MESSAGE OF JEFFERSON DAVIS.

DESPONDENCY OF THE SOUTH.

THE REBEL DISASTERS IN THE FIELD.

Failure of Southern Finances and Diplomacy.

THE EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS.

The French Policy in Mexico Endorsed.

CONSCRIPTION WITHOUT SUBSTITUTES.

MR. DAVIS' RECOMMENDATIONS.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the Confederate States:

The necessity for legislative action, arising out of the important events that have marked the interval since your last adjournment, and my desire to have the aid of your counsel on other matters of grave public interest, render your presence at this time more than ordinarily welcome. Indeed, not for serious obstacles to convening you in extraordinary session, and the necessity for my own presence at the seat of Government, would I have invited you to an earlier meeting than that fixed at the date of your adjournment.

Grave reverses held our armies soon after your departure from Richmond. Early in July our strongholds at Vicksburg and Port Hudson, together with their entire garrisons, capitulated to the combined land and naval forces of the enemy. The important interior position of Jackson next fell into their temporary possession. Our unsuccessful assault on the post at Helena was followed, at a later period, by the invasion of Arkansas; and the retreat of our army from Little Rock gave to the enemy the control of the important valley in which it is situated.

The resolute spirit of the people soon rose superior to the temporary despondency naturally resulting from these reverses. The gallant troops, so ably commanded in the States beyond the Mississippi, indicted repeated defeats on the invading armies in Louisiana and on the coast of Texas. Detachments of troops, and active bodies of partisans, kept up so effective a war on the Mississippi river as to practically destroy its value as an avenue of commerce.

The determined and successful defence of Charleston against the joint land and naval operations of the enemy afforded an inspiring example of our ability to repel the attacks even of the iron-clad fleet on which they chiefly rely; while on the northern frontier our success was still more marked.

The able commander who conducted the campaign in Virginia determined to meet the threatened advance on Richmond, for which the enemy had made large and costly preparations, by forcing their armies to cross the Potomac and fight in defence of their own capital and homes. Transferring the battle-field to their own soil, he succeeded in compelling their rapid retreat from Virginia, and in the hard-fought battles which followed, inflicted such severity of punishment as disabled them from early renewal of the campaign as originally projected. Our loss in these engagements was great, but our general relied for receiving his supplies of munitions, wrested by his victories from the enemy, and swelling the Potomac as to render impassable the fords by which his advance had been made, and he was thus forced to withdraw his army, unencumbered with its liberation, after securing large trains of captured supplies, and with the loss of comparatively few prisoners. On more than one occasion the enemy has since made demonstrations of a purpose to advance, invariably followed by a prompt retreat to entrenchments taken on the approach of our forces.

The effective check thus opposed to the advance of the invaders at all points was such as to afford hope of their early expulsion from portions of the territory previously occupied by them. When this result was achieved, we surprised by the intelligence that the officer in command at Chattanooga had abandoned his impregnable and nearly defensible pass without firing a shot, upon the summons of a force still believed to have been inadequate in numbers, and when reinforcements were within supporting distance and had been ordered to his aid. The precipitate retreat of our forces, including the being still held prisoners by the enemy, I am unable to suggest any explanation of this disaster, which laid open Eastern Tennessee and all Southwestern Virginia to our operations, and broke the line of communication between the east and Middle Tennessee and Virginia.

This easy success of the enemy was followed by an advance of Gen Rosecrans into Georgia, and our army evacuated Chattanooga without a battle, and with the opportunity afforded of winning, on the field of Chickamauga, one of the most brilliant and decisive victories of the war. This signal defeat of Gen Rosecrans was followed by his retreat into Chattanooga, where his position was soon after so closely invested as to yield to the pressure of the invasion at other points, forcing the concentration of his whole force, and the subsequent withdrawn from the armies in the Mississippi Valley and in Northern Virginia. The combined forces thus accumulated in Tennessee so far outnumbered our army as to encourage the enemy to attack. After a long and severe battle, in which great carnage was inflicted on him, some of our troops inexplicably abandoned a position of great strength, which, in orderly retreat, compelled the commander to withdraw the forces elsewhere successful, and finally to retire with his army to a strong position some twenty miles to the rear. It is believed that if the troops who yielded to the assault had forced with the valor which they had displayed on previous occasions, and which was manifested in this battle on the other parts of the line, the enemy would have been driven from the great slaughter, and our country would have escaped the calamities which have fallen upon her in consequence of the first defeat that has resulted from misconduct by the troops. In the meantime, the army of Gen Burnside was drawn from its field position in Eastern Tennessee, and forced to retreat into his entrenchments at Knoxville, from which, for some weeks, it was threatened with capture by the forces under Longstreet. No information has reached me of the final result of the operations of our commander in Southwestern Virginia because of his withdrawal from that place.

