

the commissioners of accounts, &c. reported and brought in a bill for the purpose intended, which was read the first time.

A report from the secretary at war, on the petition of Col. John Ely, was read, and laid on the table.

A message was received from the President, by Mr. Lear, transmitting the ratification of eleven of the twelve articles of amendments, proposed by Congress to the constitution of the United States, by the state of Delaware, the consideration of the first article being postponed.

The Speaker presented the petition of Gifford Dally, door-keeper of the house, respecting services by him performed during the recess of Congress, which was read and referred to Messrs. Livermore, Sylvester, and Lee.

Mr. White, from the committee who were instructed to bring in a bill for preventing the exportation of goods not legally inspected, brought in one for that purpose, which was read the first time.

Mr. Ames presented a petition of David Oliphant, late director for the hospitals of the southern department, which was read and laid on the table.

On motion of Mr. Hartley, the report of the committee to whom was referred the memorials respecting the abolition of slavery, was read a second time, and after some considerable debate, Tuesday the 16th instant was appointed for its discussion.

Mr. Livermore, from the committee to whom was referred the petition of Gifford Dally, reported, that he be allowed two dollars per diem, for 96 days services during the recess of Congress.

The house then went into a committee, on the report of the secretary of the treasury, the resolve for assuming the state debts being under consideration.

Mr. White and Mr. Stone spoke strenuously against the adoption of the measure at the present time, and Mr. Gerry, in favour thereof; but the usual hour of adjournment being arrived, on motion of Mr. Vining, the committee rose.

Mr. Hartley moved, that the report of the committee on the memorials of the people called Quakers, should be taken up for a second reading, which motion being adopted, it was read.

Mr. Smith (S. C.) moved, that the above be referred to a committee of the whole, to be taken up the first Monday in May next.

Mr. Boudinot proposed the first Monday in April.

Mr. Jackson opposed the latter period; he urged several reasons which rendered it extremely inconvenient to assign so early a day. A proper knowledge of the present state of the importations and other particulars respecting the slave trade, which cannot be known so early, call for a longer time—he adverted to the peculiar circumstances of the southern states, and urged the necessity and justice of requiring a more perfect knowledge of the sentiments of their constituents; to adopt it in its present form, would produce infinite mischiefs in the southern states—it would excite tumults, seditions, and insurrections.

Mr. Vining opposed a postponement; he considered the report, if adopted, as an honourable declaration of the sentiments of the legislature on this important business; he could not conceive that there was any ground for the alarming apprehensions entertained by some gentlemen.

Mr. Boudinot answered Mr. Jackson. He observed, that if the report was calculated to produce such effects, the argument is in favour of the shortest period; that the report may be so amended as to prevent those effects. He moved the first Monday in April, because he expected that Congress would rise in May, and he thought it would not be giving the business that attention which it deserved, to postpone it to a period which may preclude all discussion whatever.

Mr. Smith (S. C.) and Mr. Stone urged the postponement; the latter gentleman observed, that he had not approved of the interference of Congress in the business. He thought that persons who are not interested, ought not to interfere; such interferences favored very strongly of an intolerant spirit; and he

could not suppose that any one of the states had a right to interfere in the internal regulations of another: the states are not accountable to each other for their moral conduct. He wished that the interesting circumstances of the states which would be so materially affected, might be taken into consideration, and the subject postponed to the first Monday in May.

Mr. Vining replied to Mr. Stone, and observed, that it was very extraordinary that a humane, liberal spirit, a wish to diffuse universal liberty, should be called an intolerant spirit; and disinterested persons, he had always supposed the most likely to form a just judgment; he could not but approve of the report of the committee; it was couched in terms of humanity and prudence, and did great honour to the gentlemen who framed it.

Mr. Boudinot observed, that as there were some expressions in the report, which, if altered, might give satisfaction to all parties, he would move that the house should now go into a committee of the whole, in order to make those alterations.

Mr. Jackson said, for the purpose of altering the phraseology, he should have an objection to going into a committee.

