

John C. ...

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SATURDAY morning, the Senate of the United States, being convened in their chamber, on the call of the late President, Thomas Jefferson was sworn in as Vice-President of the United States, and President of the Senate. He addressed them in the following extempore speech:

Gentlemen of the Senate,

Entering on the duties of the office to which I am called, I feel it incumbent on me, to apologize to this honourable house, for the insufficient manner in which I fear they may be discharged. At an earlier period of my life, and through some considerable portion of it, I have been a member of legislative bodies, and not altogether inattentive to the forms of their proceedings. —But much time have elapsed; since that other duties have occupied my mind, in a great degree it has lost its familiarity, with this subject. I fear that the house will have but too frequent occasion to perceive the truth of this acknowledgment. If a diligent attention however, will enable me to fill the functions now assigned me, I may promise that diligence and attention shall be sedulously employed. For one portion of my duty I shall engage with more confidence, because it will depend on my will, and not on my capacity.

The rules which are to govern the proceedings of this house, so far as they shall depend on me for their application, shall be applied with the most rigorous and inflexible impartiality, regarding neither persons, their views or principles, and seeing only the abstract propriety on subject to my decision. If in forming that opinion, I concur with some, and differ from others, as must of necessity happen, I shall rely on the liberality and candour of those from whom I differ, to believe that I do it on pure motives. I might here proceed, and with the greatest truth, to declare my zealous attachment to the constitution of the United States, that I consider the union of these states as the first of blessings, and as the first of duties, the preservation of that constitution which secures it; but I suppose these declarations not pertinent to the occasion of entering into an office whose primary business is merely to preside over the forms of the house; and no one more sincerely prays, that no accident may call me to the higher and more important functions which the constitution eventually devolve on this office. These have been justly confided to the eminent character which has preceded me here, whose talents and integrity have been known and revered by me through a long course of years, have been the foundation of a cordial and uninterrupted friendship between us; and I devoutly pray he may be long preserved for the government, the happiness, and prosperity of our common country.

Soon after the Senate removed to the chamber of the house of representatives.

At an early hour, a great number of citizens, had assembled round Congress Hall, to witness the retirement of our late worthy President WASHINGTON from public life; the concourse increased to such a degree as to fill the street, and when the gallery doors were thrown open, the house was suddenly filled up, to overflowing. —The Ladies added to the dignity of the scene, numbers of them were seated in the chairs of the representatives, and others were accommodated with seats on the floor of the house. A few minutes after the Senate arrived preceded by their president; George Washington entered, but before he had advanced half way across the floor, a burst of applause broke forth from every quarter of the house—on the entrance of John Adams, like marks of approbation were expressed.

The chief justice of the United States, Oliver Ellsworth, together with judges Basing, Wilson, and Iredel, were seated at a table in front of the elevated seat—the President then delivered the following speech:

PRESIDENT'S SPEECH.

When it was first perceived in early times that no middle course of America remained, between unlimited submission to a foreign legislature, and a total independence of its claims, men of reflection were less apprehensive of danger, from the formidable power of fleets and armies, they must determine to resist, than from those contests and dissensions which would certainly arise, concerning the forms of government to be instituted over the whole and over the parts of this extensive country. Relying, however, on the purity of their intentions, the justice of their cause, and the integrity and intelligence of the people, under an over-ruling providence, which had so signally protected this country from the first, the representatives of this nation; little more than half its present number, not only broke to pieces the chains

which were forging, and the rod of iron that was lifted up, but frankly cut asunder the ties which had bound them, and launched into an ocean of uncertainty.

The zeal and ardour of the people during the revolutionary war, supplying the place of government, commanded a degree of order sufficient at least for the temporary preservation of society. The consideration which was early felt to be necessary, was prepared from the models of the Batavian and Helvetic confederacies, the only example which remain with any detail and precision, in history; and certainly the only ones, which the people at large had ever considered. —But reflecting on the striking difference, in so many particulars, between this country and those, where a courier may go from the seat of government to the frontiers in a single day it was then certainly foreseen by some who assisted in Congress at the information of it, that it could not be durable.

Negligence of its regulations, inattention of its recommendations, if not disobedience to its authority, not only individuals, but in states, soon appeared with their melancholy consequences, universal languour, jealousies, and rivalries of states, decline of navigation and commerce, discouragement of necessary manufactures, universal fall in the value of lands, and other produce; contempt of public and private faith, loss of consideration and credit with foreign nations; and at length in discontent and an mobilities, combinations, partial conventions, and insurrections, threatening some great national calamity.

In this dangerous crisis the people of America were not abandoned by their usual good sense, presence of mind, resolution and integrity. Measures were pursued to concert a plan, to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provided for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty. The public disquisitions, discussions, and deliberations issued in the present happy constitution of government.

Employed in the service of my country abroad during the whole course of these transactions, I first saw the constitution of the United States in a foreign country. Irritated by literary altercations, animated by no public debates, hated by no party animosity, I read it with great satisfaction as the result of good heads prompted by good hearts, as an experiment, better adapted to the genius, character, situation, and relations of this nation and country than any which had ever been proposed or suggested.

