



CONGRESS.

PHILADELPHIA.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
THURSDAY, MARCH 8.

Debate on the resolution reported by a select committee—That the Secretary of the Treasury be directed to report his opinion to the House, on the best mode of raising those additional supplies which the public service may require for the current year.

MR. PAGE—I shall always vote against a motion for applying to the Secretary of the Treasury for information respecting the means of procuring the sums of money necessary for the exigencies of government.

It is no argument to me to be told that the act which established the department, at the head of which that officer is placed, authorises that motion. That act may be plead as obligatory on the Secretary to reply to such enquiry when made by Congress, but not to induce this House to make such enquiry. When that act, which is now urged in justification of the motion before the House, was under the consideration of the House which formed it, I raised my feeble voice against it—I endeavored to shew that the powers given to an officer, who was appointed by the President and Senate, and removeable by the President alone, were such as were utterly incompatible with the principles of the constitution, and perhaps with the letter of it, as that does not permit even the independent Senate, the representatives of the legislatures of the several states, to originate a money bill. I remarked that if the bill passed, it would verify the predictions of the anti-federalists, as they were called, and would alarm many friends of the new government—I observed that the practice of the former Congress, which was adduced as a precedent for such applications to the Secretary, for his statements and reports, was not a case in point; as the Congress under the confederation was looked upon as a mere diplomatic body, whose acts were revised, approved or rejected by the state assemblies—which shews that it was immaterial who planned the schemes of finance,—whence information was derived, or who drew the acts of the then Congress; as they were not, as the laws of the present Congress are, paramount to the laws of all the states.—I contended, Sir, that it was the peculiar duty of this House, to originate money bills, and to devise ways and means, as they are called—I am still most decidedly of the same opinion; and I think with the member from Pennsylvania (Mr. Fitzsimons) that such a reference to the Secretary of the Treasury, is a dereliction of our duty, and an abandonment of the trust reposed in us; & that many other references must have the appearance of an unbecoming indolence—I am also of opinion with the member from Georgia, (Mr. Baldwin) that if ever we make a stand, it should be on this ground.

I will add, that it is high time to make that stand.—For a bill having passed which was opposed as dangerous to the constitution, and utterly incompatible with the principles of a free government, and indeed as inconsistent with the plain construction, and I may say the very letter of our own constitution; and that bill being now appealed to as a justification of a motion which can be supported on no other principles, but such as may be used to subvert our government, and to introduce a monarchy, as unlimited as that lately abolished in France—for surely if more wisdom can be found in a few heads of departments, than in the whole representative body of the people—and if those heads can be made responsible, whilst the representatives are free from responsibility, and dispatch and energy can be obtained without the expence of a Congress, or of this House at least; I see not why the people might not make a favorite President as absolute as the kings of France have been, and call on Congress, like the Parliaments of Paris, only to register his edicts. I say, as this is the case, it is high time to make a stand.—But we are told that the heads of departments are recognized by the constitution, and the business now required of one of them sanctioned by law—and we are also told of precedents establishing and authorising this mode of proceeding—it is surely then high time for every member, who views that law and such proceedings under it, in the light I do, to join with the member from Georgia, and make a stand, as he called it.—And I trust, Sir, that rather than suffer that law to be thus referred to, they will unite to amend or repeal it.

I repeat it, Sir, here we should make a stand; for however well intended such measures may

be, and the arguments in support of them, their tendency is mischievous, and ought to be opposed by every friend to a free government.

The bills establishing the departments of government, have strong monarchical features; and have too often led Congress into the steps of monarchical governments. The republican part of the British government, rely on a committee of ways and means—the heads of departments being members of the House of Commons, are always forward to take the lead in the plans or projects of the Crown—and they have so ingeniously involved the plans of finance, that few understand the mysterious business, and therefore it is in the minister's hands alone.—Sir, the House of Commons always severely scrutinize their plans, and are not so obsequious to their ministers, as some gentlemen are disposed to be to our Secretaries.

But what would Englishmen say, if their Parliament were to pass such a bill as this now referred to; and should call on a man, not a member of either House, but appointed by the King, with the advice indeed of the House of Lords, removeable however by the King alone; to lay before the House of Commons a plan of ways and means? Would the people of England be satisfied with the strange story of his responsibility? And of his superior abilities? But what is this responsibility so much talked of? The President may dismiss the Secretary from his office, or this House may impeach him—but when the President and Congress both are his accomplices, who will dismiss or who impeach, and where then is his responsibility? And what is to become of the people's rights, if this be the case, and this House be not accountable to the people for its acts? as a member yesterday said.

But, Sir, I will not ask what Englishmen would say on such an occasion, I will tell you what Americans have said.—They have said, that under this boasted act, you might as well apply to the President in the first instance, as to any head of department under him, were it not for their virtue; and that at the rate Congress have proceeded in some cases, their rights are at the mercy of departments. But here we are asked, if we have not wisdom enough to reject an improper plan, how we could be supposed capable of devising a good one?—To this, Sir, I shall only reply, that when we have done our best, we shall have discharged our duty; and our bills will at least be framed according to our constitution—and the doubting members may ask the opinion of the Secretary, if they please. One member endeavored to ridicule republican jealousy—I thank God, although I am a republican, I know where to direct my jealous attention; and where and when to repose confidence; when to strengthen government, and when to restrain it.

