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SATURDAY, JULY 2, 1790.

[WHOLE No. 128.]

TRANSLATED
FOR THE GAZETTE OF THE UNITED STATES.
ADDRESS of the NATIONAL ASSEMBLY to the
PEOPLE of FRANCE.
FEBRUARY 11th, 1790.
(CONTINUED.)

WE have destroyed the Executive power—No: Say the Ministerial power: It was this which destroyed, and frequently degraded the Executive power.—We have more particularly expelled it by conducting it to the true source of its power, THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE. It is at present destitute of strength—against the Constitution and the Law: This is true; but in their favor, it will be more powerful than ever.

The people have armed themselves:—Yes, in their own defence: They had need so to do. But, mischiefs happen in consequence of it, in several places. Can the National Assembly be reproached for them? Can the disasters complained of, be imputed to it, which it has wished to prevent and check by the whole strength of its decrees, and which will undoubtedly cease under the future indissoluble union of the two powers, and the irresistible strength of the whole national force.

We have exceeded our powers: The answer is simple. We were indisputably sent to form a Constitution; this was the wish, this was the want of all France. Was it possible then to create this Constitution—to form one altho imperfect, from the constitutional decrees, without the plenitude of the powers which we have exercised? Say rather, without the National Assembly, France was lost—without the principle, which submits every thing to the plurality of free suffrages, it is impossible to conceive of a National Assembly; it is impossible to conceive, we do not say a Constitution, but even the hope of irrevocably destroying the least abuse—this principle, is eternally true—it has been acknowledged throughout all France. It has appeared in a thousand ways—these numerous addresses of adhesion, which are in every direction—the crowd of libels, which reproached us with having exceeded our powers. These addresses, these congratulations, these homages, these patriotic oaths—what confirmation of the power, which they wish to contest with us!

People of France! Such are the reproaches, made against your representatives, in that crowd of culpable writings, which affect the tone of the citizen's complaint. Vainly do they flatter themselves to discourage us:—Our courage redoubles:—It will not be long before you perceive the effects. The Assembly is about giving you a Military Constitution, which by composing an army of citizen-soldiers, will unite the valor which defends the country, and the civic virtues which protect, without alarming it. It will shortly present you with a system of Impost, which will promote agriculture and industry, which will in short respect the freedom of commerce—a system which, being simple, clear and easily conceived, by all those who pay, will determine what they owe, and will render easy the knowledge necessary for the employment of the public revenues—and will lay open to every Frenchman the true state of the finances, till now an obscure labyrinth, where the eye could not pursue the traces of the treasury of the State.

Very shortly, a citizen-clergy, removed alike from poverty and riches, an example at once to both rich and poor, excusing the injurious expressions of a transient delirium, will inspire a true confidence, pure and universal, which will neither attract that envy which inflames, nor that pity which humiliates—will cherish religion—will increase its happy influence by the mildest and most intimate connections between the people and the pastors—and will no longer afford the sight which the patriotism of the Clergy itself, has more than once reprobated in this Assembly, of opulent idleness, and unrewarded industry.

Very shortly, a system of criminal and penal laws, dictated by reason, justice and humanity, will show, even in the person of the victim of the law, the respect due to the quality of man, without which respect we have no pretension to speak of morals. A code of civil laws, entrusted to Judges appointed by your suffrages, and rendering justice gratuitously, will soon make all those laws disappear, which were obscure, complicated and contradictory, whose incoherence and number, appeared to leave, even an upright Judge, the right of calling his will, his mistakes, and sometimes his ignorance, justice—but even at this

moment you religiously obey these very laws, because you know, that respect for laws unrevoled, is the distinctive mark of a true citizen.

In short, we will terminate our labors by a code of instructions, and national education, which will place the Constitution under the protection of succeeding generations, and by leading civic instruction, through all the degrees of representation, we shall transmit, thro every class of society, the knowledge necessary for the happiness of each of those classes, as well as for that of the whole society. (To be continued.)



CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

TUESDAY, MAY 25.

Mr. GERRY's motion on the assumption of the State debts, which was inserted in this paper on the 26th, under consideration

Mr. A M E S:

(CONTINUED FROM OUR LAST.)

