

Mr. SCOTT had no objection to give his sentiments. The resolve which he had laid on the table had been honored by a majority of the house. It contained such principles as he believed ought to govern in the settlement of this grand question. Whether the place which had been moved for was the right one, was a matter yet to be decided.

Taking the Atlantic coast for a guide, he said, the Susquehannah involved undoubtedly the center of wealth, population and territory. All that had been said of the western country had not induced him to wish that all that immense country should be brought into view. The resolution held out an idea that the Atlantic states should go as near that country as their own convenience would allow. This was all he expected or hoped for.

He was convinced that to go farther west than this point of convenience, would be to injure the western territory itself. The question seemed to lie between the Susquehannah and Potowmack. The center which he contemplated lay between them, at nearly equal distances, but rather nearer the latter. He was pretty well acquainted with both rivers—He then gave a geographical description of those rivers, which, to avoid any possible errors, we shall not attempt to trace. The description related to their several advantages of communication with the western territory. In his calculation he considered Pittsburgh as the key of that territory; and that the advantages of one river or the other must be determined, by its relation to that place. The result of his detail was a conclusion clearly in favor of the Potowmack. To do justice to the committee, he said, he must declare that there was no comparison between the advantages of one communication and the other, with respect to the Ohio country. Potowmack would, no doubt, one day be a very important channel into those regions.

He concluded by observing, that though he thought that the Potowmack was nearer that centre of communication between the Atlantic and the Ohio, than the Susquehannah, as there was no prospect of a decision in favor of the former, he should give his vote for the Susquehannah. In this situation, as he was a native of Pennsylvania, there was a certain duty which he owed to his country, and which he should now perform.

Mr. MADISON. If this delay should not produce any alteration in the sentiments of the gentlemen, it will at least soften that hard decision that seems to be so unfavorable to the friends of the Potowmack. I hope we shall all concur in the great principles on which we ought to conduct and decide this business. I conceive that an equal attention to the great rights of every part of the community is the principle on which we are to proceed. No government, Sir, not even the most despotic, can go beyond a certain point, without violating that idea of equal right which prevails in the mind of every community. In republican governments, justice and equality form the basis of the system; and perhaps the structure can rest on no other foundation that the wisdom of man can devise. In a federal republic, give me leave to say, it is even more necessary and proper that a sacred regard should be paid to them. For beyond the sense of the community at large, which has its proper agency in such a system, no such government can act with safety. The federal interest involves local distinctions, which produce local jealousies, and give at the same time a greater local capacity to support and exert this sense most effectually. In a confederacy of states, in which the people operate in one direction as citizens, and in another as forming political communities, the local governments will ever possess a superior capacity to take advantage of those powers on which the protection of their rights depend. If these great rights be the

basis of republics, and if there be a double necessity of attending to them in a federal republic, it is further to be considered, that there is no one right, of which the people can judge with more ease and certainty, and of which they will judge with more jealousy, than of the establishment of the permanent seat of their government; and, Sir, I am persuaded that however often this subject may be discussed in the representative body, or however the attention of the committee may be drawn to it, the observations I have made will be more and more verified. We see the operation of this sentiment fully exemplified in what has taken place in the several states. In every instance where the seat of government has been placed in an eccentric position, we have seen the people either successfully or unsuccessfully struggling to place it where it ought to be. In some instances they have not yet succeeded, but I believe they will succeed in all. In many they have actually gained their point.

One of the first measures in the state of Virginia since the revolution, was the removal of the seat of government from an eccentric position to one which corresponded more with the sense of the state, and an equal regard to the rights of the community. In North Carolina we have seen the same principle operate, in South Carolina the same. In the state of Pennsylvania, powerful as the inducements are, in favor of its capital, we have seen serious and almost successful efforts already to translate it to a more proper place. In the state of Delaware, where the government was as little removed from the center as in any other state, we have seen the same spirit operate. In the state of New-York we have seen the same thing, with some fluctuations arising from occasional circumstances of convenience. In Massachusetts the same efforts have been made, and in all probability, when some temporary considerations cease, we shall find the same principle acting there also. Sir, it is not surprising, when we consider the nature of mankind, that this should be the case.

With respect, however, to the federal government there is one consideration, which shews in a peculiar manner the necessity and policy of paying a strict attention to this principle. One of the greatest objections which has been made by the opponents of the system, which has been admitted by its friends, is the extent of our limits. It has been asserted by some, and almost feared by others, that within so great a space no free government can exist. I hope and trust that the opinion is fallacious. But at the same time, Sir, acknowledging it to have a certain degree of force, it is equally incumbent on those who wish well to the Union, that this inconvenience should be diminished as much as possible. The way to diminish it, is to place the government in that spot which will be least removed from every part of the empire. Carry it to an eccentric position, and it will be equivalent to an extension of our limits. And if our limits

are already extended so far as warrants in any degree the apprehension above mentioned, we ought to take care not to extend them farther.

