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NEW-YORK, SEPTEMBER 12, 1789.

SKETCH OF PROCEEDINGS OF CONGRESS.

In the HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES of the UNITED STATES,

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3.

Debate on the subject of fixing the PERMANENT SEAT of GOVERNMENT—Continued.

THE motion of Mr. GOODHUE being read, Mr. MADISON observed, that as the gentleman has been candid enough to inform the committee that their measures have been preconcerted, and that the better half of the Union are to be disposed of by contract, at the sovereign will of the other, I hope they will be also so candid as to show in the clearest manner, that the principles which have now been established are applicable to the motion made by the Member from Massachusetts. I wish they would prove that the place which they have pitched upon, is in fact the permanent center, and New-York the temporary center of wealth, population and extent of territory, that the grounds may be known on which this great question is to be decided.

Mr. GOODHUE replied that the Susquehanna is not far from the center of territory; that it is further fourth than the center of population, which may fall somewhere on the Delaware. I believe that this center of population will never alter materially, as I suppose it will always incline towards the manufacturing States.

Mr. JACKSON I was originally opposed to the question's coming forward, and am so still. I thought the subject ought not to be touched upon till the States who have not yet acceded to the Union might have an opportunity of giving their voice; I agree with the gentleman from Virginia. I am sorry that people should learn that this matter has been precipitated; that they should learn that the Members from New-England and New-York had fixed on a seat of government for the United States. This is not proper language to go out to freemen. Jealousies have already gone abroad. This language will blow the coals of fedition and endanger the Union. I would ask if the other members of the Union are not also to be consulted? Are the Eastern members to dictate in this business, and fix the seat of government of the United States? Why not also fix the principles of government? Why not come forward and demand of us the power of legislation, and say, give us your privileges, and we will govern for you? If one part has the power to fix the seat of government, they may as well take the government from the other—This looks like aristocracy. Not the United, but the partial voice of America is to decide—how can gentlemen answer for this, who call themselves Representatives on the broad basis of national interest?

I deny the fact of the territorial centrality of the place proposed. From New-York to the nearest part of the province of Maine, it is two hundred and fifty miles; and from New-York to the nearest part of the upper district of Georgia, from which my Colleague, General Matthews comes is eleven hundred miles; and from the proposed place on Susquehanna, it is four hundred miles to the nearest part of Maine, and goes to the nearest part of that district.—The proportion is more than four to one. But the gentleman should have an eye to the population of Georgia. One of the finest countries in the world can not but rapidly extend her population. Nothing but her being harassed by the inroads of savages, has checked her amazing increase, which must under the auspices of peace and safety people her western regions.—Georgia will soon be as populous as any State in the Union. Calculations ought not to be made on its present situation.

He concluded with expressing himself in favor of the Patowmac. Mr. GOODHUE replied that the distance from that part of the province of Maine, from which one of his Colleagues came, to Susquehanna is seven hundred and sixty miles; from Savannah, to the same center about seven hundred; and from Kentucky nearly the same.

Mr. LAURANCE observed, that when this matter was under discussion some time, it appeared to be the wish of the members from the eastward, and of the Representation from this State, that this question should not now be decided. They urged several reasons why it would be improper. I thought those reasons weighty, and was for postponing the consideration till next meeting; But it was answered that the business was important; that the citizens of the United States were uneasy and anxious, that factions did not now exist; and that it was now the proper time to decide this question. What was the Representation from the eastward to do? Was it not necessary for them to consult, and fix upon the proper place?

They are disinterested. It is well known, he said, that government is expected to be fixed in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, or Jersey. We are called on to determine on a question in which we conceive ourselves unbiased, and to determine it on those principles which will reflect honor on this House. I trust it will be found that we have fixed on those principles, and that this resolution will be confirmed by Congress. We do not, he said, decide for the Union, nor for the southern States. We decide for ourselves, and if our reasons are substantial, I trust that gentlemen will meet us in the determination.

There are several principles which have been agreed to in the general resolution. I believe it will be shown with exactness, that the place proposed will come within these principles. The first respects population. Is the House to consider the present or the expected population? The resolution has a determinate meaning: It speaks of the population at the present period; and to calculate on this principle, gentlemen can not say is unjust. The Representation in this House is itself a demonstration of it. The population of this country may be determined pretty safely by the proportion in the House; for it is probable that it is established on this ground. I believe therefore that the principle of population leads to this place in preference to a more southern situation.

