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SPEECH

OF
PRESIDENT ADAMS,

On his entering into Office, the 4th ult.

WHEN it was first perceived, in early times, that no middle course for America remained, between unlimited submission to a foreign legislature, and a total independence of its claims: men of reflection were 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 ever ruling Providence, which had so graciously protected this country from the first, the Representatives of this nation, then consisting of 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 to thrash them, and launched into an ocean of unpopularity.

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 Confederation, which was only felt to be necessary, was prepared from the models of the Batavian and Helvetic Confederations, the only examples 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 country goes from the seat of government to the bottom in a single day, it was then certainly better by some, who assisted in Congress at the formation of it, that it could not be de-

livered of its regulations, inattention to its recommendations, if not disobedience to its authority, not only in individuals but in the mass, soon appeared, with their melancholy consequences; universal languor; jealousies of rivalries of states; dreams of navigation and commerce; discouragement of necessary manufactures; universal fall in the value of land and their produce; contempt of public and private faith; loss of consideration and respect with foreign nations; and at length, in domestic animosities, combinations, party divisions, and insurrections, threatening the ruin of national felicity.

In this dangerous crisis, the people of America were not abandoned by their usual good sense, preference of mind, resolution or integrity. Measures were pursued to enforce a plan of a more perfect union, establish justice, secure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty. The public discussions, deliberations, and deliberations led to the present happy constitution of government.

Employed in the service of my country, and tracing the whole course of these transactions, I felt the constitution of the United States in a foreign country. Irritated by a literary altercation, animated by no public spirit, heated by no party animosity, I read it with great attention, as a result of good heads, prompted by good hearts; as an experiment more 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 cases, my own native state in particular, had been best to establish. Clauses of a large 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 expect my approbation of it, on all

occasions, in public and in private. It was not then, nor has been since, any objection to it, in my mind, that the Executive and Senate were not more permanent. Nor have I entertained a thought of promoting any alteration in it, but such as the people themselves, in the course of their experience, should see and feel to be necessary or expedient, and by their Representatives in Congress and the 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 have 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 cities and nations, 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 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 else, any thing more than mere ornament and decoration be added by robes or diamonds? Can authority be more amiable or respectable, 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 personal pride is ever justifiable or excusable, it is when it springs, not from power or riches, grandeur or glory, but from 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 the 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 vanity, 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 can did men well acknowledge, that in such cases, choice would have 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 wise 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, in-

spired 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 legislature 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, & a conscientious determination to support it, until it shall be altered by the judgments 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 government; 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, eastern or western position, their various political opinions on such neutral 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 patronise every rational 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 sophistry, the spirit of party, the spirit of intrigue, prodigality of corruption, and the pestilence of foreign influence, which is the angel of destruction to elective government; 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, convenience and defence; if a spirit of equity and humanity towards the aboriginal nations of America, and a disposition to meliorate their condition, by inclining them to be more friendly to us and our citizens to be more friendly to them; if an inflexible determination to maintain peace and inviolate faith, with all nations, and that system of neutrality and impartiality, among the belligerent powers of Europe, which has been adopted by this government, and solemnly sanctioned by both house of Congress and applauded by the legislatures of the States—and the public opinion, until it shall be otherwise ordained by Congress; if a personal esteem for the French nation, formed in a residence of seven years chiefly among them, and a sincere desire to preserve the friendship which has been so much for the honour and interest of both nations; if, while the conscious honour and integrity of the people of America, and the interests of their own power and energy must be preserved, an earnest endeavour to investigate every just cause and remove every colorable pretence of complaint; if an intention to pursue, by amicable negotiation, a reparation for the injuries that have been committed on the commerce of our fellow citizens by whatever nation; and if success cannot be obtained, to lay the facts before the legislature, that they may consider, what further measures