

An Impartial Citizen, Petersburg *Virginia Gazette*, 10 January 1788

At so important a period as this, when the United States have experimentally found, that the Federal Government which they hastily formed, when pressed by imminent danger, is defective and inadequate to the purpose of permanently securing to themselves and posterity, the inestimable blessings of happiness and safety; and, when to form such a system as could answer this end, a Convention of Deputies from the respective States, has devised a Constitution, which those Deputies have declared to be that which appeared to them the most adviseable, and which it was their opinion should be submitted to a Convention of Delegates chosen in each state, by the people thereof, under the recommendation of its Legislature, for their assent and ratification; and, when in conformity thereto, the Legislature of this State has recommended a Convention to be chosen next March, for the sole purpose of investigating this Constitution—I say, that at a time so deeply interesting as this, it behoves every citizen and well wisher to this State, to promote an enquiry into the nature of the Constitution thus devised and submitted, and to fathom its principles and objects; that if we find it to be just, rational, and politic, we may elect for the Convention those only, whose principles we may know to be such as will lead them to advance it; and if we find it to be the reverse, we may choose those only, who, from their sentiments, will reject it. I have uniformly observed, that the friends of this Constitution extolled it with uncommon enthusiasm, and that those who were averse to it, reprobated it with unusual asperity. This led me to consider it attentively, as well as the arguments urged by both parties:—After a thorough investigation of this system; after comparing it with the best governments ancient and modern; after examining its aptitude for the peculiar situation of the United States, and after minutely considering the objections urged against it,—I am clearly of opinion, that it is an excellent system of confederate government, which, considering the United States in an aggregate collective view, is most wisely and judiciously devised; and that every friend to this country ought, by every reasonable means, to promote its adoption, on which depend perhaps our happiness and national existence. Animated by the most sincere attachment to the welfare of the United States, and this State particularly, I thought it my duty as a citizen, to lay my sentiments before the public, with a view of promoting an examination of this Constitution; to remove prejudices that may have been inconsiderately imbibed against it; to inspire the people with respect and zeal for what I conceive to be their highest interest; to animate its friends and those of their country, to promote and defend it; and to answer the objections against it, which (notwithstanding the mediocrity of my ability, and the distinguished celebrity of *some* characters that are said to support them) I trust I will be able to confute. If in the pursuit of this view, I shall have been misled by a mistaken zeal, or a misconception of the principles of this Constitution, or of the true interest of this State, I will candidly acknowledge, and heartily recede from, any errors, which shall be clearly pointed out, and indisputably proved...

...These brilliant characters have devised this constitution. They assert it is the most adviseable they could form. Congress has approved of it. It is to become the government of any nine States that will assent to, and ratify it. In this situation it is submitted to our consideration. Our Convention is to embrace or reject it. In choosing the alternative the question must be, whether the advantages to be relinquished by this State be too great a sacrifice for the object to be

acquired by the adoption of this system? I contend they are not. As to amendments, which are so strenuously insisted on by some, the Constitution itself has pointed out a most judicious and most unexceptionable mode of amending, to wit,—that when two-thirds of both Houses think proper, amendments shall be proposed; or, on the application of two thirds of the State Legislatures, a Convention shall be called for that purpose, and the amendments so proposed to become a part of this Constitution, when afterwards ratified by three-fourths of the State Legislatures, or Conventions from three-fourths of the States, as the one or the other mode of ratification shall be proposed by Congress. Now as this mode is so obviously rational and undeniably judicious, to adopt another mode of amending, besides its seeming impracticability, is unnecessary and inexpedient. It is unnecessary, because every inconvenience or possible defect in this system may and can be radically and entirely removed by the amendatory mode included in itself. It is seemingly impracticable to adopt another mode of amending, as the very circumstance of this frame of government's being objected to, strongly proves the difficulty of a general concurrence by all the States, with any proposition. A certain Honorable Gentleman in a letter to the Executive, and which has been published, has insisted on the facility and expediency of deputing another Convention to amend the Constitution devised by the last. With deference to so eminent a character, I humbly conceive, that the plan he proposes is by no means so eligible as that pointed out by the Constitution itself, which extends its remedy to every possible defect that experience may prove real; whereas his plan excludes every amendment which the Convention he proposes may not recollect or point out; or then, the omissions will be the ground of another Convention, and so on as often as experience will prove an actual omission or omissions. Moreover, if, as he proposes, another Convention should be deputed to amend, it is very probable, if not certain, that any amendments they may recommend, will be equally as exceptionable and as much objected to, as the Constitution devised by the last Convention: They could not possibly think of amendments that would meet with general approbation, nay, perhaps they might be considered as no melioration of the present system, and then, by this gentleman's way of reasoning, another Convention should be delegated to amend the amendments, &c. which would be endless. Some other eminent persons have asserted that it was impolitic to adopt a form of government which included amendatory provisions; that the idea of entering into a government confessedly defective, and in need of amendments, was enough to disgust any people, and a sufficient reason for its rejection. To which I answer, that all the world has allowed, that it was a good government which had in itself a capacity of amending; that a government which undeniably possesses many excellent regulations, and still provides for such amendments, and secures such remedies, as experience will evince to be necessary, is one of the best systems that human sagacity and ingenuity can devise, must be respected by all the sensible part of mankind, and be the idol, admiration, and envy, of all nations. I add, that as human nature is frail, and no people ever did, or ever can suppose, that the plan of government they first adopt, can at once be perfect, that the bare idea of entering into a form of government confessedly admirable, which provides for the fallibility of human nature, and secures a constitutional mode of amending every possible defect, is sufficient to inspire the good people of this country with respect, confidence, admiration and zeal, for this constitution. I therefore contend that though we have indisputably a right to propose amendments, yet it is unnecessary and inexpedient to

