

extension, might snap, and be rendered more difficult to bring together than the rope of sand divided in a dozen places.

Let us look to the policy of the former Congress. Did they ever entertain an idea of taking on themselves the State debts? Did they ever pledge the faith of the continent to assume them? Nay—Did they, when they applied to the respective States for the power of preserving the Union, I mean the five per cent. ever dream of discharging those debts, or did any of the States require it? The constitution did not contemplate it; for that provides for the debts of the Union only, and many of the State debts are not of a continental nature, and ought not to be a continental charge; of this kind, I hold the Penobscot expedition from Massachusetts, and the fitting out the ship South-Carolina by that State. If States choose to run into those balloon exploits on their own account, their neighbors ought not to pay for it. The intention of the present system I imagine is to introduce all those charges.

Policy, he said, was against the assumption. Many of the States have material objections, and will view the interference with a jaundiced eye; and notwithstanding what gentlemen so frequently ridicule of monsters and hydras, jealousies will arise, and perhaps from the nature of republican governments it is necessary they should. I think, at least, that there will be a just foundation for them in the present instance—for, will the citizen who has already paid his proportion of the debt to his State, contentedly see a new burthen imposed on himself and his posterity—a burthen we know not when we shall be rid of—a burthen we know not the weight or amount of.

Again Sir, is it policy on the subject of public credit; paper of whatever denomination, whether stock or not, will be affected by the quantity in circulation, and will be depreciated accordingly. Policy on every principle forbids it—policy forbids us, in the vigor of youth, to cloath ourselves with all the impotence, imbecility and infirmity of extreme old political age. Britain was seventeen hundred years politically old, dating from Julius Cæsar's invasion, before she had a funded debt. The United States have scarcely attained their fourteenth political year, when they are about to mortgage themselves and posterity for a funded debt; the one third, or perhaps the one half of the amount of Britain's enormous debts at this day.

Mr. Jackson observed, that the justice of the measure had as many objections.

The greatest plea of justice was, that the debt was of the same nature, and contracted for the same reasons and in the same cause. His arguments before, he said, had proved this not to be altogether the case: but supposing it was, he asked whether it was justice to compel the citizen who had already contributed, to pay a second proportion. Gentlemen had talked much of the exertions of their States—the hardships they had endured—and the ravages they had sustained. He could advance, with equal confidence, that he came from the State which had suffered the most of any in the Union; where there was no place, no corner but where the British arms had been carried; where the families had been totally driven off, and their properties had been totally destroyed; where the inhabitants had scorned the British, and left their properties behind them; where what the British had left, the American army had taken to subsist on, and not a certificate had been given in numerous instances. Yet those citizens whose property had been thus destroyed, had cheerfully submitted to the payment of the State debt. But would it be justice, after all those losses, and after this already voluntary contribution, to put our hands again in their pockets, and say, you must pay the debts of Massachusetts and South-Carolina. If those States have not done as they ought—if they have not extinguished their debts, they have themselves to blame for it.

Sir, in Georgia the audited debt has drawn no interest—interest has been allowed only on a small proportion of funded debt; for we also Mr. Chairman, must have our project of funding, until we were convinced by experience it would not answer, and that we could not pay a regular specie interest. By this plan, fir, all those audited certificates will draw interest from the time of liquidation, which will greatly increase the debt of Georgia, and not benefit her citizens: for the late speculations, no doubt have changed the holders, and the very man who did the service or furnished the supply, contented with the principal sum, will now have to contribute his proportion towards payment of the interest of his own certificate and which he himself was not entitled to.

By the system before us the settlement with the States is postponed to a distant day—a day which never may arrive, and notwithstanding the balance may be in favor of the State I represent, the citizen may be forever bound for the interest of this enormous debt—the debt of other States.

There is another part of the Secretary's report which will materially injure Georgia. The proviso, that where a state shall have exchanged the securities of the continent for those of her own, no settlement shall be made until those exchanged certificates shall be brought in and surrendered. The State of Georgia little thinking of such a day as this, altho very materially concerned, has, as it was usual with her, burnt her exchanged certificates as they have returned to her treasury. Is she, because those certificates have been sunk and sent to oblivion, and which I wish our whole debt was, to suffer for her honesty, and that of her citizens?

Sir, I will not tax the Secretary with the design; I will not impute the intention to him; but I trust that we shall not run ourselves enormously in debt and mortgage ourselves and our children, to give scope to the abilities of any minister on earth to give an opening to shew the talents he possesses of managing taxes and the resources of the burthen he imposes.

Mr. Jackson concluded, by saying, that to his mind and agreeably to the reasons he had given, he was convinced the assumption of the State debts was inexpedient, impolitic, and unjust; and he trusted that it would not be adopted.