But the truth is, that in every point of view in which we can regard this subject, we shall find it a subject of importance. It is important that every part of the community should have the power of sending, with equal facility, to the seat of government such representatives to take charge of their interest as they are most disposed to confide in. If you place the government in an eccentric situation, the attendance of the members, and all who are to transact the public business, will not be equally convenient. The members of the union will not have an equal chance of being represented by men of the best abilities. You do therefore violate the principle of equality, in a part which is peculiarly vulnerable. If we consider the expence, that is an inconvenience not without its weight.

In the last compensations that have been voted, the eccentricity of our position has had a disagreeable influence. The more remote the government is, the greater will be the necessity of making liberal compensations, and holding out powerful inducements in order to obtain serviceable men to represent you; and you can make no distinction; you must give to those who have the least inconvenience, the same as those who have the most. The seat of government is of great importance, if you consider the diffusion of wealth which proceeds from this source. I presume that the expenditures that will take place where the government will be established, by those who are immediately concerned in its administration, and by others who may resort to it, will not be less than half a million of dollars a year. It is to be regretted that those who may be most convenient to the center, should enjoy those blessings in a higher degree than others. But it is an evil which is imposed on us by necessity; we diminish it as we place the source from which those emanations are to proceed as near the center as possible.

If we consider, Sir, the effects of legislative power on the aggregate community, we must feel equal inducements to look for the center, in order to find the proper seat of government. Those who are most convenient to the seat of legislation, will always possess advantages over others. An early knowledge of the law, an influence in enacting them, and a thousand other circumstances, will give a superiority to those who are thus situated. If it were possible to promulge our laws by some instantaneous operation, it would be of little consequence in that point of view where the government was. But if on the contrary, time is necessary for this purpose, we ought as far as possible to give every part of the community an opportunity of obtaining a knowledge of the subject.

If we consider the influence of the government in its executive department, there is no less reason to conclude that it ought to be placed in the center of the union. It ought to be in a situation to command information, relative to every part of the union, in every conjuncture, to seize every circumstance which can be improved, and which ought to be attended to. One of the most important considerations which is presented by this part of the subject, is the necessity of having the executive eye placed in a situation where it can see the dangers which may threaten, and the executive arm placed also from whence it may be extended, most effectually to the protection of every part. Perhaps it is peculiarly necessary, that in looking for this center, we should keep our eye as much as possible to our western borders. For a long time, dangers will be most apt to spring from that quarter.

In respect to the judiciary, if it is not equally necessary, it is yet highly important, that the government, should be equally accessible to every part of those who are to be governed—Why should the citizens of one quarter of the union be subject to greater difficulties than others? Why should they be obliged to travel a greater distance than others—to carry their witnesses, and be subject to all the inconveniencies attending the administration of justice at a remote distance? In short, whether we consider the subject with regard to the executive, the legislative and judicial departments, we see the soundest reasons for fixing on that place, which may be the most permanent center of territory and population.

In respect to the western territory, we are not to expect, for it would be an affront to the understanding of our fellow citizens on the western waters, that they will be united with their Atlantic brethren, on any other principle than that of equality and justice.

I venture to say that it is necessary in order to preserve the Union, that we should deal out the blessings of government with an impartial hand, and that in placing the government from which these blessings are to flow, we should retire from the Atlantic, as far as is convenient, and approach that point which will most accommodate the western country; and in doing this we shall still stop short of that geographical center whose circle would embrace our ultramontane citizens themselves. In my opinion, the favor requested by the western inhabitants is as reasonable as possible, when they declare that they will be satisfied, if we go so far only as to leave open a proper and easy communication with the Atlantic; though they still be subject to great inconveniencies.

From the Atlantic to the Mississippi according to the best estimate, the distance is not less than seven hundred and fifty miles. If we go to that part of the Potowmack which is proposed, it will carry the government 250 miles west: we still have 500 from the Mississippi. I am sure that if justice requires that we should take any one position in preference to another, we have every inducement of interest as well as generosity to fix on the Potowmac. It is impossible to reflect a moment on the separation of that branch of the union, without seeing the mischiefs which that event must create. The area of the United States, when divided into equal parts, will perhaps leave one half on the west side of the Allegany mountains. From the fertility of soil, and the fineness of climate, and every thing that can favor a growing population, we may suppose that the settlement will go on with every degree of rapidity which our imagination can conceive. If the ratio of calculation is considered, that we double in twenty five years, we shall contemplate in that time an astonishing mass of people on the western waters. Whether this great mass shall form a part of the united members, or whether it shall be separated into a alien, a jealous and a hostile people must depend on the measures that are shortly to be taken. Sir, the difference between considering them in the light of fellow citizens, bound to us by a common interest, obeying common laws, and pursuing common good, and considering them in the light I have mentioned, presents one of the greatest ideas that can fill an American mind. Instead of peace and friendship, we shall have rivalry and enmity. Instead of being a great people, invulnerable on all sides, and without the necessity of those establishments which other nations require, we shall have to support expensive and dangerous establishments necessary for defence. We shall be obliged to lay burthens on the people to support them, and which sooner or later will be fatal to the liberties of America. It is incumbent on us, if we wish to act the part of enlightened legislators or magnanimous citizens, to consider well when we are about to take a step, that the step be directed by the motives I have described. We must consider what is just, what is equal, what is satisfactory.

