THESIS:
Federalist and Democrat.
C. W. Palmer, '82.
FEDERALIST AND DEMOCRAT.

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FEDERALIST AND DEMOCRAT.

The most important event in the history of the United States, after the declaration of independence and the acknowledgment of their freedom by England, was the adoption of the Constitution.

There are but few if any great political questions which are without opponents. That on the adoption of the Constitution did not form an exception to this rule. It was pretty generally admitted, however, that the Articles of Confederation were insufficient as the supreme law of the land. It was admitted that revision should be made in the governing code, but many persons, and thoughtful ones, too, were not prepared for the radical change which the proposed Constitution, as presented by the Constitutional Convention, would bring about.

On this question, then, the two parties, Federal and anti-Federal (afterwards Republican, and still later Democratic) stood in opposition. That the men in both parties were equally patriotic, equally honest and equally unselfish we will not question; but that “the presumption of right, because they defended the existing state of things against innovation,” as stated by Mr. A. H. Everett in the North American Review of July, 1834, was in favor of the anti-Federalists, we will not admit. This would be true in some cases; but the fallacy lies in the condition of affairs. “The Union was not the result of a free and spontaneous effort, but it was extorted from the grinding necessity of a reluctant people.” — Professor Sumner, in N. A. Review, January, 1876. It had, then, become a necessity that a change should be made; the Articles of Confederation were proved by trial to be insufficient. Truly, therefore, unless the opponents of the measure could show good reason for its rejection, or could produce a more rational scheme, the burden of proof instead of the presumption lay with them. Professor Sumner, again: “A political party which resists a proposed movement by predicting calamitous results to flow from it must abide by the verdict of history. Tried by this test the anti-Federalists are convicted of resisting the most salutary action in our political history.”

The principal point at issue between these parties was that pernicious doctrine of “state rights”—one that obtained such a hold on the minds of certain men that it well nigh caused the dismemberment of the Union at a later time. In other words, it was a conflict between the two most important principles of all government, law and liberty. These elements, without which, each in due proportion, the best of government is impossible, were found in bitter strife. But, we take it, that it was a mistaken idea of liberty for which its champions contended. Those who held that the general government should be supreme, loved liberty none the less, but rather, law the more. The bitter hatred against England, and against a monarchial or centralized government, as engendered by the events preceding and during the revolution, would not allow of a calm judgment in the matter on the part of many. Liberty, with these, meant freedom from restraint of any sort and release from the payment of debts—debts which had been contracted before the war, and for which, under a strong central government, it was feared payment would have to be made.
These debts were mostly due in England. The influence which this matter had is shown by Hildreth—History of U. S., Vol. IV., p. 37—whom we here quote. Speaking of the parties in Virginia, he says: "What tended to strengthen the anti-Federal party in Virginia was the large amount of old debts due to British merchants, for enforcing the payment of which it was feared the new Constitution would afford additional facilities. * * These debts were estimated at ten millions of dollars by Jefferson. They had become hereditary from father to son for many generations, so that the planters were a species of property annexed to certain mercantile houses in London. The idea of being again subjected to this thraldom, or, at least, to square up the old accounts, had a very great influence in diffusing and holding up anti-Federal ideas, not only in Virginia, but also through the entire south, from which another ten millions were due." Surely, not a very laudable motive or a just idea of liberty.

The best statement favorable to the anti-Federalists is that of Mr. Everett, article as given above. After speaking of the presumption in their favor, he says: "They had also the popular pretence of asserting the rights of states against the encroachments of government:—another golden topic." A golden topic, indeed, with which to catch the popular ear. "Nor did they want authority," he continues, "to back their reasoning. * * John Hancock and Samuel Adams were very doubtful friends of the Constitution. On the other hand, who were its principal partisans? The Parsons, the Kings, the Ames, and so forth. Men of yesterday—young lawyers before unknown to the country. They gave proof no doubt of eloquence, of talent, of book-learning; but were these qualities, however precious in their way, to counterbalance the mature wisdom, the rich experience, the tried patriotism of the incomparable fathers of our liberty?" But Hancock and Adams were certainly not friends of the Confederation; and men "before unknown" are often made known by circumstances like these and their wisdom proved. To make the case stronger—quoting from the same source: "Look now at Virginia. Mr. Madison, a young barrister about thirty years of age, comes forward and proposes to his fellow citizens to abandon a part of their individual and state rights, and submit to a general government, possessing large and, because untried, of course unknown powers:—to acknowledge a single ruler (monarch) under the name of a president, the precise extent of whose authority future experience alone could determine. The proposition was, it must be owned, not very palatable, and might well have alarmed a people less jealous on the subject of state rights than that of the Ancient Dominion. Under these circumstances, the oldest and most respected of the revolutionary patriots,—the man who was the first in all the country to raise the cry of independence,—Patrick Henry himself,—tells them in the same familiar voice, sweeter than music, that was never known to deceive,—that never lisped a sound that was not as pure and as true as the word of inspiration,—that Mr. Madison, though a clever and honest man, is wrong—that the innovations he proposes are dangerous,—that under the name of a president he is imposing upon the country a tyrant in disguise, who will place one foot upon the border of Maine and the other upon the furthest extremity of Georgia, and then—farewell to liberty!" In other words,
“better endure the ills we have, than fly to those we know not of.” But as the vices of the old system would soon have led to entire separation, and death as a nation—the certainty of which was evident at the time—all this rhetoric and hesitation, this fear of dreams to come, seems now unwarranted. There certainly could not have been formed a much worse or a more poorly administered government, and there was a chance for a much better one in the change. A monarchy over the whole people, under the circumstances, was an impossibility. The new government must necessarily have been republican, and that, too, with a great degree of individual liberty. The thing really to be feared, quotation from Mr. Everett to the contrary notwithstanding, was the encroachment of the states upon the general government. States, with the territory and resources of New York and Virginia, did not need to fear a central power without territory except that contained in the states and without resources, at that time, except as derived from them.

