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Political!

FOR THE MINERVA.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

But particularly to the Citizens, Electors of the County of Rowan.

At the May sessions, most generally in each year, you are called upon by your fellow citizens to remember that an election for representatives in the general assembly will take place the ensuing August. In reminding you of this circumstance you are at the same time made acquainted with the names of those who are willing to represent you in the capacity of Legislators. As one among that number for the present year, I was induced to consider it as a duty to declare myself publicly, at the time which the custom authorized. At any other period than the present it might justly be entitled a species of false delicacy were I to attempt conciliating your pity and charity by rehearsing the diffidence of my abilities, the reluctance with which I had complied with repeated solicitations to become a candidate for the House of Commons—inexperience in business, &c.—all of which wise sayings are oftener literally true than otherwise—though intended by their authors to produce quite an opposite belief upon the people. Laying aside hackneyed phraseology of this description, I know and am sensible that without making objections to myself, there are others whose interest being opposite to mine, would willingly grasp any circumstance provided they believed it could be wielded to my disadvantage. Let, notwithstanding, I should be charged with partially concealing facts from those who have been without the means of information, I shall here take the liberty of anticipating such as are willing heralds of my disqualifications. It is a fact then that our State Constitution requires six months residence previous to the election; and on this ground it has been said I am disqualified if elected. In answer to this I reply first, that it is notorious in the annals of our Legislature of divers young gentlemen, having been elected—taken their seats, and retained them, who had not been residents more than two months previous to the election out of twelve. The thing was not questioned by the county or the Legislature. Why? Either because there was no opposition—their politics were of the right stamp—or that their seat was a matter of no great consequence any way. But I say the substantial fact was that they were eligible and therefore competent. First because their absence was temporary—upon business as students, or otherwise, and therefore a case which the framers of the constitution never intended to embrace. Their property and interests were in the county and having none more substantial in any other place, had consequently never lost their citizenship. I answer secondly that I am a citizen of Rowan alone—have always been a freeholder there, and no where else—have paid taxes in the county, and no other; that I am settled in no other county only temporarily. That during the year and a half past, my absence, at the longest period, has not been five months—and that I have frequently returned at intervals of two or three, and passed a part of my time. That my absence has been owing to the mode of life I have chosen, connected with my education, &c. endeavouring to prepare for some grade of usefulness and respectability, which I presume every honest man has a right to do—that I am a resident, and have no certainty of ever being a citizen of any other county. I could not forbear this sketch, since in travelling through some of the counties lately, several gentlemen (with whom I am, in other respects, on terms of intimacy and friendship) have by way of half joke and earnest, intimated that were I elected, it should be contested; imagining perhaps that the political course I had chosen, though my individual exertions should be futile, might yet by possibility be a drop in the bucket. For the soul of me, I can think of no other objection on that score. Nor do I apprehend a contest in any event. With the constitution and common sense for my main sail, I defy the malicious squibs and poppings of partisan landlubbers, and picaroon logographers. I would here fellow citizens enter into a critical examination of the reasons that will govern my exertions on one point in the event of your patronage; and also of the rise, progress, publications, and master pieces of conclusive argument, circulated, and endeavoured to be crammed down the throats of such as are believed incompetent to judge for themselves. did I not fear trespassing upon your patience. It is perhaps unfair for any individual or party to speak tauntingly of another—and even when done should carry moderation in its principal features. Otherwise, I should almost be tempted to erase argument in the sentence above and insert with its adjunct *conclusive nonsense*, whose aspect is to share in the loaves and fishes issued from the public granary; whose tendency is inequitable, and should the reins of government in a few years begin to be drawn tighter, will prove oppressive—controul the wills of those who now boast with propriety of freedom; whose real object though not the ostensible one, is the election of a single individual; yet without a single iota of evidence to prove its political and future utility. With the Virginia orator, P. Henry, I might exclaim, and by changing one word of his sentence, propriety would authorize the exclamation; that the electoral law may have “beautiful features for the election of Mr. Madison; but in other respects it has an awful squinting; it squints towards aristocracy.”

