.

By the last census the number of free persons in the northern states was 1,231,672 and in the southern 1,604,230—By the former census the number of free persons in the northern states was 1,006,636, and in the southern 1,221,364—How are the people in these different quarters of the union relatively represented? By the first census Vermont had two members, New-Hampshire 4, Massachusetts 14, Rhode-Island 2, Connecticut 7—28 members Maryland 7, Virginia 19, Kentucky 2, North Carolina 10, South Carolina 6, Georgia 2—46 members. 1,006,636 citizens in the northern states had 29 representatives. Without allowing any fractions of the ratio of representation in the appointment to the several states and making no allowance for slaves, the northern states would have been entitled by the census of 1790 to 30 representatives and a fraction of 15,636, the southern to 37 only with the trifling