The opposition to the Constitution is very strongly shown by the time which elapsed after the adjournment of the convention, September 17, 1787, before the requisite number of states ratified. The first to ratify was Delaware, unanimously, on December 3, following the adjournment. The ninth was New Hampshire, June 28, 1788, by a vote of 57 to 56. But three states, Delaware, New Jersey and Georgia, gave an unanimous assent. Connecticut ratified by a majority of 128 to 40—88; Maryland, 63 to 12—51; South Carolina, 149 to 73—76; the remainder by only small majorities—Massachusetts by but 19, the vote being 187 to 168. It is somewhat odd that South Carolina, which afterward gave a name to a peculiarly state right doctrine, “nullification,” or the “South Carolina doctrine,” should have ratified with so large a majority, while Massachusetts, at a later time one of the most staunch upholders of the Union, should have given such a meager assent. North Carolina did not ratify until November, 1789, and Rhode Island not till May 29, 1790.

A number of the states on ratification proposed amendments which they considered essential, or made declarations of rights. Virginia, which ratified by ten majority, proposed many amendments and made a declaration as follows: “We, the delegates of the people of Virginia, * * do, in the name and in behalf of the people of Virginia, declare and make known that the powers granted under the Constitution, being derived from the people of the United States, may be resumed by them whenever they shall be perverted to their injury or oppression,” etc. This sounds queer from a state professing radical state right doctrines; for it is in direct opposition to that principle. It declares their belief in the right of the whole people to do away with an existing form of government—a right which no one will deny—but does not express belief in the right of individuals, either persons or states, to secede. Evidently the delegates of Virginia did not understand the force of their declaration. New Hampshire recommended twelve amendments; Massachusetts, nine; New York, a number and a declaration; North Carolina, a bill of rights and several amendments.

These cases are sufficient to show that the Constitution was accepted only as the best thing under the circumstances; as an act of faith, it was not at all sublime.

When we come to look at the manner of ratification,
the wonder is that the Constitution ever was adopted. It was to be ratified by conventions in the several states. In many cases, but a small part of the voters went to the polls for the election of delegates to those conventions. Those who were unwilling either to oppose the measure or to uphold it, stayed away; yet, had they voted, would probably have cast their ballots for men who would not have been in favor of ratification. It was by but small majorities of not more than half the voters that the delegates were elected; so that it was by barely one-third of the voters that the Constitution was carried into effect. We can look upon the happy termination of the contest as little less than a miracle.

We take the liberty of inserting here a striking paragraph from Hildreth's history, Vol. V., p. 414: "From the first moment that party lines had been distinctly drawn, the opposition had possessed a numerical majority against which nothing but the superior intelligence and practical skill of the Federalists, backed by the great and venerable name and towering influence of Washington, had enabled them to maintain an arduous and doubtful struggle. The Federal party, with Washington and Hamilton at its head, represented the experience, the prudence, the practical wisdom, the discipline and conservative reason and instincts of the country. The opposition, headed by Jefferson, expressed its hopes, wishes, theories, many of them enthusiastic and impracticable, more especially its passions, its sympathies and antipathies, and its impatience of restraint."