Depend upon it, man is a frail machine; magnanimous and Godlike in some respects, but in others let him be in the way of error for a time, though he boasts it at first, at length it becomes habitual. His propensities weaken the arguments he could have once used against it. Let him grow richer than his fellows, and sip the nectar of independence by himself, and his descendants for a few generations; the old trunk, but especially the grafts are changed. Let honours be heaped upon him at first, possibly as much by accident, as induced by merit, and lo! he is assured merit gives him that which in the first case fell upon him factitiously. Nothing gratifies his ambition—and if by chance he misses one aim of his heart, see him pining and sickening with disgust; and ten chances to one if it is an office, whether he could fill it with any sort of credit to himself or others. Yea, let even the sacred flame of liberty for the first time in his life fire his breast; he is all animation, benevolent, a lover of virtue, gives his spare morsel to those who need it, hates tyrants and scowls at oppression. But by and by he forms a little circle of *particulars*—shakes off an old friend, who has not been so fortunate as himself, enlarges his sphere of superiority. . . believes that necessary which he once thought damnable. . . and lo! he talks of families and distinction; and honours, and upstarts; winces at the familiar vulgarity of a republican form of government; wonders why politicians wont follow the track which he would point out: which would be to govern the nation himself if you would let him. Something like this picture I think is not inapplicable to a portion living under our republican form of government. We had not only once a constitution which directed that the most worthy in the nation should fill the highest station in it, and others grades of offices down to the lowest; but that constitution also directed that each individual of the republic, possessing the requisite qualifications, should be the judges of that work. Now it seems our Congress and State Legislatures have become the constitution and bill of rights. They in their dependant and individual capacity hold caucuses and recommendations. . . What? Why the old bridge that has born them over safe. . . Very natural; that is, according to the notions of weak and corrupt politicians. But by and by the multitude crowd along over the same old bridge, and what is the consequence? The poor old way worn machine totters. . . and tottering, sinks the shuddering crowd into drowning annihilation.

At the dawn of Mr. Jefferson's administration, though a child, my little heart bounded with delight at the glorious change which I anticipated to take place; when the then reigning party should share a portion of that disappointment which they had sedulously meditated for others, and when I thought it high time that they should recede from that administration which they had abused; whilst freedom shrieked for her prostrated immunities. Was our nation either monarchical or aristocratical, it would be faction and madness to talk of changes. Our only redress would then be, to make the best of a bad bargain. . . reclaim the monarch from his frailty or insufficiency by the best anodynes in our power. . . if an aristocracy, rouse the princes or great men to a sense of honor and virtuous action by the specifics which our experience furnished. But it is monstrous to hear the political gabblers of the day talk of a superior claim, a continuance of eight years like the great “predecessor” and then he will be willing to retire with dignity. If man's period of life was as certain as eight years, it is as precisely the same to insist upon three score and ten years as eight. And in human calculation, virtue and disinterestedness, would be a *rara avis* like the phoenix in any sort of government if directed by one man or any set of men for that period. By this I would not be understood to mean, that it is impossible for men to commence virtuously and not to continue so. I mean only that the history of nations and of governments, affixes an indelible signature to each epoch of legislative and executive probation; that the most sublime and wisdom wrought theories when entrusted to long with any set of men, have failed and vanished. I am almost tempted to stay on this side the Atlantic and rest the incontrovertibility of this assertion upon our own ephemeral progress. A part we may say are satisfied. The confidence of many ventures to assert that it is a majority. Another part, and I may venture to say with equal confidence, as virtuous, as patriotic, as learned, and as well skilled in the transactions of mankind; together with the sort of government calculated to cherish liberty and secure independence at home and abroad, are not. The nation groans under foreign wrongs inflicted by the friends of incipient internalism, & continued by the unparalleled policy of two beligerents, whose restless ambition has long since hooted and spurned at the law of nations; national and individual rights, and christian brotherhood. Away with the conciliatory policy and effervescence of patriotic apologies for a weak and insufficient routine of measures, governing our political relations, at least since 1807. Talk of Pearce murdered, impressed seamen, and national honour! Peels of volunteering reiterated throughout the nation. We talked of the “violent infraction of our rights”—“the unparalleled outrage”—sent a pretty little billet doux to the President—and received a pretty little billet doux in answer, of the “high honour” which the President felt in being billeted; written in a very neat, pretty style first by the chief magistrate, and then copied into a neat fair hand by a handsome clerk—duplicates forwarded to the different slang-whangers of the right kidney, for typographical ebullition,

