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To the Freemen

OF THE COUNTIES OF

Johnston, Wayne, Greene, Lenoir, Jones,
Carteret and Craven.
FELLOW-CITIZENS,

ON my return home from the Supreme Court at Raleigh, I was presented with a copy of Mr. Blackledge's address to you of the 12th inst. Though reluctant to trespass again on your attention; I must nevertheless, submit to you, some observations, which this address seems to demand: for this purpose, I seize the first moment of leisure.

In presenting myself to your notice as a Candidate, I cautiously abstained from every remark and every expression which might rouse the furious passions of party. This forbearance however has been of no avail. To have made a tender of my services at all, is insinuated to be an offence that should subject me to the censure of all moderate men, and which owes its origin to the intemperance of party spirit.—How strange that this charge should be brought forward by Mr. Blackledge, at the very moment in which he declares, that his resolution to become a candidate, had been formed at the time when it was understood and believed that he should stand opposed to our present representative!—He comes forward himself in opposition—and then complains of those who awaken “the intemperance of party spirit!”—If the desire of being useful to his country and a deference to the “pressing invitations” of his friends, justify his avowed wish to oppose Mr. Stanley, why should not the same motives afford to me a justification for a wish to succeed to this gentleman, although at the hazard of thwarting his (Mr. B's.) views? But no; it seems that these considerations ought to have had no weight with me—because there should be no division in our public counsels. The man, fellow citizens, does not exist, who more sincerely deprecates the horrid consequences of factious divisions of our country, than myself. Union is indeed essential to our welfare, if not to our existence as a nation—but it is an union of honest and intelligent men, on correct principles and with pure motives, all combining their efforts to promote the great interests of truth, of justice and of the public good. Is such the nature of the union which Mr. B. recommends?—His union—is an expulsion of all men from the public counsels who do not belong to the dominant party—it has in view the monopoly of all power and influence into the hands of a particular political sect—it is marked by an illiberal proscription & abuse of every individual—as engaged in “defeating the objects of government”—as a “deserter” from the cause of his country—as a friend to “the enemy”—who will not ascribe perfect wisdom to the conduct of the administration, who will not exclaim against insults which he is unable to discover, and extoll the excellence of measures which experience proves to have been injurious. This spirit of combination is the very essence of faction—and to it we owe many, if not most of the evils under which we suffer. It is this factious sentiment which has filled the walls of Congress with persons notoriously incompetent to the duties of their station—which in lieu of the question “what will best advance the interest of the country” has substituted “what will most contribute to the strength of our party”—which, in the selection of men for office, has nearly banished all enquiries as to moral fitness or intellectual capacity, has given us William Duane for a lieutenant, and retains James Wilkinson as a general of our armies. It is to this factious principle we may attribute the profusion of the public treasure among servile dependents and newly made converts, for it soon teaches the members of “the league” to regard not only the power but the emoluments of government as their exclusive property, of which they may dispose not as trustees but as owners. It is in short this same spirit of faction which has brought on the ruin of every republic with which ancient or modern history acquaint us, and which, unless suppressed in time, must occasion the destruction also of our's.

Fellow-Citizens, Mr. Blackledge gives you his decided opinion as to the wisdom of the Embargo, and declares his “all but positive conviction” that a continuance of it three months longer would have obtain-

ed redress from Britain and prevented the outrages of France. However strong the claims of this Gentleman to be respected for his political sagacity, it is to be regretted, that on a subject where a difference of opinion is known to exist, he had not favored us with something more than a bare assertion.—He ought to have recollected that this “strong measure” had been continued fourteen months—had impoverished the country, hampered all mechanical industry, destroyed the hopes of the farmer, put an end to commercial enterprise, shut up our courts of justice—and never produced the least symptom of a disposition in the Belligerents to relax from their injurious decrees and orders.—He should have reflected that it had diminished the revenue ten millions of dollars, that a perseverance in it one year longer would have rendered inevitable a recourse to direct taxation, and yet the propositions to repeal it made in the summer of 1808 to France and Britain, had been by both rejected.—He should have remembered that our government had been apprised by our Minister General Armstrong of the futility of regarding it as a measure of coercion.—In his dispatch of 30th August 1808, (which for some reason or other, it was deemed improper to communicate to the people) Mr. B. knows or ought to have known are contained these remarkable expressions: “We have somewhat overrated our means of coercion of the two great belligerents to a course of justice. The embargo is a measure calculated above any other to keep us whole, and keep us in peace, but beyond this you must not count upon it.—Here (In France) it is not felt, and in England, in the midst of the more recent and interesting events of the day, it is forgotten.”—He should have reflected that even the terms on which Mr. Erskine was authorized to make an arrangement (terms certainly inconsistent with our rights but with which Mr. E. took such a liberty as rendered them acceptable) were predicated not upon the embargo but on the *less partial*, though in many respects injudicious measure, a proposed non-intercourse.—He should have called to mind that every one of his former predictions, such as starving the British by withholding supplies of provisions, and ruining their manufacturing establishments, by curtailing their exports, has so completely failed, that he is now willing to forget that he ever had been made.—Had these reflections occurred to him, surely he would have doubted whether his mere “say so” proved the correctness of his opinion. It seems too a little extraordinary that after all his praises of the embargo, he cautions you against believing that he would recommend another.—If it be really so excellent a measure, why not adopt it again?—Is it that he fears it will be unpopular, and he is unwilling to do what he deems right, if it be opposed by public clamour? Oh no! Circumstances he thinks have changed. Our property and citizens are now afloat and it is too late as a precautionary measure.—As a measure of coercion it will fail, because Britain will take care to provide a sufficient supply of naval stores!—Admirable reasoning! Who does not know that when the Embargo was imposed, every sea was whitened with our sails, and every foreign port filled with our ships?—Who can not perceive that it was formerly infinitely easier for Britain to procure naval supplies, when she had free access to the ports of the Baltic, than now, when she is almost excluded from them? Perhaps the whole may be considered as an illustration of the sage sentiment of the poet,

