SELECTIONS FROM THE FEDERALIST

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION

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PREFACE

Too little use has been made of The Federalist as a means of affording instruction both in the foundations of American government and in the principles of English composition. In clearness both of thought and expression these letters of Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay are not surpassed in the whole range of American political literature. In order that some of them may be more conveniently used in the training of young men for clear-headed citizenship, this volume of selections has been arranged.

For several years the editor has been using The Federalist in his class-room. Students have made their approach to the study of federal government through its pages. On the whole the results have been very satisfactory, although some of the letters have proved much better than others as starting-points for class-room discussion. In determining what should go into the present volume and what should not, this experience has been the sole guide. It happens, however, that all the selections have come from among the first fifty of the original letters.

The text of The Federalist from which these selections have been taken is that of the first collected edition, published by McLean (New York, 1788). It differs only in some minor matters of form from the texts of the original letters printed in the newspapers of that year and the year before, and is said to have received the benefit of Madison’s revision in preparation for the press. The importance of
using the original text is obvious in the case of articles written for such a special and immediate purpose; yet most editors have followed either the revised text of 1802, or the amended "original text" which Dawson prepared for his edition of 1863. The only foot-notes included in the present Selections are those which appeared in the edition of 1788, and which were put there by the authors themselves.

W.B.M.

Cambridge, December 28, 1913.
CONTENTS

Preface .................................................................................................................. iii

Introduction
1. The Making of the Constitution ................................................................. 1
2. The Campaign for its Adoption ............................................................... 9
3. Why the Federalist was written ............................................................ 11
4. The Federalist as a Treatise on Government ....................................... 14
5. Bibliographical Note .................................................................................. 17

Selections from the Federalist
I. The Dangers of Disunion
   (a) Dangers from Abroad (Articles 2-5) .................................................. 19
   (b) Dangers at Home (Articles 6-8) ....................................................... 37

II. The Need of a Strong Federation
   (a) To Prevent Internal Strife (Articles 9-10) ........................................ 56
   (b) To Develop and Protect Commerce (Article 11) ............................ 70
   (c) To Provide an Adequate Revenue (Articles 12-13) ....................... 77

III. The Inadequacy of the Old Confederation
    (a) General Features of Weakness (Article 14) ................................... 87
    (b) The Lack of Power to Compel Obedience (Article 21) ............... 93
    (c) The Lack of Power to Regulate Commerce (Article 22) ............ 98

IV. Difficulties Encountered in Framing the New Constitution
   (a) Inherent Difficulties of the Undertaking (Article 37) ................... 109
   (b) Differences of Opinion concerning Details (Article 38) ............... 117

V. The Conformity of the New Constitution to Republican Principles.
   Establishes a Government both Republican and Federal (Article 39) . 126

VI. Justification of the Powers Conferred by the New Constitution
    upon the Federal Government
   (a) Military Powers (Article 41) ........................................................... 134
   (b) Diplomatic and Commercial Powers (Article 42) ....................... 144
   (c) Other Powers (Articles 43-44) ....................................................... 152
   (d) The Powers of the Federal and the State Governments
       Compared (Articles 45-46) ............................................................. 170
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VII. The System of Checks and Balances</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) An Examination of Montesquieu’s Doctrine (Article 47)</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) The Objection to a Complete Separation of Powers (Article 48)</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Separation of Powers Necessary to Prevent Frequent Constitutional Amendments (Article 49)</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SELECTIONS FROM THE FEDERALIST
INTRODUCTION

I. THE MAKING OF THE CONSTITUTION

In the early summer of 1787 a group of fifty-five men, representing all the states except Rhode Island, met in Philadelphia to work out some plan of union which would better serve their common interests than the one provided by the Articles of Confederation. These Articles had been adopted in 1777 by the delegates of the various states in the Continental Congress, and this action was subsequently ratified by the states themselves. But the Confederation which was thereby established amounted to little more than a league of friendship among the states, for each state retained nearly all its sovereign powers, and very little authority was handed over to the congress of delegates which was the official organ of the Confederation.

THE CRITICAL PERIOD

It was under this makeshift arrangement that the thirteen states managed to make a formal treaty of peace with England in 1783 and to wrestle somewhat ineffectively with various other difficult problems during the next few years. These years formed a very critical period in American history. The states were growing jealous of each other, and some of them were already endeavoring by restrictive trade regulations to gain prosperity at the expense of their neighbors. In some cases, again, the boundaries between states had never been authoritatively fixed; rival claims were being pressed, and it looked as though some of the states would soon come to blows over such matters. As for the Congress of the Confederation, it had no power to compel a state to do anything; it had no revenues except such grants of money as the various states might make;
and it had no authority to regulate commerce in the common interest. It did not even possess power to make the states fulfill the terms of the treaty with England which it had made on their behalf in 1783.

**The Need of a Stronger Union**

Under these circumstances it soon became apparent to thoughtful men that the Confederation must be either strengthened or dissolved; that no useful purpose would be served by continuing it in impotence. To abandon it altogether was something hardly to be considered, for that would have opened wide the door to interstate quarrels and this, in turn, would have invited foreign intervention. The only alternative was to make the union a real one with a central authority strong enough to insure united action in all matters of common interest. To be efficient in this direction it was felt that the central government would require three powers not given to it by the Articles of Confederation: (1) the power to raise revenue and to borrow money without recourse to the states; (2) the power to regulate foreign and interstate commerce; (3) the exclusive power of making and enforcing treaties. It was well realized that the several states were likely to surrender any such powers very grudgingly, if at all; but in 1787 twelve of them were finally induced to send delegates to Philadelphia in order that the whole problem should be carefully considered.

**The Constitutional Convention of 1787**

Among the delegates who came to this convention were many men of great influence in their own communities. Washington, Madison and Randolph were on hand as representatives of Virginia. Jefferson could not be a delegate as he was at the time on a diplomatic mission to France. Pennsylvania sent Benjamin Franklin, James Wilson, John Dickinson, Robert Morris, Gouverneur Morris and others. New York looked askance at the whole proceeding but had among her three delegates an able