But to take up the principle of territory, are the House to calculate on the unhabited wilderness? Shall they take the Lake of the Woods on one side, and the Missouri on the other, and find a geographical center? If so, to what an extent must they go? The inhabited and populated part of the country ought chiefly to be considered. If St. Croix is taken as the eastern limit, and St. Mary as the southern, the center of the line will be found to fall pretty near the Susquehanna.

It is another important consideration that this center is on navigable water, and sufficiently removed from the Atlantic coast, and from access by sea, as to ensure security. With respect to the Western Country, its situation is convenient and favorable, with a communication by land and water, practicable and easy. But another principle should be attended to. It has been hinted that this ought not to govern; but I think it of some importance. Gentlemen should look to those parts of the country where is the highest population, the commercial and opulent cities, and see where is the substantial wealth, the strength of the Union, means by which the United States are to be protected, and the sources from which the government is to draw its principal supports. It will be found that the seat of these is the northern and eastern States.

If the eastern Members had consulted their own interests, they would have chosen the banks of the Delaware; but they knew it

would not be deciding on those generous principles, which might be expected. They knew that there is one State not yet in the Union, to which such a measure would give disgust.

Mr. SEDGWICK asked if there was really any impropriety in gentlemen's consulting together, who had a uniformity of interests upon a question, which it had been said, was so infinitely important. My colleague, said he, has barely stated that such a consultation has taken place, and that in consequence of it, men's minds have been induced to run in a current. Is there any thing wrong in this? Let those who are determined not to consult not have any communication on such a subject, determine for themselves. I should think myself lost to that regard which I owe to my country, and immediate constituents in particular, should I abstract myself from the contemplation of the benefits which would flow from knowing the feelings and sentiments of those with whom I am to act. Instead of being an evidence of that aristocratic spirit which has been mentioned, it is only a proof that men, attentive to their business had preferred that way, which every honest man must have had in view. I have contemplated the subject with great anxiety, and though I can not declare that my local situation has had no influence on my mind, yet I will say I endeavored that it should have none. I believe that the true interests of the country will be best answered by taking a position eastward and northward of the Susquehanna. The Delaware is one extreme, the Patowmac another. But when I reflect how anxious some gentlemen are for one, and some for the other. I am willing to accommodate by advancing to a middle ground, to which I hope the public mind will be reconciled. In fixing this opinion I was also influenced by the sentiment of the celebrated Montesquieu. He has laid it down that in a country partaking of northern and southern interests, of a poor and a productive soil, the center and the influence of government ought to incline to that part where the former circumstances prevailed; because necessity stimulates to industry, produces habits and a surplus of labour; because such parts are the nurseries of soldiers and sailors, and the sources of that energy which is the best security of the government.

The Susquehanna in my opinion is southwest of the center of wealth, population and resources of every kind. I would suggest another idea. In my view, on the principles of population, the Susquehanna is far beyond the center; for I do not think it just on this subject to take the constitutional computation. Will any gentleman pretend that men who are merely the subject of property or wealth should be taken into the estimate, that the slaves of the country, men, who have no rights to protect, being deprived of them all, should be taken into view in determining the center of government? If they are considered, gentlemen may as well estimate the black cattle of New-England.

I would ask if it is of no importance to take a position in which the credit of the government may procure those supplies, that its necessities might require. Will the strength and riches of the country be to the north or to the south of the Susquehanna? Certainly to the north.

It is an opinion of all the eastern States, that the climate of Patowmac, is not only unhealthy but destructive to northern constitutions. It is of importance to attend to this: for let the thing be true or false, such is the public prepossession. Vast numbers of eastern adventurers have gone to the southern States, and all have found their graves there. They have met destruction as soon as they arrived. These accounts have been spread, and filled the northern people with apprehension.

With regard to the temporary residence, I originally had very little concern where it should be, but I believe that if the government should take a temporary stand so central as Philadelphia, so seducing would be the accommodations of that city, and so strong the interest of that powerful State, that it would be more difficult to remove Congress ever from it, than from a place which is acknowledged to be improper for their permanent seat.