Mr. Smith (S. C.) replied to Mr. Jackson, that he should be as unwilling as that gentleman to assume debts of any State incurred for balloon schemes (as they had been termed) but he did not think the Penobscot expedition or the South-Carolina frigate came within that description; the members from Massachusetts could answer for the former, and as to the latter, he could safely say that the State of South-Carolina suffered such injury to her commerce during the war, that a naval protection was indispensably necessary—that other States were protected by vessels of war on continental establishments, while the State alluded to was unprotected, and her trade crippled by the enemy—that the equipment of that vessel had cost a much less sum than was generally believed, as but a small part of the sum demanded had been allowed by the State. He observed, that as the union were under obligations to protect every part, so were they also bound to contribute their proportion of expence, incurred by any particular part for its own defence—that this was language which had been much repeated during the last session, when the house had been called on to vote a large sum of money for the protection of Georgia from the Creeks, and which under the influence of that principle, the house had actually done. That State could have justly complained had she been left to protect herself, and to incur so heavy a burthen.—Mr. Smith said the opposition of gentlemen to the measure seemed to originate in an idea that their were the private debts of the several States incurred for their own particular purposes; the fact was just the reverse—they were as much the debts of the continent, as those which were called the continental debts—they were as much the price of independence—instead of their being State debts assumed by the continent, they were in truth continental debts which the States had assumed when Congress were unable to pay them; but now Congress had in its exclusive possession the best resources of the nation, and should all those resources be applied to the payment of a few continental creditors (and they had been frequently told that all the continental securities were in the hands of a few speculators) to the total ruin of all the State creditors, it was easy to anticipate dangerous consequences; indeed such would be the dissatisfaction on the part of the State creditors, that it would considerably obstruct the collection of the national revenue. There

had been no reason assigned, and he believed it was impossible to assign any, which could establish a distinction between the one and the other class of these creditors—their claims were precisely similar, and they ought to be provided for on similar terms.

Gentlemen were mistaken, if they thought South-Carolina had made no exertions to discharge her debt since the peace—that State had levied on her citizens every year a tax, which considering her losses by the war, and the devaluations committed by the enemy, was a very considerable one, amounting to upwards of 300,000 dollars annually for the interest, besides a million and an half of dollars principal paid off, making upwards of three millions of dollars.

It had been said that Great Britain was 1700 years old before she began a funding system, while the United States were about to adopt it at the age of 14; to that he observed, that America was nearly, if not quite, as far advanced in political sagacity in her early youth as Great-Britain in her extreme old age, having the experience of Great-Britain, and of other nations during a long course of years as her guide; and that he always thought the vigor of youth was more equal to the support of heavy burdens than infirmity of age. He agreed with the gentleman that if the measure was a wrong one, the sentiments of one or two States should not influence their determination, but he was persuaded that on a discussion of its own merits, it would be found necessary for the union and tranquility of all the States.

To Mr. Smith's answer, that the State debts were all on a footing with the debts of the Union, and that on this principle, Georgia had received protection last year, and might receive more this, Mr. Jackson replied, that if Georgia had received protection, it had not been with the vote of some members from that State (S. C.) who supposing, as he would charitably allow, that the Georgians, and not M'Gillivray, were in the wrong, had withheld their voice; but that however in his opinion, the cases were not the same; but he denied that Georgia hitherto had received the least shadow of protection from the union, although the most favorable report was existing of their conduct on the table.

That the cases were not similar, because in the cases of Georgia there was an invasion of the union: whilst in the case of the State the South-Carolina which he had mentioned, that State had done what they were not warranted in by the laws of Congress or confederation. The fitting out ships of war—that that State was not contented to be on an equality with her sisters, but aimed at a high sounding fame, of possessing vessels of war in her own employ. Finding here he would remark that as well in this case as in that of the State vessel of Massachusetts, it could not be expected that the Union should defray their expence. He would ask if any of the prize monies of those vessels had been lodged in the treasury of the continent. He believed it had not been the case, and if it had not, the States which had reaped the benefits ought to pay the charges.

The gentleman had insinuated, that as Georgia had allowed no interest or could not pay the interest of her funded debt, she certainly could not have discharged much of her debt. He would put that gentleman on this head, by assuring him, that altho' Georgia had not specie sufficient to discharge the interest of her funded debt regularly, yet she had sunk some hundred thousand dollars of her principal debt.

Mr. Sedgwick said that he had not the vanity to suppose any thing new which he could say would authorize him to expect the alms of an exhausted pecuniary of the committee, in an extensive discussion of the vast subject before them. He would however, call on the candor of the gentlemen who so strenuously opposed the proposition under consideration, for, an attempt to answer some of the arguments which had been repeatedly advanced by himself and the gentlemen with whom he had the honor to act and think on this occasion.

