

The emphatic testimonial which you have stamped upon my official course, has been received by me with feelings of deep emotion. The natural distrust which I felt of my own ability for this station, has been augmented in no common degree by the difficulties attending the peculiar organization of this body—difficulties, which have confronted us at every step of our progress, and the pressure of which has never for an instant ceased to be felt. But I can say, under a devout conviction of the truth of the declaration, that in administering the duties of this chair, I have been governed by a disinterested and pure desire to secure the freedom of debate, to protect the rights of individual members, and to promote the public welfare; “my witness is in Heaven, and my record is on high.”

Gentlemen, when by your too partial suffrages, I was elevated to this honorable position, I avowed without reservation the doubts and misgivings which perplexed my judgement upon the question of constitutional reform. The maturest reflection of which my mind was capable, had led me to the conclusion that many of the reforms which had been demanded, were not required by a sound regard for the public welfare, and that even in relation to those as to the necessity and expediency of which there might be less difference of opinion, the best and safest mode for their accomplishment was that which in a wise forethought our ancestors had themselves provided by the 59th article of the old constitution. I did not believe in the necessity of a resort to any of the forms of revolution to secure a remedy for any grievances under which this gallant old State of ours might be suffering. In change, for the mere sake of gratifying a vague and undefined love of change, I saw, or thought I saw, nothing but present discomfiture and future evil.

Entertaining those sentiments, I have witnessed with profound regret many of the features which have been embodied in the constitution now about to pass from our hands. That some changes, salutary, in my judgment, and therefore commanding my voice and my vote, have been made, I freely admit. But these changes are so few and light when weighed in the balance against graver and more objectionable features, that I have no alternative but to vote at the ballot-box, as I should have voted here, against the ratification of the instrument. This I do in no factious spirit. If my own forebodings should not be realized—if this constitution should be adopted by the people—if it should strengthen our union—cement our interests—foster our industry—promote civil and religious peace, and secure in a more eminent degree the blessings of that great republican liberty for which, in other times, the blood of our people was poured out like rain, my “right hand shall wither and my tongue shall cling to the roof of my mouth” sooner than I will raise an impious voice against it!

And now, gentlemen, we part, not, I trust, without a deeper sympathy in each others destinies, and a more devoted attachment