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MESSAGE

From the President of the United States to both Houses of Congress—June 5, 1798.

Gentlemen of the Senate, and

Gentlemen of the House of Representatives,

I NOW transmit to both Houses, the Communications from our Envoys at Paris, received since the last, which have been presented by me to Congress.

JOHN ADAMS.

UNITED STATES,
June 5th, 1798.

No. 7.

Paris, March 9th, 1798.

DEAR SIR,

AGREEABLY to what we represented to you in our No. 6 we prepared a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, on the subject of the late law authorizing the capture of neutral vessels, on board of which any productions of Great Britain or its possessions should be laden, shewing how incompatible such law was with the rights of neutral nations and the treaty between France and America, its direct tendency to destroy the remaining commerce of our country, and the particular hardships to which it would subject the agricultural as well as commercial interests of our countrymen, from the peculiar situation of the United States. We added, that under existing circumstances, we could no longer resist the conviction that the demands of France rendered it entirely impracticable to effect the objects of our mission, and that not being permanent Ministers, but Envoys extraordinary, with full power for particular purposes, we deemed it improper to remain longer in France after the impossibility of effecting those purposes had been demonstrated. Before however we took this measure and explicitly demanded our passports, we deemed it expedient to desire Major Rutledge to call on Mr. Talleyrand, on the 19th ultimo, to know if he had any communication to make to us in consequence of our letter, dated the 17th and delivered the 31st of January. To this Mr. Talleyrand replied, that he had no answer to make, as the Directory had not taken any order on the subject, and when they did, he would inform us of it. Still being anxious to hear explicitly from Mr. Talleyrand himself before we sent our final letter, whether there were no means, within our powers, of accommodating our differences with France, on just and reasonable grounds, we wrote to him on the 27th of February, soliciting a personal interview on the subject of our mission; he appointed the 2d of March following. You will find in the exhibit A. herewith enclosed, what passed on that occasion. On the 4th instant we requested another interview. We have detailed in the latter part of the same exhibit, for your information, the substance of that conversation. From these accounts you may observe that the views of France with regard to us, are not essentially changed, since our communications with its unofficial Agents in October last.

We have the honor to be,

With great respect,

Your most obedient humble servants,

CHARLES COTESWORTH PINCKNEY,

J. MARSHALL,

E. GERRY.

Col. Pickering,

Secretary of the United States.

March the 2d.

At three o'clock we waited on Mr. Talleyrand, and were almost immediately introduced to him. General Pinckney commenced the conversation by saying, that our government and ourselves were extremely anxious to remove the subsisting difference between the two Republics: that we had received many propositions through Mr. Y. to which we had found it impracticable to accede; and, that we had now waited on him for the purpose of enquiring whether other means might not be devised which would effect so desirable an object. The minister replied, that without doubt the Directory wished very sincerely on our arrival to see a solid friendship established between France and the United States, and had manifested this disposition by the readiness with which orders for our passport were given. That the Directory had been extremely wounded by the last speech of General Washington, made to Congress when about to quit the office of President of United States; and by the first and last speech of Mr. Adams. That explanations of these speeches were expected and required of us. General Pinckney expressed his surprize that the speech of General Washington was complained of, and said this was a new complaint. Mr. Talleyrand merely observed, that the Directory was wounded at it; and proceeded. He said, that the original favourable disposition of the Directory had been a good

deal altered by the coldness and distance which we had observed. That instead of seeing him often, and endeavouring to remove the obstacles to a mutual approach, we had not once waited on him. General Pinckney observed, that when we delivered him our letters of credence, he informed us, that the Directory in a few days would decide concerning us, and that when the decision was made he would communicate it to us. That this had for some time suspended any procedure on our part. He answered that this related only to our public character, and not to private visits. General Pinckney said, that on an application made by his secretary for a passport for an American under his care, he was told, that he must apply to the office of police, for that America had no minister in France, since the recall of Mr. Monroe. The minister said, that was very true; and then proceeded to say, that the Directory felt itself wounded by the different speeches of Mr. Washington and Mr. Adams, which he had stated, and would require some proof on the part of the United States of a friendly disposition previous to a treaty with us. He then said that we ought to search for and propose some means which might furnish this proof; that if we were disposed to furnish it there could be no difficulty in finding it; and he alluded very intelligibly to a loan. He said, he had several conferences with Mr. Gerry on this subject, who had always answered that we had no power. Mr. Gerry said, that he had stated other objections; that he had particularly urged that it would involve us in a war with Great Britain. He made no reply; and General Pinckney observed, that a loan had been suggested to us, but that we had uniformly answered that it exceeded our powers. Mr. Talleyrand replied, that persons at such a distance as we were from our government, and possessed as we were of the public confidence, must often use their discretion, and exceed their powers for the public good. That there was a material difference between acting when instructions were silent, and doing what was particularly forbidden; that if indeed a loan was positively forbidden, we might consider ourselves as incapable of making one; but if, as he supposed, was the case (he looked the question) our instructions were only silent, that it must be referred to us to act in a case not provided for according to the best of our judgment, for the public good: that in almost all the treaties made during the revolution, the negotiators had exceeded their powers; although the government appointing them was at no considerable distance. He particularized the treaty with Prussia, and several others. General Pinckney told him that our powers did not extend to a loan, and perhaps might forbid it. The Minister still urged the difference between an express prohibition and mere silence. He then proceeded to state that the principal objection on the part of our government to a loan must be, that it would draw us out of the neutral situation in which we wished to continue; that there were various means of evading this; first, the secrecy of France, which might be relied on; and secondly, means of disguising the loan might be devised, which would effectually prevent its being considered as an aid during the present war: that if we were truly and sincerely desirous of effecting the thing, we should experience no difficulty in finding the means. He again stated a proposition of this sort, on our part, as being absolutely necessary to prove that the government was not about entering into a treaty with persons of a temper hostile to it. Mr. Gerry not well hearing Mr. Talleyrand, who spoke low, asked him to explain himself with respect to the proposition which he had alluded to, supposing it to be a new one: and he answered, that one of them was secrecy? but that there were besides various ways which might easily be suggested to cover the loan as an immediate one, by limiting the time of advancing it to distant instalments. Mr. Gerry observed that Dutrmond had suggested that a loan was proposed to be made, payable after the war and in supplies to St. Domingo. Mr. Talleyrand signified, that that might be one of the means used; and said that if we were only sincere in our wish, it would be easy to bring about the end. General Marshall told Mr. Talleyrand, that if the Ministers of the United States had manifested any unwillingness to take all proper measures to reconcile the two Republics, or any indifference on the subject, they had very badly represented the feelings and wishes of their government; that the government of the United States was most sincerely desirous of preserving the friendship of France, and had, in his opinion, unequivocally manifested that desire, by having deputed us under the extraordinary circumstances attending our mission, and by having so long patiently borne the immense loss of property which had been sustained; that we had en-