He observed that the revolution was a common, a national cause, that therefore the expence should be equally apportioned—that whatever had been advanced towards the attainment of the object should be satisfied, if within the ability of the government. That if the whole could not be paid the loss should be sustained in equal and just proportion: That these were the dictates of common justice and common honesty, and universally considered as conclusively binding in the usual intercourse of men in civil society: That thus considering the subject, he thought the States now flagging under an unequal weight of burthen, had a right to demand of this government the adoption of the proposed measure. He further observed that this demand for justice would appear the more reasonable, when it was considered that the government would not, should the resolution be adopted, sustain any loss. For that it was in fact true, as had been repeatedly stated, that should the debts be assumed, there would still remain, a balance due, to every State. Because there was no State, which since the commencement of the war had not done more than to support the expences of its own government, and all its other incidental charges. That this would be evident, when it was remembered, that the whole with which a State, in the event could be charged, would be the debt to be assumed, together with what had been heretofore advanced to it; and on the other hand it would be entituled to a credit for all its advances and services in the war. In this view of the subject, which was the just one, he wished gentlemen would explain why the government should delay to put the citizens on a footing of equality?

He observed that the accounts of individual States with the United States would ultimately be settled, or they would not: If the former, then justice would be done to all; if the latter, the only charitable and liberal supposition would be, that the States had equally exerted themselves in their glorious struggle for freedom.

He further wished gentlemen would explain to the committee and to the world, what were their intentions in regard to the State creditors, who it had been proved were equally entitled with others to justice. He affirmed that as it respected some of the States, no efficient measures, of national finance, could be carried into execution, and at the same time leave the States an ability to fulfil their engagements—engagements entered into at a time when they were in possession of funds which were fully adequate to the purpose, and which funds were now surrendered to this government.

ERRATUM: In Mr. Ames's speech, in our last, 5 paragraph 3 column, for "130,000," read 1,300,000.

FRIDAY, MARCH 19.

Sketch of the debate on Mr. Sherman's motion for appointing a committee to enquire into the receipts and expenditures of public money during the administration of the Hon. Robert Morris, late superintendent of Finance.

Mr. Gerry observed that some how or other the House is continually recurring to the modes of procedure adopted by the late Congress, who were both a legislative and executive body; the present government is organized on quite different principles.—The President of the United States is the only competent authority to take cognizance of the conduct of officers in the executive department—if we pursue the proposed plan of appointing committees we destroy the responsibility of executive officers—and divert the House of a great and essential privilege, that of impeaching our executive officers for mal-administration. He concluded by saying he was in favor of the report of the Senate for the appointing commissioners—as placing the business in a more parliamentary and constitutional direction.

Mr. Gerry was replied to by Mr. Hartley and Mr. Fitzsimons who contended that the motion was strictly parliamentary as it was certainly just that an investigation on the part of the House of the conduct of public officers ought to precede all censure of their conduct; this enquiry Mr. Morris has applied for—and on every principle of equity, he ought to have a fair and full hearing; that if his conduct has been such as to merit approbation, he may no longer stand under any disadvantageous or injurious imputation.

Mr. Jackson called for a reading of the memorial, which being read—He objected to the appointment of a committee, he thought it unnecessary, it would establish a precedent which would in-

volve a great variety of difficulties; he had no doubt of the honor and rectitude of conduct in the memorialist, he was ready to acknowledge that he had rendered the country great and meritorious services—and that this was the opinion of the people in general through the United States—he was for accepting the report of the committee and thus finish the business.

Mr. Vining was in favor of the motion—and observed that the report (it appears) does not come up to the ideas of the memorialist—he wishes to give particular satisfaction to the members of this house; he wishes the sanction of this house to the merit of his services, should they on investigation appear to deserve such a sanction, justice is all he asks for, and surely gentlemen will not deny that.

Mr. Fitzsimons followed Mr. Vining in a similar train of observations.

Mr. Bland was opposed to the motion: he thought the report was a full justification of the conduct of Mr. Morris; he was opposed to appointing commissioners, as creating an unnecessary expence.

Mr. Madison was in favor of the motion, he offered a variety of observations on the subject, and in support of the idea, that the House should possess itself of the fullest information in order to doing justice to the country and to public officers.

Mr. Gerry defended his first opinion, that the several branches of government should be kept separate—he was only solicitous he said that the house should not establish a precedent which would mix the several parts of the government. The memorialist requests the appointment of commissioners—and what is the objection: nothing more than the expence, which in a matter of justice, ought not to be considered.

Mr. Stone observed on the idea of expence, that if the business is easy to be settled, commissioners will not be wanted for a long time; if the business is intricate and difficult, a committee will be very improper—he was therefore in favor of commissioners.

