

It had been urged that if government should interpose in the present case, an interposition would be made in any case whatever, where the stock might fluctuate; the principle would apply as well to a fall of 60 or 70 per cent. as to a fall of 600 or 700 per cent. He could not admit this inference. A distinction was essential between an extreme case and a case short of it. The line was difficult to be drawn; but it was no more incumbent on him, than on his opponents, to draw it. They themselves could not deny that a certain extremity of the evil would have justified the interposition. Suppose that the distress of the alienating creditors had been ten times as great as it was; that instead of 2, 3 or 4s. in the pound, they had received a farthing only in the pound; and that the certificates lay now in the hands of the purchasers in that state, or even at a less value: was there a member who would rise up and say, that the purchasers ought to be paid the entire nominal sum, and the original sufferer be entitled to no indemnification whatever?

Gentlemen had triumphed in the want of a precedent to the measure. No government, it was said, had interposed to redress fluctuations in its public paper. But where was the government that had funded its debts under the circumstances of the American debt? If no government had done so, there could be no precedent either for or against the measure, because the occasion itself was unprecedented. And if no similar occasion had before existed in any country, the precedent to be set would at least be harmless, because no similar occasion would be likely to happen in this.

If gentlemen persisted, however, in demanding precedents, he was happy in being able to gratify them with two, which, though not exactly parallel, were on that account of the greater force, since the interpositions of government had taken place where the emergency could less require them.

The first was the case of the Canada bills. During the war, which ended in 1763, and which was attended with a revolution in the government of Canada, the supplies obtained for the French army in that province were paid for in bills of exchange and certificates. This paper depreciated, and was bought up chiefly by British merchants. The sum and the depreciation were so considerable, as to become a subject of negotiation between France and Great Britain at the peace. The negotiation produced a particular article; by which it was agreed by France that the paper ought to be redeemed, and admitted by Great Britain that it should be redeemed at a liquidated value. In the year 1766 this article was accordingly carried into effect by ministers from the two courts, who reduced the paper in the hands of the British holders, in some instances, as much as 75 per cent. below its nominal value. It was stated, indeed, by the reporters of the case, that the holders of the paper had themselves concurred in the liquidation; but it was not probable that the concurrence was voluntary. If it was voluntary, it shews that they themselves were sensible of the equity of the sacrifice.

The other case was of still greater weight, as it had no relation to war or to treaty, and took place in the nation which has been held up as a model with respect to public credit. In the year 1713, the civil list of Great Britain had fallen into arrears to the amount of 500,000l. The creditors who had furnished supplies to the government had, instead of money, received debentures only from the respective offices. These had depreciated. In that state, they were assigned in some instances; in others, consented to be assigned. When the parliament appropriated funds for satisfying these arrears they inserted an express provision in the act, that the creditors who had been obliged by the default of government to dispose of their paper at a loss, might redeem it from the assignees, by repaying the actual price with an interest of 6 per cent. and that all agreements and covenants to assign should be absolutely void. Here then was an interposition on the very principle, that a government ought to redress the wrongs, sustained by its default, and on an occasion trivial when compared with that under consideration; yet it does not appear that the public credit of the nation was injured by it.

The best source of confidence in a government was the apparent honesty of its views. The proposition on the table could not possibly be ascribed to any other motive than this, because the public was not to gain a farthing by it. The next source was an experienced punctuality in the payments due from the government. For this support to public credit, he relied on what had been experienced by a part of the foreign creditors; on the provision to be made for the residue; and the punctuality which he flattered himself would be observed in all future payments of the domestic creditors. He was more apprehensive of injury to public credit from such modifications of the interest of the public debt, as some gentlemen seemed to have in view. In these the public would be the gainer, and the plea of inability the more alarming; and because it was so easy to be set up, so difficult to be disproved, and because it was for which the temptations would be alluring.

