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## MR. HARPER'S LETTER.

Philadelphia, April 7, 1800.

My Dear Sir,

As the most interesting intelligence at present, is that which relates to our commissioners lately sent to France; I thought it best to postpone writing, till I could tell you something on that subject; this was not in my power till three days ago, when the first intelligence was received from them, and was brought by the frigate which carried them out. From these accounts it appears that they first touched at Lisbon, on the 27th of November last, for the purpose of gaining some intelligence about the state of things in Europe, and particularly in France; and that after being detained for some time, at that port, on the 21st day of December. On their passage they met with head winds and storms, which at length obliged them to put into a port in Spain; where they arrived on the 11th day of January last. Immediately after their landing, they dispatched an express to Paris, to give the French government an account of their arrival, and to request passports for enabling them to travel through France. After refreshing themselves for some days, they proceeded on their journey towards Paris through Spain; at a town of which is called Burgois they met their express, with their passports, and a letter from the French government in very polite terms, informing them that they had been very impatiently expected for a long time, and that the change which had lately happened in the French government, would occasion no difficulty in their reception or negotiations. From this town their letters were dated. They were to leave it about the 10th day of February and will probably have reached Paris about the middle of March. Nothing further has been heard from them since, nor probably will be for some time to come.

It appears from this account, that the French government is disposed to treat this embassy with more civility than the former received at their hands; but whether they will be better disposed now than formerly to do justice to our demands, and make a fair settlement of the differences between us, remains yet to be tried. I am inclined to think that it will be the case; though the point is very doubtful. One thing, however, is, in my opinion, perfectly certain, that the change in their manners has been produced, altogether, by our spirited conduct, and measures of defence and resistance; and that to a continuation of that conduct, and those measures, we must look for a change in their system. If we persevere in the same steps, they, I am persuaded, will do us justice, and respect our rights. If, on the contrary, we recede and fall back, they will press on again with more violence than ever; for it is the nature of bullies to impose on the timid and feeble, and to forbear striking those, who show a determination or an ability to strike again.

Having alluded to the late change in the government of France, which is of a very singular nature, I will give you some account of it.

General Buonaparte, finding that there was nothing to be got in Egypt, but hardships and gradual destruction, privately abandoned his army, which he left to fight for itself, and very unexpectedly, by the French government, and nation at least, made his appearance in France. It is not improbable, however, that he had been secretly invited by some individuals, with a view to the objects which he afterwards accomplished. Having travelled in triumph to Paris, and received the praises and congratulations of the French government, which most probably felt much better disposed to punish him, if it had been able to do so; he proceeded to form a party of some members of the Directory and the two councils, and to gain over a number of officers and troops who were in and about Paris. By the help of these associates, he one morning seized and imprisoned the members of the directory who were not in the secret, and compelled them to resign. The others did so of their own accord. He then went to the Council of Ancients; from which he obtained a vote, investing him with the whole military command in Paris and the neighbourhood, and adjourning the two Councils to a place some miles from the city. The object of this was, to put the Council of Five Hundred, of which he was afraid, more completely in his power, by removing them from Paris, the populace of which might have supported them. Accordingly he attended with a military guard, at the first meeting of that Council; and after making a speech to them, the amount of which was, that they were a pack of fools and scoundrels, he gave the word, "charge," to his grenadiers, and drove out at the point of the bayonet, all those who were not of his party. The rest soon re-assembled under his orders, and passed decrees, whereby he, and a few of his associates were invested, in fact, with absolute power;

the two branches of the legislature were adjourned to a distant day; many members were expelled; and a small number was selected from each council to form a new constitution. It was not difficult to foresee that the constitution formed by them, would be of a nature to please general Buonaparte. Accordingly it soon made its appearance, and constituted him chief Consul of the French republic, for ten years, with a salary of one hundred thousand dollars, the absolute command of all the fleets and armies, the entire disposal of the public treasury, the appointment and removal of all officers of every kind, the whole executive authority, and the right of proposing all laws, to a body which, in substance and truth though not in name, is chosen by himself; which the people have not, even in name, a part in choosing; and which must accept or reject such laws as he may choose to offer to them, and none others, without the power even of proposing an amendment. This is the substance of the thing; tho' there is some fringed and the tinsel stuck on, to catch the eyes of the vulgar; and it is obvious that a despotism more complete never existed.

Such has been the issue of the famous French revolution; on the ruins of which, after more than ten years of agitation, anarchy, proscription, murder, pillage, and crimes of every kind and degree, and eight years of the most cruel extensive and bloody wars, civil or foreign, and frequently both, we at length see a military usurper seated, with chains in one hand, the dagger in the other, and all law and right beneath his feet: invested with a power more absolute, in effect, than any king of France ever enjoyed: which he will be compelled, by his situation and the state of things, to exercise, with iron handed rigour; and which he will retain, as long as he can retain his life, his understanding, and his courage. I might indeed say his understanding and his courage: for while he retains them, his life, I believe, will be in very little danger. When they fail him, and they have sometimes failed people who were suddenly raised to so great a height, he will be pushed from his seat by some new usurper, who will occupy in his stead.

