

MARYLAND GAZETTE.

T H U R S D A Y, M A Y 25, 1797.

PHILADELPHIA, May 16.
CONGRESS.

This day, precisely at 12 o'clock, the President of the United States met both houses of congress in the hall of the representatives, where he addressed them in the following

S P E E C H.

Gentlemen of the Senate, and
Gentlemen of the House of Representatives,

THE personal inconveniencies to the members of the senate and of the house of representatives, in leaving their families and private affairs, at this season of the year, are so obvious, that I the more regret the extraordinary occasion, which has rendered the convention of congress indispensable.

It would have afforded me the highest satisfaction, to have been able to congratulate you on a restoration of peace to the nations of Europe, whose animosities have endangered our tranquillity. But we have still abundant cause of gratitude to the Supreme Dispenser of national blessings, for general health and promising seasons; for domestic and social happiness; for the rapid progress and ample acquisitions of industry, through extensive territories; for civil, political, and religious liberty. While other states are desolated with foreign war, or convulsed with intestine divisions, the United States present the pleasing prospect of a nation governed by mild and equal laws; generally satisfied with the possession of their rights; neither envying the advantages nor tearing the power of other nations; solicitous only for the maintenance of order and justice, and the preservation of liberty; increasing daily in their attachment to a system of government in proportion to their experience of its utility; yielding a ready and general obedience to laws flowing from reason, and resting on the only solid foundation, the affections of the people.

It is with extreme regret that I shall be obliged to turn your thoughts to other circumstances, which admonish us, that some of these felicities may not be lasting. But if the tide of our prosperity is full and a reflux commencing, a vigilant circumspection becomes us that we may meet our reverses with fortitude, and extricate ourselves from their consequences with all the skill we possess, and all the efforts in our power.

In giving to congress information of the state of the union, and recommending to their consideration such measures as appear to me to be necessary or expedient, according to my constitutional duty, the causes and the objects of the present extraordinary session will be explained.

After the president of the United States received information, that the French government had expressed serious discontents at some proceedings of the government of these states, said to affect the interests of France, he thought it expedient to send to that country a new minister, fully instructed to enter on such amicable discussions, and to give such candid explanations as might happily remove the discontents and suspicions of the French government, and vindicate the conduct of the United States. For this purpose he selected from among his fellow-citizens, a character, whose integrity, talents, experience and service, had placed him in the rank of the most esteemed and respected in the nation. The direct object of his mission was expressed in his letter of credence to the French republic, being "to maintain that good understanding, which, from the commencement of the alliance, had subsisted between the two nations; and to efface unfavourable impressions, banish suspicions, and restore that cordiality, which was at once the evidence and pledge of a friendly union." And his instructions were to the same effect, "faithfully to represent the disposition of the government and people of the United States, their disposition being one, to remove jealousies and obsolete complaints, by shewing that they were groundless, to restore that mutual confidence which had been so unfortunately and injuriously impaired, and to explain the relative interests of both countries and the real sentiments of his own."

A minister thus specially commissioned, it was expected, would have proved the instrument of restoring mutual confidence between the two republics. The first step of the French government corresponded with that expectation. A few days before his arrival at Paris, the French minister of foreign relations, informed the American minister then resident at Paris, of the formalities to be observed by himself in taking leave, and by his successor, preparatory to his reception. These formalities they observed, and on the 9th of December presented officially to the minister of foreign relations, the one a copy of his letters of credence, the other a copy of his letters of credence.

These were laid before the Executive Directory. Two days afterwards, the minister of foreign relations informed the recalled American minister, that the Executive Directory had determined not to receive

another minister plenipotentiary from the United States, until after the redress of grievances demanded of the American government, and which the French republic had a right to expect from us. The American minister immediately endeavoured to ascertain, whether by refusing to receive him, it was intended that he should retire from the territories of the French republic; and verbal answers were given that such was the intention of the Directory. For his own justification he desired a written answer, but obtained none, until towards the last of January, when, receiving notice in writing to quit the territories of the republic, he proceeded to Amsterdam, where he proposed to wait for instruction from this government. During his residence at Paris, cards of hospitality were refused him, and he was threatened with being subjected to the jurisdiction of the minister of police; but with becoming firmness he insisted on the protection of the law of nations due to him as the known minister of a foreign power. You will derive further information from his dispatches which will be laid before you.

As it is often necessary that nations should treat for the mutual advantage of their affairs, and especially to accommodate and terminate differences, and as they can treat only by ministers, the right of embassy is well known and established, by the law and usage of nations. The refusal on the part of France to receive and hear our minister, is then the denial of a right; but the refusal to receive him, until we have acceded to their demands, without discussion and without investigation, is to treat us neither as allies, nor as friends, nor as a sovereign state.

With this conduct of the French government, it will be proper to take into view, the public audience given to the late minister of the United States, on his taking leave of the Executive Directory. The speech of the president discloses sentiments more alarming than the refusal of a minister, because more dangerous to our independence and union; and at the same time studiously marked with indignities towards the government of the United States. It evinces a disposition to separate the people of the United States from the government; to persuade them that they have different affections, principles and interests from those of their fellow-citizens, whom they themselves have chosen to manage their common concerns; and thus to produce divisions fatal to our peace. Such attempts ought to be repelled, with a decision which shall convince France and the world, that we are not a degraded people, humiliated under a colonial spirit of fear and sense of inferiority, fitted to be the miserable instruments of foreign influence, and regardless of national honour, character and interest.

