

1833

For the U. S. Telegraph

N. Beverley Tucker

Repository Citation

Tucker, N. Beverley, "For the U. S. Telegraph" (1833). *Faculty Publications*. 1567.
<https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs/1567>

There is a well authenticated story of a poor old man, who had been born and bred in Paris, and who had lived to extreme old age, without ever leaving the city. The King, who considered the money of his subjects as his own, and, when the whim took him, gave it away as freely as our Congress give our money to the paupers of the ten-mile-square, gave him a comfortable pension, which was to be paid *only so long as he remained in Paris*. In a few days, the old man appeared before the King, praying his Majesty to resume his bounty, and release him from the intolerable sense of constraint, which the condition imposed upon him produced.

This story lays bare one of the chambers of the human heart, which our rulers would do well to explore. Of the Union, we can all say, "ESTO PERPETUA!" and the aspirations of every heart will bear it, in one universal prayer, to the throne of Him in whose hands are the destinies of nations. But let these words be uttered in a voice of authority, as a mandate of human power, and backed and enforced by military coercion, and we do not, and cannot, receive them with the same feeling. Well may we look with pride and pleasure on the long retrospect of peace, prosperity, and harmony, which our history displays; but he knows little of human nature, who does not see that much of this has been the fruit of a conscious freedom from constraint, and the well understood, though silent recognition of the principle, "that union was to be regarded as the *means* of liberty and happiness, and not as an *end* to which these are to be sacrificed;" that it was entered into for the better fulfilment of the great purposes of our existence, and to be renounced whenever the same paramount duty might require it.

Under this impression, we have heretofore lived, not only free in *act*, but in *spirit*. What changes will be wrought, by putting our obligations to the Union on a different footing, is a question which, I am afraid, has not been well considered. Whether the sense of constraint may not end in such acts as impatience of constraint is apt to provoke from brave men, is at least doubtful. But none can doubt that this impatience, however it may be held in check by force, or prudence, or cold fear, must be fatal to the happiness of the thousands who feel, and the tens of thousands who will feel it. The prison may be too strong to be attempted. The *EAGLE SPIRIT* of our fathers may be quenched in our breasts, and "the wild-born Falcon" may quietly fold his "clipt wing." What then? Will his happiness or his glories remain? Will his heart ever again know the same wild joy, with which, from his lofty perch, he looked down on earth, and up to heaven, and felt that the wide expanse was all his own? "The thunder of his beak, and lightning of his eye!"—will these remain? Alas, no! And the cheerful songster of the grove—his carol will be heard no more! His native "wood-notes will be exchanged—how ill exchanged!—for the tuneless, still repeated cry of Sterne's poor Starling, "I cannot get out." He says true—he cannot get out. And yet, methinks, so trite a truth, which men, in all ages, have been learning and teaching to each other, might be well exchanged for untaught melody and joyous freedom.

The eyes of the VIRGINIA mocking bird are sometimes put out to make it sing more cheerfully. Poor bird! Must it be blinded to the liberty it has lost, before it can have the heart to sing? And VIRGINIA, too! VIRGINIA herself! Will she permit her EYES TO BE HOODWINKED, that she may learn to CLANK HER CHAINS, and DANCE TO THEIR MUSIC?

A Friend of State Rights, because

A Friend of Union.