

CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31.

*The proposition for assuming the state debts under consideration.*

MR. WILLIAMSON, observed, that North-Carolina must be confessedly a sufferer, unless the accounts of the several States within the union should be settled. He had said it was his firm belief that the final settlement of those accounts was intentionally delayed: He also believed that if the assumption had once taken place, a settlement would never be effected. He was not bound to answer so many questions. Why were commissioners appointed? Why were they continued? Why were they allowed clerks sufficient, with liberal salaries? There was an answer at hand. All this might be done to save appearances, until the assumption was affected—but he rather supposed that the scheme of assumption, was new, and not coherent with former systems. If questions might stand for arguments, he would take the liberty, in his turn, of asking, Why are not the commissioners furnished with a rule for determining the quotas of the several States? It is known that, without such rule, they cannot possibly settle the accounts. The neglect of this provision, and some other concomitant circumstances, stand with him for a good cause to suspect that the accounts are to await the final settlement. The member from New-York had observed that Congress, being in possession of all the funds, ought in justice to pay all the debts of the individual States. This position, if well founded, proves too much: it proves that Congress should pay the expence of the civil government of the States; but it is not true, as he conceives, that Congress have the exclusive benefit of any fund except the impost duty. It is granted that Congress may impose taxes of excise; it may demand twelve cents per gallon for all the rum that is retailed in the United States, and the legislature of any State may lay an additional excise of 18d. per gallon on rum. Are gentlemen afraid that the consumption of rum will be prevented? It is strange that gentlemen should offer to support this new and exceptionable measure by allegations that are so ill founded.

Mr. PAGE. One of my colleagues has taken pains to convince the house that it was the interest of his State for Congress to assume payment of the State debts, and had concluded that his colleague differed from him in opinion. I rise to shew upon what grounds they so differ from him; and this I do not because I suppose I am the best qualified to undertake the business, but because, as I have said but little as yet, and may have been misunderstood, I wish, whilst I answer my respectable friend, I may have an opportunity of shewing in what light I view the question before the committee.

Sir, my colleague stated that it was the interest of Virginia that Congress should assume the payment of the debts, because taxes laid for that purpose by her legislature bore unequally on the state, particularly in the middle and eastern parts. But sir, granting this to be true, it is only a proof that the weight of legislative influence is against those parts of the country, and, if so, it is a proof that a majority of the legislature at least must be against our sheltering ourselves under the general government, against the exertions of its authority; That if the present mode of levying taxes be agreeable to a majority of the people, the innovation proposed must be disagreeable to them; and that it is disagreeable even to the holders of public securities, appears to me to be evident from the sudden and great fall of state certificates, and the eagerness with which creditors get rid of them. This is a fact of which I am well informed; they fell 30 or 40 per cent. it is affirmed, soon after the plan of assumption was proposed; and I am assured, by some of the most sensible and best informed gentlemen in Virginia, that they think the assumption of the state debts unjust with respect to Virginia, and impolitic.

This, then, I think ought to be a satisfactory answer to my worthy colleague, especially when I add that the state now pays its debts in its own way, in its own time, upon very easy terms, and the creditors are satisfied, and cannot but be alarmed at the assumption proposed by Congress, at least at the delay of two years before they can possibly tell what their certificates will be worth.

Sir, my friend (Mr. Bland) and other respectable members on his side of the question, suppose that policy and justice dictated the resolution before you, but I conceive that policy demands that we should do nothing which may wound the credit of the general government and excite the jealous fears of its late opposers and secret enemies; and as to justice, that requires that Congress should pay the debts of the late Congress, and sacredly comply with all its own engagements; and that state legislatures should pay their debts, and comply with their engagements; by doing this, both the general government and the individual states establish their credit and follow the dictates of the fittest policy.

