

JAMES MONROE

JAMES MONROE, fifth President of the United States (1817-25) and famous as the promulgator of the Monroe Doctrine, was born of a Scottish Cavalier family in Westmoreland Co., Va., April 28, 1758, and died at New York, July 4, 1831. Early he became a student at William and Mary College, Va., and served with distinction for a while in the Revolutionary War and was wounded at Trenton, studying law intermittently under the direction of Jefferson, and becoming a member of the legislature of his native State. From 1783 to 1786 he was a delegate in Congress, where he was instrumental in bringing about the conventions at Annapolis and Philadelphia, which resulted in the framing of the United States Constitution, though he opposed the adoption of that instrument, and during the years 1790-94, as United States Senator, allied himself with the anti-Federalist party and the advocates of State's Rights. In 1794, he became minister to France, but was recalled within two years owing to his sympathy with the French Revolution. This brought out an attack upon the government, which gave pleasure to the Democratic party, while attempting to justify his diplomatic action in France. For three years (1799-1802), he was governor of Virginia, after which he was appointed by Jefferson envoy extraordinary to France, where he cooperated with Morris and Livingston in effecting the purchase of Louisiana, and from 1803 to 1807 was United States Minister to Great Britain, undertaking at the same time a special mission to Madrid. His diplomatic course abroad was, however, not agreeable to the home government, and on his return he once more found it expedient to publish a defence of his acts. In 1810, he found solace for a time in the legislature of his own State, and in the office of Governor of Virginia, to which post he was again elected. In Madison's administration he became Secretary of State, acting also for a brief period as Secretary of War, when he was elevated to the Presidency of the United States in 1816 and re-elected for another term in 1820. During his period of office he formulated, in an annual message to Congress, the famous Monroe Doctrine, opposing interference by European Powers in the affairs of the States on the American continent, on pain of the act being deemed one of hostility and antagonism to the United States. Jefferson had declared that one of the maxims of American policy was "never to suffer Europe to meddle with cis-Atlantic affairs." Practically, this was the keynote of President Monroe's utterance on this subject, an utterance more specially directed at the time at Russia, which country is told that "the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintained, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers." He further and emphatically explained his attitude by adding this clause: "With the governments who have declared their independence and maintained it, . . . we could not view any interposition for the purpose of

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oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner, their destiny, by any European power, in any other light than as a manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States." The protest was happily effectual. Monroe's administration was also notable for what was then deemed "the era of good feeling," and one that brought about the acquisition of Florida from Spain (1819), and the agreement with Missouri for its admission into the Union, barred only by the compromise which forbade the extension of slavery in that State. See "Life and Public Services of Monroe," by D. C. Gilman, in American Statesman Series (1883).

FEDERAL EXPERIMENTS IN HISTORY

VIRGINIA CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION, JUNE 10, 1788

Mr. Chairman:

I CANNOT avoid expressing the great anxiety which I feel upon the present occasion—an anxiety that proceeds not only from a high sense of the importance of the subject, but from a profound respect for this august and venerable assembly. When we contemplate the fate that has befallen other nations, whether we cast our eyes back into the remotest ages of antiquity, or derive instruction from those examples which modern times have presented to our view, and observe how prone all human institutions have been to decay; how subject the best formed and most wisely organized governments have been to lose their checks and totally dissolve; how difficult it has been for mankind, in all ages and countries, to preserve their dearest rights and best privileges, impelled, as it were, by an irresistible fate of despotism—if we look forward to those prospects that sooner or later await our country, unless ye shall be exempted from the fate of other nations, even upon a mind the most sanguine and benevolent, some gloomy apprehensions must necessarily crowd. This consideration is sufficient to teach us the limited capacity of the human mind—how subject the wisest

men have been to error. For my own part, sir, I come forward here, not as the partisan of this or that side of the question, but to commend where the subject appears to me to deserve commendation; to suggest my doubts where I have any; and to hear with candor the explanation of others; and, in the ultimate result, to act as shall appear for the best advantage of our common country.

