

"Third Annual Message to Congress" (December 3, 1799)

It is with peculiar satisfaction that I meet the 6th Congress of the United States of America. Coming from all parts of the Union at this critical and interesting period, the members must be fully possessed of the sentiments and wishes of our constituents.

The flattering prospects of abundance from the labors of the people by land and by sea; the prosperity of our extended commerce, notwithstanding interruptions occasioned by the belligerent state of a great part of the world; the return of health, industry, and trade to those cities which have lately been afflicted with disease, and the various and inestimable advantages, civil and religious, which, secured under our happy frame of government, are continued to us unimpaired, demand of the whole American people sincere thanks to a benevolent Deity for the merciful dispensations of His providence.

But while these numerous blessings are recollected, it is a painful duty to advert to the ungrateful return which has been made for them by some of the people in certain counties of Pennsylvania, where, seduced by the arts and misrepresentations of designing men, they have openly resisted the law directing the valuation of houses and lands. Such defiance was given to the civil authority as rendered hopeless all further attempts by judicial process to enforce the execution of the law, and it became necessary to direct a military force to be employed, consisting of some companies of regular troops, volunteers, and militia, by whose zeal and activity, in cooperation with the judicial power, order and submission were restored and many of the offenders arrested. Of these, some have been convicted of misdemeanors, and others, charged with various crimes, remain to be tried.

To give due effect to the civil administration of Government and to insure a just execution of the laws, a revision and amendment of the judiciary system is indispensably necessary. In this extensive country it can not but happen that numerous questions respecting the interpretation of the laws and the rights and duties of officers and citizens must arise. On the one hand, the laws should be executed; on the other, individuals should be guarded from oppression. Neither of these objects is sufficiently assured under the present organization of the judicial department. I therefore earnestly recommend the subject to your serious consideration.

Persevering in the pacific and humane policy which had been invariably professed and sincerely pursued by the Executive authority of the United States, when indications were made on the part of the French Republic of a disposition to accommodate the existing differences between the 2 countries, I felt it to be my duty to prepare for meeting their advances by a nomination of ministers upon certain conditions which the honor of our country dictated, and which its moderation had given it a right to prescribe.

The assurances which were required of the French Government previous to the departure of our envoys have been given through their minister of foreign relations, and I have directed them to proceed on their mission to Paris. They have full power to conclude a treaty, subject to the constitutional advice and consent of the Senate. The characters of these gentlemen are sure pledges to their country that nothing incompatible with its honor or interest, nothing inconsistent with our obligations of good faith or friendship to any other nation, will be stipulated.

It appearing probable from the information I received that our commercial intercourse with some ports in the island of St. Domingo might safely be renewed, I took such steps as seemed to me expedient to ascertain that point. The result being satisfactory, I then, in conformity with the act of Congress on the subject, directed the restraints and prohibitions of that intercourse to be discontinued on terms which were made known by proclamation. Since the renewal of this intercourse our citizens trading to those ports, with their property, have been duly respected, and privateering from those ports has ceased.

In examining the claims of British subjects by the commissioners at Philadelphia, acting under the 6th article of the treaty of amity, commerce, and navigation with Great Britain, a difference of opinion on points deemed essential in the interpretation of that article has arisen between the commissioners appointed by the United States and the other members of that board, from which the former have thought it their duty to withdraw. It is sincerely to be regretted that the execution of an article produced by a mutual spirit of amity and justice should have been thus unavoidably interrupted. It is, however, confidently expected that the same spirit of amity and the same sense of justice in which it originated will lead to satisfactory explanations.

In consequence of the obstacles to the progress of the commission in Philadelphia, His Britannic Majesty has directed the commissioners appointed by him under the 7th article of the treaty relating to the British captures of American vessels to withdraw from the board sitting in London, but with the express declaration of his determination to fulfill with punctuality and good faith the engagements which His Majesty has contracted by his treaty with the United States, and that they will be instructed to resume their functions whenever the obstacles which impede the progress of the commission at Philadelphia shall be removed. It being in like manner my sincere determination, so far as the same depends on me, that with equal punctuality and good faith the engagements contracted by the United States in their treaties with His Britannic Majesty shall be fulfilled, I shall immediately instruct our minister at London to endeavor to obtain the explanation necessary to a just performance of those engagements on the part of the United States. With such dispositions on both sides, I can not entertain a doubt that all difficulties will soon be removed and that the 2 boards will then proceed and bring the business committed to them respectively to a satisfactory conclusion.

The act of Congress relative to the seat of the Government of the United States requiring that on the 1st Monday of

December next it should be transferred from Philadelphia to the District chosen for its permanent seat, it is proper for me to inform you that the commissioners appointed to provide suitable buildings for the accommodation of Congress and of the President and of the public offices of the Government have made a report of the state of the buildings designed for those purposes in the city of Washington, from which they conclude that the removal of the seat of Government to that place at the time required will be practicable and the accommodation satisfactory. Their report will be laid before you.

Gentlemen of the House of Representatives:

I shall direct the estimates of the appropriations necessary for the service of the ensuing year, together with an account of the revenue and expenditure, to be laid before you. During a period in which a great portion of the civilized world has been involved in a war unusually calamitous and destructive, it was not to be expected that the United States could be exempted from extraordinary burthens. Although the period is not arrived when the measures adopted to secure our country against foreign attacks can be renounced, yet it is alike necessary for the honor of the Government and the satisfaction of the community that an exact economy should be maintained. I invite you, gentlemen, to investigate the different branches of the public expenditure. The examination will lead to beneficial retrenchments or produce a conviction of the wisdom of the measures to which the expenditure relates.

Gentlemen of the Senate and Gentlemen of the House of Representatives:

At a period like the present, when momentous changes are occurring and every hour is preparing new and great events in the political world, when a spirit of war is prevalent in almost every nation with whose affairs the interests of the United States have any connection, unsafe and precarious would be our situation were we to neglect the means of maintaining our just rights. The result of the mission to France is uncertain; but however it may terminate, a steady perseverance in a system of national defense commensurate with our resources and the situation of our country is an obvious dictate of wisdom; for, remotely as we are placed from the belligerent nations, and desirous as we are, by doing justice to all, to avoid offense to any, nothing short of the power of repelling aggressions will secure to our country a rational prospect of escaping the calamities of war or national degradation. As to myself, it is my anxious desire so to execute the trust reposed in me as to render the people of the United States prosperous and happy. I rely with entire confidence on your cooperation in objects equally your care, and that our mutual labors will serve to increase and confirm union among our fellow citizens and an unshaken attachment to our Government.