Mr. Sherman said that for himself he was perfectly satisfied respecting the accounts of Mr. Morris; they are certified by as good and honest men as can possibly be appointed—men entirely un-influenced and uncontrolled by any person whatever; but still he thought to give full satisfaction to the memorialist and to wipe off any aspersions which may have been cast on him, he was in favor of a committee.

MONDAY, MARCH 22.

The amendments proposed by the senate to the bill for establishing a uniform rule of naturalization, and to the bill to provide for the mitigation or remission of fines, forfeitures and penalties in certain cases, were taken into consideration. To the first bill one amendment only was proposed, which was agreed to by the house. The amendment to the other, it was said, involved an alteration of the principle on which the bill was founded; other objections were made, and on motion it was voted that the amendment should lie on the table.

In committee of the whole; the report of the select committee on the memorials on the slave trade under consideration. The sixth article was further discussed.

Mr. Scott commenced the debate this day in advocating the prayer of the memorialists, he was replied to by several of the Southern gentlemen. It was moved that the clause should be struck out, this motion being put, it passed in the negative.

The committee then agreed to the proposition.

The seventh article was struck out of the report.

The committee then rose, and the report, as amended and agreed to, was laid on the table.

A message was received from the senate, with the bill making appropriations for the support of government for the year 1799, concurred in with amendments. Adjourned.

TUESDAY, MARCH 23.

Sundry memorials and petitions were presented and read.—The amendments of the Senate to the appropriation bill were taken into consideration—the first was agreed to.

The fun allowed by the house to Gifford Dally, Esq. for services performed during the recess, it was proposed by the Senate should be divided between him and Mr. Mathers the door keeper of the Senate, this amendment was objected to; after some conversation, the amendment was concurred in with an amendment.

The committee to whom was referred the petition of Richard Wells and John Hart, brought in the following report.

Resolved, That the possessors of the continental bills of credit, emitted by the authority of Congress, before the 18th day of March, 1780, on bringing the same into the Treasury of the United States, shall receive certificates for the same, at the rate of one dollar specie value for one hundred dollars of the said bills; and the same shall be funded on interest in the same manner as the other debts of the United States. The interest to commence on the day the said bills shall be lodged in said treasury—and all such bills in the treasury of any State exceeding its quota required by the acts of Congress of the 7th day of October, 1779; and the 18th day of March, 1780, on being brought into the treasury of the United States shall be credited to the account of such State at the rate aforesaid, on interest of six per cent. per annum—from the time it was received into the Treasury of the respective States; laid on the table.

It was then moved that the house should take up the report of the committee of the whole on the memorials of the people called Quakers.—This motion was opposed by Mr. Jackson, Mr. Smith, Mr. Burke, and Mr. Bland—they severally observed that the discussion of the subject has already excited a spirit of dissention among the members of the house—and that every principle of policy and concern for the dignity of the house, and the peace and tranquility of the United States, concur to shew the propriety of dropping the subject, and letting it sleep where it is.—On the other hand Mr. Vining, Mr. Hartley, and Mr. Page observed, that there was the same propriety in a conclusion as there was for first taking it up—that it has been so fully discussed, that it cannot be supposed gentlemen will go over the same ground again; it may soon be determined, to pass it over will be unprecedented, and will leave the public mind in the same State of uncertainty from which so much danger is apprehended.

The motion for taking up the report was warmly contested, in a lengthy debate, and finally passed in the affirmative, by a majority of one. This was followed by a motion for entering the report of the select committee, and the report of the committee of the whole on the journals of the house. This motion called up the speakers from all sides of the house, and was at last determined by Ayes and Noes as follow.

AYES.

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| Messrs Boudinot, | Hartley, | Partridge, |
| Brown, | Hathorn, | Schureman, |
| Cadwallader, | Heister, | Scot, |
| Contee, | Huntington, | Sedgwick, |
| Floyd, | Lewis, | Sherman, |
| Foster, | Lee, | Sylvester, |
| Gerry, | Leonard, | Sinnickson, |
| Gillman, | Madison, | Vining, |
| Goodhue, | P. Muhlenburg, | Wynkoop. 29. |
| Griffin, | Parker, | |
- NAYS—
- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Messrs Baldwin, | Livingston, | Sturges, |
| Baldwin, | Livermore, | Sumner, |
| Benson, | Matthews, | Thacher, |
| Bland, | Moore, | Trumbull, |
| Burke, | Page, | Tucker, |
| Carroll, | Van Ransselaer, | White, |
| Coles, | Smith, (M.) | Williamson. 25. |
| Gale, | Smith, (S. C.) | |
| Grout, | Stone, | |
- For the report of the select committee, see No. 96, March 19. The substance of the 1, 3, 5, and 6th propositions of this report were agreed to by the committee of the whole.
- The amendment proposed by the House to the Appropriation Bill, was non-concurred by the Senate. Adjourned.