deavoured, according to the best of our judgment, to represent truly this disposition of our government; but that we understood that France would consider nothing as an evidence of friendship, but an act which would transcend and violate our powers, and at the same time operate the most serious injury to our country; that neutrality, in the present war, was of the last importance to the United States; and they had resolved faithfully to maintain it; that they had committed no act voluntarily, which was a breach of it; and could do nothing in secret, which, if known, would justly arrange them among the belligerent powers; that in the present state of things, if America was actually engaged with France in the war, she would only be required to furnish money; that we had neither ships of war or men to be employed in it, and could consequently, as a belligerent power, only be asked for money; that, therefore, to furnish money, was, in fact, to make war; which we could by no means consent to do; and which would absolutely transcend our powers; being an act altogether without the view and contemplation of our government, when our mission was decided on: that with respect to supplies to St. Domingo, no doubt could be entertained that our merchants would furnish them very abundantly if France would permit the commerce; and a loan really payable after the close of the war, might then be negotiated. Mr. Talleyrand again marked the distinction between silence of instructions and an express prohibition; and again insisted on the necessity of our proving by some means, which we must offer, our friendship for the Republic. He said, he must exact from us, on the part of his government, some proposition of this sort; that to prove our friendship, there must be some immediate aid, or something which might avail them; that the principles of reciprocity would require it. General Pinckney and General Marshall understood him, by this expression, to allude to the loan formerly made by France to the United States. Mr. Gerry at the time thought he alluded to the treaty to be made, and said, all treaties should be founded in reciprocity; and then asked him whether a loan was the ultimatum of this government. Mr. Talleyrand did not give a direct answer to the question: he said, as he was understood, that the government insisted on some act which would demonstrate our friendly disposition towards, and our good wishes for the Republic, this once done, he said, the adjustment of complaints would be easy; that would be matter of enquiry, and if France had done us wrong, it would be repaired. But that if this was refused, it would increase the distance and coldness between the two Republics. The conversation continued in this style until four o'clock, when we took our leave, and agreed to meet in the evening.

In the course of it, and in reply to some observations of Mr. Talleyrand, respecting the proofs of friendship required by France, General Pinckney observed, that our being here was a mark of the friendly disposition of our Government, and that while we were here, the Government had passed a decree for seizing neutral vessels having on board any article coming out of England; which in its operation would subject to capture all our property on the Ocean. Mr. Talleyrand replied, that this was not particular to us, but was common to all the neutral powers. At another time, in answer to his demand, of some mark of our friendship, General Marshall observed, that we considered the mutual interests of the two nations as requiring peace and friendship; and we relied on finding sufficient motives in the interest of France to prefer that friendship, without forcing us to an act which transcended our powers and would be so injurious to our Country. As we were taking our leave, Mr. Talleyrand again noticed our not visiting him and said, that he conceived our not having had an audience from the Directory ought not to have prevented it. General Marshall told him, that our seeing the Directory, or not, was an object of no sort of concern to us; that we were perfectly indifferent with regard to it; but that we conceived that until our public character was in some degree recognized, and we were treated as the ministers and representatives of our government, we could not take upon ourselves to act as Ministers, because by doing so, we might subject ourselves to some injurious circumstance to which we could not submit. He said that was very true; but that we might see him as private individuals; and discuss the objects of difference between us.

We requested of Mr. Talleyrand another interview, at such hour as might be convenient to him, on the 16th instant. He answered, that he would receive us at half past eleven; at which hour we attended him.

Immediately after our arrival at his office, we were