In its general principles and great outlines, it was conformable to such a system of government as I had ever most esteemed, and in some states, my native state in particular, had contributed to establish. — Claiming a right of suffrage in common with my fellow-citizens, in the adoption or rejection of a constitution, which was to rule me and my posterity, as well as them and theirs, I did not hesitate to express my approbation of it, on all occasions, in public and in private. It was not then, nor has it been since, any objections to it, in my mind, that the executive and senate were not more permanent. Nor have I ever entertained a thought of promoting any alteration in it, but such as themselves in the course of their experience, should see or feel to be necessary or expedient, and by their representative in congress, and state legislatures, according to the constitution itself, adopt and ordain.

Returning to the bosom of my country, after a painful separation from it for ten years, I had the honour to be elected to a station under the new order of things, and I repeatedly laid myself under the most serious obligations to support the constitution. The operation of it has equalled the most sanguine expectations of its friends, and from an habitual attention to it, satisfaction in its administration and delight in its effects, upon the peace, order, prosperity, and happiness of the nation, I have acquired an habitual attachment to it, and veneration for it.

What other form of government indeed can so well deserve our esteem and love?

There may be little solidity in an ancient idea, that congregations of men into nations and cities, are the most pleasing objects in the sight of superior intelligences: but this is very certain, that to a benevolent human mind, there can be no spectacle presented by any nation more pleasing, more noble, majestic, or august, than an assembly like to that which has so often been seen in this and the other chamber of congress; of a government in which the executive authority, as well as that of all the branches of the legislature, are exercised by citizens selected, at regular periods, by their neighbours, to make and execute laws for the general good. Can any thing essential, any thing more than mere ornament and decoration, be added to this by robes or diamonds? Can authority be more amiable or re-

spectable, when it descends from accidents, or institutions established in remote antiquity, than when it springs fresh from the hearts and judgments of an honest and enlightened people? For it is the people only that are represented; it is their power and majesty that is reflected, and only for their good in every legitimate government, under whatever form it may appear; the existence of such a government as ours for any length of time, is a full proof of a general dissemination of knowledge and virtue, throughout the whole body of the people—and what object or consideration more pleasing than this can be presented to the human mind? if national pride is ever justifiable or excusable, it is when it springs not from power or riches, grandeur or glory, but from conviction of national innocence, information and benevolence.

In the midst of these pleasing ideas, we should be unfaithful to ourselves, if we should ever lose sight of the danger to our liberties, if any thing partial or extraneous should infect the purity of our free, fair, virtuous and independent elections. If an election is to be determined by a majority of a single vote, and that can be procured by a party, through artifice or corruption, the government may be the choice of a party, for its own ends, not of a nation, for the national good. If that solitary suffrage can be obtained by foreign nations, by flattery or menaces, by fraud or violence, by terror, intrigue or venality, the government may not be the choice of the American people, but of foreign nations. It may be foreign nations who govern us, and not we the people who govern ourselves. And men, candid men will acknowledge, that in such cases, choice would have a little advantage to boast of, over lot or chance.

Such is the amiable and interesting system of government (and such are some of the abuses to which it may be exposed) which the people of America have exhibited to the admiration and anxiety of the wife and virtuous of all nations, for eight years, under the administration of a citizen, who by a long course of great actions, regulated by prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude, conducting a people, inspired with the same virtues, and animated with the same ardent patriotism and love of liberty, to independence and peace, to increasing wealth and unexampled prosperity; has merited the gratitude of his fellow-citizens, commanded the highest praises of foreign nations, and secured immortal glory, with posterity.

In that retirement, which is his voluntary choice, may he long live to enjoy the delicious recollection of his services, the gratitude of mankind; the happy fruits of them to himself and the world, which are daily increasing; and that splendid prospect of the future fortunes of his country, which is opening from year to year; his name may be still a rampart, and the knowledge that he lives a bulwark, against all open or secret enemies of his country's peace.

This example has been recommended to the imitation of his successors, by both Houses of Congress, and by the voice of the legislatures and the people, throughout the nation.

On this subject it might become me better to be silent, or to speak with diffidence; but as something may be expected, the occasion, I hope, will be admitted as an apology, if I venture to say that,

If a preference upon principle of a free Republican government, formed upon long and serious reflection, after a diligent and impartial enquiry after truth; if an attachment to the constitution of the United States and a conscientious determination to support it, until it shall be altered by the judgment and wishes of the people expressed in the mode prescribed in it;—if a respectful attention to the constitutions of the individual states, and a constant caution and delicacy towards the state governments; if an equal and impartial regard to the rights, interests, honour, and happiness of all the states in the Union, without preference or regard to a northern or southern, an eastern or western position, their various political opinions on unessential points, or their personal attachments; if a love of virtuous men of all parties and denominations, if a love of science and letters, and a wish to patronize every national effort to encourage schools, colleges, universities, academies, and every institution, for propagating knowledge, virtue and religion, among all classes of the people; not only for their benign influence on the happiness of life, in all its stages and classes, and of society in all its forms, but as the only means of preserving our constitution from its natural enemies, the spirit of selfishness, the spirit of party, the spirit of intrigue, the profligacy of corruption, and the pestilence of foreign influence, which is the angel of destruction to elective governments; if a love of equal laws, of justice, and humanity, in the interior administration; if an inclination to improve agriculture, commerce and manufactures for necessity,