

**CONNECTICUT FEDERALISM,
OR ARISTOCRATIC
POLITICS IN A SOCIAL
DEMOCRACY. AN ADDRESS**

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Connecticut Federalism, Or Aristocratic Politics in a Social Democracy. An Address by James C. Welling

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JAMES C. WELLING

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CONNECTICUT FEDERALISM, OR ARISTOCRATIC
POLITICS IN A SOCIAL DEMOCRACY.

An Address

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ON ITS

EIGHTY-SIXTH ANNIVERSARY,

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1890,

BY

JAMES C. WELLING, LL.D.,

PRESIDENT OF THE COLUMBIAN UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, D. C.



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1890.

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PROCEEDINGS.

AT a meeting of the NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, held in its Hall, on Tuesday Evening, November 18, 1890, to celebrate the Eighty-sixth Anniversary of the founding of the Society :

The exercises were opened with prayer by the REV. CORNELIUS ROOSEVELT DUFFIE, D.D., Chaplain of Columbia College.

The Anniversary Address was then delivered by JAMES C. WELLING, LL.D., President of the Columbian University, on " Connecticut Federalism, or Aristocratic Politics in a Social Democracy."

On its conclusion the HON. CHARLES A. PEABODY submitted the following resolution, which was adopted unanimously :

Resolved, That the thanks of the Society be presented to DR. WELLING for the able and learned address which he has delivered this evening, and that he be requested to furnish a copy for publication.

A benediction was pronounced by the REV. DR. DUFFIE. The Society then adjourned.

Extract from the Minutes :

ANDREW WARNER,
Recording Secretary.

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CONNECTICUT FEDERALISM, OR ARISTOCRATIC POLITICS IN A SOCIAL DEMOCRACY.

FOR all the purposes of the discussion before us, the State of Connecticut must be selected as the most typical of the New-England communities. She must be so selected because of the greater simplicity of her social tissue during the early colonial period; because of her priority in ordinating, under the new conditions of American life, a purely independent and popular form of self-government; because of the preëminence she had, through her representative men in the Federal Convention, in determining the structure of our federative policy; * because of the active share she took in dressing the balances of the Constitution in the fateful matter of slavery—thus helping to contrive the sectional equilibrium which she was afterward destined to shake; and, finally, because of the greater tenacity with which she clung to the Federalist Party in its origin, in the period of its proud ascendancy, and in the days of its decline down to the hour of its "dim eclipse" within the closed doors of the Hartford Convention. Hartford is at once "the birthplace of American democracy" and the old historic stronghold of aristocratic politics in the United States. The first written constitution ever adopted by the people in the name of the people was framed there in 1639. Hartford was the metropolitan see of Federalism from 1790 to 1815.

* "The government of the United States to-day is in lineal descent more nearly related to that of Connecticut than to that of any of the other thirteen colonies." —John Fiske: "Beginnings of New England," p. 127.

The preponderant strength of the Federalists had always been at the North. The preponderant strength of the anti-Federalists, or Republicans, as they soon came to call themselves, had always been at the South, and so it came to pass that the line of cleavage between the two parties was, from the first, identified in large measure with geographical boundaries determined by the greater or lesser prevalence of slavery in our country. It was this aspect of the schism in our body politic which gave to Washington his gravest concern, and hence the warning he pointed in his Farewell Address against "characterizing parties by geographical discriminations." It has been common to suppose that this adjuration of the *Pater patriæ* was meant to serve as a general lesson in political didactics. In fact the warning was inspired by the most exigent considerations of political opportunism at the moment when Washington wrote, as we shall see in the sequel of this paper.

The stratification of our politics by lines of geographical latitude was well defined in Washington's day, at least in the closing years of his second term. The marks of the stratification had been detected by Madison in the different trends of opinion in the Federal Convention; and in all periods of political upheaval the marks of this same stratification have come most visibly to the surface in the shape of disunion portents. Sometimes the strain of this upheaval has come from the South; sometimes the strain has come from the North; sometimes the strain has come from both sections at the same time, as, for instance, during the administration of John Adams, when that "sectional equilibrium" of which I have spoken was put into a state of violent oscillation by the storm and pressure of our Federal politics. Everybody is familiar with this oscillation as observed at the southern end of the beam, for everybody has read, or read about, the famous Virginia and Kentucky "Resolutions of '98." It was in these resolutions, both emanating from Virginian pens, that the State-rights theory of our Federal compact was put into its first concise and logical form of statement. In the Kentucky declaration of 1799 the ill-omened word