Mr. Burke was for postponing the business altogether; he dilated on the pernicious consequences which may be expected to flow from an interference in the business.

Mr. Smith (S. C.) moved that the report should be recommitted. He expatiated on the construction which might be put on the several parts of the report, and shewed their pernicious tendency; he was pointedly severe in animadverting on the conduct of the memorialists in meddling with the business.

Mr. Sherman opposed this motion; he said that this report was agreeable to his idea; it was prudent, humane, and judicious.

The motion for recommitment was negatived. It was then voted, that it should be referred to a committee of the whole house. The time when it should be taken up, occasioned some further debate; it was urged that as so much time had been spent in the discussion, and many ideas were thrown out of alarming insurrections, it was become necessary to make an early decision on the business; Mr. Boudinot, therefore, withdrew his motion for April, and moved, that the house should at this time go into a committee of the whole on the report.

Mr. Jackson was opposed to the motion; he animadverted with great severity on the memorialists, and introduced an account of the mischiefs which had resulted from the interference of a sect called Anabaptists, in the state of Georgia.

Mr. Gerry justified the Quakers—he was astonished, he said, that these persons should be treated with so much severity, when it was well known that they had exerted themselves in the same cause in Great-Britain and other parts of the world—that they had formed societies to effect their humane purposes, and for their exertions had hitherto met with universal applause.

It was finally voted to take up the report to-morrow week.

Tuesday, March 9.

The order of the day was called for on the report of the secretary of the treasury, respecting the assumption of the state debts.

Mr. Benson in the chair.

Mr. Sherman spoke in favour of the assumption, and thought it would be agreeable to the people to have the public debt all under one common stock; it would be for the interest of the particular states as well as the public good. He therefore thought it would be best to agree to the proposition.

Mr. Bland said the assumption of the state debts was the only means to bind the Gordian-knot of justice and equity in the United States, and if it was not immediately adopted, the evil which had been complained of respecting speculators, would be multiplied tenfold.—Some states would exert themselves—others would not—and in this situation

the speculators would know when to take the advantage.

The secretary of the treasury has reported ways and means for paying the state debts; and it cannot be disputed but that one of these two alternatives will eventually be adopted—either the states individually must levy taxes to pay their debts, or Congress must do it, in order to keep up the peace and credit of the country.

Mr. Bland then said he was highly pleased with the amendments proposed by his worthy colleague, which provided for a door to be kept open for the liquidation of the state debts. Had the fourth resolution been adopted without this amendment, the state securities might have suffered a fall, such as would have reduced them to one shilling in the pound, or less perhaps; but with the amendment they would probably stand nearer to their value. Congress, said Mr. Bland, must sooner or later have taken up this business. He then concluded by professing that he spoke from the heart, and could not think of voting any other way than for the proposition.

Mr. Scott then rose and said, that he was well aware that adopting the proposition would operate in favour of some states, to the certain prejudice of others, and it would be well if a day of retribution could be fixed, that might equalize the business; but he could not look forward to that day—he feared it would never arrive. He was well disposed to consent that the actual debts yet unpaid should be taken into the common mass, and a ratio struck, notwithstanding he had been against a funding system. Yet under the impression that it was a great national effort, and that the state debts were incurred in the common cause of the union, he would vote for the proposition.

Mr. Lee said, when he considered the great respect which was due to the committee, and the character of the officer who reported, he thought it his duty to declare his reasons for the part he should take in the business before them. He acknowledged that the assumption would be just, if it could be effected on right principles; but the exertions of the individual states would be found unequal, and it would require two or three years to bring about a system of taxation. He was willing to assume the debts now, if they were to be provided for by the United States as soon as a liquidation can be made; and he therefore moved for a resolution to that effect.

If it will take two years, said Mr. Lee, to collect the voice of unanimity and equity, why precipitate the business at present? Every gentleman who considers well of this, will agree that more satisfaction would be given to the public mind by more deliberate procedures, and it would be more agreeable to the constitution.

