James Madison to George Nicholas
Orange Co., Va., 8 April 1788 (excerpt)

. . . I think entirely with you on the subject of amendments. The plan of Massts. is unquestionably the Ultimatum of the fœderalists. Conditional amendments or a second general Convention will be fatal. The delay only of such experiments is too serious to be hazarded. It is a fact, of which you though probably not a great number may be apprized, that the late Convention were in one stage of the business for several days under the strongest apprehensions of an abortive issue to their deliberations. There were moments during this period at which despair seemed with many to predominate. I can ascribe the final success to nothing but the temper with which the Members assembled, and their ignorance of the opinions & confidence in the liberality of their respective constituents. The circumstances under which a second Convention composed even of wiser individuals, would meet, must extinguish every hope of an equal spirit of accomodation; and if it should happen to contain men, who secretly aimed at disunion, (and such I believe would be found from more than one State) the game would be as easy as it would be obvious, to insist on points popular in some parts, but known to be inadmissible in others of the Union. Should it happen otherwise, and another plan be agreed on, it must now be evident from a view of the objections prevailing in the different States among the advocates for amendments, that the opponents in this State who are attached to the Union and sensible of the necessity of a nervous[1] Government for it, would be more dissatisfied with the result of the second than of the first experiment. From the account I have of Mr. Pendleton's opinions I have no great apprehensions of his falling into the scheme of preliminary alterations. I had some days ago an opportunity of conversing pretty fully with his colleague & particular friend Col. Taylor,[2] and of stating such facts & remarks as appeared to combat that scheme. Should a convenient occasion offer, I may take the liberty of repeating them to the Chancellor. When I write to [our?] friend in Richmond I shall feel no restraint from giving him similar intimations.[3] If report be not more than usually incorrect as to the conduct and language of Col. Mason, he has totally abandoned his moderation on this subject; and is pursuing his object by means which will neither add to the dignity of his character; nor I should hope, to the success of his cause. The manner in which you account for his intemperance is, I fancy, the true one. . . .

1. At this time, "nervous" meant "strong, vigorous, robust."

2. James Taylor and Edmund Pendleton represented Caroline County, Va., in the state Convention, where they voted to ratify the Constitution.

3. Probably Governor Randolph, to whom Madison wrote on 10 April.

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