I should have been happy to have thrown a veil over these transactions, if it had been possible to conceal them; but they have passed on the great theatre of the world in the face of all Europe and America; and with such circumstances of publicity and solemnity that they cannot be disguised and will not soon be forgotten; they have inflicted a wound in the American breast.

It is my sincere desire that they may be healed. It is my sincere desire, and in this I presume I concur with you and with our constituents, to preserve peace and friendship with all nations; and believing that neither the honour nor interest of the United States absolutely forbid the repetition of advances for securing these desirable objects with France, I shall institute a fresh attempt at negotiation, and shall not fail to promote and accelerate an accommodation, on terms compatible with the rights, duties, interests and honour of the nation. If we have committed errors, and these can be demonstrated, we shall be willing to correct them: if we have done injuries, we shall be willing on conviction to redress them. And equal measures of justice we have a right to expect from France and every other nation.

The diplomatic intercourse between the United States and France being at present suspended, the government has no means of obtaining official information from that country; nevertheless there is reason to believe that the Executive Directory passed a decree on the second of March last, contravening in part the treaty of amity and commerce of 1778, injurious to our lawful commerce and endangering the lives of our citizens. A copy of this decree will be laid before you.

While we are endeavouring to adjust all our differences with France, by amicable negotiation, the progress of the war in Europe, the depredations on our commerce, the personal injuries to our citizens, and the general complexion of affairs, render it my indispensable duty to recommend to your consideration effectual measures of defence.

The commerce of the United States has become an interesting object of attention, whether we consider it in relation to the wealth and finances, or the strength and resources of the nation. With a sea coast of near two thousand miles in extent, opening a wide field for fisheries, navigation and commerce, a great portion of our citizens naturally apply their industry and en-

terprise to those objects. Any serious and permanent injury to commerce would not fail to produce the most embarrassing disorders; to prevent it from being undetermined and destroyed, it is essential that it receive an adequate protection.

The naval establishment must occur to every man who considers the injuries committed on our commerce and the insults offered to our citizens, and the destruction of the vessels by which these causes have been practised. As the sufferings of our mercantile and seafaring citizens, cannot be ascribed to the omission of duties demandable, considering the neutral situation of our country, they are to be attributed to the hope of impunity, arising from a supposed inability on our part to afford protection. To resist the consequences of such impressions on the minds of foreign nations, and to guard against the degradation and servility which they must finally stamp on the American character, is an important duty of government.

A naval power, next to the militia, is the natural defence of the United States. The experience of the last war, would be sufficient to shew, that a moderate naval force, such as would be easily within the present abilities of the Union, would have been sufficient to have baffled many formidable transportations of troops from one state to another, which were then practised. Our sea coasts from their great extent are more easily annoyed and more easily defended by a naval force than any other. With all the materials our country abounds in: in skill our naval architects and navigators are equal to any; and commanders and seamen will not be wanting.

But, although the establishment of a permanent system of naval defence appears to be requisite, I am sensible it cannot be formed so speedily and extensively, as the present crisis demands. Hitherto, I have thought proper to prevent the sailing of armed vessels, except on voyages to the East Indies, where general usage, and the danger from pirates appeared to render the permission proper; yet the restriction has originated solely from a wish to prevent collisions with the powers at war, contravening the act of congress of June, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-four, and not from any doubt entertained by me of the policy and propriety of permitting our vessels to employ means of defence, while engaged in a lawful foreign commerce. It remains for congress to prescribe such regulations as will enable our seafaring citizens to defend themselves against violations of the law of nations, and at the same time restrain them from committing acts of hostility against the powers at war. In addition to this voluntary provision for defence by individual citizens, it appears to me necessary to equip the frigates and provide other vessels of inferior force to take under convoy such merchant vessels as shall remain unarmed.

The greater part of the cruisers, whose depredations have been most injurious, have been built, and some of them partially equipped in the United States. Although an effectual remedy may be attended with difficulty, yet I have thought it my duty to present the subject generally to your consideration. If a mode can be devised, by the wisdom of congress, to prevent the resources of the United States from being converted into the means of annoying our trade, a great evil will be prevented. With the same view I think it proper to mention that some of our citizens resident abroad have fitted out privateers, and others have voluntarily taken the command, or entered on board of them, and committed spoliations on the commerce of the United States. Such unnatural and iniquitous practices can be restrained only by severe punishments.

But besides a protection of our commerce on the seas, I think it highly necessary to protect it at home, where it is collected in our most important ports. The distance of the United States from Europe, and the well known promptitude, ardour, and courage of the people, in defence of their country, happily diminish the probability of invasion; nevertheless, to guard against sudden and predatory incursions, the situation of some of our principal sea ports, demands your consideration. And as our country is vulnerable in other interests, besides those of its commerce, you will seriously deliberate, whether the means of general defence ought not to be increased by an addition to the regular artillery and cavalry, and by arrangements for forming a provisional army.

With the same view, and as a measure, which even in a time of universal peace, ought not to be neglected, I recommend to your consideration a revision of the laws for organizing, arming, and disciplining the militia, to render that natural and safe defence of the country, effectual.

Although it is very true, that we ought not to involve ourselves in the political system of Europe, but to keep ourselves always distinct and separate from it, yet to effect this separation, early, punctual, and continual information of the current chain of events, and of the political projects in contempla-