Mr. Page was apprehensive, that, unless a fair settlement could be had, instead of consolidating the interest of the states, this measure would tend to create more jealousies, and renovate the old disputes, which had nearly subsided between the parties, in many states. He was willing that Massachusetts should be paid for their extraordinary exertions, and the Penobscot expedition, and South-Carolina for theirs in building a frigate, &c. But he thought it would be better policy to leave the settlement of the state accounts to themselves.

Mr. Page used several other arguments, and thought that a more proper time might be found for going into this business; he therefore wished for a postponement.

Mr. Jackson said, that most of the arguments which he had heard, in favour of the resolution, had already been answered. Let us examine, said he, the taxes proposed by the secretary of the treasury. The excise is a tax that has always been odious to the people of most of the states; the abolition of the ten per cent. allowance on tonnage to domestic owners of vessels, and the ten per cent. additional duty on foreign bottoms, will affect the southern states most, the principal imports being articles for the use of the husbandman; so that in this instance it operates like direct taxation on agriculture, equal to a tax on houses or lands. Salt also was

an article on which a tax would be thought odious.

Here Mr. Jackson referred to the debates of the last session, when some gentlemen who, perhaps, had now spoken differently, had then complained and reprobated the idea of taxing articles of this kind. If we do not assume the state debts, we will not want their excises. He denied the position which some members had argued for "that Congress could collect taxes in the states better than the states themselves;" for Congress cannot go beyond certain limits in taxation, even if a case of necessity required it, but the states themselves could go beyond those bounds; it was therefore more in their power to fund their own debts, than in the power of Congress.

Has there been a single answer offered by the gentlemen on the other side of this question to the charge of injustice, which would be incurred by taxing the original creditors a second time. He thought there was no prospect of retribution, not even with regard to its expediency: It will not prevent speculations, for speculations have already taken place; the state certificates are now in the hands of a third person—the debt will be enhanced, &c.

Mr. Jackson concluded by confessing, that if he could be convinced, even of its utility, it should have his sanction; but as no arguments had been offered, which were sufficient to make him change his opinion, he therefore would be against the proposition, and he only claimed the right of general justice.

Mr. Bland rose to reply to some gentlemen, whom, he said, had appeared squeamish with regard to funding laws and taxation. When the constitution was framing, it was well known that it would go to an absorption of all the official revenues of the United States; it was now too late to be squeamish on those subjects. He thought the military debts were the debts of the Union; for these reasons he adhered to his first principles.

Mr. Page thought the powers of Congress should not be so greatly extended, but in cases of urgent necessity.

Mr. Vining then rose, and apologized for his long absence from the house, which he said had been unavoidable; but although he had been absent, he had been employed in collecting the best information possible upon the subject.

When he viewed it as respecting a state, it appeared iniquitous, unjust, and inequitable; but when taken in a larger extent, as respecting the United States, he confessed he was puzzled how to determine, and he scarcely knew where to apply for information. Sacrifices were to be made upon the altar of accommodation, and the fate of America, perhaps, depended upon the decision of this question. Some states have, perhaps, issued securities for their own particular advantage, which would be unjust to charge to the United States, whilst other states were in a contrary predicament, and will have to pay into the common stock.

Here Mr. Vining expatiated upon the different lights in which the subject appeared to him, under various circumstances; but he inferred, at length, that confusion must ensue, if the debts were not assumed. Again, when he considered that direct taxation was to be the consequence, he was puzzled; yet this alternative had not the dreadful appearances to his mind, which had been depicted by some gentlemen; for the great influx of money which would follow the adoption of the measure, would render even direct taxation easy—it would not be felt in the degree which had been supposed.

The state of Delaware, he knew, would suffer by the assumption; for they had funded their debt, and provided for the interest. Another circumstance he would mention from information, that some states have made advances for their own particular advantage without regard to the Union. However, enough has been said by the gentlemen who have so ably debated this subject; it was therefore unnecessary for him to add any thing. He only wished to consider it in a large and general scale, and ob-