Mr. VINING observed, that he must acknowledge himself a party to the bargain, though he had no share in making it. It is, said he, an unexpected bargain to me, though it involves the interests of the State which I represent. I am yet to learn whether Congress are to tickle the trout in the stream of the Codorus, to build their sumptuous palaces on the banks of the Patowmac, or to admire commerce, with her expanded wings on the waters of the Delaware. I have on this occasion educated my mind to impartiality, and have chartered its prejudices.

I confess to the House and to the world, that viewing this subject with all its circumstances, I am in favor of the Patowmac. I wish the seat of government to be fixed there, because I think the interest, the honor, and the greatness of this country require it. I look on it as the center from which those streams are to flow, that are to animate and invigorate the body politic. From thence it appears to me the rays of government will most naturally diverge to the extremities of the Union. I declare that I look on the Western Territory in an awful and striking point of view. To that region the unpolished sons of the earth are flocking from all quarters. Men to whom the protection of the laws and the controlling force of the government are equally necessary from this great consideration I conclude that the banks of the Patowmac are the proper station.

With respect to the temporary residence. The accommodations which have been mentioned operate as reasons against New-York. It is indeed but too agreeable; its allures are too dangerous; when I look round I see such handsome arguments addressed to my feelings that my understanding dreads their impression.

Mr. LEE moved to strike out the words "east bank of the Susquehanna" and to insert a clause to this effect, That whereas the banks of the Patowmac united all the aforesaid advantages with fertility of soil, salubrity of climate, &c. Resolved that the permanent seat of government ought to be fixed some where on the banks of the said river.

He then stated at large the comparative advantages of Patowmac, its great and increasing improvements, the extent of its navigation, its direct communication with the Western Country, and its easy communication with the Eastern and Southern States.

The House, he said, are now to determine whether regard is to be had to a central position—whether regard is to be had to the people of the Western Territory, to the greater portion of the territory of the Union: In point of climate, it is extremely salubrious, in fertility it is exceeded by no country on earth. Thither will emigrants from all quarters flock.

I ask if this government is intended for a temporary or a lasting one; whether it is to be a fleeting vision, or to continue for ages? I hope that the result will proclaim that the government is calculated for perpetuity, and that the common interests of the country have been consulted. If that is done, the government will be removed to the Patowmac; if not, we shall stop short of it; and what will be the consequence? I am averse to sound alarms, or introduce terrors into the House; but if they are well founded, I think it my duty. It is well known with what difficulty the Constitution was adopted by the State of Virginia. It was then said that there would be confederacies of the States East of Pennsylvania, which would destroy the Southern States. That they would unite their councils in discussing questions relative to their particular interests, and the Southern States would be disregarded. To these suspicions it was answered, no! It was contended that the magnanimous policy arising from mutual interests and com-

mon dangers would unite all the States, and make them pursue objects of general good. But if it should be found that there are such confederacies as were predicted, that the Northern States do consult their partial interests, and form combinations to support them, without regarding their Southern brethren, they will be alarmed, and the faith of all fourth of the Patowmac will be shaken. It will be shown to them, that what was predicted by the enemies to the Constitution has come to pass, that the Northern States have not even waited till the Government was organized, but are sacrificing the Southern people to their own interests.

Let the seat be fixed where it will, Virginia has not solicited Congress to place its feet in her State. She only contends that the interests of the Southern and Western country should be consulted. And I declare, that these interests will be sacrificed if Congress fixes on any place but the Patowmac. The greater part of Virginia is distant from that river. Many parts are not nearer than New-Jersey. She wishes not to have the seat on the Patowmac but for the general good. It is not for the benefit of that State, but the Union.

Mr. LAURANCE said it is improper and unnecessary to hold out terrors to the fancy of members. The true way to convince them is to address their understanding. I am sure there is no dangerous confederacy which the gentleman has talked of. I believe that the conduct of the Northern States will bear the strictest scrutiny; that if probed to the bottom it will be found fair and candid. I remember in the debate upon the tonnage bill a gentleman from Virginia observed that could the moderate and equal policy of that day's proceeding have been foreseen in the Convention of Virginia, it would have obviated many objections that were there produced against the Constitution.

In conducting the business before us, I trust that gentlemen will find no cause eventually to entertain different sentiments from what he then delivered.

