

has been so eminent and distinguished. He, (Mr. J.,) would ask the clerk to read from the debates of the North Carolina Convention the portions which he has marked beginning at page 358

The clerk then read as follows:

"Mr. Gaston of Craven, observed, that it would be recollected the Convention, that some days ago he had laid on the table a resolution involving an important principle, as he conceived, the consideration of which he now asked for. Since the introduction of the resolution, he had reflected much on the subject matter of it, and his views, as to the expediency of adopting the principle suggested, were more thoroughly confirmed. He wished to have it acted on with deliberation, and hoped the Convention would therefore now take it up.

The resolution read as follows:

"Resolved: That it is expedient, in framing amendments to the Constitution, on the subject of representation, in the House of Commons, to provide, that in making every apportionment, the Legislature shall divide, or cause to be divided, those counties to which more than two representatives shall be assigned, into election districts, consisting severally of contiguous territory, and of equal federal numbers, as nearly as convenience will permit, each of which district shall elect one representative only."

"Mr. Gaston said he did not feel disposed to occupy much of the time of the Convention, and would herefore with the utmost brevity, consistent with perspicuity, state the reasons which induced him to bring forward this proposition. In the first place, it affords the best opportunity of having a full expression of the public voice. The chief object in all representative governments is to afford the people, whose conduct is regulated by legislative enactments, a full, fair and free opportunity for the deliberate expression of their will. And that mode of election is to be preferred, which gives the fairest chance of arriving at public sentiment. That this arrangement would afford such an opportunity, he thought demonstrable. By means of it, the same number of individuals in every part of the State will have equal weight. For instance, if a district should consist of 6 000 federal numbers, it would elicit as fully, as the nature of government will admit, a fair expression of public sentiment.

"But suppose a county with 24 000 federal numbers, entitled to four members, elected by the whole county—that 12 500 of these vote for one set, and 11,500 for another—the voice of all these freemen is unheard in the legislative hall. It was also the fairest arrangement for this reason. When in a county, there are a number of candidates, they form combinations and enter into intrigues. It is now frequently the case, that there is a tacit or express understanding between candidates to this effect:—"You run me in your end of the county, and I will press your claims in my neighborhood." And this kind of management increases in geometrical ratio as the number of representatives in a county increases. But where there is only one member to be elected, there is

a distinct expression in favor of one individual.

"There were other reasons why this arrangement should be adopted. He presumed every gentleman on that floor would admit that if the counties in the East had equalled in size and population those of the West, no Convention would ever have been demanded.

"The real grievance complained of by the West, and that it was a grievance he admitted, was that 5,000 men, in one section of the State had as much weight in the Legislature as 20,000 in another. It was not because counties were equal in representation, but unequal in numbers. To remedy this effectually, we ought to equalize as far as practicable the voice of the people in every part of the State. This will not be done if the large counties vote in common for the whole number of representatives to which they are entitled, as is now the usage—because the majority will be represented, but the minority will not. This mode gives to those who wield the power in large counties an unfair strength.

"In other States this evil has been prevented by increasing the ratio entitling to representation as the number of members increases. * * * For he asserted distinctly that this division of the large counties into districts would not derogate in the slightest degree from their political weight. But this effect would justly be produced. It would prevent a party having a temporary ascendancy in a county, from wielding it to purposes of personal aggrandizement. No one, he presumed, would deny that if every State in the Union would agree to choose their Electors of President and Vice President by districts, that it would be much the fairest mode. But the politicians of large States were always opposed to this change, because it prevents them from wielding, by the agency of combinations and caucuses, the entire power of the State. So, the politicians of these large counties may oppose the proposition to district them, from a similar views of policy. Another reason, said Mr. G., which operated with great force upon his mind, was this: He had more than once declared that he came to this Convention, neither as an Eastern or Western man, but to make peace and produce tranquility.

"Nothing can render the painful privation of political power more tolerable to the small counties, than the adoption of this plan. The delegates could then go home to their constituents and say—it is true you are entitled to but one member, and the county of Orange sends four: but it takes the same number of voters there to elect a member as it does with you, and therefore every voter has the same political weight. He thought it a matter of no slight importance in making a change involving principles of such magnitude, to render the operation of those principles as little unpleasant as possible."

It was objected (continued Mr. J.,) to the plan of Mr. Gaston, by Mr. Branch and others, that he left counties with two members undivided, and hence it was unequal. This objection cannot attach to the plan I propose. It was objected to his plan further, that the census was