This government, however, is still called the "French Republic;" and general Buonaparte still quality, and still talks as gravely as Robespierre himself, about the "sovereignty of the people." He is thus far in the right; that France is as much a republic now as ever it was: for there never existed in it any thing republican but the name, and that still exists. There is also as much "Liberty and Equality," as there had ever been, and probably much more; for the people, instead of being subject to the lawless and capricious despotism of a multitude of persons, a vast majority of whom, including the most energetic, active and influential, have generally been madmen or knaves, are now subject to the despotism of one man of sense, who may find it his interest to govern well, and in his power to govern with steadiness. As to the "sovereignty of the people," they have at least as much of it as heretofore; for it is notorious that the government called at various times the "Republic," has been a series of forcible or fraudulent usurpations, in the choice of which the people has never had a real effective voice, and very seldom even an apparent one. We know indeed, that it has been acknowledged by some of the greatest admirers of the French revolution, and, by one in particular, who resided for some years in France, and proved himself a faithful servant of the Republic, "that the government in that country, was every thing, and the people nothing." For my own part, I confess myself to be of opinion, that general Buonaparte's government is far the best for France, that has existed within the last ten years, and that he deserves the thanks of his own country, and of the world for its establishment: for I hold it to be an indisputable truth, that whoever by any means, suppresses an anarchical democratical despotism, which is the only description that I can give of the late French government, ought to be considered as a benefactor to mankind.

The lovers of true republicanism ought particularly, to rejoice in this event; for such was the disgrace brought upon that kind of government, by those who usurped the name and form of it in France, that there was a great danger of a lasting and universal disgust being created against it, amongst the rational and virtuous part of mankind.

Whether general Buonaparte will pursue the policy of his predecessors towards foreign nations, or adopt a just and pacific system, remains yet to be seen. He has talked much of peace; as each of them also did at the commencement of their careers; for the purpose of raising the hope, and securing the good wishes of the nation. Just as a man puts the neck of his horse, till he can get fast hold of the reins, and well

fixed in the saddle. Then come the whip and spur. As Buonaparte's authority, however, is more likely to be permanent, than that of his predecessors, it is more probable that he may find it in his power, and even in his inclination and interest, to make peace. At present every thing in Europe wears the appearance of continued war.

In the course of the last campaign, the French were totally defeated in Italy by the Austrians and Russians, and driven entirely out of that country. They also experienced severe defeats in Germany and Switzerland, in the early part of the campaign, but towards the close of it, they regained their ground in Switzerland, where they were victorious. In Germany they still continue unsuccessful. The English and Russians also attacked them in Holland, where the former landed a considerable army, after capturing the whole Dutch fleet, but the French, after many sharp actions and some defeats, were finally victorious, and compelled the English and Russians to abandon the country; and to release 8000 French prisoners, for permission to do so without molestation.

Thus stand matters now. Both sides are preparing for another Campaign. Should it take place, the probability of success, as it appears to me, is greatly against France.

With respect to our internal affairs, and the proceedings of congress, I shall delay any detail of them, till near the close of the session, when I shall write again, and when it will be in my power to give you a more complete view of those subjects than at present. I will, however mention in the mean time, that a motion was made some time ago, to disband the newly raised army; which I opposed, for reasons that are explained in the enclosed speech on that subject. The motion was rejected; on the ground that we ought not to diminish our means of defence, in the moment of negotiation, while it was yet uncertain to what attacks we might be exposed. But as it is a very desirable object to diminish the expenses of government as much as possible, consistently with a due regard to the public safety and interest, an act was afterwards passed for suspending all further enlistments for that army till the further order of Congress. The expenses of this year, if the negotiation should succeed, the whole army will be disbanded of course; and if it should fail, Congress will be again in session, time enough to order the renewal of the enlistments.

I must also mention that our gallant naval commander Truxton, has performed another very brilliant achievement, in the West Indies. With the Constellation frigate, which carries but 26 guns, and three hundred and forty men, he engaged some time ago, a French ship of war of 54 guns, and five hundred men, which he totally disabled, and would have taken, had not his own men gone overboard, so as to prevent him from pursuing his antagonist, at the very moment when the latter ceased his fire, and betook himself to flight. There were fourteen men killed, and twenty-five wounded, on board the Constellation; and one hundred and fifty or sixty killed and wounded, on board the Frenchman.

To reward this very gallant and well conducted action, and to encourage a similar spirit in the navy generally, Congress have requested the President to present Truxton with a Golden Medal emblematical of the same. ROBERT G. HARPER.

## List of ACTS passed during the first session of the Sixth Congress of the United States.

An act for reviving and continuing suits and proceedings in the circuit court for the district of Pennsylvania. An act extending the privilege of franking to William Henry Harrison, the delegate from the territory of the United States north-west of the Ohio; and making provision for his compensation. An act, supplementary to the act, intitled, "An act to provide for the valuation of lands and dwelling houses, and the enumeration of slaves within the United States." An act for the relief of persons imprisoned for debt. An act for the preservation of peace with the Indian tribes. An act to repeal part of an act, intitled, "An act to provide for mitigating or remitting the forfeitures, penalties and disabilities, accruing in certain cases therein mentioned, and to continue in force the residue of the same." An act for the relief of John Vaughan. An act giving further time to the holders of military warrants, to register and locate the same. An act to suspend in part, an act, intitled, "An act to augment the army of the United States; and for other purposes." An act further to suspend the commercial intercourse between the United States and France, and the dependencies thereof. An act for the relief of James Yard. An act providing for the second census or enumeration of the inhabitants of the