

TOWN MEETING IN PETERSBURG, August 4, 1795.

ON Saturday last, agreeably to public notice, a considerable number of the inhabitants of this town and the counties adjacent, met in the town courthouse, for the purpose of expressing their opinions on the Treaty now depending between the United States and Great Britain. General Joseph Jones was unanimously chosen chairman, and Mr. William Whitlock, Secretary.

Mr. George M. Taylor opened the debate, and prefaced his remarks by observing, that at the time Mr. Jay was appointed Envoy from the United States to the British Cabinet, our country was in a ferment, every citizen was agitated, at the gross insults and injuries which our commerce was then daily sustaining from the depredations committed by the orders of the British court, and we were then preparing for war, if proper redress should not be obtained by amicable negotiation—that Mr. Jay went to Great Britain with a full knowledge of these circumstances, that the people expected he should have insisted on a complete immediate reparation for those injuries, and a fulfilment of the Treaty of peace of 1783; but that none of the objects which were then understood to be the grounds of his mission, had been obtained on principles consistent with the honor, safety, and welfare of the United States.

He then said, that he should only make a few observations on the Treaty now before the meeting, and he should take it up in three points of view—1st. *As it respects the constitution of our country*—2dly. *As it respects our treaties with other nations, particularly with France*—and 3dly. *As it respects the people of this country.*

To the first, *As it respects the constitution of this country*, he said that neither Mr. Jay, nor the Senate, had any right to agree on imposing restrictions on the commerce of the United States—that the Senate by giving their assent to the Treaty had violated the constitution, which states that the power of making commercial regulations, &c. belongs to Congress, that it was taking upon themselves an authority which they had no right to exercise, and which might tend to establish a precedent dangerous to the peace and welfare of our country.

*As it respects our treaties with other nations, particularly with France*, he went largely into a comparative view of the conduct of the French government and that of the British government, towards this country, that the former had received us with open arms, had liberally assisted as through a severe bloody conflict with Great Britain, and had materially contributed to establish our independence, that in these trying scenes of danger, the French government had entered into a Treaty of Amity and Commerce with this country, which it was our duty and our interest to adhere to, and which would be shamefully abused and ungratefully disregarded, by accepting of the one now depending between the United States and Great Britain, that we had also much greater advantages secured to us in all our Treaties with other European powers, which were generally founded upon the law of nations and upon the principles of reciprocity, that we should shew a very unfriendly disposition indeed to the cause of France, if we joined in the present European combination in their attempt to starve the French, by admitting the right of the British government to stop our vessels loaded with provisions bound to France, and that it was a principle not to be denied, that neutral nations should continue in the same situation with

respect to the belligerent powers to the end of the war as they were at the commencement of it.

*As it respects the people of this country*, he said, that a stipulation had been made for the payment of debts due British creditors, which would operate very injuriously to the people at large, and for the settlement of which a tribunal was to be established, that was a reflection on the American Judiciary, and a dishonor to our country, that the subject of payment for the property carried off by the British army contrary to the Treaty of peace, appeared to be totally abandoned, and here he appealed to the citizens of Virginia, and asked them if they could suffer so glaring an imposition, so gross a violation of the Treaty of 1783, to pass unnoticed, or would they suffer to be thus plundered of their property, and not insist upon full compensation for the same. He then went into the subject of the Western Posts, and said he believed it was never seriously the intention of Great Britain to give them up. Mr. Jay, he said, ought to have insisted on an immediate delivery of those posts, and compensation from the British government for having unjustly and in violation of the Treaty of Peace kept us out of them so long, by which means we had been involved in a ruinous and expensive Indian war, and deprived of a profitable and advantageous commerce in that country.

Mr. J. Thomson followed Mr. Taylor, and after expatiating on the right of discussing political questions, and examining into the tendency of the acts of our government, he observed, the magnitude of the present subject, and the danger of the present crisis, render this meeting peculiarly proper. We are called upon to examine a Treaty which involves the most precious rights, the most valuable interests, the commerce, the peace, and the honor of America. A concise historical detail will unfold the peculiar circumstances in which America stood prior to the embassy which produced this treaty. The King of Great Britain, who has sworn eternal enmity to republics, acceded at an early period to that combination, which has convulsed Europe, in attempting to stifle the liberty of France. Under the obnoxious pretext of attempting to starve thirty millions of men, he issued orders for intercepting the correspondence, and plundering the commerce of neutral nations. He had long viewed with indignant sorrow, the rapid progress which the Americans made in spite of all the obstacles he could impose by commercial restrictions, or by flagrant violations of the treaty of 1783. The destruction of our rising commerce, the annihilation of our growing navigation, were the objects immediately contemplated by these nefarious orders. They were executed with all the diligence, and all the oppression which rapacity can practice. A patriotic phalanx in Congress proposed every expedient which wisdom could dictate, to obtain compensation for these injuries, but our illustrious President, animated by paternal solicitude for the welfare of America, gently insinuated to Congress that the subject was out of their jurisdiction, and appointed our Chief Justice to perform the honorable duty of declaring the indignation, and demanding the rights of an injured people. If stern aristocracy had not steeled his bosom against the generous sensation of patriotism, if gratitude, sensibility and honor, had not been enveloped in the sable gloom of political prejudice, he must have been animated by a magnanimity worthy of his country. In the presence of venal pride and courtly profligacy, even