While, in the main, in driving the enemy from our soil has not equalled the expectations confidently entertained at the commencement of the campaign, the progress made in the west has been such as to regret losses in Tennessee and Arkansas, we are not wanting ground for congratulation on successes in Louisiana and Texas. On the sea coast he is exhausted by vain efforts to capture our ports, while on the northern frontier he has to guard against a threatened renewal of invasion. The indomitable courage and perseverance of the people of the Southern States have been nobly attested by the unanimity with which the Legislatures of Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia have responded to the call for the expression of their sentiment; and like manifestations may be anticipated from all the States. Whatever disheartening effect may have resulted from the illegitimate sacrifices of money, life, and liberty, in the hope of conciliating us, the experience of nearly two years has convinced the enemy that our endurance of those who fight for home, liberty, and independence, is not yet exhausted by the result.

Foreign Relations.

I regret to inform you that there has been no improvement in the tone of our relations with foreign powers since my message in January last. On the contrary, there has been a still greater divergence in the conduct of European nations from the principles of neutrality which alone deserves the name of neutrality, and their action, in some cases, has assumed a character positively unfriendly.

You have heretofore been informed that, by common consent of the nations of Europe, the initiative in calling the contest on this continent had been left by foreign Powers to the two great maritime nations of western Europe, and that the Governments of these two nations had agreed to take no decisive steps on previous occasions, if they should deem it wise to do so, without the concurrence of the other. This mutual understanding, the initiative in all action touching the contest which it was thought might be left to foreign Powers to the two great maritime nations of western Europe, and that the Governments of these two nations had agreed to take no decisive steps on previous occasions. The result of these arrangements has, therefore, placed it in the power of Great Britain, if she should deem it wise, to prevent the recognition to which the Confederacy is justly entitled, or even to prolong the conflict on this continent, if she should deem it, in the policy of either could be promoted by the postponement of peace. Each has, on important occasions of great influence in so shaping the general exercise of neutral rights in Europe as to render them subservient to the purpose of aiding one of the belligerents to the detriment of the other. I referred, at your last session, to some of the leading points in the course pursued by the fleeted neutrals, which betrayed a partisan leaning to the side opposed to us, and I have to regret that no occasion has yet arisen for us to review the subject in greater detail than was then deemed necessary. In calling to your attention the action of foreign Governments, I shall refer to the documents appended to President Lincoln's message, and to the correspondence between the two Governments, as the chief evidence of their policy and the motives which guided it. To this course no exception can be taken, inasmuch as our action has invited the fullest disclosure of information by their official publication.

In May, last, the Minister of the Hanseatic Majesty informed our enemies that it had not "allowed any other than an intermediate position on the part of the Southern States." It was then stated that the sympathies of this country (Great Britain) were rather with the Northern than with the South.

On the 1st day of June, 1861, the British Government intercepted the use of its ports "to armed ships and privateers, both of the United States and the so-called Confederate States," with their prizes. The Secretary of State of Great Britain, in announcing the decision, cited as the chief source and motive of this interdiction, when he observed to Lord Lyons, who communicated it, that this measure, and that of the same character which had been adopted by France, would probably prove a death-blow to Southern privateers.

On the 22d of June, 1861, the United States Minister in London informed the Secretary for Foreign Affairs that the fact of his having held interviews with the Commissioners of this Government had given "great dissatisfaction," and that a continuance of such intercourse would be viewed by the United States "as hostile in spirit, and as inconsistent with some corresponding action accordingly." In response to this intimation, Mr Mason's Secretary assured the Minister that "he had no expectation of seeing them any more."

By proclamation, issued on the 19th and 27th of April, 1861, President Lincoln declared the blockade of the entire coast of the Confederacy, extending from the Potomac to the Rio Grande, embracing, according to the estimate of the United States Government, a coast line of three thousand five hundred and forty nine statute miles, on which there are numerous rivers, bays, harbors, inlets, sounds, and passes is one hundred and eighty-nine. The navy possessed by the United States for enforcing this blockade was, at the commencement of the war, President Lincoln to consist of twenty-four vessels of all classes, of an aggregate tonnage of 18,000 tons, on all seas. The absurdity of the pretension of such a blockade, in face of the authoritative declaration of the maritime rights of neutrals, made in Paris, in 1856, was so manifest that the attempt was regarded as an experiment on the forbearance of such powers, which it was hoped would promptly resist. This conclusion was justified by the fact that the Governments of France and Great Britain determined that it would not yield to the pretension to obtain from both belligerents "securities concerning the proper conduct of neutrals."