It may be asked why it was necessary to bring into view these principles, since they would not be denied. Sir, I apprehend that in general we shall not disagree as to the principle. But at the same time principles are so connected with facts, that it is necessary we should collect all the light, and examine all the circumstances which may lead us to a just decision. On a candid view of the two rivers, I flatter myself that the seat which will most correspond with the public interest will be found on the Potowmac is not much nearer this center than any part of the Susquehannah. Sir, if we measure from the banks of the Potowmac to the most eastern part of the United States, it is less distant than from the most southern. If we measure this great area diagonally, the Potowmac will still be nearer. If you draw a line perpendicular to the line of the Atlantic coast, you will find that it will run more equally through the Potowmac, than any other part of the Union; or if there be any difference between one side and the other, there will be a greater space on the southwest, than on the north east. All the maps of the United States shew the truth of this. From the Atlantic coast to that line which separates the British possessions from the United States, the average distance is not more than 150 miles. If you take the average breadth of the other branch of the United States, it will be found to be six, seven, and eight hundred miles. From this view of the subject, which it is not easy to describe by words, I am sure that if the Potowmac is not the geographical center, it is because the Susquehannah is less so.

I acknowledge that some regard is to be paid to the center of population. But where shall we find this center? I know of no rule by which we may be governed, except by considering the proportion among the representatives of the different states. I believe, if we take that criterion, the present center of population will be found somewhere in Pennsylvania, and not far from the Susquehannah. I acknowledge that the present center of population is nearer the Susquehannah than the Potowmac. But are we choosing a seat of government for the present moment? Are we to confine our attention to the present state of population? I presume not, we must look forward to those probable changes that are soon to take place. I appeal to the judgment of every gentleman, if we have not reason to suppose that those future changes in the population of this country will be particularly favorable to that part which lies south of the Potowmac. On what do the measure and extent of population depend? They depend on the climate, on the soil and the vacancy. We find that population like money seeks those places where it can act with most freedom, and has always a tendency to equalize itself. We see the people moving from the more crowded to the less crowded parts. We see migration take place from the parts that are filled. The swarms do not come from the southern, but from the northern and eastern hive. This will continue to operate till every part of America receives its due share of population. If there be any event on which we may calculate with tolerable certainty, I take it that the center of population will continually advance in a south western direction. It must then travel from the Susquehannah, if it is now found there. It may go beyond the Potowmac. But the time would be long first, and if it should, the Potowmack is the great highway of communication

between the Atlantic and the western country, which will justly prevent any attempts to remove the seat farther south. I have said, Sir, that the communication to the western territory is more commodious through the Potowmac than the Susquehannah. I wish all the facts connected with this subject could have been more fully ascertained, and more fully stated. But if we consider the facts which have been offered by gentlemen who spoke, we must conclude that the communication through the Potowmac would be more facile and effectual than any other.¹¹

Mr. Madison then stated the different stages of distance on the two rivers, from which he concluded that the distance from the probable place of fixing the government on the Potowmac to Fort Pitt, by land, was 170 or 180 miles, and from that part of the Susquehannah which was contemplated, 250, the course of the Potowmac was followed, not more than 250, but on the course of the Susquehannah, about 500.

Whether therefore, said he, we measure the distance by land or water, it is in favor of Potowmac; and if we consider the progress in opening this great channel, I am confident the consideration would be equally favorable. It has been determined by accurate research, that the waters running into the Ohio, may be found not more than two or three miles distant from those of the Potowmac. This is a fact of peculiar importance.