Mr. MADISON: I admit that on a former occasion I applied the remark quoted by the gentleman from New-York; but I now as verily believe, that had a Prophet started up in that Convention, and foretold the proceedings of this day, Virginia would not now be a party to this Constitution. A motion being made for rising.

Mr. SEDGWICK: I hope the committee will not rise. Will it be contended, that the majority shall not govern; and shall the minority because they can not carry their points, accuse the House of want of candor? Are we to be told that an important State would not have joined the Union had they known what would have been the proceedings of this House? Gentlemen have brought forward this business themselves: They have precipitated the House into it. We prayed, said he, we supplicated for time; and now gentlemen from some causes not explained, wish to postpone the matter, in order to have time to deliberate. I believe that a deliberation of six weeks would not alter a single opinion, and it is not proper to consume the public time uselessly.

Mr. MADISON contended for a postponement as a right. Debate ought not to be precluded, said he. The minority certainly are to be governed by the majority, but they claim a right to bring forward all those facts and arguments which can have any possible influence. It is unusual to press for a decision on occasions like these, after a partial discussion of a single day. Questions of less magnitude has occupied weeks. This business presents an aspect; it marks a genius in this body, which will contradict the expectations of its warmest friends. I wish to make many observations for which there is not now an opportunity. I wish to speak to gentlemen who will open their ears; and not to silent majorities, who bear down every thing before them. I hope another day to experience a cooler and more favorable temper.

Mr. AMES: I remember, said he, that when this subject came before the House the other day, when we solicited for delay, it was observed that the necessities of the Union required an immediate decision—that it would take up but little time—that the proper centre might be easily ascertained—that this would depend on geographical calculation, and that little discussion would be necessary. Now, when circumstances appear to be changed—when the calculation is made—when the House are ready to vote, gentlemen come forward and pretend that they want time. I hope the question will be now decided. While I am up I would observe that I do not entertain a doubt of the patriotism and good intentions of the gentlemen from Virginia. I believe however, that their judgments are influenced by their wishes, for they seem to be engaged with a degree of eagerness which none else appear to feel. The very language of their motion declares this. They seem to think the banks of Patowmac a paradise, and that river a Euphrates. I have been told it is a fine spot—and I sincerely wish those blessings may ever reside there.

Mr. BURKE: The Northern States have had a fortnight to manage this matter, and will not now allow the Southern a day. What is the conduct of gentlemen? A league has been formed between the Northern States and Pennsylvania. [Here Mr. Fitzsimons contradicted him.] This morning furnished the first information of it. I want information. I call on gentlemen for the honor of the House to give more time.

The question on rising was carried.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 4.

Mr. SCOTT, being called on, said, he had no objection to give his sentiments. The resolve which I laid on the table has been honored by a majority of the House. It contains such principles as I believe ought to govern in the settlement of this grand question. Whether the place which has been moved for is the right one, is a matter yet to be decided.

Taking the Atlantic coast for a guide, the Susquehanna involves undoubtedly the center of wealth, population and territory. All that has been said of the western territory has not induced me to wish that all that immense country should be brought into view. The resolution holds out an idea that the Atlantic States should go as near that country as their own convenience would allow. This is all I expect or hope for. I am convinced that to go farther west than this point of convenience, would be to injure the Western Territory itself. The question seems to lie between the Susquehanna and Patowmac. The center which I contemplate lies between them, at nearly equal distances, but rather nearer the latter. I am pretty well acquainted with both rivers.

He then gave a geographical description of those rivers, which to avoid any possible errors, we shall not attempt to trace. The description related to their several advantages of communication with the Western Territory. In his calculation he considered Pittsburgh as the key of that Territory; and that the advantages of one river or the other must be determined, by its relation to the place. The result of his detail was a conclusion clearly in favor of the Patowmac. To do justice to the committee, he said, I must declare that there is no comparison between the advantages of one communication and the other, with respect to the Ohio Country. Patowmac will no doubt, one day, be a very important channel into those regions.

He concluded by observing, that though he thought that the Patowmac was nearer that centre of communication between the Atlantic and the Ohio, than the Susquehanna, as there was no prospect of a decision in favor of the former, he should give his vote for the Susquehanna. In this situation, as he was a native of Pennsylvania, there was a certain duty which he owed to his country, and which he should now perform.