

commend such as in my judgment, the occasion called for. To this end, an unreserved communication of the case, in all its aspects, became indispensable. To have shrunk, in making it, from saying all that was necessary to its correct understanding, and that the truth would justify, for fear of giving offence to others, would have been unworthy of us. To have gone, on the other hand, a single step further, for the purpose of wounding the pride of a government and people with whom we had so many motives for cultivating relations of amity and reciprocal advantage, would have been unwise and improper. Admonished by the past of the difficulty of making even the simplest statement of our wrongs, without disturbing the sensibilities of those who had, by their position, become responsible for their redress, and earnestly desirous of preventing further obstacles from that source, I went out of my way to preclude a construction of the message, by which the recommendation that was made to congress might be regarded as a menace to France, in not only disavowing such a design, but in declaring that her pride and her power were too well known to expect any thing from her fears. The message did not reach Paris until more than a month after the chambers had been in session; and such was the insensibility of the ministry to our rightful claims and just expectations, that our minister had been informed that the matter, when introduced, would not be pressed as a cabinet measure.

Although the message was not officially communicated to the French government, and notwithstanding the declaration to the contrary which it contained, the French ministry decided to consider the conditional recommendation of reprisals, a menace and an insult, which the honor of the nation made it incumbent on them to resent. The measures resorted to by them to evince their sense of the supposed indignity, were, the immediate recall of their minister at Washington, the offer of passports to the American minister at Paris, and a public notice to the legislative chambers that all the diplomatic intercourse with the U. States had been suspended.

Having, in this manner, vindicated the dignity of France, they next proceeded to illustrate her justice. To this end, a bill was immediately introduced into the chamber of deputies, proposing to make the appropriations necessary to carry into effect the treaty. As this bill subsequently passed into a law, the provisions of which now constitute the main subject of difficulty between the two nations, it becomes my duty, in order to place the subject before you in a clear light, to trace the history of its passage, and to refer, with some particularity, to the proceedings and discussions in regard to it. The minister of finance in his opening speech, alluded to the measures which had been adopted to resent the supposed indignity, and recommended the execution of the treaty as a measure required by the honor and justice of France. He, as the organ of the ministry, declared the message, so long as it had not received the sanction of congress, a mere expression of the personal opinion of the president, for which neither the government nor people of the United States were responsible, and that an engagement had been entered into, for the fulfilment of which the honor of France was pledged. Entertaining these views, the single condition which the French ministry proposed to annex to the payment of the money, was, that it should not be made until it was ascertained that the government of the United States had done nothing to injure the interests of France; or, in other words, that no steps had been authorised by congress of a hostile character towards France.

What the disposition or action of congress might be, was then unknown to the French cabinet. But, on the 14th of January, the senate resolved that it was, at that time, inexpedient to adopt any legislative measures in regard to the state of affairs between the United States and France, and no action on the subject had occurred in the house of representatives. These facts were known in Paris prior to the 28th of March, 1835, when the committee, to whom the bill of indemnification had been referred, reported it to the chamber of deputies. That committee substantially re-echoed the sentiments of the ministry, declared that congress had set aside the proposition of the president, and recommended the passage of the bill, without any other restriction than that originally proposed. Thus was it known to the French ministry and chambers, that if the position assumed by them, and which had been so frequently and solemnly announced as the only one compatible with the honor of France, was maintained, and the bill passed as originally proposed, the money would be paid, and there would be an end of this unfortunate controversy.

But this cheering prospect was soon destroyed by an amendment introduced into the bill at the moment of its passage, providing that the money should not be paid until the French government had received satisfactory explanations of the president's message, of the 2d December, 1834; and what is still more extraordinary, the president of the council of ministers adopted this amendment, and consented to its incorporation in the bill. In regard to a supposed insult which had been formally resented by the recall of their minister, and the offer of passports to ours, they now, for the first time, proposed to ask explanations. Sentiments and propositions which they had declared could not justly be imputed to the government or people of the United States, are set up as obstacles to the performance of an act of conceded justice to that government and people. They had declared that the honor of France required the fulfilment of the engagement into which the king had entered, unless congress adopted the recommendations of the message. They ascertained that congress did not adopt them, and

yet that fulfilment is refused, unless they first obtain from the president explanations of an opinion characterized by themselves as personal and inoperative.