The impracticability of the measure was the remaining ground on which it had been attacked. He did not deny that it would be attended with difficulties, and that perfect justice would not be done; but these were not the questions. It was sufficient that a grievous injustice would be lessened, and that the difficulties might be surmounted. What he had in view was that, for the convenience of claimants, some authority should be provided, and properly distributed thro' the union, in order to investigate and ascertain the claims; and that for the security of the public, the burden of proof should be thrown on the claimants. A scrutiny on this plan, aided by the settlements in the books of the army department, and the state commissioners, and other office-documents, would be a remedy at once for all the difficulties started with regard to fictitious names, certificates issued as money by commissaries and quarter-masters, due bills, &c.

For some particular cases special provisions might be requisite. The case of loan-office certificates, alienated at early periods, before they were depreciated fell under this description. Legacies might be another. He should have no objection to some special regulation, as to the payments of debts in certificates to persons within the British lines, said to have been authorized by the laws of New-York; though he presumed few such payments had been made, and that of these few the greater part had by this time passed from the creditors into other hands. There might be a few other cases equally entitled to some particular attention in the details of the provision. As to the merchants who had compounded for their debts in certificates, or persons who had exchanged bonds for them, it could not be doubted that the transactions had reference to the market value of the paper, and therefore had nothing peculiar in them.

The expense incident to such a plan of investigation ought to form no difficulty. It bears no proportion to the expense already incurred by commissioners, &c. for effecting a lone proportion of justice. Rather than justice should not be done, the expense might be taken out of the portion to the original sufferers.

The danger of frauds and perjuries had been worked up into a formidable objection. If there had always been equally alarming, no provision could have ever been made for the discharge of public debts. He reminded the committee of the frauds and perjuries for which a door had been opened by the final settlements, &c. of the frauds and perjuries inseparable from the collection of impost and excises; yet these were all submitted to as necessary evils, because justice could not be done without them. The frauds and perjuries incident to this supplementary provision for justice, must be very inconsiderable in number; and still more so, when compared either with the subject to be attained, or with the like evils already encountered in pursuit of a like object.

Great ingenuity and information had been exerted, by gentlemen on the other side, in raising difficulties: he was sure that, after an adoption of the proposition, the same exertion would be used in removing them, and with such aid the idea of impracticability would vanish.

Mr. Lee: The gentlemen, he said, who had argued against the proposition of his colleague, seem to have referred to these rules

which are found necessary to regulate the intercourse between man and man in civil society, without regarding the great law of political associations, which had for its object the safety and happiness of every individual in the community. The end of government was certainly to accommodate all, and not to aggrandize a few; and every class of citizens ought to be regarded in the distribution of national justice. And nothing is more common in the history of the most virtuous and renowned republics, when brought into calamitous circumstances, than to see this great law superceding the forms established to regulate civil intercourse. Without such exercises of power, justice could not have been done, nor the nation preserved. And in such a situation, no wife people will ever be bound by the ordinary maxims of government: So that he had no doubt of the right of the government to interfere on the present occasion.

He also thought, that in all the deliberations of the House, the nature of our government should be attended to. It was the government of the people, and nothing like a coercive principle was found in it: In order therefore to render the administration salutary and honorable, our measures should be calculated to procure popular approbation. Paying taxes was a serious thing. And to induce a free people to pay taxes, they must be convinced of the necessity and equity of them. And if the proposition on the table was calculated to reconcile the public mind to the requisite degree of taxation, every class of the public creditors would probably be finally benefited by its adoption. If, on the contrary, our measures should appear irreconcilable to the popular idea of equity and right, it is probable that they would meet with that hearty support from the community, which, under our government, is essential to a prosperous administration of it. The general opinion of the people should have its due weight in all our deliberations; and he believed that the calm and unbiassed expression of the public mind, would be always found the best index of that which was just and politic. For his own part, he declared, that he had always been convinced of the equity of such an arrangement as that proposed by his colleague; but that he had considered doubts with regard to the practicability of such a plan, which were not yet altogether removed. But this appeared to him by no means a sufficient reason to prevent us from recognizing the principle. This would be a declaration to the world, and to our constituents, that we did not disregard the great principles of natural equity; and if hereafter, on further investigation, the plan should be found impracticable, this would be a sufficient justification to us for relinquishing it.