We were asked indeed, are you afraid of truth, and unwilling to receive instruction? I answer no—Truth is our great object, and just information our only aim—but to get at truth, respecting the most likely means of raising a revenue, with as little inconvenience as possible to our constituents, was I conceive, a principal object in the view of the framers of our constitution, when they instituted this House of Representatives. In this House alone I should search for truth, respecting this important question—from the representatives of the states I should expect to receive all the necessary information respecting it; and if the Secretary be possessed of vouchers or further information, the House should call for it.—In the committee of the whole, every enquiry should be made—resolutions be proposed, examined, amended, and when maturely considered and approved by the House, where all the further information which the heads of departments can give may be called for, our business would be done. I say this is the way for Congress to get at information, and to arrive at truth—but to apply in the first instance to a single individual, must be improper—to an individual circumstanced as the heads of departments are; that is removeable by the President; liable from the infirmity of human nature, to local attachments, to imposition, even of ingenuity and good sense; I mean the imposition of their own theoretical reasoning, borrowed from writers on governments not altogether resembling our own.—Whatever he should propose, would come with such advantages as to require much time, and perhaps more penetration than this House could readily command, to see through and reject, if improper—but some, I know, are of opinion that a Secretary may venture to propose what no member would be hardy enough to mention—Some have doubted whether the Funding System, the Assumption, or the Excise could have been introduced by any other means.—If this be true, and these schemes be such as in the issue of them shall be attended with happy consequences, so far as we have gone, such applications to the Secretary were right—but it is unmanly, and unbecoming the representatives of freemen, to act in this manner—to adopt measures which we dare not propose, and to applaud them because they were planned by this or that Secretary.—It is ungene-

rous to hold up a Secretary as responsible for errors adopted by Congress—and it is unreasonable to impose upon him a task which, although our peculiar duty to perform, we shrink from. The multitude of references already made to the Secretary of the Treasury, and the necessary length of some of his reports, leave him no leisure to attend properly to the different branches of his own department.

But what information do we ask? We know the estimates of expences for the present year.—We have estimates of the probable amount of the revenue—and we have called for a report of the amount of surplusses, if any, in the treasury. We can then, as well as the Secretary, determine whether any additional revenue will be necessary; and if so, we alone ought to devise the ways and means of raising it. If dispatch is necessary, it is better to determine here at once what is to be done, than to apply to the Secretary, whose plans we may, after long debates, reject.—As to the Secretary of the Treasury, I acknowledge his abilities; I know too that some of his reports do honor to his heart, as well as to his head—his gallant behaviour in the late war, has commanded my highest respect and esteem—but I owe too much respect to our country to agree to the resolution before you—I wish, therefore, that this House would refer only such cases to him, as they cannot decide on without official information in his hands—and that in the present case, the House would, in a committee of the whole on the state of the Union, take under their consideration the means of raising the supplies which may be found necessary for the support of government, and protection of the frontiers.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

FRIDAY, APRIL 6.

The President's message, with the representation bill returned to the House with objections, and the bill being read,—

On the motion,
“Will the House, on reconsideration, agree to pass the bill?”—it passed in the negative; ayes, 28; noes, 33.

A Y E S.

Messrs. Ames, Benfon, S. Bourne, B. Bourne, Clark, Fitzsimons, Gerry, Gilman, Goodhue, Gordon, Hartley, Jacobs, Kitchell, Kittera, Lawrence, Learned, Livermore, Niles, Schoonmaker, Sedgwick, J. Smith, I. Smith, Steele, Thatcher, Treadwell, Vining, Wadsworth, Ward—28.

N O E S.

Messrs. Ashe, Baldwin, Barnwell, Brown, Findley, Giles, Gregg, Griffin, Grove, Heister, Hillhouse, Huger, Key, Lee, Macon, Madison, Mercer, Moore, Muhlenberg, Murray, Page, Parker, Seney, Sheredine, W. Smith, Sterrett, Sturges, Sumpter, Tucker, Venable, White, Williamson, Willis—33.

SATURDAY, APRIL 7.

The bill supplementary to the act for the establishment and support of light-houses, beacons, buoys, and public piers, was read twice, and taken up by the committee of the whole; who, after making one amendment, rose, and the chairman reported the bill accordingly.

This amendment was moved by Mr. Parker—which was to establish three floating beacons in the Chesapeake.

The amendment being agreed to by the House, the bill was read a third time and passed.

The bill to erect a light-house on Montuk Point, in the state of New-York, was read the third time and passed.

The House receded from their amendment to the bill for fixing the compensation of the Doorkeepers of both Houses of Congress, disagreed to by the Senate.

A committee was appointed to prepare and bring in a bill for the apportionment of representatives among the several states, at the ratio of one representative for every persons.

A bill was brought in, which was read twice, and made the order of the day on Monday next.

In committee of the whole on the report of the Secretary of the Treasury on the Ways and Means—the committee agreed to sundry resolutions, which being reported to the House, a committee was appointed to bring in a bill.

Adjourned.

MONDAY, APRIL 9.

A resolution for authorising the commissioners for settling the accounts of the United States with the individual states, to liquidate a claim of the state of Maryland, was taken into consideration, and agreed to, and a committee appointed to bring in a bill accordingly.

In committee of the whole on the bill apportioning representatives among the several states, &c.—Mr. Muhlenberg in the chair.

The bill being read, Mr. Clark moved to fill the first blank with 33,000. Mr. White proposed 30,000. After some debate, the question on 33,000 being put, it was carried, 34 members rising in the affirmative.