at the foot stool of the throne, he would have preserved the attitude of dignity, and spoken the language of truth. But basely apostatizing from Republican principles, he hoped to offer the incense of flattery to a tyrant, the scourge of his country, the foe of mankind. After a long negotiation, in which he happily practised the art of diplomatic flattery, he has presented this Treaty to his expecting country. It has received in every article but one, the sanction of the Senate. The conduct of that assembly has indeed been uniform. Since the establishment of the Federal Government it has never deigned to adopt the sentiments of the people, or to communicate its own, except in the dignified form of Laws and Treaties. The majesty of that assembly has never been polluted by the vile feet of the swinish multitude. The existence of an aristocracy in this country is too often regarded as the chimera of some distempered enthusiast, or the fiction of some dangerous demagogue. I will appeal to the understandings of this audience, if the Funding System has not organized a great aristocracy, which has usurped the dominion of the Senate, which has often preponderated in the House of Representatives, which proclaim itself in servile addresses to our Supreme executive, in dangerous appointments, in monstrous accumulations of debt, in violation of the constitution, in proscriptions of democrats, and to complete the climax of political infamy, in this Treaty.

I will ask if the Senate does not discover abject servility in proposing the ratification of a treaty in which the fine expressions of friendship are prostituted by being used to a King? I will ask, if it was delicate, virtuous, or republican, to look upon the struggle of a great people for liberty, with cold indifference, to preserve a sullen neutrality, between freemen and despots, and to grant important privileges in peace and in war, to a government tottering under its own abuses, and feebly warring against liberty?

I will now consider each article of the treaty, I will compare it with the French Treaty, and demonstrate to this meeting the necessity of expressing our detestation.

Prior to a discussion of this treaty, it may be proper to observe that the sequestration proposed in Congress, was preferable to the system of negotiation adopted by the Executive. The compensation obtained, would have been instantaneous and adequate, the punishment inflicted severe and just, the measure adopted energetic and republican. This expedient was opposed, as leading to a war, by a party who conceal aristocracy under the gentle form of moderation. Whilst I declare the triumph of this party. I blush for my country. Yes, we hesitated to offend a proud king, who had captured our vessels, enslaved our fellow citizens, ruined our merchants, invaded our territory, and trampled on our sovereignty. Shrinking from this measure, we prostrated ourselves before him, smiled in his face, flattered and obtained this Treaty.

The objections I shall make to it are, first, on account of the articles it does not contain, and, secondly, on account of the articles it does contain. It ought to have been expressly stipulated, that the king of Great Britain should interpose for us his good offices with the piratical states, or at least that he should not negotiate a peace between Portugal and Algiers, which should again render plunderers the tyrants of the ocean. His recent conduct in that quarter had very materially injured us; but no

provision against a repetition of it, has been made by our minister. By the French Treaty concluded in the year 1778, in the tumultuous moments which attend the crisis of liberty, by a government so much despised for imbecility, this protection from Algerine Corsairs was expressly given by a king, from whom we had nothing to demand, and every thing to sue, and to whom we granted privileges much less important than those we now grant.

A stipulation ought to have been insisted on for ample compensation for the detention of the western posts, a detention which has defrauded America of the fur trade, and which has produced a long, bloody, and disastrous Indian war.

A stipulation ought to have been made that British ships of war should protect American ships at sea. Although the articles relative to armed ships appear to be mutual; since we have no armed ships, we receive no consideration for the privileges we grant theirs. Here another advantage is given to us by the French Treaty which this Treaty denies.

As I have been forced to anticipate the comparisons between the two Treaties, I will now continue it, and then state my objections to the articles contained in the Treaty. The French are by Treaty to pay no higher duties than the most favored nations pay. In the year 1778, we refused to admit even those generous allies into our ports upon the same terms with citizens—By this Treaty the British are to be admitted on the same terms with American merchants. But the French, the Dutch, most favoured nations, if this Treaty is ratified, they will be obliged to pay no higher duties than American merchants. This Treaty then almost annihilates the distinction between foreigners & natives; which we refused to relinquish in favor of our allies and protectors in the epoch of danger and infancy; Let this circumstance prove the abject humility with which America has been prostrated before the British king.

By the 2d article of the French Treaty it is provided, that enemies property shall not be taken out of American vessels—The French cannot take out of American vessels British property. By this treaty it is expressly provided, that enemies may take out of American vessels French property. The object of this article was, to give the sanction of America to those atrocious robberies, which are wrested from the wretched West-Indian exile, the last pittance of despairing poverty. By the French treaty the carrying trade of enemies property, not only from neutral ports to enemies ports, but from enemies ports to enemies ports, is given us—By this Treaty that valuable source of wealth is denied us. By the French Treaty it is declared that they shall not intercept American vessels bound with provisions to the ports of their enemies—By this Treaty it is declared that the British may intercept American vessels bound with provisions to the ports of their enemies. The French then cannot intercept American vessels bound with provision to the ports of Great Britain, but the British can intercept American vessels bound with provisions to the French republic. The object of this article was to render America accessory to the nefarious scheme of exciting by the agency of famine, insurrection and disorder, which may either exterminate or enslave the French. The object of this article was to render America a cowardly confederate, concealing under the venerable form of friendship the vilest malice. And shall this Treaty dissolve the compact made by nature between the two Republics, secured by feelings