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Germantown, Pa., Antifederalist Meeting, 14 August 1788

This unsigned letter dated 17 August describes the events that occurred at a meeting held in a tavern in Germantown on the evening of 14 August in response to the Cumberland County circular letter of 3 July that called for the election of delegates to the Harrisburg Convention. Presumably the account was sent to Benjamin Franklin, who was ending his three-year term as president of the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council.

An alarm!

Dear Sir,

I have a sincere love for my country & therefore cannot be silent & torpid when I see danger approaching—there is an old adage, i.e., a spoonfull of water will put out a fire at the beginning which if suffer'd to increase into a flame an ocean may prove inadequate to Extinguish its raging violence. but I will come to the point without further procrastination—Last friday morn [15 August] I stoped with a friend at the public school near Germantown when Colonel Dunning the master informd us that Mr. Ashurst had prevailed on him the Evening before to go to a public meeting at Nices's Tavern & that they happened to be the first in the room—soon after which Dr. Finely, Colonel Ingle, & two others Entered the apartment when one of them took a writing out of his pocket & handed it to Mr. Ashurst to read which he attempted but the writing being bad & much interlined he found it too difficult & therefore handed it to Colonel Dunning who read it aloud to the Company; but ere he had perused it a second time with hope of fully developing its real intentions (which the Company appear'd ignorant of) Mr. Blare McClanegan seated himself opposite & instantly declared his disapprobation of any persons being in that private meeting (as he called it) Except those of their own Society. this caused Dunning to lay down the paper which was instantly pocketed by McClanegan & an Altercation succeeded. Dunning contended that no meetings of a public nature ought to be under the rose [in secret, i.e., sub rosa] & that he Evidently saw from the tenour of what he had read there was Evil at the root. This Circular Letter was wrote from Cumberland County where Patriotic meetings (as they term em) are Established in all the towns & to meet in Harrisburg the 3 day of September as well for *wrath* as Conscience sake to consider of amendments to the proposed Government previous to its organization. Similar letters it seems are forwarded to all States to ascertain the numbers & strength of the antifederalists & if found sufficient to make Effectual opposition then to stand forth boldly in the cause[.] there are, I'm inform'd very alarming Expressions in the

waiting blood & slaughter seem unavoidable unless speedily Counteracted by sufficient authority—we have in Pennsylvania a wise Council & President & their wisdom will direct them to pursue the proper measures perhaps they may see the necessity of issuing a Proclamation suitable to the occasion without loss of time stating the iniquity of these proceedings, the danger of perservering & the humiliating fate of the [majority.?] Shay in his vain opposition to the government of Massachusetts & the necessity of sending a sufficient body of Militia instantly to remove the sinews of war from Carlisle & Philadelphia as likewise to take Effectual measures to secure the insurgents & their papers at their meeting on thursday Evening at the same Tavern—

At the instance of Mr. Ashurst a letter was wrote to Genl: Mifflin¹ on the above [— —] subject signed by him who declares himself ready to give every particular when [called?] upon by proper authority but the General being in New York the hope of [— —] secretary was lost thro his means, however it may yet be revived thro [your?] means as the happiness of America is near your heart— should the matter be conducted with due secrecy & prudence in those appointed to go to the Tavern, great discoveries may be made—Mr. Ashurst was the next day informed by [some?] in the secret that Doctor Finelay was selected to go over Schuylkill to sound [out] people—Mr. McClanegan to the Northern Libertys of the City & others to [various?] parts of the Country for the like purpose[.] there appears to be a firm plan to defeat the government if they possibly can & without speedy spirited [measures?], perhaps a Civil war will be unavoidable the horrors of which none [can?] imagine but those who have unhappily Experienced its dreadfull Consequences which may God in his infinite goodness preserve us from—

1. Because of Benjamin Franklin's infirmities, Thomas Mifflin was serving as acting president of the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council. Mifflin was elected president of the Council in November 1788.

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