As to the debt of America, it is two fold; one part was incurred for the general defence, some-

times under requisitions of Congress, and sometimes by virtuous and voluntary exertions; the other part was incurred for local purposes, sometimes indeed against the common enemy, but sometimes to shew the power and spirit of the state; perhaps sometimes to lay the foundation of future grandeur and pre-eminence amongst the states, which, it ought to be remembered, were separate, sovereign and independent, vying with each other and clashing in their interests, so as to render it necessary to abolish the confederation which feebly held them together only against a common enemy, and to establish the present federal government, under which alone provision can be made for payment of such debts as are now proposed to be assumed; but those particular debts, further than such as are truly continental charges and contracted under the late government, Congress ought no more to meddle with than the debts of our allies in Europe. Sir, if we undertake to pay a debt beyond that which the late Congress was bound to pay, and a debt too which is said to be enormous, must we not alarm the creditors of the late government?—Must we not weaken the credit of the new government, and perhaps to such a degree as to injure the very states which suppose they will be benefited by the assumption proposed? I conceive sir, it would be good policy in Congress to establish its credit upon the firmest basis: If it should do this, it may hold forth its protecting hand to the weaker states, and enable them to flourish in agriculture, arts and commerce, so as to be able to pay all their own debts with honor.

Here, by the bye, I will observe that I think it highly improper in gentlemen, to represent the State debts as so large as to be beyond their abilities to pay them; I think this injurious to the credit of the States, and, I hope, founded on a mistake. I, for my part, think there is not a State in the union which, under the fostering hand of the general government, cannot pay its debts in a reasonable time; and sure I am, that the impost, tonnage, and back lands, will abundantly suffice for the payment of the debts and supplies of the general government.

It is said that these, and all the resources of government, being taken away, leave the States without the means of paying their debts; but this is a mistake: for if we reject the resolution before you, sir, the States will have direct taxes in their own hands for this purpose. If, indeed, the resolution be adopted, I know not what the States will have left: we shall then have grasped at all their resources: we shall prove the truth of the predictions of the enemies of this government, and wound the feelings of its friends, who so often declared that they could pledge themselves that Congress never would lay direct taxes but in cases of extreme necessity, and where the general good evidently required it; but in the case before us there is no such necessity; on the contrary, it is proposed merely to afford a partial relief to a few States, to the injury of a majority, and perhaps to the destruction of public credit, which may terminate in the ruin of all.

Thinking, therefore, as I do, sir, of the resolution before the committee, I shall vote to reject it.

Mr. BLAND. I rise to explain myself to my honorable colleague over the way (Mr. Page) or I would not now have troubled the House. That gentleman seems to have rested his arguments in his opposition to the sentiments I expressed yesterday, on a single point, and that not the principal one which I made use of, but only a collateral one; nor do I think he has by any means invalidated what I then said even on that point. I could wish the gentleman had taken the whole of my arguments, and answered them satisfactorily to me and the committee, and not have detached them; he would then have found that I yesterday mentioned some facts not easily to be disproved; that Virginia had suffered the loss of a very great number of her citizens by emigration to Kentucky, Franklin, Georgia, and other places, of whose assistance in the payment of her State debt she was totally deprived; nay, to those of Kentucky, she had yielded a very expensive protection, since the war, without receiving any return in taxes: that in consequence of her citizens emigrating, great quantities of the lands of those emigrants were offered for sale, which, with other causes, had produced a very great fall in the value of the lands held by those who had not emigrated, and who had now to pay the debts which were properly the debts of the union, to pay their own State debt, and the debts which they owed to British creditors prior to the war, to those creditors and that nation who had taken from these very people their negroes, laid waste those very lands, and burnt those towns, from whence they were to derive the means of paying any thing. It is true I mentioned in a cursory manner, and meant to apply it in its proper place, that the weight of wealth lay towards the sea coast, and in the track of the armies; that there also, of course, lay the burthen of war, and the principal part of those who were creditors of the State for monies loaned and supplies furnished, &c. and that the weight of legislative influence lay towards the mountains, and beyond them. I called upon the gentleman if this fact had not been ascertained in the legislature of Virginia, when the subject of the payment of British debts was agitated in that assembly; and asked him if loud complaints were not uttered from every part of the house from the lower members above described, nay, even from members surrounding the Honorable gentleman's place of abode. How much then must the State creditors, as I contend they are improperly called, for the bulk of the State debt, dread a similar proceeding, if the assumption does not take place, should any measure be moved which might effect the credit of the State funds, and especially when the securities, by being transferred, shall get into the hands of a few persons compared to the whole, or to those who now possess them, and who may be obliged to part with them? I must remind the gentleman that the British debtors are liable to be sued for their debts in the federal court, and that to many total ruin must ensue. A peace was necessary for America at the time it was made; few persons, except those who profited by the war, would have been willing to have continued it in our circumstances; those debtors were made a sacrifice to the obtaining that

peace; and without they are relieved by the assumption of the continental debt, which was assumed by the States when the continent was deficient in resources, their ruin would be complete. He would candidly hear and weigh every argument that could be urged; but had yet heard none that, either on a general or a State principle, had induced him to believe he should vote on this great question otherwise than he had hitherto done; that he was open to conviction, but could not change his opinion on slight grounds.

SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 28.

On motion, ordered, That Mr. Carroll, Mr. Ellsworth, Mr. Morris, Mr. Izard, and Mr. Butler, be a committee to consider what provision will be proper for Congress to make in the present session respecting the State of Rhode-Island.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

APRIL 28.

The House resolved itself into a committee of the whole, on the bill for the remission and mitigation of fines, forfeitures and penalties in certain cases—the same having been gone through with the committee rose, and the House ordered it to be engrossed and read the third time to-morrow.

The bill for the government of the territory south-east of the river Ohio, was taken up by the committee of the whole, and reported without any amendment, but in going through the House some amendments were made thereto, and was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading to-morrow.

Mr. Page, from the committee appointed for that purpose, brought in a bill to describe the mode in which the acts, records, and judicial proceedings of the several States shall be proved, &c.—which was read the first time.

The House then resolved itself into a committee of the whole on the bill to regulate trade and intercourse with the Indian tribes, and made progress therein.

THURSDAY, APRIL 29.

Mr. Sherman, Mr. Smith (S. C.) and Mr. Vining were appointed a committee to report to the house if any, or what further rules were necessary to regulate the proceedings in the house; and also to confer with a committee of the Senate respecting further regulations in conducting business between the two houses.

Mr. Fitzsimons, Mr. Smith (M.) and Mr. Sturges were appointed a committee to bring in a bill for the government and regulation of seamen in the merchants service.

The house then resolved itself into a committee of the whole on the bill supplementary to the act, entitled, "An act for establishing the salaries of the executive officers of government, their assistants and clerks." The bill being gone through with, and amended, the committee rose, and the house agreed to the same. By this bill the secretary of state is allowed to employ another chief clerk at a salary of 800 dollars per annum.

The house took into consideration the bill for providing the means of intercourse with foreign nations, and agreed to the same as amended by the committee of the whole on Tuesday last.

The house then resolved itself into a committee of the whole on the bill "For the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and other writings, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned."

FRIDAY, APRIL 30.

Sundry petitions and memorials were read. A committee was appointed to report a catalogue of books suitable to form a library, for the accommodation of both Houses of Congress, and the Executive Officers of Government—with an estimate of the expence. Some reports of committees were read—and then the House adjourned till Monday.

The first session of the General Assembly of Virginia, subsequent to the election of the President of the United States, not having been held until several months after that event, necessarily delayed an address of congratulation to the President until the winter following; and the ill health of the Senators from that State, who were directed to present the address, having interposed a further delay, until Tuesday the 27th instant, when

The following Address was presented to the President of the United States, at his house in Broadway, by the Senators from the Commonwealth of Virginia in the Congress of the United States.

TO GEORGE WASHINGTON, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

The Address of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

S I R,  
THE General Assembly of your native State, embrace the first moment in their power to present the congratulations of your countrymen, on your election to the Chief Magistracy of a free and enlightened nation.

In early life you engaged the affections of your fellow-citizens, by the exercise of those social virtues, which have so eminently marked your conduct, and acquired their confidence, by the display of these abilities, which, under Divine Providence, afterwards saved their liberties, and established their independence.

That you were a citizen, was never forgotten by you, whilst a soldier; and the end of your military command confirmed the professions with which it commenced.

The very toils and dangers through which you have passed for our defence, although they sanctified your claim to retirement, yet by presenting an earnest of your worth, created a title in your fellow-citizens to demand your return to public action; yes, Sir, you have been called to your present high station, by the unanimous voice of a free people; you have obeyed them with a peculiar greatness of mind, disdaining all scruples which could induce even a momentary pause, and renouncing that domestic tranquility, which alone you claimed as the reward of victory.

Devoted as we are to republican government, we fear not to utter these truths to you, for we believe you will feel no emotions from the cordial offerings of universal praise, but those which the purest virtue inspires.

We look forward with ardent hopes, that the great disposer of events may long continue you the instrument of general happiness; and when