The American States exhibit at present a new and interesting spectacle to the eyes of mankind. Modern Europe, for more than twelve centuries past, has presented to view one of a very different kind. In all the nations of that quarter of the globe, there has been a constant effort, on the part of the people, to extricate themselves from the oppression of their rulers; but with us the object is of a very different nature: to establish the dominion of law over licentiousness; to increase the powers of the national government to such extent, and organize it in such manner, as to enable it to discharge its duties and manage the affairs of the States to the best advantage. There are two circumstances remarkable in our colonial settlement: first, the exclusive monopoly of our trade; second, that it was settled by the Commons of England only. The revolution, in having emancipated us from the shackles of Great Britain, has put the entire government in the hands of one order of people only—freemen; not of nobles and freemen. This is a peculiar trait in the character of this revolution. That this sacred deposit may be always retained there, is my most earnest wish and fervent prayer. That union is the first object for the security of our political happiness, in the hands of gracious Providence, is well understood and universally admitted through all the United States. From New Hampshire to Georgia (Rhode Island excepted),

the people have uniformly manifested a strong attachment to the Union. This attachment has resulted from a persuasion of its utility and necessity. In short, this is a point so well known that it is needless to trespass on your patience any longer about it. A recurrence has been had to history. Ancient and modern leagues have been mentioned, to make impressions. Will they admit of any analogy with our situation? The same principles will produce the same effects. Permit me to take a review of those leagues which the honorable gentleman has mentioned; which are, first, the Amphictyonic Council; second, the Achæan League; third, the Germanic system; fourth, the Swiss cantons; fifth, the United Netherlands; and, sixth, the New England confederacy. Before I develop the principles of these leagues, permit me to speak of what must influence the happiness and duration of leagues. These principles depend on the following circumstances: first, the happy construction of the government of the members of the union; second, the security from foreign danger. For instance, monarchies united would separate soon; aristocracies would preserve their union longer; but democracies, unless separated by some extraordinary circumstance, would last forever. The causes of half the wars that have thinned the ranks of mankind, and depopulated nations, are caprice, folly, and ambition; these belong to the higher orders of governments, where the passions of one, or of a few individuals, direct the fate of the rest of the community. But it is otherwise with democracies, where there is an equality among the citizens, and a foreign and powerful enemy, especially a monarch, may crush weaker neighbors. Let us see how far these positions are supported by the history of these leagues, and how far they apply to us. The Amphicty-

onic Council consisted of three members—Sparta, Thebes, and Athens. What was the construction of these States? Sparta was a monarchy, more analogous to the Constitution of England than any I have heard of in modern times. Thebes was a democracy, but on different principles from modern democracies. Representation was not known then. This is the acquirement of modern times. Athens, like Thebes, was generally democratic, but sometimes changed. In these two States the people transacted their business in person; consequently, they could not be of any great extent. There was a perpetual variance between the members of this confederacy, and its ultimate dissolution was attributed to this defect. The weakest were obliged to call for foreign aid, and this precipitated the ruin of this confederacy. The Achaean League had more analogy to ours, and gives me great hopes that the apprehensions of gentlemen with respect to our confederacy are groundless. They were all democratic, and firmly united. What was the effect? The most perfect harmony and friendship subsisted among them, and they were very active in guarding their liberties. The history of that confederacy does not present us with those confusions and internal convulsions which gentlemen ascribe to all governments of a confederate kind. The most respectable historians prove this confederacy to have been exempt from these defects. . . . This league was founded on democratical principles, and, from the wisdom of its structure, continued a far greater length of time than any other. Its members, like our States, by their confederation, retained their individual sovereignty and enjoyed perfect equality. What destroyed it? Not internal dissensions. They were surrounded by great and powerful nations—

the Lacedæmonians, Macedonians, and Ætolians. The Ætolians and Lacedæmonians making war on them, they solicited the assistance of Macedon, who no sooner granted it than she became their possessor. To free themselves from the tyranny of the Macedonians, they prayed succor from the Romans, who, after relieving them from their oppressors, soon totally enslaved them.

The Germanic body is a league of independent principalities. It has no analogy to our system. It is very injudiciously organized. Its members are kept together by the fear of danger from one another, and from foreign powers, and by the influence of the emperor.