It has been said that if Congress should make choice of the Potowmac,

greater discontents would arise than if they preferred the Susquehannah. I know not the data from which this opinion is drawn. Who will have the best right to complain? Will it be those who may be gratified if the government should be fixed on the Susquehannah? I believe not. The truth is, that if the place short of the present geographical center is short of the center of population, as it may exist in a reasonable time, we have reason to believe that the southern inhabitants will conceive themselves most aggrieved. I think I may with truth declare, that if the seat of government should be fixed on the Susquehannah, every part south of that river, and every part of the United States south of the Ohio, will conceive that the great principles of equal justice, have been disregarded. If we are to consider the subject in that point of view, I am sure it is most expedient that we should give the preference to Potowmac. This is not all—If you establish it on the Potowmac, those who think themselves not equally dealt by, will find the cause of their discontent continually subsiding; because the center of population will be continually approaching to the geographical center—If on the other hand, you fix the seat in a place which is perpetually eccentric with respect to territory, the center of population will forever recede.

The gentleman from Massachusetts, yesterday raised great objections against the Potowmac, because it was, he supposed, subject to periodical maladies from which the other river is free. I am not authorised from personal experience, or very particular information to draw a comparison between them: But there are some general facts that may serve to shew that if there is any difference, it is more likely to be in favor of the Potowmac than of the Susquehannah. The position contemplated on the banks of the former is considerably farther from tide water than the place proposed on the latter. On this account therefore we have little reason to expect that the Potowmac is more unhealthy. If we consider their comparative situation with respect to the west, the Potowmac is almost as much farther west, as it is distant from the Susquehannah: And we well know that generally speaking as we retire towards the western and high country, we are generally removed from the causes of those diseases to which lower situations are exposed. As also the two places are nearly in the same latitude, the objection which holds with respect to southern climes cannot apply to one more than the other. It is only their western or eastern position, their remove from or proximity to the lower country, and to fresh or stagnate water which can properly be brought into view. It is not because we advance so much to the south that we advance to the centre, it is because we go more to the west. I do not know that there is a difference of more than a degree and five or six minutes between the latitude of New-York and the proposed place on the Potowmac. The advantage the Potowmac has from its centrality is derived from its western than its southern position.

I will not at present go farther in this argument, & flatter myself that the considerations which have been suggested will have their proper weight; and if they should be contradicted, that we shall be able further to support them.

Mr. AMES said he did not wonder that gentlemen had supposed it necessary to disclaim local views and narrow prejudices. This subject teemed with them, and perhaps it was one of those which rendered it impossible for the firmest mind to escape. He was more convinced of this principle from observing that the fact had corresponded with it. He had observed that gentlemen whose discernments were the most clear had been most surprisingly warped from that plain line of propriety and fair enquiry, which he supposed they wished to pursue. He was persuaded that they had been so misled by their wishes, as to lose sight of the real and solid objects of the public interest. He made these observations with all humility and candor, conscious that he might be liable to the same imputation. He did, however, believe that he felt those motives in a less powerful degree. If the seat of government should be placed in Virginia, the strength and reputation it would give that state, must be powerful inducements to engage the prejudices of those gentlemen. In this situation they could not have those advantages to discover truth as some others. He believed that the majority were free from local interest, because there was little idea of a separate interest existing. For himself, he could enjoy that kind of consolation which rested in the conscious pride of his own heart, which would suffer the deepest mortification could he for a moment suppose himself to be the representative of a little paltry spot. Another security he derived to his feelings was the nature of the reasons which actuated his mind. He would explain them, and gentlemen should see, that if he was mistaken, it was the error of his head and not of his heart. He felt the more confidence in his own candour from this circumstance. Many gentlemen who voted with him, could bear witness, that he doubted long and balanced the subject fairly—that he did declare, that if the Potowmac was the national ground, he would vote for it. He did not deny the idea that it was a question highly important to the feelings and interests of the people. He would not say that we ought not to take a central position. He wished it might compromise the center of territory, wealth, population, strength and convenience. These centers he believed did not meet on the Potowmac. A gentleman from Virginia, he said, had given a beautiful picture of the country on the Illinois and Western Waters. He fancied that that gentleman would hardly suppose that the Atlantic States were contemplating a mere geographical centre,

or that they would take into view the circumstances of that immeasurable wilderness. Because if this centre was to be regarded, it would involve us in great absurdity. We had been told, he said, of the practice of the several states. But he believed that nations in general had not regarded the center of territory. In Denmark, on this rule, the capital would probably be placed in the inhospitable deserts of Lapland. When he spoke of these western territories, he begged to be understood that he esteemed it a fine and fertile country, and he was disposed to secure its union with us by every means of sound policy and national justice. But he wished to draw this inference from the observations, that if we were to take the geographical center, we might be involved in inextricable difficulties; for that center might happen to fall where it would not accommodate any body. He imagined that we ought to be guided by another center, and that would be the center of the sea coast. The geographical center would carry us so far back beyond the mountains, or beyond the Ohio, as to render the seat of our government almost inaccessible, and instead of accommodating all parties would be incommodious to every body.