exercise that right on the present occasion, and that rejection or adoption of this Constitution is the alternative.

From what I have premised, it must appear clearly the duty of all those who after examination have thought this system to be just an[d] rational, to forward its adoption by every possible reasonable means they can; and it is indisputably incumbent on its enemies, to point out clearly by irresistible arguments deduced from plain facts, the danger that is to result, the mischiefs that are to arise from it. Or shall we suffer ourselves to be amused with ideal and imaginary contingencies, by vague assertions and general surmises? This present period is perhaps no less important than that when we struggled for freedom. We have overcome oppression, but we have not established our rights and liberties on a permanent basis, which every friend to America must confess depends primarily on the consolidation of the Union, and on the establishment of a general government, the very end whereof ought to be political freedom. At such a time as this then, every friend to his country ought to be roused, animated, and inspired. At such an awful period, heedless indifference and indolent supineness, must be criminal. Let every true American, therefore, examine this Constitution, and if it be found rational, support it by all possible means; and not reject it, till they be thoroughly convinced that it is impolitic. What will be the consequence of our rejection, should it be adopted by nine other States? Will any sensible man, or friend to Virginia say, that we shall be excluded, and that it will be a happy event for us to stand by ourselves? Will any nine States that may accede to this system, recede from its adoption out of deference and complaisance to our caprice, and concur with our amendatory propositions? If all the States should totally reject it, will any future Convention be more enlightened than the last? Or will the States be more ready to embrace any future proposed Constitution, or less apt to form objections? I fear I am warranted from the frivolous and groundless objections raised against this Constitution, to believe, that the situation of *some people* is such as anarchy would accommodate better than the best government; who would be happy were the distinctions of *meum* and *tuum* done away. I hope, however, that there are no such persons, or if there be, that they are but few—but if there be any such, they cannot be real friends of America. The Honorable Gentleman before alluded to, in his letter to the Executive, says, that to say we must embrace a bad government for fear of anarchy, is really saying, we must kill ourselves for fear of dying. Not to make any remarks on his metaphor, (which, however is unworthy of so great a man) I will only here assert, that this is not a bad government, but a most excellent one; and that therefore his metaphor is by no means applicable to the present purpose. By a thorough and minute examination of every part of this Constitution, I propose in some future numbers to prove every general assertion I have advanced in its favor in this number; and in my first succeeding numbers, I intend fully to answer all the objections that I have heard, or seen written against it, including those published in the letter from the honorable gentleman before mentioned—as well as any other objections which I shall hear against it privately, or which shall publicly appear, and which I will consider worthy of notice. I must, however, add in this place, that I am not a blind and prejudiced admirer of this System—that I do not deny its having some faults; but that these faults are minute and could not easily have been avoided consistently with the jarring and discordant complication of interest necessary to have been consulted: but that these minute defects will and must be amended by the provisions and arrangements contained in the Constitution itself.

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