A man convinced against his will,
Retains the same opinion still.—

False charges and insinuations, you are told, have been circulated by “Federal Leaders” such as the giving of two millions of dollars to Bonaparte, Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Madison being Frenchmen, and the Embargo being the effect of French influence.” I have no pretensions to the character of a “Federal Leader,” and of course will not consider myself as attacked by this remark. For fear of misapprehension however, I feel myself bound to say that none of these charges have ever been advanced by me. Yet a regard to truth, requires me to declare, that I have not hesitated to say, when I thought the occasion required it, that in the session of 1805—6, (when Mr. B. was a member) two millions of dollars were placed at the disposal of the President, and that the object was to bribe France to bully Spain to do us justice.—I have said so because the first part of the observation is evinced beyond controversy by the act of Congress making the appropriation—and the latter part I believed and still believe to be true, upon the faith of Mr. Randolph's public declaration on the floor of Congress. On a question of fact the man does not

exist to whom I would give more undivided credit than to this Gentleman.—He declared that in conversing with Mr. Madison, then Secretary of State, on the subject of our difficulties with Spain, the Secretary told him, “France will not permit Spain to do us justice.—France wants money, and we must let her have it”—and soon afterwards the two millions of dollars were voted with closed doors.—That the money was not given to Bonaparte, I know. Why it was not—how far the negotiation proceeded—what finally prevented it are indeed secrets worth knowing, but to me, and to the public are as yet mysteries undivulged. I know that Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Madison are Americans by birth, but I also know that they are or were French Citizens by adoption.—By a decree of the Convention of France, in the year 1793, they were declared French Citizens—privilege of which they accepted. How can this be material in a discussion of their claims to our confidence the people are qualified to judge.—The truth however they ought to know.—That the Embargo was not conceived in a spirit of impartiality to both belligerents, is a sentiment which I have frequently avowed; and of the correctness of which I can not doubt. Had I doubts, Mr. B's. address would remove them. Do you perceive in it one word of the effects it was designed to produce on France? He tells you it was “calculated to bring at least one of our enemies to a sense of justice.”—He speaks of the “shock it gave the British Nation.”—He would not recommend another Embargo, because “the British Nation will take care to provide and keep on hand a sufficient supply of naval stores.”—Not a syllable uttered as to the coercion it was to operate on France. Indeed it would have been nugatory to utter such, for you have seen that our Government was informed by Armstrong that in France it was not felt, and it is notorious that the French Emperor declared his decided approbation of it. From France and Britain both our Country received gross injustice, but on one side only have the dominant party shewn sensibility. Witness the Embargo and this defence of it.—Witness the Non-Intercourse, by which Holland (as notoriously dependent on France as Ireland on the King of Great-Britain) was nevertheless left open to our trade, as tho' perfectly a neutral.—Witness the repeated refusals of the majority to permit Champany's insolent letter of the 15th Jan. 1803, to come to the knowledge of the public. You remember its words—“War exists in fact between England and the U. States, and the Emperor considers it as decreed from the day on which England published her decrees.” He has ordered that the American vessels shall remain sequestered until a decision may be had thereon according to the dispositions which shall have been expressed by the Government of the United States.” Witness the concealment of Armstrong's communication of the 22d Feb. 1808, in which he announces to our government that “The French Emperor has declared his decrees should suffer no change—and that the Americans should be compelled to take the positive character of either allies or enemies”—that the sequestered cases amount to One hundred and sixty, which at present prices will yield upwards of one hundred millions of francs, a sum whose magnitude alone renders hopeless all attempts to save it.”—“If I am right in supposing that the Emperor has definitively taken his ground, I can not be wrong in concluding that you will immediately take yours.”—Witness the concealment of Armstrong's dispatch of the 30th August, 1808, of which you have already seen extracts.—Witness—but it is unnecessary, it is degrading to American Pride to be more particular. The insensibility, the tameness which is manifested at the late confiscations and sales of our property, by the aspiring master of the world; at the burning of our ships and imprisonment of our Citizens for no cause, but be cause they are Americans.—too plainly proves in the emphatic language of a gentleman of Greene, “the rulers of the party like a one eyed horse, in going over a bridge have seen danger but on one side, and thus rushed into destruction on the other.—And yet you are invited to join in Mr. B's. “union”—that is to exclude from your confidence every man who doubts of the perfect wisdom of the Administration. From such an union, may the all-wise disposer of events preserve my country!