Further, in regard to the geographical strongholds of the two parties and the character of the populations: "The Federalists had their strength in those narrow districts where a concentrated population had produced and contributed to maintain that complexity of institutions and that reverence for social order, which, in proportion as men are brought into contiguity, become more absolutely necessaries of existence. The ultra democratic ideas of the opposition prevailed in all that more extensive region in which the dispersion of population, and the despotic authority vested in individuals over large families of slaves, kept society in a state of immaturity, and made legal restraints the more irksome in proportion as their necessity was less felt. Massachusetts and Connecticut stood at the head of one party.*  

* * * The other party was led by Virginia, by whose finger all the states south and west of the Potomac might be considered to be guided. In the tide-water district of South Carolina, indeed, a certain number of the wealthier and more intelligent planters, led by a few men of talents and probity, were inclined to support the Federal policy, so ably defended in congress by Smith, Harper, Pinckney and Rutledge. But the mass of the voting population felt and thought otherwise." "The rapidly increasing backwoods settlements constantly added new strength to the opposition." This was said of the parties as they stood a few years after the adoption of the Constitution, but it applies as well to the condition previous to the adoption.

A sufficient number of states having ratified by June 21, 1788, it became certain that the new Constitution would go effect, and preparations were set on foot in different parts of the country for making the approaching fourth of July one of more than usual rejoicing. In Philadelphia there was a grand celebration. In other places the sentiment was so
strong against the measure that the ceremonies of the day were interfered with and suppressed.

March 4, 1789, the first congress met in Federal Hall at New York, but a quorum was not obtained until nearly the end of the month. George Washington and John Adams were then declared elected President and Vice-President of the United States, in accordance with the constitutional provision.

After the Constitution had been in operation some time, scarcely anyone could be found opposed to it; but the parties divided as to the construction to be placed upon the different articles. The Federalists favored a liberal construction; the anti-Federalists adhered to the "letter of the law."

On the questions of the "National Bank," "Assumption of State Debts," the "Funding System," etc., the parties were again divided. The Federalists favored these measures, the other party opposed them.

With the close of Adams' administration the Federalists lost their political ascendancy, and Republican leaders held the chief positions. The increase of democratic ideas, for causes already mentioned, together with division in the party itself, brought about the change. While it was in power, however, what more could be asked of it than it accomplished? It is praise enough of any party to say that it framed the Constitution, adopted it, and carried it into successful operation in the face of an opposition with which few measures have to contend. But more than that, it pursued a financial policy which brought immediate relief to an over-taxed people, and which led to the speedy liquidation of the revolutionary debt.

Of the anti-Federal policy after its accession to power Hildreth says—Vol. V. p. 418: "But though the Federal party fell never to rise again, it left behind it permanent monuments. The whole machinery of the federal government, as it now exists, must be considered the work of that party. With every individual part of that machinery * * * the opposition had found most critical and pertenacious fault. We shall soon see how, themselves in power, they at once adopted the greater part of this very machinery, and how they were ultimately driven again to restore, with hardly an exception, all those portions with which they had attempted at first to dispense:—testimony as irrefragible as it was reluctant, that however the so-called Republican leaders might excel the Federalists in the arts of popularity, the best thing they could do, in the constructive part of politics, was humbly to follow the models they had once calumniated."

A review of these parties necessitates the consideration of the chiefs of them. Undoubtedly, Jefferson was at the head of the Republican; Hamilton, the foremost man of the Federal party.

There have been great numbers of men within the past fifty years, and there are some to-day, though the number is fast decreasing, who came to their political belief more by inheritance than by any thought of their own, that rejoiced in styling themselves "Jeffersonian Democrats." Were the extreme principles of the Republicans (and here it must be borne in mind that the names anti-Federalist, Democrat, and Republican, for the time under discussion, are synonymous) such principles as one might, with just pride, maintain? The foregoing discussion would answer, No. Was the character
of Jefferson, viewed solely in a political light, one that should excite enthusiasm or worship? The conclusion again must be negative; yet such has been the quality of the honor paid to him.

Jefferson was, without doubt, patriotic; we can also give him credit for honesty and for talents of a certain order. His services in the legislature of Virginia, as minister to France, and as Washington's Secretary of State had served to bring him prominently before the public. By advocating doctrines which were increasing in popularity he became president.

We find in his system of political philosophy, however, that Jefferson was given to the ultra principles of the French revolutionists. His attention had been fixed more upon the abuse of power than upon the use of it. The sentiments set forth in the Declaration of Independence, of which he was the chief author, were intensified by his residence abroad, where he was the center of the group that formulated a constitution for the revolutionists. Whether he was influenced by the French, or whether the French influenced him, as some have held, makes very little difference. The fact that he held extreme ideas remains the same. The spirit of the age was revolutionary, and, no doubt, the French were inspired by the success of the Americans. They were suffering from the effects of accumulated misgovernment. Their desire for liberty was strong; they sympathised with us in our struggle for freedom, and they sent us great aid in our need. There were not wanting those in this country who sympathised with them in their revolution. But the circumstances of the two countries were different. The colonies aimed merely at political separation from a distant country, and at self-government. The revolutionary party of France aimed at the overthrow of the entire existing form of government at home. They would substitute a rule of "reason," of equal rights(?), of liberty. The result is well-known—a despotism worse than ever. Jefferson was one of their most ardent sympathisers in this country. This sympathy was caused partly by gratitude, partly by a love for liberty. But, under the circumstances, this country owed no debt of gratitude. To individuals it did; to the revolutionary party it did not owe any such debt. Herein, and in their hatred for everything British, Jefferson and the Democratic party worked great mischief to this country. By ratifying Jay's treaty, Washington preserved ten years of peace between England and the United States. By refusing to ratify the treaty negotiated by Pinckney, Jefferson involved us in an unnecessary war with that nation—a war as unprofitable as it was unnecessary.