He concluded with observing, that he had been unexpectedly induced to appear on the floor, and had hastily expressed ideas which were the ebullitions of the moment, and hoping that in future, the debate would be conducted without intemperate, in the most remote degree, that any gentleman was influenced by unworthy motives. For his own part, when he entered the house, he considered himself as entering into a sanctuary; and that every motive or passion, which had not for its object the public good, should be left behind. He did not doubt that every gentleman took his seat here with similar impressions; and expressed a hope, that the final result of their deliberations would be that which would contribute most to the national honor and advantage.

(To be continued.)

Our readers will please to incorporate the following correction in the speech of the Hon. Mr. PAGE, inserted in our last.—Mr. Page endeavored to shew, that Mr. Madison's motion did not deserve the harsh expressions used against it by Mr. Ames; that so far from being an infamous proposition, he thought his colleague might have said, that should Congress adopt it, they might, with a safe conscience, stand before the tribunal, not merely of a superior order of beings, but before the Great Judge of the whole Earth. Mr. Page said nothing like threatening his opponents with divine justice: He only endeavored to moderate their zeal, and to justify his colleague's motion.

MONDAY, MARCH 1.

Mr. Sumpter took his seat this day. A message was received from the President of the United States, by the Secretary for the Department of War, with sundry communications relating to the present situation, and prospects of the Western Frontiers in respect to the Indian Tribes.

Mr. Scott presented a petition from sundry inhabitants of Pennsylvania, holders of old paper money—this petition was lengthy, and entered into a particular discussion of the subject, stated the pretensions of those who are creditors of the United States in consequence of holding this money, especially such as had been compelled to receive it by virtue of tender laws, and laying great stress on the specific promise impressed on the face of the bills.—Laid on the table.

Sundry petitions and memorials were read and referred. The bill for securing to Francis Bailey, the exclusive right of using certain inventions in Typography, was read the second time, and ordered to be engrossed for a third reading to-morrow.

A resolution of the Assembly of the State of South Carolina, respecting the establishment of a military guard at Fort Johnston, was read a second time, and ordered to lie on the table.

In committee of the whole, on the report of the Secretary of the Treasury.

The proposition for assuming the State debts, and the amendments proposed thereto, under consideration.

Mr. Madison withdrew the motion he made on Friday: He then moved one to the following effect: That the amount of the debts actually paid by any State to its creditors since the day of — shall be credited and paid to such State on the same terms as shall be provided in the case of individuals.

Mr. Ames offered the following resolutions, which he desired might be laid on the table, to be taken up after the propositions under consideration had been decided on.

Resolved, that effectual provision be made for the settlement of accounts between the United States and individual States.

Resolved, that in the said settlement, the States respectively be charged with the advances to them severally made by the United States, liquidated to specie value, with interest thereon at the rate of six per cent. per annum, and that they be also charged with the amount of their respective debts (which with the consent of the creditors shall have been assumed by the United States) with the interest thereon to the time from which interest shall be payable by the United States.

Resolved, that in the said settlement the said States respectively be credited with all monies paid and supplies furnished to or for, and debts incurred on account of the United States, and in general with all expenditures whatsoever towards general or particular defence during the late war between the United States and Great Britain, with interest thereon at the rate of six per cent. per annum.

Resolved, that the said settlement be made under the direction of commissioners whose authority shall continue until the said settlement shall be effected, and whose decisions shall be final and conclusive upon the United States, and upon the several States.

Resolved, that in case a ratio for adjusting the contributions of the respective States shall not be preferred by Congress during the present session, the said commissioners shall have full power to settle such ratio, and shall also have power to determine in all other respects the principles of the said settlement in conformity to these resolutions.