THERE is another view of the subject to be taken. It is allowed that the people pay duties in proportion as they consume dutiable articles. The consumption in the several States is nearly according to the numbers of the people. It will be as fair in this, as in the former calculation, to take the number of representatives as our rule to compute the proportions which the several States contribute by the consumption of articles charged with duties. The impost of New-Hampshire and Massachusetts collected within the period from August to December, and added together, was nearly 120,000 dollars. Allow the former three parts in eleven, according to her representation, and it will appear that her citizens paid thirty-two thousand seven hundred dollars of the whole sum. Less than 8,000 dollars were collected within the State. In case the debts should not be assumed, but should be provided for by State duties and excises, according to these principles, the citizens of New-Hampshire would have to pay 5,000 dollars a month, or at the rate of 25,000 from August to December into the treasury of Massachusetts. Connected in like manner, would pay within an equal period 54,000 dollars, and Jersey, if reckoned with New-York, would have to pay about 60,000 dollars, and with Pennsylvania still more. In a whole year, this tribute which one State would exact from another would amount to very large sums. North-Carolina is a non-importing State, and in common with the others beforementioned, would have to pay for the debt of its neighbours and then to provide for its own. Is there any justice or cause of discord and violence charged, or even imagined, against the assumption equal to this? And yet we hear it said, let us leave the States to pay their debts for themselves.

Perhaps we shall never be fully agreed as to what is policy; on great questions when the judgment should be cool, the passions most frequently interpose and disturb its decisions, and this is most likely to happen where public men are zealously faithful to their trust.

But it is otherwise with our sense of justice; our pity, our gratitude, our resentments may mislead us; but of all the operations of the moral sense the most precise and infallible is our sense of justice. The heart acts as interpreter and guides us to certainty—justice or wrong is the opposite of justice. I appeal to that moral sense, to that law written upon the heart, and confidently ask, whether you can impose this burden upon the States and call it equality? Whether you can reject the claims of their creditors and call it justice?—As to the policy of the assumption. To object is always easy. It is not hard to shew how many little objections a great measure will be liable to; but, in a question of policy, we are commonly obliged to disregard little things for the sake of great ones—nor can complete proof be given of the affirmative; for, when it is asserted that bad consequences will ensue, time only can fully prove that they will not. I neither expect nor pretend to overcome every doubt when I undertake to shew that it is more safe and prudent to assume than not to assume the State debts. When we speak of policy what is meant by the term? A measure is said to be against wise policy when it tends to prevent good, or to produce evil—it respects either the government or the citizens: as it respects government will the assumption diminish its power or embarrass the exercise of it? Or as it regards the people, will it produce evil and not good?

This measure can neither increase nor diminish the power of government; for the power to be exercised is expressly given it by the constitution. Will it embarrass the exercise of power? The contrary is true—it removes impediments which will be in its way if not assumed. Experience has taught us, to our cost, how very pernicious those obstacles are. The systems of State revenues before the constitution was formed, had crushed industry, and almost ruined trade, from State to State.

Will its tendency be to evil rather than to common benefit? This, it is true, is a vague as well as complex question; but its great objects are to establish justice—to produce equality of burthens and benefits—an uniform revenue system—to secure public credit by removing every example of bad faith, and to prevent all interference between the national and State governments, and the dangerous usurpation of the one upon the other, which would be the consequence.

How can it be said that policy is against the measure if its tendency be such? Much has been said about consolidation. Certainly it cannot be usurpation for Congress to pay the debts which were contracted either by itself, or, at its own request, by the States. The State governments are said to be in danger of a consolidation: that however, is not the only, probably not the greatest, danger they have to risk; disunion is still more formidable; nothing can shelter the small States from the great ones but union; nor would any single State be safe against the combination of several States. All would be exposed to foreign foes.—If you make the State governments strong by taking strength from the union, they become exposed exactly in the degree that you do it. For the principle

of union ought to be strong in proportion to the strength of the members. In a compound ratio, therefore, you make the national government too weak to combine the whole together, and you expose governments and citizens to the caprice of accidents and to the fury of passions, which will confound laws, liberty and government.

It is true, a body of valuable citizens will be attached to the government; all good citizens should love the government, and they will do it if government should deserve their love.

Revenue powers are given to Congress without reserve. To say that it is dangerous and improper to exercise them is a charge against the constitution.

There are but three points of view to consider the State governments in. Either as rivals for power—as watchmen—or as legislators within the State. To call them rivals, would be an avowal of the principle of disunion, or rather of positive force, which is absurd.

I do not know that either the State or national constitutions have given them the office to watch this government.—The people are to watch us all, and I wish they always may. But if the State governments are still called watchmen, that office may be performed as well, perhaps better, without than with the incumbrance of their debts.