The conception that it was my intention to menace or insult the government of France, is as unfounded, as the attempt to extort from the fears of that nation what her sense of justice may deny, would be vain and ridiculous. But the constitution of the United States imposes on the president the duty of laying before congress the condition of the country, in its foreign and domestic relations, and of recommending such measures as may, in his opinion, be required by its interests. From the performance of this duty he cannot be deterred by the fear of wounding the sensibilities of the people or government of whom it may become necessary to speak; and the American people are incapable of submitting to an interference, by any government on earth, however powerful, with the free performance of the domestic duties which the constitution has imposed on their public functionaries. The discussions which intervene between the several departments of our government belong to ourselves; and, for any thing said in them, our public servants are only responsible to their own constituents, and to each other. If, in the course of their consultations, facts are erroneously stated, or unjust deductions are made, they require no other inducement to correct them, however informed of their error, than their love of justice, and what is due to their own character; but they can never submit to be interrogated upon the subject, as a matter of right, by a foreign power. When our discussions terminate in acts, our responsibility to foreign powers commences, not as individuals, but as a nation. The principle which calls in question the president for the language of his message, would equally justify a foreign power in demanding explanation of the language used in the report of a committee, or by a member in debate.

This is not the first time that the government of France has taken exception to the messages of American presidents. President Washington, and the first president Adams, in the performance of their duties to the American people, fell under the animadversions of the French directory. The objection taken by the ministry of Charles X, and removed by the explanations made by our minister upon the spot, has already been adverted to. When it was understood that the ministry of the present king took exception to my message of last year, putting a construction upon it which was disavowed on its face, our late minister at Paris, in answer to the note which first announced a dissatisfaction with the language used in the message, made a communication to the French government under date of the 29th of January, 1835, calculated to remove all impressions which an unreasonable susceptibility had created. He repeated, and called the attention of the French government to, the disavowal contained in the message itself, of any intention to intimidate by menace—he truly declared that it contained, and was intended to contain, no charge of ill faith against the king of the French, and properly distinguished between the right to complain, in unexceptionable terms, of the omission to execute an agreement, and an accusation of bad motives in withholding such execution—and demonstrated, that the necessary use of that right ought not to be considered as an offensive imputation. Although this communication was made without instructions, and entirely on the minister's own responsibility, yet it was afterwards made the act of this government by my full approbation, and that approbation was officially made known on the 25th of April, 1835, to the French government. It, however, failed to have any effect. The law, after this friendly explanation, passed with the obnoxious amendment, supported by the king's ministers, and was finally approved by the king.

The people of the United States are justly attached to a pacific system in their intercourse with foreign nations. It is proper, therefore, that they should know whether their government has adhered to it. In the present instance, it has been carried to the utmost extent that was consistent with a becoming self-respect. The note of the 29th of January, to which I have before alluded, was not the only one which our minister took upon himself the responsibility of presenting, on the same subject, and in the same spirit. Finding that it was intended to make the payment of a just debt dependent on the performance of a condition which he knew could never be complied with, he thought it a duty to make another attempt to convince the French government, that whilst self-respect and regard to the dignity of other nations would always prevent us from using any language that ought to give offence, yet we could never admit a right in any foreign government to ask explanations of, or to interfere in any manner in, the communications which one branch of our public councils made with another: that in the present case, no such language had been used, and that this had in a former note been fully and voluntarily stated, before it was contemplated to make the explanation a condition; and that there might be no misapprehension, he stated the terms used in that note, and he officially informed them that it had been approved by the president; and that, therefore, every explanation which could reasonably be asked, or honorably given, had been already made—that the contemplated measure had been anticipated by a voluntary and friendly declaration, and was therefore not only useless, but might be deemed offensive, and certainly would not be complied with, if annexed as a condition.

When this latter communication, to which I specially invite the attention of congress, was laid before me, I entertained the