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Purported Letters from George Bryan to John Ralston *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 26 March 1788

These letters were allegedly written by George Bryan to John Ralston. Bryan was thought to be the author of the Centinel essays. Bryan neither denied nor affirmed that he had written the letters, although some Antifederalists insisted that he had not.

Messrs. HALL & SELLERS, *The original Letters I send you for publication, and which will be left in your hands for inspection, afford one proof amongst a thousand, that the indefatigable Monster, the CENTINEL, is endued with a zeal and activity in every work of mischief always commensurate with its extent; for who but himself, to serve any cause whatever, would condescend to a correspondence with one of the sourest, narrowest, and most illiterate creatures in the state.*

X.

Philadelphia, 7th March, 1788.

DEAR SIR, Last Tuesday the post from New-England brought sad tidings for some folks here. The Convention of New-Hampshire, it seems, by 70 *against*, and 40 *for*, have adjourned till 17th June. Had the final adjustment of the new system been put, it would have been rejected by a great majority. The friends of it, therefore, to let it fall easily, proposed the adjournment, and the others gave way. This disaster we consider as fatal to the business. So do its advocates here, and they are in the dumps, and some of the members of the General Convention are apologising for their conduct. Before this news came, the party was up in the skies, as their behaviour seemed to express. Yet their success at Boston was so moderated by the propositions for amendment, which, however superficial, broke the sanctity of the new Constitution. Besides, the president of the Boston Convention, *Hancock*, has written to our Assembly, sending their doings and the amendments, and desiring, that this state would adopt similar amendments.¹—On the whole, as New-York is not likely to concur; nor Virginia, tho' General W. lives there; nor Rhode-Island; and as N. Carolina Convention meets not till 17th July, and will be much swayed by Virginia; as Maryland is much divided, if not on the whole against; I have no doubt there will be another General Convention. Georgia acceded to it, because pressed by an Indian war, and wanted aid immediately.

Failing, the conspirators against equal liberty will have much deceit and wicked conduct to answer for. They have seduced the post-officers to stop all news-papers from state to state, that contained investigations of their plan, so that the dissent of the minority of Pennsylvania did not get to Boston before their Convention rose. Every little town furnished a flaming account, like those of Carlisle, Bethlehem, &c. asserting how much the people of their place and neighbour-

hood approved the new plan. These were circulated and re-printed from Georgia to New-Hampshire, with parade. This deceived the people into a notion that there was a general approbation. In Virginia, at this moment, from the suppression of intelligence and by false letters, it is generally supposed that the opposition in Pennsylvania had vanished; and at Boston, the news of the disturbances at *Carlisle* reaching Boston, before the Convention there rose, the whole was confidently denied. As the Convention of Massachusetts was finishing, a vessel is made to arrive at a port 15 miles off, with account that N. Carolina had adopted, tho' that Convention sits not before July. Again, as the Convention of New-Hampshire was near finishing, this falshood is newly published at Newport in Rhode-Island, and another vessel pretended, to seduce another adoption. These are but a specimen of these arts and inventions. But a lying tongue is but for a moment. The people every where will see and feel their frauds. Yet these are generally the doings of the first men in many of the states. I say nothing of the fraud of calling Conventions hastily in all the New-England states, save Rhode-Island, which has called none, in New-Jersey, in Pennsylvania and Delaware. In the southern states (all except Georgia) the calls of Conventions have been deliberate and distant; so in New-York. I am glad of the prospect we have, because it will prevent the danger of confusion and bloodshed. For if nine states had been nominally led into the plan, while the body of the people in many of them were still averse, civil war must have ensued, as the Conspirators would have endeavoured to set their scheme in motion, without funds to support the necessary standing army. This danger now seems to be over, for which we ought to be thankful.

In Cumberland county all are against it, except a small group in Carlisle, and a few, very few, scattered in the country. This small group, in October, met and censured their county representatives for attempting the breaking up of the late General Assembly, to prevent the calling of the people of every county east of Bedford to elect Convention in nine or ten days; with other matters favoring the new plan. These were paraded in the Carlisle Gazette as the sense of the people, and by the party published here and elsewhere. The county resented it, and warned these men not to repeat the artifice. Yet on the 25th December the same people attempted to rejoice on occasion of the adoption by the Convention of Pennsylvania. They were hindered: some blows ensued. Next day the same men, armed, made another essay; they were over-powered, and the effigies of two leading members of Convention were burned in contempt. Upon this, a letter with many affidavits was dispatched to Mr. M'Kean, pressing his warrants for 20 persons, charged with riots; among others Justice [John] Jordan. The business being irksome, Mr. M'Kean, alledging it was indelicate for him to act where he was ill-used, persuaded Mr. [William Augustus] Atlee, and laboured me to send up our warrant. I represented the danger of risking insult to our precept, advising delay, and the rather, as no hasty steps had been taken to bring the city rioters to justice. Mr. A. and Mr. [Jacob] Rush sent up their warrant. It lay some time in Carlisle, unexecuted, to bring the accused to submit and ask pardon. Nothing being done however, in this way, about 26th of February the sheriff was set to work. Eight or nine refusing to give bail, they were imprisoned. By the last accounts from Harrisburg, large numbers were assembled, from York and Dauphin, as well as Cumberland, to set the prisoners at large. This gives much uneasiness to the Conspirators here. Even the Chief Justice, 'tis said, had before the news came consented to drop the prosecution, as the members of Council feared the event. But he wrote to Mr. Atlee too late, if he has written. We hope no further mischief will ensue; tho' the Con-

spirators in Carlisle told Mr. M’Kean in their letter, they feared that their dwellings would be pulled down. Here, in October, we were forced to hold our tongues, lest well dressed ruffians should fall upon us. At this day the case is otherwise. Yet many are still silent, lest, the new plan being adopted, they might hereafter be ruined for opposing. Since it was commonly safe from immediate attack, some of us have been open and avowed, and risked all the malice of these men. The common people are latterly too much of our opinions to hurt us. Indeed, none but *gentlemen mobs* have been active in Philadelphia.

