“Monarchy or a Republic?”

As the Constitutional Convention adjourned, “a woman [Mrs. Eliza Powell] asks Dr. Franklin well Doctor what have we got a republic or a monarchy? A republic replied the Doctor if you can keep it.” Although this story recorded by James McHenry (1753–1816), a delegate from Maryland, is probably fictitious, people wondered just what kind of government was called for in the new constitution.

James McHenry. Diary, September 18, 1787. Manuscript. James McHenry Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (63.02.00) [Digital ID# us0063_02p1.]

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https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/convention-and-ratification.html#obj8
Mr. Martin said one day in company with Mr. Jenifer speaking of the system before Congress I'll be hanged if ever the people of Maryland awoke to it. Then I advise you and Mr. Jenifer to stay in Philadelphia lest you should be hanged.

Lady, to carry it to Congress, introduction of slavery taken off. Members to be provided with printed copies - adjourned to meet together at the City Tavern 18.

A lady asked Dr. Franklin well Doctor what have we got a republic or a monarchy - A republic replied the Doctor if you can keep it.

The lady have asked B & C as well. Mr. Powel of Phila. [illegible]
PARTIAL TRANSCRIPTION

Literal:
& A lady asked Dr. Franklin: 'Well Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy — A republic replied the Doctor if you can keep it.

[horizontal line break]
+ The lady here alluded to was Mrs. Powel of Philadelphia.

With 21st century punctuation added:
“A lady asked Dr. Franklin: 'Well Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy' — 'A republic,' replied the Doctor, 'if you can keep it.' 'The lady here alluded to was Mrs. Powel of Philadelphia.'”

Sources:
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