

Autobiography

3,175
4,288

of

Thomas Jefferson

1743-1790

Together with

A Summary of the Chief Events in Jefferson's Life

An Introduction and Notes by
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and

A Foreword by
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The Declaration thus signed on the 4th, on paper was engrossed on parchment, & signed again on the 2d. of August.¹

On Friday July 12. the Committee appointed to draw the articles of confederation reported them, and on the 22d. the house resolved themselves into a committee to take them into consideration. On the 30th. & 31st. of that month & 1st. of the ensuing, those articles were debated which determined the proportion or quota of money which each state should furnish to the common treasury, and the manner of voting in Congress. The first of these articles was expressed in the original draught in these words.² "Art. XI. All charges of war & all

comparing it with the text as printed *post*, under July 4, 1776, it will be seen that he took the liberty of somewhat changing and even expunging portions.

¹ This is an interlineation made at a later period—apparently after the question as to the signing of the declaration was raised. Jefferson has also written the following on a slip and pasted it on the sheet:

"Some erroneous statements of the proceedings on the declaration of independence having got before the public in latter times, Mr. Samuel A. Wells asked explanations of me, which are given in my letter to him of May 12. 19. before and now again referred to. I took notes in my place while these things were going on, and at their close wrote them out in form and with correctness and from 1 to 7 of the two preceding sheets are the originals then written; as the two following are of the earlier debates on the Confederation, which I took in like manner."

² In the *Works of John Adams* (ii., 492) are printed his memoranda of the debates on the confederation, wherein he has recorded the following sentences from Jefferson's speeches on that subject: Article 14. "The limits of the Southern Colonies are fixed. Moves an amendment, that all purchases of lands, not within the boundaries of any Colony, shall be made by Congress of the Indians in a great Council." Article 15. "What are reasonable limits? What security have we, that the Congress will not curtail the present settlements of the States?"

other expenses that shall be incurred for the common defence, or general welfare, and allowed by the United States assembled, shall be defrayed out of a common treasury, which shall be supplied by the several colonies in proportion to the number of inhabitants of every age, sex & quality, except Indians not paying taxes, in each colony, a true account of which, distinguishing the white inhabitants, shall be triennially taken & transmitted to the Assembly of the United States."

Mr. [Samuel] Chase moved that the quotas should be fixed, not by the number of inhabitants of every condition, but by that of the "white inhabitants." He admitted that taxation should be always in proportion to property, that this was in theory the true rule, but that from a variety of difficulties, it was a rule which could never be adopted in practice. The value of the property in every State could never be estimated justly & equally. Some other measure for the wealth of the State must therefore be devised, some standard referred to which would be more simple. He considered the number of inhabitants as a tolerably good criterion of property, and that this might always be obtained. He therefore thought it the best mode which we could adopt, with one exception only. He observed that negroes are prop-

I have no doubt that the colonies will limit themselves." Article 16. "Thinks the Congress will have a short meeting in the Fall and another in the Spring." Article 17. "Explains it to mean the Indians who live in the Colony. These are subject to the laws in some degree. . . . I protest against the right of Congress to decide upon the right of Virginia. Virginia has released all claims to lands settled by Maryland, &c."

erty, and as such cannot be distinguished from the lands or personalities held in those States where there are few slaves, that the surplus of profit which a Northern farmer is able to lay by, he invests in cattle, horses, &c. whereas a Southern farmer lays out that same surplus in slaves. There is no more reason therefore for taxing the Southern states on the farmer's head, & on his slave's head, than the Northern ones on their farmer's heads & the heads of their cattle, that the method proposed would therefore tax the Southern states according to their numbers & their wealth conjunctly, while the Northern would be taxed on numbers only: that negroes in fact should not be considered as members of the state more than cattle & that they have no more interest in it.

Mr. John Adams observed that the numbers of people were taken by this article as an index of the wealth of the state, & not as subjects of taxation, that as to this matter it was of no consequence by what name you called your people, whether by that of freemen or of slaves. That in some countries the labouring poor were called freemen, in others they were called slaves; but that the difference as to the state was imaginary only. What matters it whether a landlord employing ten labourers in his farm, gives them annually as much money as will buy them the necessaries of life, or gives them those necessaries at short hand. The ten labourers add as much wealth annually to the state increase it's exports as much in the one case as the other. Certainly 500 freemen produce no more profits, no greater surplus for the