In Montgomery, the current of the county is against the plan, the friends of it are silent; Berks very few, who favour it; the same in Dauphin. In the town of Lancaster there is a party, but few elsewhere in the county. In York, the opposers are very numerous. In Franklin they are the great body of the people. In Bedford and in the overhill counties very few are for it. Of Northumberland I can say little. Our friends in Bucks and Chester are much increased. The Quakers are changed generally. The solid Quakers here greatly dislike it; but they do not intermeddle. Their young people favour it, and in this city, Baltimore, New-York, Boston, &c. there is a majority for it; most so in Boston. Shays insurrection has been made a great engine of terror to dispose people of that country to receive chains, if the western counties can be kept down. Shays and his adherents were roused to what they did by excessive taxes; perhaps contrived to dispose the New-England states to receive the new system, to which they would otherwise be averse.

Since writing the foregoing, we have accounts from Carlisle, that about 1000 armed men appeared there, and demanding of the sheriff to open the prison, set at liberty the persons charged as rioters, and burned the commitment. The inhabitants of the town, in the mean while, kept close within their houses, and the armed men soon went away without doing any thing further. Mr. James Hanna, a constitutionalist, attorney at law at Newtown, was this day very unexpectedly chosen to succeed Colonel Hart, as recorder of deeds and register of wills of Bucks county. Mr. Dubois, nephew of Mr. Henry Wynkoop, was a competitor, yet, to the surprize of every body, and astonishment of Gerardus Wynkoop, Hanna had 36 votes, and Mr. Dubois but 26. Mr. Irwin, son of Arthur Irwin, of Tinicum, in Bucks county, had 5 votes.

The peculiar reason why the party for the new constitution is large here, is the supreme influence of the Bank, the weight of Mr. Morris, the bankrupt and dependent state of the traders generally, the hopes that by giving large powers to Congress, no foreign ship will be allowed to carry off the rice, tobacco, flour, &c. but it shall be limited to American bottoms. These, and a vain delusion, that present distress, caused by too large use and consumption of foreign goods, and the consequent shipping off of specie, would be relieved. At Boston all ranks have been taught to believe it would be a cure for every sore; so infatuated are the inhabitants.

The Assembly is not doing much. A short session is talked of. A day has been spent on the subject of Wyoming,² but to no purpose. R. Morris is absent in Virginia. He has been there some months. Our river is yet shut, but this cannot last above a day or two.

I am, Dear Sir, Your very humble Servant,
GEO. BRYAN.

To Mr. John Ralston,
Allen township, Northampton County.

P.S. We learn by Mr. Ellicot, late a Commissioner for Pennsylvania in running the lines between us and Virginia, that beyond doubt Maryland will reject the new constitution of the general government. He is just come from Baltimore.

Philadelphia, 12th March, 1788.

DEAR SIR, I wrote a letter addressed to you on Saturday, the 8th instant. It contained a state of present intelligence as to the designed constitution of the United States. But there was a mistake in giving the vote of New-Hampshire adjournment till June. Instead of 70 to 40, it was 56 for and 51 against; which shews its advocates nearly escaped a sudden rejection. The other numbers, 70 to 40, were the estimated size and strength of the parties, of the advocates and opposers. Those in favour of the plan cry out, that the others came fettered with instructions; yet this base practice was begun by their friends in Pennsylvania. The place where the Convention of New-Hampshire sits on the 17th June is Concord, 100 miles farther inland, as I am told, than Exeter, where this body sat, which bodes no good to the *fœderal* party, as they falsely call themselves.

Saturday a person arrived by the stages from North-Carolina. He assures that there is no doubt that the new plan will be rejected by that state.

The Conspirators are fully detected in stopping the transmission of intelligence from state to state by tricks in the post-offices. Being charged with it early in February, they stiffly denied it. It is at length become too palpable to all. Sure no business of a public nature has proceeded upon such base tricks of fraud and surprize!

I am, dear Sir, with compliments to all friends,

Your very obedient Servant,
GEO. BRYAN.

To Mr. John Ralston,

Allen Township, Northampton County.

[P.S.] Old Col. Hart is dead. Robert Whitehill has lately married a widow Montgomery, of Upper Octorara, Chester county.

1. On 16 February 1788 Governor John Hancock, the president of the Massachusetts Convention, transmitted the Convention's proceedings and the form of ratification of the Constitution, which included recommendatory amendments to the Constitution, to the executives of the several states.

2. The Wyoming Valley in Eastern Pennsylvania was the site of a dispute over land claims between settlers from Massachusetts and Pennsylvanians.

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