and conveyed in one of Mr. Gfanger's political band boxes to the different redoubted patriots. Hei mihi! Long road to Canada!!!—By and by Captain Ograbme stalked along the sea shore—the fight was hashed up—the sun went down, and so ended the campaign of Logocracy. The wheels of the government have trundled along over non-intercourses, non-importations, *alleged* repeals of the French decrees, up hill and down hill to market, without even locking once. . . But returning got into the sloughs of impoverished treasures, national penury, individual deprivations of honest earnings, and at length may be pronounced literally *ruined*. Oh ye plantation and governmental *machines* how tardy is thy progress without *Washington's* is gone, and so it our free constitution in practice. Contradictory maxims of legislation, like the Lombardy growth have towered their heads, waved in the breezes, looked green and luxuriant for a few “little years,” but at length are perishing by the superabundance of their exuberance. Among some of these are “Commerce is a mere nonentity to this republic, and but a secondary consideration.” “Domestic manufactures, and agriculture—that's your sort—and desperation to the French tyger and the British lion.” Yet it comes to pass that after having stripped Commerce of her best advantages we are *chuck* full of fight for that which is scarcely worth the money we are borrowing, as prima facie evidence of our manhood. Without men to manufacture, or men to build factories, his nursing of political sagacity has been taken pro confesso and heard *ex parte*; and like the “animal spirits” of the ancient metaphysical dreamers, has never circulated through the bones and sinews of our national prosperity. Agriculture, the reputed grand dam of commerce and manufactures, has become old and stricken in years; a lady of very feeble habits and contrite spirit; sleeps a greater part of the day, and at night complains of head ache & costiveness—lies down again & ejaculates “perhaps all is for the best, but the Lord knows I have seen better days—my present puny state is unaccountable to me.” With the elegant Sir Thomas Smith, when speaking of the hardships of the English tenures in Chivalry, we may feelingly complain. “After having sold our infant navy, and substituted a pitiful gun boat system, whose officers, as I am creditably informed, in the sea ports where they are stationed, receive little or no attention from the citizens—run head long after French politics and illuminism; courted the emperor and his beet sugar manufactory; and as the premium of our ardent affections, given up commercial gains, pocketed grimace, insult, our ministers quizzed, Napoleonic falsehood, confiscation and burning, and poet Barlow's scire facias of prosaic heroics, returned with this indorsement—nothing done. Signed Barlow *Pen Knife*, Grand Plenipotens. Add to this manufactures epitomized; agriculture denationalized; vessels, raw materials for exportation, goods, wares and merchandize, rotten and pulverized, wholesome counsel ere the evil day came, stigmatized; boasting of a rich treasury, and national plenty, when almost the next day, on examination, we found ourselves bankrupts. Despised abroad, poor at home, insulted by Great Britain; for what? The pusillanimous and pecanious policy which has darkened the horizon of these American States. Add to this the untimely and expensive war in which we are engaging, in order that our poverty may be made completely splendid.” Our acquisitions may *possibly* be a few wolf skins, and other peltry—a little more territory than queen Dido surrounded with a bull's hide, but not half so fertile: The simplicity of our intellectual and moral character revolutionized and changed; for what? for the jargonistical volleys, and sputtering of a few military coxcombs. Lead republicans to an offensive war and you make of them friends and despots. Knowing but little, their ignorance and insolence is the more intollerable from the incongruity of their notions respecting freedom. But in the name of the *eighth* wonder, if we are to fight (as much as I dislike the present war) let us not be backward in this inexpedient, yet it seems *dernier* resort of the present government. We had better kill a hundred enemies than permit one patriotic life to be lost by any unnecessary backwardness, when the thing is inevitable. But I see no reason why the abominable maxim of men and not measures, should any longer shake us to dissolution. Have we not tried them sufficiently? We could not be worsted with scarcely any other President who had any claims to intelligence—may I feel satisfied we should be bettered. Many are now basking in the sunshine of ease, and say—let us alone; our government is well enough administered. So can some say in the most despotic and degraded governments on earth. Very different however is the balance of poor degraded humanity. A crisis of our affairs is approaching when we must either be united under a different set of men and measures, or feel to our latest breaths, the direful want of precautionary prudence.

June, 1812.

SPIRIT OF DESPOTISM.

Extract of a letter from a Member of Congress, dated Washington, May 29.

