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John Armstrong, Sr., to Benjamin Franklin Carlisle, Pa., 25 December 1787 (excerpt)

. . . You must be so tired of various and perverse speculation on the new Constitution that I must not add to the common trespass but as little as possible. I confess I am far from pretending to know what is the best system of government, and ready to question whether any man knows it, otherwise than by a general knowledge of human nature and the particular circumstances of the people for whom it is framed. The people of best discernment this way instead of caviling are rather amazed that so many states with their different prejudices have been brought to meet on so good ground. Dr. [Charles] Nesbit, with great strength of reason is clear for adopting it, keeping in view such amendments as experience and a fitter time shall point out.¹ And indeed when we consider our situation at home (on the confines of anarchy) and our need of reputation abroad, it appears to me in the light of moral certainty, that immediate adoption is not only our wisest course, but also the shortest and safest mode to obtain such amendments as may either be found to be really salutary in themselves, or only calculated merely to please. In this view my small support shall not be wanting; more apprehensive as I am of a failure in the duty of the people, than of any early encroachment of a new Congress—nor would the body of the people but by undue influence give any opposition. Stale and careless jealousy, or prejudice and private motives, have thrown too many men into a political phrenzy, which in Pennsylvania we now have to regret. Your last speech in the Federal Convention, being just up, will be in our paper tomorrow. It is come in good time, and I think can scarcely fail of some good effects.

The tenor of the minority's Dissent and particularly a few explicit [sentences?] appears to have a wild and pernicious tendency! We must not pray God to reward them according to their works, but beseech Him to restrain the residue of their wrath, to still the tumults of the people which they seem to provoke; and forgive their abettors for the Mediator's sake, for they either care not, or know not what they do.

1. Nisbet, a Presbyterian clergyman, was president of Dickinson College at Carlisle.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. II: Pennsylvania (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1976), 648–49.