

AntiFederalist Papers

No. 5

Scotland and England - A Case in Point

A writer, under the signature Publius or The Federalist, No. V, in the Daily Advertiser, and in the New York Packet, with a view of proving the advantages which, he says, will be derived by the states if the new constitution is adopted, has given extracts of a letter from Queen Anne to the Scotch parliament, on the subject of a union between Scotland and England.

I would beg leave to remark, that Publius has been very unfortunate in selecting these extracts as a case in point, to convince the people of America of the benefits they would derive from a union, under such a government as would be effected by the new system. It is a certainty, that when the union was the subject of debate in the Scottish legislature, some of their most sensible and disinterested nobles, as well as commoners! (who were not corrupted by English gold), violently opposed the union, and predicted that the people of Scotland would, in fact, derive no advantages from a consolidation of government with England; but, on the contrary, they would bear a great proportion of her debt, and furnish large bodies of men to assist in her wars with France, with whom, before the union, Scotland was at all times on terms of the most cordial amity. It was also predicted that the representation in the parliament of Great Britain, particularly in the house of commons, was too small; forty-five members being very far from the proportion of Scotland, when its extent and numbers were duly considered; and that even they, being so few, might (or at least a majority of them might) at all times be immediately under the influence of the English ministry; and, of course, very little of their attention would be given to the true interest of their constituents, especially if they came in competition with the prospects of views of the ministry. How far these predictions have been verified I believe it will not require much trouble to prove. It must be obvious to everyone, the least acquainted with English history, that since the union of the two nations the great body of the people in Scotland are in a much worse situation now, than they would be, were they a separate nation. This will be fully illustrated by attending to the great emigrations which are made to America. For if the people could have but a common support at home, it is unreasonable to suppose that such large numbers would quit their country, break from the tender ties of kindred and friendship and trust themselves on a dangerous voyage across a vast ocean, to a country of which they can know but very little except by common report. I will only further remark, that it is not about two or three years since a member of the British parliament (I believe Mr. Dempster) gave a most pathetic description of the sufferings of the commonalty of Scotland, particularly on the sea coast, and endeavored to call the attention of parliament to their distresses, and afford them some relief by encouraging their fisheries. It deserves also to be remembered, that the people of Scotland, in the late war between France and Great Britain, petitioned to have arms and ammunition supplied them by their general government, for their defense, alleging that they were incapable of defending themselves and their property from an invasion unless they were assisted by government. It is a truth that their petitions were disregarded, and reasons were assigned, that it would be dangerous to entrust them with the means of defense, as they would then have it in their power to break the union. From this representation of the situation of Scotland, surely no one can draw any conclusion that this country would derive happiness or security from a government which would, in reality, give the people but the mere name of being free. For if the representation, stipulated by the constitution, framed by the late convention, be attentively and dispassionately considered, it must be obvious to every disinterested observer (besides many other weighty objections which will present themselves to view), that the number is not, by any means, adequate to the present inhabitants of this extensive continent, much less to those it will contain at a future period.

I observe that the writer above mentioned, takes great pains to show the disadvantages which would result from three or four distinct confederacies of these states. I must confess that I have not seen, in any of the pieces published against the proposed constitution, any thing which gives the most distant idea that their writers are in favor of such governments; but it is clear these objections arise from a consolidation not affording security for the liberties of their country, and from hence it must evidently appear, that the design of Publius, in artfully holding up to public view [the bugbear of] such confederacies, can be with no other intention than wilfully to deceive his fellow citizens. I am confident it must be, and that it is, the sincere wish of every true friend to the United States, that there should be a confederated national government, but that it should be one which would have a control over national and external matters only, and not interfere with the internal regulations and police of the different states in the union. Such a government, while it would give us respectability abroad, would not encroach upon, or subvert our liberties at home.

AN OBSERVER