It is rumored, and correctly believed, that the awful question of war is to be brought forward by the committee of foreign relations on Monday next. It is also said, that it is to be debated with closed doors, in which case it is the opinion of most of our friends that we should indignantly refuse to take any part in the discussion. No speaker on our part could entertain the delusive

hope of convincing a single war-hawk in the house:—his attention ought to be addressed to the *union*, and the effect of this appeal they fear, and purpose to prevent. It is even said they were to make a rule inhibiting the publication, after the injunction is taken of any speeches made while in secret session. Whether this is intended or not, I cannot say; but judging from the manner in which they know the public mind has been influenced by the very accurate report published by a member of the last debate of that kind, I do not think it improbable. That the reign of terror is commenced, and that the freedom of debate which the majority have during the whole session been fighting, let the following important document, *their* day's proceedings tell.

Mr. Randolph (very probably in anticipation of the intended convale) rose to submit a motion affecting our foreign relations. He went into an extensive view of our relative and political situation; and with much energy and conclusiveness of reasoning, proved by documents submitted to congress, that the Berlin and Milan decrees were not repealed. He then shewed that the orders in council did not form a ground for war. He discussed the blockading decree of May, 1807; shewed the acquiescence of our government in it, and contended that it was maintained with a force sufficient, according to the law of nations, to make it perfectly legal, and that our government had been obliged to resort to Bonaparte's new doctrine, that to make an efficient blockade it must be by land as well as by sea. After progressing with great ability for upwards of an hour, he warmed into a most *alarming* strain of eloquence, declaring that if the United States without indemnity for the past or security for the future, if under the present circumstances they made themselves virtually a part on the side of France in her war against Great Britain, it would prove the truth of every assertion hitherto made that there does exist in this government a fatal and undue French influence.

Sir, said he, such an event, thank heavens, has not yet taken place; but is it does, this government will stand branded (unless a free press should be overwhelmed in the common ruin) as the minions, the parasites, the sycophants, the tools of France to the latest prosterity: It would be a war unexampled and without parallel, with such an extent of ocean separating us from Europe to abandon the defence of our domestic to engage in the quarrels of others. It would be like a man's going out at night in search of assassins with an hundred daggers pointed at his breast. It is called a war for commerce while it was deprecated by the whole commercial world, by New-York and New-England, the strong holds of Commerce.

I give you but a faint idea of the nature of his argument. At that period of his speech to which I have just adverted, Mr. Randolph was interrupted by Mr. Calhoun, who said he was not in order to go into such an extensive discussion without mentioning the proposition which he intended to offer to the house.

Mr. Bibb, who was in the chair under the new rule as the speaker's substitute, decided that Mr. Randolph was in order, and had an undoubted right, if he chose, to finish his remarks before he submitted his motion.—Mr. Randolph proceeded, but soon afterwards Mr. Clay resumed the chair, and Mr. Calhoun renewed his call to order. The speaker, reversing Mr. Bibb's decision, decided that the motion should be intimated by Mr. Randolph before he proceeded further. Mr. Randolph endeavoured to prove that according to rule and usage the mover of a proposition had a right to preface it with such observations as went to explain its nature and object. The speaker told him to sit down, that he had decided the question, and farther that he would require a second to the motion and that it be reduced to writing. An appeal was taken from this decision, and as might be expected, on the eyes and noses, it was confirmed 67 to 40. Those democrat best acquainted with the rules of the house, voted with the Federalists, such as Macon, Stanford Bibb and D. R. Williams.

Mr. Randolph then said, I suppose by this decision I am compelled to reduce the motion to writing before I close my observations, and under that compulsion I do it. It was accordingly handed to the chair. Mr. R was then proceeding, when Mr. Calhoun said, that the motion was now made and seconded, and in possession of the house, he could not proceed to debate it till a question was taken whether the house would or would not decide it. The speaker at first said that the rule did not apply to the mover; but the murmurs of the party soon brought him to his political recollection, and he determined that Mr. Randolph should *not* proceed.

The question after an attempt to defeat in a side-wind manner by a motion to adjourn, was taken on considering and determined in the negative. So that the result is that one day's work has ended with a prostration of almost the only remaining principle of free debate. If a member rise to submit any proposition whatever, he may be instantly required to make it known, to reduce it to writing, to procure a second (without being permitted to convince any one by argument of the propriety of seconding) and that if the proposition does not precisely quadrate with the political feelings of the majority he is *put down* by a refusal to consider his motion.

[On the following page will be found Mr. Randolph's appeal to his constituents.]