In the instructions which "confided the negotiation on this matter to the British consul in Charleston, he was informed that "the most perfect accordance of the question existing between her Majesty's Gov.rnment and the Government of the President of the Union," of which these instructions were accompanied, by a copy of the despatches of the British Foreign Office of the 18th of May, 1861, stating that there was no difference of opinion between Great Britain and the United States as to the validity of the principles contained in the convention of Paris, the Declaration of Paris, in reference to blockades. Your predecessor, in his Provisional Congress had, therefore, no difficulty in proclaiming, "that, proving, the resolutions which abandoned in favor of Great Britain and France the right to capture enemy's property when covered by the flags of those Powers. Without any stipulation on the part of those Powers we understood by us to be required from both belligerents. Neutrals were exposed on our part to the exercise of the belligerent right of capture, with the exception of conveying the property of our enemies. They were exposed, on the part of the Confederacy, to interruption in their unquestioned right of trading with any port, in declaration of the paper blockade above referred to.

We had no reason to doubt the good faith of the proposal made us, nor to suspect that we were to be the only belligerent bound by the stipulations of the Paris instructions of the neutral Powers informed their agents that it was "essential under present circumstances, that they should act with great caution, to prevent their taking the question of the recognition of the new Confederacy, and," that "it was important that neutrals should not assume for that reason the shape of a formal convention." It was, we deemed just by us to decline the arrangement on this ground, and, in less than twenty days had then elapsed since the arrival of our commissioners at Paris, and in ignorance of their action, we were entitled to a reasonable delay in acting on a subject of so much importance, and which, from their point of view, presented difficulties that we, perhaps, did not fully appreciate.

Certain it is that the action of this Government on the occasion and its faithful performance of its own engagements have been such as to entitle it to expect, on the part of those who sought in their own interests a mutual understanding, the same scrupulous adherence to their own promises. I feel constrained to inform you that in this expectation we have been disappointed, and that not only have the Governments of Great Britain and France arrangements yielded to the prohibition against commerce by the blockade, which they had joined in, in defiance of the law of nations, but that this concession of their neutral rights to our detriment has, on more than one occasion, been claimed in intercourse with our enemies as an evidence of friendly feeling towards them. A few extracts from the correspondence of her Majesty's chief Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs will suffice to show marked encouragement to the United States to persevere in the blockade, and to mistakable intimations that her Majesty's Government would not countenance any relaxing.

On the 21st May, 1861, Earl Russell pointed out to the United States minister in London, that "the blockade might no doubt be made effective, considering the small number of harbors on the Southern coast, even though the extent of 3,000 miles were comprehended in terms of that blockade.

On the 14th of January, 1862, her Majesty's minister in Washington communicated to his Government an intercepted letter of the barbarous attempt to destroy the port of Charleston by a floating infernal machine in its harbor. Mr. Seward had explained "that the Government of the United States had, last spring, with a navy very little prepared for so extensive an operation, undertaken to blockade upwards of three thousand miles of coast. The Secretary of the Navy had reported that he could stop up the large holes" by means of his ships, but that he could not stop up the "small ones." It had been found necessary, therefore, to close some of the numerous small inlets by sinking vessels in the channel."

On the 6th May, 1862, so far from claiming the right of British subjects, as neutrals, to trade with us as usual, upwards, and to disregard the blockade on the ground of its explicit confession of our enemy of his inability to render it effective, her Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs claimed credit with the United States for friendly action in respecting it. His lordship stated that "the United States Government, on the allegation of a rebellion pervading from nine to eleven States of the Union, have now, for more than twelve months, endeavored to make good a blockade of upwards of 3,000 miles of coast. This blockade, kept up irregularly, but when enforced, enforced severely, has seriously injured the trade and manufactures of the United Kingdom. Those lands are now obliged to resort to the poor places for subsistence, owing to this blockade. Yet her Majesty's Government have never sought to take advantage of the obvious imperfections of this blockade, in order to declare itself ineffective. They have, to the loss and detriment of the British nation, scrupulously observed the duties of neutrality, and of a friendly Sort."