Resolved, that the several States may exhibit their claims against the United States until the — day of — next, but not afterwards; and that the said commissioners shall, as soon as may be after the said day, proceed to a final adjustment of the said accounts; whether the whole of the claims of the respective States shall have been then exhibited or not.

No decision this day.

The bill to secure to Francis Bailey the exclusive right to his inventions in typography, was brought in engrossed, read the third time, and passed to be enacted.

A report from the Secretary of the Treasury, containing an estimate of the appropriations necessary for the year 1790 was read—on motion of Mr. Page it was ordered that this report be printed for the use of the House.

It was then moved that a committee of ways and means should be appointed, and that this report should be referred to that committee.

This motion occasioned a considerable debate—in the course of it, Mr. White moved the following, in substance, viz. That the Secretary of the Treasury should be directed to ascertain the resources that may be applied to the payment of the State debts, should they be assumed by the United States. The motion on this question after considerable discussion was put, when the House was equally divided—and the Speaker gave the casting vote in favor of the motion.

The report of the Secretary of the Treasury relative to appropriations was referred to the committee on appropriations.

Mr. Ames presented a memorial from the manufacturers of cordage in the town of Boston.

A petition of Abraham Skinner late Commissary General of prisoners, was read and laid on the table.

A memorial of George Scriba, in behalf of himself and others, containing a proposal for purchasing a tract of land in the western territory, of not less than 3 or more than 4 millions of acres—at the rate of 20 cents per acre, was read and referred to the Secretary of the Treasury.

Mr. Stone introduced the following resolution, which was adopted, viz. That the Secretary of the Treasury be directed to lay before the House the amount of the impost and tonnage received in the several States, from the commencement of the collection to the 31st December last.

In committee of the whole House, on the report of the Secretary of the Treasury—the assumption of the State debts under consideration; Mr. Madison's amendments to the original proposition being read, the debate was renewed—His last proposition, viz. That the amount of the debts actually paid by any State to its creditors since the — day of — shall be credited and paid to such State on the same terms as shall be provided in the case of individuals—Mr. Smith (S. C.) moved should be amended, by inserting the words *principal and interest*—which after some debate was carried in the affirmative.

The question on this amendment, as thus amended, being taken, was negatived.

The committee then rose—and the House adjourned.

FROM THE CONNECTICUT JOURNAL.

MESSRS. PRINTERS.

THE writer, who, in your last paper, attempted to ridicule the pompous account of the Western Territory, has dealt so much between jest and earnest, that one is in the event at a loss for his object.

Your readers may be pleased with a fine picture, even though it have no original in nature, but when the proportions are horrid and impossible, they must be disgusting—These anecdotes might figure among the Arabian Night's Entertainment—but among us can never be entitled to a shadow of credibility.

When Dives was in torment, he kindly lent to his brethren to shift their course—happy for us, if the desperate settlers of the Georgian Territory were as humanely disposed.

To people acquainted with new countries I need only observe, that with all possible advantages from nature, the first settlers must have a Benjamin's mess of the curse of Adam, before they can receive the fruit of their labours.

Deprived of the blessings of neighbourhood and social intercourse, at a distance from markets, in constant fear from savages, they may pick strawberries larger than those of Chili—may reflect that in the latitude of their lands lie many delightful countries on the other Continent—Their imagination may represent, Age resuming Youth—all the Seasons resolved into one eternal Spring—the waters of a modern Bethesda, healing with a preter christian rapidity—the most painful disorders flying at the first draught—rivers clear as chrysal stocked with all kind of fish—they may conceive of trees reaching far above the atmosphere, with diameters like the planet Mars—these bearing spontaneously, all manner of fruits, in abundance, transcending calculation—A second and much improved edition of Eden may please their mendacious fancies, but call these poor wretches to apprehension of the good gives but

“the greater feelings to the world;—
“Who can hold a fire in his hand by thinking on the frosty Caucasus? or bly the hungry edge of appetite? or bare imagination of a feast—”

These raging accounts have been foisted into public notice by the emissaries of land jobbers—