

Providence *United States Chronicle*, 15 November 1787

To the Printer of the United States Chronicle.

Your correspondent, from Rehoboth, appears to be under violent apprehensions, that the liberty of the press is in danger—and his coadjutor, that the liberties of the people are struck at: But I think the press takes great liberties with the people, and the people with the press—I believe there is an even balance.—He has assumed a title (*ARGUS*) which implies clear and strong sight:—This may be true of his organs of vision, but not of his understanding.—He thinks he sees objects which have no existence—but does not appear at all to understand subjects which evidently exist, and are capable of the clearest demonstration.—He threatens “again to shoulder his musket.”—Shoulder your firelock!—If we may judge of your use of that by the manner of your handling a quill, I feel entirely safe. This alarm is taken from a request which appeared in the *Boston Centinel*,—“that any person who should send a piece to the Printer of it, against the Federal Constitution, would send his name;” and was this any crime? It was but a request, and binds no one.—He asks, “why, if the proposed Constitution is a good one, are its supporters afraid to have any thing said against it?”—And why, if it is a bad one, are its opposers ashamed of their names?—If they are honest in their opposition, and not governed by sordid motives, why do they not come out, and shew cause, if any there be, why it should not be adopted?—He asks, “why are they for hurrying it down our throats before we have opened our mouths?”—To the first part I answer, because, “their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongue they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips.” The latter part I deny—for their mouths were opened against it before they saw it: This is a well known fact in this town;—therefore, Mr. *Argus*, though you have “a chance to read it, *not* once or twice only,” but an hundred times, it avails nothing—you have already made up your mind to oppose it—not for its defects and imperfections—but for that which is its perfection, and would be highly honourable to Americans in their adoption of it, viz. its being a plan of efficient government, wisely accommodated to the various interests of the United States—securing the liberties of the whole, protecting the property of the industrious against the fraudulent practices of the dishonest.

At the critical moment in which poor *Argus*, the strength of whose genius is forcibly represented by the poverty of Rehoboth soil, was trying to think of something to say, a very fortunate circumstance took place.—His son—probably a hopeful youth! came in and brought the means of supplying his own deficiencies—“Mr. *Powars*’ last paper,” containing “a piece signed JOHN DE WITT:”—This piece I read with attention, expecting from the signature to find something new and worth reading—but when I had gone over it with care, and found it a mere declamation on an hacknied subject, and seeing *John De Witt* at bottom, it reminded me of the following anecdote:—A gentleman of ingenuity having read a book, written by Mr. JOHN WISE, was asked how he liked the performance, replied—“If I had not seen *John Wise* at the bottom, I should have thought it had been written by TOM FOOL.”

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