The Swiss cantons have been instanced, also, as a proof of the natural imbecility of federal governments. Their league has sustained a variety of changes; and, notwithstanding the many causes that tend to disunite them, they still stand firm. We have not the same causes of disunion or internal variance that they have. The individual cantons composing the league are chiefly aristocratic. What an opportunity does this offer to foreign powers to disturb them by bribing and corrupting their aristocrats! It is well known that their services have been frequently purchased by foreign nations. Their difference of religion has been a source of divisions and animosity among them, and tended to disunite them. This tendency has been considerably increased by the interference of foreign nations, the contiguity of their position to those nations rendering such interference easy. They have been kept together by the fear of those nations, and the nature of their association, the leading features of which are a principle of equality between the cantons, and the retention of individual sovereignty. The same reasoning applies nearly to the United

Netherlands. The other confederacy which has been mentioned has no kind of analogy to our situation.

From a review of these leagues, we find the causes of the misfortunes of those which have been dissolved to have been a dissimilarity of structure in the individual members, the facility of foreign interference, and recurrence to foreign aid. After this review of those leagues, if we consider our comparative situation, we shall find that nothing can be adduced from any of them to warrant a departure from a confederacy to a consolidation, on the principle of inefficacy in the former to secure our happiness. The causes which, with other nations, rendered leagues ineffectual and inadequate to the security and happiness of the people, do not exist here. What is the form of our State governments? They are all similar in their structure—perfectly democratic. The freedom of mankind has found an asylum here which it could find nowhere else. Freedom of conscience is enjoyed here in the fullest degree. Our States are not disturbed by a contrariety of religious opinions and other causes of quarrels which other nations have. They have no causes of internal variance. Causes of war between the States have been represented in all those terrors which splendid genius and brilliant imagination can so well depict. But, sir, I conceive they are imaginary—mere creatures of fancy.

ROBESPIERRE



MAXIMILIEN MARIE ISIDORE ROBESPIERRE, French revolutionist and madman during the Reign of Terror, was born at Arras, France, May 6, 1758, and died by the guillotine in Paris, July 28, 1794. Educated at Arras, and at the College of Louis the Great, Paris, he studied law and was admitted to the Bar in 1781. Following his profession at his native town, he was appointed criminal judge in the diocese of Arras, a post he, however, resigned rather than pass upon a culprit the death-sentence which the law demanded. Resuming his law practice, he for a time took to literary pursuits, which in 1784 gained for an essay he wrote a medal from the Academy of Metz. Elected in 1789 to the States-General, he blossomed into a radical Democrat and became leader of the Extreme Left. Three years later, on the death of Mirabeau, his fell influence became dominant, and an era of raging revolution approached, such as struck terror to the hearts of even the boldest and aroused the horror of all Europe. The flight of the King followed, which excited Robespierre's suspicions of foreign intervention and inflamed the revolutionary clubs. The monarch's arrest and return in ignominy to Paris were but steps that led to the King's execution, to the suppression of the privileged orders, and to the demand for the Revolutionary Tribunal, which by its inhumanity and violence fanned the flame of fanaticism and anarchy, and caused the streets of Paris to run with blood. Robespierre, meanwhile, had been returned in 1792 a deputy from Paris to the National Convention, and in July of the following year he became a member of the Committee of Public Safety. In both of these bodies the Girondists or moderate Republicans were in the minority, so the Jacobins, the men of the Mountain, moved on unchecked to that Saturnalia of bloodshed which they let loose on the capital and on the towns, such as Lyons, Arras, Toulon, and Nantes, of fair France. The holocaust of murder during the "Reign of Terror" was appalling; by a righteous retribution, one of its victims was Robespierre himself, who, owing to a schism that had arisen in the infamous Committee of Public Safety, fell before the intrigues of his enemies and of the despotic power which he had insanely arrogated to himself. Writing of the Reign of Terror and the September massacres, Carlyle observes that "it is unfortunate, though very natural, that the history of this period has so generally been written in hysterics. Exaggeration abounds, execration, wailing; and on the whole darkness." Those who are familiar with the annals of the era in French history, and, above all, who know the contemporary documents, need have no wonder that history has dealt with the period as it has. Nor can they fail to determine how far Robespierre, of all the actors in the Revolution, was responsible for the inhuman tragedies of the time, and how the lurid curtain lifted when he went to his doom.