paiment of taxes than 500 slaves. Therefore the state in which are the labourers called freemen should be taxed no more than that in which are those called slaves. Suppose by any extraordinary operation of nature or of law one half the labourers of a state could in the course of one night be transformed into slaves: would the state be made the poorer or the less able to pay taxes? That the condition of the laboring poor in most countries, that of the fishermen particularly of the Northern states, is as abject as that of slaves. It is the number of labourers which produce the surplus for taxation, and numbers therefore indiscriminately, are the fair index of wealth. That it is the use of the word "property" here, & it's application to some of the people of the state, which produces the fallacy. How does the Southern farmer procure slaves? Either by importation or by purchase from his neighbor. If he imports a slave, he adds one to the number of labourers in his country, and proportionably to it's profits & abilities to pay taxes. If he buys from his neighbor it is only a transfer of a labourer from one farm to another, which does not change the annual produce of the state, & therefore should not change it's tax. That if a Northern farmer works ten labourers on his farm, he can, it is true, invest the surplus of ten men's labour in cattle: but so may the Southern farmer working ten slaves. That a state of one hundred thousand freemen can maintain no more cattle than one of one hundred thousand slaves. Therefore they have no more of that kind of property. That a slave may indeed from the custom of

speech be more properly called the wealth of his master, than the free labourer might be called the wealth of his employer: but as to the state, both were equally it's wealth, and should therefore equally add to the quota of it's tax.

Mr. [Benjamin] Harrison proposed as a compromise, that two slaves should be counted as one freeman. He affirmed that slaves did not do so much work as freemen, and doubted if two effected more than one. That this was proved by the price of labor. The hire of a labourer in the Southern colonies being from 8 to £12. while in the Northern it was generally £24.

Mr. [James] Wilson said that if this amendment should take place the Southern colonies would have all the benefit of slaves, whilst the Northern ones would bear the burthen. That slaves increase the profits of a state, which the Southern states mean to take to themselves; that they also increase the burthen of defence, which would of course fall so much the heavier on the Northern. That slaves occupy the places of freemen and eat their food. Dismiss your slaves & freemen will take their places. It is our duty to lay every discouragement on the importation of slaves; but this amendment would give the *jus trium liberorum* to him who would import slaves. That other kinds of property were pretty equally distributed thro' all the colonies: there were as many cattle, horses, & sheep, in the North as the South, & South as the North; but not so as to slaves. That experience has shown that those colonies have been always able to pay most which have the most inhabitants, whether they be

black or white, and the practice of the Southern colonies has always been to make every farmer pay poll taxes upon all his labourers whether they be black or white. He acknowledges indeed that freemen work the most; but they consume the most also. They do not produce a greater surplus for taxation. The slave is neither fed nor clothed so expensively as a freeman. Again white women are exempted from labor generally, but negro women are not. In this then the Southern states have an advantage as the article now stands. It has sometimes been said that slavery is necessary because the commodities they raise would be too dear for market if cultivated by freemen; but now it is said that the labor of the slave is the dearest.

Mr. Payne¹ urged the original resolution of Congress, to proportion the quotas of the states to the number of souls.

Dr. [John] Witherspoon was of opinion that the value of lands & houses was the best estimate of the wealth of a nation, and that it was practicable to obtain such a valuation. This is the true barometer of wealth. The one now proposed is imperfect in itself, and unequal between the States. It has been objected that negroes eat the food of freemen & therefore should be taxed. Horses also eat the food of freemen; therefore they also should be taxed. It has been said too that in carrying slaves into the estimate of the taxes the state is to pay, we do no more than those states themselves do, who always take slaves into the estimate of the taxes the individual is to pay. But

¹ Robert Treat Paine.

the cases are not parallel. In the Southern colonies slaves pervade the whole colony; but they do not pervade the whole continent. That as to the original resolution of Congress to proportion the quotas according to the souls, it was temporary only, & related to the monies heretofore emitted: whereas we are now entering into a new compact, and therefore stand on original ground.

Aug. 1. The question being put the amendment proposed was rejected by the votes of N. Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode island, Connecticut, N. York, N. Jersey, & Pennsylvania, against those of Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North & South Carolina. Georgia was divided.

The other article was in these words. "Art. XVII. In determining questions each colony shall have one vote."

July 30. 31. Aug. 1. Present 41. members. Mr. Chase observed that this article was the most likely to divide us of any one proposed in the draught then under consideration. That the larger colonies had threatened they would not confederate at all if their weight in congress should not be equal to the numbers of people they added to the confederacy; while the smaller ones declared against a union if they did not retain an equal vote for the protection of their rights. That it was of the utmost consequence to bring the parties together, as should we sever from each other, either no foreign power will ally with us at all, or the different states will form different alliances, and thus increase the horrors of those scenes of civil war and bloodshed which in such a state of