It is equally difficult to see how it can impair the rights of internal legislation. The assumption and an uniform plan of revenue will take away not only all pretext but every motive for encroachment upon them. If, by the non-assumption, an interference is produced, their danger will be the more imminent. For if they prevail in the conflict, they will be ruined by disunion. If they fail, they will be swallowed up in the consolidation. I wish, among other reasons, to have the assumption take place, because I think it will give us the best security that our government will be administered as it was made, without suffering or making encroachments.

I hasten to notice some objections: A public debt is called an evil and the assumption is charged with tending to increase and perpetuate it. I am not disposed to dispute about words, tho I believe the debt as a bond of union will compensate the burden of providing for it. But I cannot admit that it is a greater evil to owe a debt than to wipe it off without paying it—and if the whole debt is to be paid, in all events, the assumption makes no increase, nay, if the modification first proposed should be made, the capital will be diminished near thirteen millions by this measure. It is said to be easier to pay 80 millions by leaving the State debts to be paid by the States and paying the other debt ourselves, than to form the whole into one debt.

By this division of the debt, if there is any force in the objection, we can pay more, or we shall pay what may be collected more easily. First, let us see whether this is true as to what the States will have to provide for. As it respects South-Carolina, the contrary is confessedly true. So far is it from being a more easy way of paying, that they cannot pay at all. If Massachusetts can pay her interest, it will be with extreme difficulty. One gentleman observed that her efforts had raised a rebellion. It is certain that they have not succeeded. The proof of State paper in most of the States has been some proof of their incapacity to make effectual provision.

The State debts are to be paid, or they are not—If by leaving them upon the States, they will be left to the creditors that cannot be supposed to be the more convenient mode of paying part of 80 millions which is intended by the argument. Besides the shock to public credit, it would be a loss of so much property. The disaster would probably be more felt than some of the greatest physical evils, such as inundation or blasting the earth for a time with barrenness. If then the debts are to be paid, by what means? The gentleman from Virginia, has strongly reprobated excises. The States cannot touch the impost, what remains? Direct taxes only. This source will be soon exhausted. The land tax of England is not more than a sixth part of its income. They have carried it as far as they think prudent. Why should not labor and stock contribute as well as land? For these give their chief value to its products. It cannot be expected that the debt will be safe to rest upon a land tax—it is not even mortgaged at all in England. If our entire funds are barely sufficient, nearly a single fund, and that not the best will be inadequate. It is a better one in England than in America—For the wild land makes it impossible to impose very heavy taxes upon the old settlements, the oppressed people will fly beyond the reach of collectors. It is besides much more easy to procure the money in England than in America. Land taxes are not only insufficient but liable to other objections—Land is to be taxed according to quantity or value. If the former, it will not produce much. If according to value, then you must resort to arbitrary assessments, more obnoxious than excises. Every farmer almost can attest the force of this objection. The expence too in England is little—but in this country it is otherwise. Taxes on land have cost as much to collect as excise. In one of the States, I am told that the collection has been estimated at 30 per cent. Experience too has proved that the States, cannot pay their debts by direct taxes. It has been pushed to the utmost extent and found insufficient.

The argument which has been urged by the gentleman from Virginia against excises, seems to exclude this mode of revenue; without it the State debts cannot be provided for. The United States will be compelled to resort to it. It is absolutely necessary for drawing forth the resources of the country. As every man consumes, every man will contribute, including foreigners and transient people. Imposts cannot be carried far without defeating the collection. Duties on imported spirits would increase the use of home made spirits, which cannot be reached without an excise. All taxes are in some degree unequal but excises probably as little so any. The rates are fixed, and very little is left to imposition and caprice. Besides every consumer taxes himself.

If then Congress should not lay excises, the best resource of revenue will be lost. I am persuaded public credit cannot be supported without them. It seems to be a measure of equal necessity that the States should impose them. But the States cannot do it with convenience, or much effect, for they cannot make them general. They will vary in the States, and hold out temptations to an infinity of frauds. The States are refrained from regulating foreign trade, or that from State to State—with such vast frontier lines to watch, and their powers on the importation and passage of goods by land so much restrained, and their laws obstructed and controverted by the laws of the union, much of the collection will be defeated. The excise in Massachusetts and Connecticut, it is supposed, has not produced 10% in the pound of what it might be made to yield. I do not pretend that there is less wisdom in the States, but they labour under almost insurmountable difficulties—It is doubtful whether they will be able to collect much, and if they should, the burden of these rival laws has been found nearly equal to another tax.