BEN FRANKLIN'S ADDRESS TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION 1787

ON THE FAULTS OF THE CONSTITUTION

I confess that I do not entirely approve of this Constitution at present; but, sir, I am not sure I shall never approve of it, for having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged, by better information or fuller consideration, to change opinions even on important subjects, which I once though right, but found to be otherwise.

Most men, indeed, as well as most sects in religion. think themselves in possession of all truth, and that wherever others differ from them, it is so far error. Steele, a Protestant, in a dedication, tells the Pope that the only difference between our two churches in their opinions of the certainty of their doctrine is, the Romanish Church is infallible, and the Church of England is never wrong.

But, though many private persons think almost as highly of their own infallibility as of that of their sect, few express it so naturally as a certain French lady, who, in a little dispute with her sister, said: "But I meet with nobody but myself that is always in the right."

In these sentiments, sir, I agree to this Constitution with all its faults -- if they are such -- because I think a general government necessary for us, and there is no form of government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered; and I believe, further, that this is likely to be well administered for a course of years, and can only end in despotism, as other forms have done before it, when the people shall become so corrupted as to need despotic government, being incapable of any other. I doubt, too, whether any other convention we can obtain may be able to make a better Constitution; for, when you assemble a number of men, to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitable assemble with those men all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected?

It therefore astonishes me, sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does; and I think it will astonish our enemies, who are waiting with confidence to hear that our counsels are confounded like those of the builders of Babel, and that our states are on the point of separation, only to meet hereafter for the purpose of cutting one another's throats.

Thus I consent sir, to this Constitution, because I expect no better, and because I am not sure that it is not the best. The opinions I have had of its errors I sacrifice to the public good. I have never whispered a syllable of them abroad. Within these walls they were born, and here they shall die. If every

one of us, in returning to our constituents, were to report the objections he has had to it, and endeavor to gain partizans in support of them, we might prevent its being generally received, and thereby lose all the salutary effects and great advantages resulting naturally in our favor among foreign nations, as well as among ourselves, from our real or apparent unanimity. Much of the strength and efficiency of any government, in procuring and securing happiness to the people, depends on opinion, on the general opinion of the goodness of that government, as well as of the wisdom and integrity of its governors.

I hope, therefore, for our own sakes as a part of the people, and for the sake of our posterity, that we shall act heartily and unanimously in recommending this Constitution wherever our influence may extend, and turn our future thoughts and endeavors to the means of having it well administered.

On the whole, sir, I can not help expressing a wish that every member of the convention who may still have objections to it, would, with me, on this occasion, doubt a little of his own infallibility, and to make manifest our unanimity, put his name to this instrument.

C O M P R O M I S E can be an ugly word, signifying a pact with the devil, a chipping off of the best to suit the worst. Yet in the Constitutional Convention the spirit of compromise reigned in grace and glory; as Washington presided, it sat on his shoulder like the dove. Men rise to speak and one sees them struggle with the bias of birthright, locality, statehood -- South against North, East against West, merchant against planter. One sees them change their minds, fight against pride, and when the moment comes, admit their error. If the story is old, the feelings behind it are new as Monday morning. -- "Miracle at Philadelphia."

LET THE CREDIT GO WHERE IT BELONGS

"It's not the critic that counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or whether the doer of deeds could have done them better," he said. "The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs, and often comes up short again and again.

"Who knows the great enthusiasms, the great great devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause. And who, if at best in the end, knows the triumph of higher treatment and high achievement. And who at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly so that his soul shall never be with those cold and timid ones who know neither victory nor defeat.

"Every man thinks
his own geese swans."

Leo

THURSDAY

14

AUGUST

1986

AUGUST hath 31 days.

"The best mirror is an old friend."

Taurus

TUESDAY

13

MAY

1986

MAY hath 31 days.

"The man who never makes a mistake seldom makes anything."

Cancer

TUESDAY

24 JUNE

1986

JUNE hath 30 days.

"Small deeds done are better than great deeds planned."

First Quarter ◐
Gemini ♊

SATURDAY 14 / 15 SUNDAY

JUNE

Flag Day (Saturday) / Father's Day (Sunday)

1986

JUNE hath 30 days.

"If the world hands you a lemon, squeeze it — and start a lemonade stand!"