Again, on the 3d September, 1862, the same noble Earl asserted that the United States were "very far, indeed," from being in "a condition to ask other nations to assume that every port of the coasts of the so-styled Confederate States is effectively blockaded."

When, in view of these facts, of the obvious ion of the British nation to adhere to the pledge made to Government at Paris, in 1856, and renewed to this Confederacy in 1861; and of these repeated and explicit avowals of the imperfection, irregularity, and inefficiency of the pretended blockade of our coast, I directed our Commissioner at London to call upon the British Government to redeem its promise, and to uphold its moral aid and assistance from the flagrant violation of public law committed by our enemies, we were informed that her Majesty's Government could not regard the blockade of the Southern ports as having been other than "practically effective," in February, 1862, and that "the manner in which it has since been enforced gives to neutral Governments no excuse for asserting that the blockade has not been efficiently maintained." We were further informed, when we insisted that by the terms of our agreement no blockade was to be considered effective, unless "sufficient really to prevent access to our coast," "that the declaration of Paris was, in truth, directed against blockades not sustained by any actual force, or maintained by a notoriously inadequate force, such as the occasional appearance of a man-of-war in the offing, or the like."

It was impossible that this mode of construing an argument, so as to make its terms mean almost the reverse of what they plainly conveyed, could be considered otherwise than as a notification of the refusal of the British Government to remain bound by its agreement or longer to respect those articles of the declaration of Paris which had been repeatedly denounced by British statesmen, and had been characterized by Earl Russell as "very imprudent" and "most unsatisfactory."

If any doubt remained of the motives by which the British ministry have been actuated in their conduct, it would be completely dissipated by the distinct avowals and explanations contained in the published speech recently made by her Majesty's Secretary for Foreign Affairs. In commenting on the remonstrance of this Government against the countenance given to an ineffective blockade, the following language is used: "It is said we have, contrary to the decisions of Paris, contrary to international law, permitted the blockade of 3,000 miles of American coast. It is quite true we did so, and the greatest cause of complaint is also quite true, that although the blockade is kept up by a sufficient number of ships, yet these ships were sent into the United States navy in a hurry, and are ill-fitted for the purpose, and did not keep up as completely and effectively as was required an effective blockade."

This unequivocal confession of violation, both of agreement and of the law of nations, is defended, on grounds the validity of which we submit with confidence to the candid judgment of mankind.

These grounds are thus stated: "Still looking at the law of nations it was a blockade we, as a great belligerent power in former times, could have acknowledged. We, ourselves, had a blockade of upwards of 3,000 miles, and it did seem to us that we were bound in justice to the Federal States of America to acknowledge that blockade. but there was another reason which weighed with me. Our people were suffering severely for the want of that material which was the main staff of their industry, and it was a question of self-interest whether we should not break the blockade. But, in my opinion, the men of England would have been for me infamous, if, for the sake of their own interest, they had violated the law of nations, and made war in conjunction with these slaveholding States of America against the Federal States."

In the second of these reasons our rights are not involved; although it may be permitted to observe that the conduct of Government has not heretofore, to my knowledge, been marked by the principle that it is infamous to assert their rights, whenever the invasion of those rights creates severe suffering among the people, and injuriously affects great interests. But the intimation that relations with these States would be discreditable because they are slaveholding, would probably have been omitted if the official personage who has published it to the world had remembered that these States were, when colonies, made slaveholding by the direct exercise of the power of Great Britain, whose dependencies they were, and that the interests in the slave trade were then supposed to require that her colonies should be made slaveholding.

But the other ground stated is of a very grave character. It asserts that a violation of the law of nations by Great Britain in 1857, when that Government declared a paper blockade of 5,000 miles of coast, in violation then of existing law, and contrary to its own rule, is a ground that her action was retaliatory) affords a justification for a similar course on neutral rights by the United States in 1861, for which no palliation can be suggested; and that Great Britain "is strictly bound, as the United States," to make return for the war waged against her by the United States in resistance of her illegal blockade of a portion of our territory, by an acknowledged blockade of 1861. The most alarming feature in this statement is its admission of a just claim on the part of Great Britain to be paid back in the same coin, which we drew a disregard of the recognised principles of modern public law, and of the course of her own courts, whenever a questionable conduct of Great Britain "in former times" has been cited as a precedent. It is not inconsistent with respect and good-will, for the great people whose Government has stated as its warning, to suggest that the conduct of the chief magistrate of a country, "in former times," and we may well deem the morality of violating recent engagements through deference to the evil propensities of the people.