Another fault in Jefferson's political philosophy: his test of the right or wrong of a measure was the decision of the people. If a proposition was responded to with a hearty assent by the people, well and good: right. If it was rejected by them, well and good: wrong. He believed in the saying, "the voice of the people is the voice of God." This may be true when the decision is the result of the sober judgment of the best men in the country; but as he applied the maxim nothing can be more false: the masses will usually assent to the measures of a popular leader without very close questioning. Jefferson's constituency did not include the more sober class of citizens.
In his relations with Washington and Hamilton, while in the cabinet, Jefferson pursued a most undignified part. Insanely jealous of Hamilton because of his success at the head of the treasury, he did everything in his power against that great man. He patronized and kept in his office the editor of a paper, the chief object of which was the calumnyation of Washington and Hamilton. Upon Hamilton, monarchical conspiracy, and corruption in office were charged. By way of response to Washington's farewell address the *Aurora* said: "If ever a nation was debauched by a man, the American nation has been debauched by Washington. If ever a nation was deceived by a man, the American nation has been deceived by Washington." In all these attacks Jefferson was let entirely alone; but, on the other hand, he was applauded on every occasion.

Before he was elected president, no man was more outspoken on the question of state rights than Jefferson. After he became president, no one has been less willing to relinquish any of the executive powers, and, in fact, no one, unless it be Jackson, has strained that authority to such limits as he. Thus we find that it became necessary for those who advocated the liberal construction to do battle in that very respect against the chief of those who had advocated the opposite.

The tendency is, because a man has held high positions, to call him great. Jefferson's greatness, if it may be so designated, consisted in his mastery of the arts of popularity.

*The Constitution of the United States, as it is to-day, must, in the main, be considered as the work of the Federal party. In that party, Alexander Hamilton was the chief man. For this reason alone he should deserve our attention. How much more ought one to consider his character when his various achievements are known.

In whatever position we find him, whether as clerk in a merchant's office, as college student, as aide-de-camp, lawyer, or member of the cabinet, he gives tokens of a master mind.

When but seventeen years of age he addressed an audience on the college green in New York, taking sides against the president of the college, on the political questions just previous to the revolution, and maintaining his propositions with wonderful reasoning.

On the battle-field, the trusted companion of Washington, he conducts the masterly retreat from Long Island, and leads the victorious charge at Yorktown.

But it was in his capacity as member of the Constitutional Convention and as cabinet officer that he won his proudest laurels. While yet engaged in the hurried life of war, he had formed a scheme of government for this nation. To him belongs the great honor of framing our Constitution and of defending it with invincible logic against all opposers. With pen and with silver speech he appealed to the reason of men whom he would influence, and not to the wild sentiments of the unthinking. It has been said that Hamilton had little confidence in the judgment of the people. This may be true, yet no one strove harder than he to educate the people upon those questions which require much information for sound judgment. Guizot said of Hamilton, "He best understood the vital principles of government."

Of his success as Secretary of the Treasury, we have the eloquent testimony of Webster: "He smote the rock of the"
national resources, and abundant streams of revenue gushed forth. He touched the dead corpse of the public credit, and it sprang upon its feet. The fabled birth of Minerva from the brain of Jove was hardly more sudden or more perfect than the financial system of the United States as it burst forth from the conceptions of Alexander Hamilton."

This great man, who fought for the liberty of the country, who gave it its code, and who assisted so materially in its successful administration under difficulties that can now hardly be appreciated, was charged with monarchical conspiracy. That nothing could be further from his thoughts, his writings and the testimony of his friends conclusively prove.

His untimely and violent death cast a great sorrow over the young republic, and caused a loss which can not be estimated. The victim of a foul conspiracy, this prince among men was cut off in his prime. The manner of his taking off can be considered as nothing less than a cold-blooded murder.

Our country has brought forth many great men. "The times that tried men's souls" tested in the fires of war some royal metal. The highest rank is conceded to our first president. We must, however, place next to the sterling Washington the no less worthy, soldier, orator, statesman, Alexander Hamilton.