I wish no longer to detain your attention, but I owe it to myself to notice some electioneering misrepresentations which I learnt have been circulated to injure me in your estimation. I will do it as concisely and as plainly as possible.—It is insinuated

that I am concerned as Counsel in a suit brought by the Devises of Granville against Mr. Collins of Edenton, which is now pending in the Supreme Federal Court at Washington, and that my willingness to be elected to Congress is connected with a wish to attend the management of that suit. I will not stop to expose the ridiculous folly and absurdity of the story—but in direct terms tell you, that it is absolutely and entirely false. Many years since when the suit was tried and lost at Raleigh, I did appear as one of the Counsel in behalf of the Plaintiffs, in the regular course of my business, and assist in the argument of it. Since the suit has been carried out of the State I have washed my hands of it. To the management of it at Washington I never have attended, and never shall attend, whether I may be elected or not.—Neither as counsel nor any other way have I more concern with it than either of you to whom I address myself.

It is intimated too that I have given offence by recently appearing as Counsel in behalf of an unfortunate being, charged with the crime of murder. I hope and trust you will not believe that I deem it necessary, as respects a vast majority of you to say a word upon this subject. I am sure that it is not. But I am told that here & there is found an individual of upright intentions who, misled by some misrepresentation or prejudice, doubts as to the correctness of my conduct and wishes for an explanation. Let us therefore for a moment inquire into the circumstances of it. A man was taken up on the charge of murder, and committed to prison. A general sentiment of indignation being strongly excited, counsel is employed to aid the officer of the State, in the prosecution against him. In this situation the prisoner applies to a very respectable professional gentleman and myself to defend him. We move the court upon an affidavit setting forth the strong prejudices of the people of the county, that the cause may be removed to the court of an adjacent county. This motion is refused, on this ground among others, that proper care will be taken to prevent any person from acting as a Juror whose mind is under the influence of such prejudices.—An attempt is then made to procure a Jury—and so many are declared incompetent by the Court on account of having made up and declared opinions on the prisoners guilt, that a full Jury is not procured and the cause continued to the next term.—Such are the facts of the case. On what part of it an explanation is wished I am at a loss to conceive. Is it for having appeared as Counsel in behalf of the Prisoner?—reflect a moment before this question is asked. Look at the Bill of Rights annexed to your State Constitution, and see what are the sacred privileges secured to every individual arraigned for a crime. Can any one of these be enjoyed by a man uninformed in the law, unless he be allowed Counsel? Are you willing that they should be denied to him, if public clamor says he is guilty? It so why not go the full length of the principle, and instead of giving him an unequal trial, refuse him all trial, and punish him at once upon the strength of rumour?

So horrid are the consequences of condemning men capitally where they have not legal assistance, that our courts uniformly order counsel to appear for such as are unable to procure them.—Had I refused the prisoner's application, and he had been left undefended, it would have been the bounden duty of the presiding judge to call on some of the bar to aid him in his trial. It is as probable that I would have been directed to perform this office of humanity as any other gentleman belonging to the profession. If not culpable then for appearing as his counsel, am I liable to censure for exerting myself to procure for him a jury free from bias? The supposition is too monstrous to be entertained for a moment. The man must deem himself insulted, who is seriously asked if he doubts upon this question. Fellow-Citizens! The important enquiry before you is, which of the Candidates that are offered to your notice is, all circumstances considered, the most proper to take charge of your momentous concern in the affairs of the nation. Whoever turns your attention from this enquiry attempts to cajole you. It is a matter of no moment to you whether the result of the election shall be favorable to the wishes of A or of B.—But it is a matter of vast consequence, whether it shall tend or not, to the security of your rights, to the advancement of your interests, to the promotion of the general welfare. Reflect deliberately—decide calmly—and may the decision be such as never to afford you cause for future repentance!

Your Friend,
WILLIAM GASTON.
Newbern, 24th July, 1810.