After defending, in the manner just stated, the course of the British Government on the subject of the blockade, he proceeds to justify the conduct of his nation, by leading off the further purpose of the British Government to prevent our purchase of vessels in Great Britain, which we were attempting to use in the war against millions of war, and states the intention of applying to Parliament for a furtherance of this design. He gives to the United States the assurance that he will do their favor not only "everything that the law of nations requires, but even that which is not required by the law of nations," but that he will ask the sanction of Parliament "for further measures that her Majesty's ministers may think fit." The language to which I refer is the official exposition of the policy adopted by the British Government in relation to our affairs, which I have imposed on me by the Constitution of giving you, from time to time, information of the state of the Confederacy. I would not have been performed if I had failed to place it distinctly before you.

I refer you for further details on this whole subject to the correspondence of the State Department which accompanies this message. The facts which I have stated, or narrated are, I trust, sufficient to enable you to appreciate the true nature of the neutrality professed in this war. It is not in my power to suppose that any change in the Government of France shares the views so unreservedly avowed by the Ministry of Great Britain, no published correspondence of the French Government having been received. No public protest nor opposition, however, has been made by France to the unprecedented assault upon the rights of trade with us, imposed on French citizens by the paper blockade of our coast. Nothing, in fact, has occurred to make us believe that an unsuccessful attempt was made, on his part, to secure the assent of the British Government to a course of action more consonant with the dictates of public law, and with the demands of justice towards us.

The unkind feeling of her Majesty's Government in favor of our enemies has been further evinced in the marked difference of its conduct on the subject of the purchase of supplies by the two belligerents. The difference has been conspicuous since the very commencement of the war. As early as the 1st of May, 1861, the Secretary of State for Ministry was informed by the Secretary of State of the United States that he had sent agents to England and Ireland, and that others would go to France to purchase arms; and this fact was communicated to the British Foreign Office, which interposed no objection. As, in October of the same year, Earl Russell entertained the complaint of the United States minister in London that the Confederate States were importing contraband of war from the island of Nassau, directed inquiry into the matter, and subsequently instituted a prosecution in that island, denying the allegations, which proved not enclosed to Mr. Adams, and received by him as satisfactory evidence to dispute "the fact that arms had been thrown upon the authorities of Nassau by that unwarrantable attack."

So, too, when the Confederate Government purchased in Great Britain, as a neutral country, and with strict observance, on the part of the vendors, of the municipal law of Great Britain), vessels which were subsequently armed and commissioned as ships of war, they were not held to have forfeited their neutral rights, but were allowed to depart from British waters, the British Government, with a full knowledge of the facts, declining to make reference to the importunate demands of the United States, made an ineffectual attempt to seize one vessel, and did actually seize and detain another which touched at the island of Nassau, on her way to a Confederate port, and subjected her owners to an informal prosecution in a time when cargoes of munitions of war were being shipped from British ports to New York, to be used in warlike assaults.

Even now the public journals bring intelligence that the British Government has ordered the seizure of two British port, of two vessels, on the suspicion that they may have been sold to this Government, and that they may be hereafter armed and equipped in our service, while British subjects are engaged in Ireland by tens of thousands to proceed to the United States for warfare against the Confederacy, in defiance both of the law of nations and of the express terms of the British statutes, and are encouraged in British ships, without an effort at prevention, to carry out these projects. The recruiting of British subjects, while less extensive than it was at the commencement of our war, is still carried on to an extent which leaves no room to doubt that the British Government, while it has prohibited the fitting out of armed vessels within its ports, has not sought to prevent the departure of those who, when once beyond the jurisdiction of Great Britain, are there to be armed with rifles imported from Great Britain, and to be employed against our people in a war for conquest. No room for hesitation in the conclusion that this forbearance is interposed, against this flagrant breach of municipal and international law, by the authorities of Great Britain, "in order to make return for the war waged against her by the United States in resistance of her illegal blockade of a portion of our territory, by an acknowledged blockade of 1861. The most alarming feature in this statement is its admission of a just claim on the part of Great Britain to be paid back in the same coin, which we drew a disregard of the recognised principles of modern public law, and of the course of her own courts, whenever a questionable conduct of Great Britain "in former times" has been cited as a precedent. It is not inconsistent with respect and good-will, for the great people whose Government has stated as its warning, to suggest that the conduct of the chief magistrate of a country, "in former times," and we may well deem the morality of violating recent engagements through deference to the evil propensities of the people.

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