

FRANCE.

Mr. Seward to Mr. Dayton.

No. 3.]

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, April 22, 1861.

SIR: You enter a very important foreign mission at a moment when our domestic affairs have reached a crisis which awakens deep solicitude. Throughout a period of eighty years law and order have prevailed, and internal peace and tranquillity have been undisturbed. Five months ago sedition showed itself openly in several of the southern States, and it has acted ever since that time with boldness, skill, and energy. An insurrectionary government, embracing seven members of this Union, has been proclaimed under the name of the Confederate States of America. That pretended authority, by means chiefly of surprise, easily seen here to have been unavoidable, although liable to be misunderstood abroad, has possessed itself of a navy yard, several fortifications and arsenals, and considerable quantities of arms, ordnance, and military stores. On the 12th of April, instant, its forces commenced an attack upon, and ultimately carried, Fort Sumter, against the brave and heroic resistance of a diminutive garrison, which had been, through the neglect of the former administration, left in a condition to prevent supplies and re-enforcements.

Owing to the very peculiar construction of our system, the late administration, Congress, and every other department of the federal government, including the army and the navy, contained agents, abettors, and sympathizers in this insurrection. The federal authorities thus became inefficient, while large portions of the people were bewildered by the suddenness of the appearance of disunion, by apprehension that needless resistance might aggravate and precipitate the movement, and by political affinities with those engaged in it.

The project of dismembering the Union doubtless has some support in commercial and political ambition. But it is chiefly based upon a local, though widely extended partisan disappointment in the result of the recent election of President of the United States. It acquired strength for a time from its assumed character of legitimate opposition to a successful party, while, on the other hand, that party could not all at once accept the fact that an administrative political issue had given place to one which involved the very existence of the government and of the Union. These embarrassments are passing away so rapidly as to indicate that far the greater mass of the people remain loyal as heretofore. The President improved the temporary misfortune of the fall of Fort Sumter by calling on the militia of the States to re-enforce the federal army, and summoning Congress for its counsel and aid in the emergency. On the other hand, the insurrectionists have met those measures with an invitation to privateers from all lands to come forth and commit depredations on the commerce of the country.

To take care that the government of his Majesty the Emperor of France do not misunderstand our position, and through that misunderstanding do

us some possible wrong, is the chief duty which you will have to perform at Paris.

It would have been gratifying to the President if the movements to which I have alluded had taken such a course as to leave this government free from the necessity in any event of conferring upon them in the presence of foreign powers. In this age of social development, however, isolation even in misfortune is impossible, and every attempt at revolution in one country becomes a subject of discussion in every other. The agitators in this case have, perhaps, not unnaturally carried their bad cause before foreign states by an appeal for recognition of the independence they have proclaimed, and which they are committed to establish by arms. Prudence requires that we oppose that appeal. The President believes that you will be able to do this in such a manner as will at once comport with the high consideration for his Imperial Majesty which this government habitually entertains, and a due sense of the dignity and honor of the American people.

The Emperor of France has given abundant proofs that he considers the people in every country the rightful source of all authority, and that its only legitimate objects are their safety, freedom, and welfare. He is versed in our Constitution, and, therefore, he will not need demonstration that the system which is established by the Constitution is founded strictly on those very principles. You will be at no loss to show also that it is perfectly adapted to the physical condition and the temper, spirit, and habits of the American people. In all its essential features it is the same system which was first built, and has since existed with ever renewed popular consent in this part of America. The people of this country have always enjoyed the personal rights guaranteed by the great statutes of British freedom, representation concurrent with taxation, jury trial, liberty of conscience, equality before the laws, and popular suffrage. The element of federation or union was early developed while the colonies were under the authority of, and during their revolutionary contest with, the British Crown, and was perfected afterwards by the establishment of the Constitution of the United States. Practically it has been voluntarily accepted by every State, Territory, and individual citizen of the United States. The working of the system has been completely successful, while not one square mile of domain that we at any time had occupied has ever been lost to us. We have extended our jurisdiction from the St. Mary's river to the Rio Grande, on the Gulf of Mexico, and in a wide belt from the Mississippi to the Pacific ocean. Our population has swollen from four millions to thirty-one millions. The number of our States has increased from thirteen to thirty-four. Our country has risen from insignificance to be the second in the world. Leaving out of view unimportant local instances of conflict, we have had only two foreign wars, and the aggregate duration of them was less than five years. Not one human life has hitherto been forfeited for disloyalty to the government, nor has martial law ever been established except temporarily in case of invasion. No other people have ever enjoyed so much immunity from the various forms of political casualties and calamities.

While there is not now, even in the midst of the gathering excitement of civil war, one American who declares his dissent from the principles of the Constitution, that great charter of federal authority has won the approbation of the civilized world. Many nations have taken it as a model, and almost every other one has in some degree conformed its institutions to the principles of this Constitution. The empire of France, and the new kingdom of Italy especially, are built on the same broad foundation with that of this federal republic, namely, universal suffrage.

Surely we cannot err in assuming that a system of government which arose out of the free consent of the people of this country, which has been

often reconsidered and yet continually upheld in preference to every other throughout a period of two hundred years, which has commanded the acceptance or the approval of all other nations, and to the principles of which even those who attempt to overthrow it adhere in the very heat of insurrection, must be regarded as one which is not only well adapted to the condition and character of the American people, but is even indispensable and inseparable from their national existence.

Should it be answered that while all this has heretofore seemed true, yet that it is now disproved by the existing insurrection, you may truthfully reply that we must wait for that refutation until we see the end of the insurrection; that the insurrection proves in fact nothing else except that eighty years of peace is as much as human nature has the moderation to endure under circumstances the most conducive to moderation.

The attempted revolution is simply causeless. It is, indeed, equally without a reason and without an object. Confessedly there is neither reason nor object, unless it be one arising out of the subject of slavery. The practice of slavery has been so long a theme of angry political debate, while it has all the time been, as it yet is, a domestic concern, that I approach it with deep regret in a communication which relates to the action of a representative of this government abroad. I refrain from any observation whatever concerning the morality or the immorality, the economy or the waste, the social or the unsocial aspects of slavery, and confine myself, by direction of the President, strictly to the point that the attempt at revolution on account of it is, as I have already said, without reason and without object. Slavery of persons of African derivation existed practically within all the European colonies which, as States, now constitute the United States of America. The framers of our government accepted that fact, and with it the ideas concerning it which were then gaining ground throughout the civilized world. They expected and desired that it should ultimately cease, and with that view authorized Congress to prohibit the foreign slave trade after 1808. They did not expect that the practice of African slavery should be abruptly terminated to the prejudice of the peace and the economy of the country. They therefore placed the entire control of slavery, as it was then existing, beyond the control of the federal authorities, by leaving it to remain subject to the exclusive management and disposition of the several States themselves, and fortified it there with a provision for the return of fugitives from labor and service, and another securing an allowance of three-fifths of such persons in fixing the basis of direct taxation and representation. The legislators of that day took notice of the existence of a vast and nearly unoccupied region lying between the western borders of the Atlantic States and the Mississippi river. A few slaves were found in the southwest, and none in the northwest. They left the matter in the southwest to the discretion of the new States to be formed there, and prohibited the practice of slavery in the northwestern region forever.

Economical, moral, and political causes have subsequently modified the sentiments of that age differently in the two sections. Long ago slavery was prohibited by all the northern States, and, on the contrary, the increased production of cotton has resulted in fortifying the institution of slavery in the southern States. The accretions of domain, by purchase from Spain, France, and Mexico, brought regions in which slavery had either a very slight foothold, or none at all; and this new domain, as it should come under occupation, was to be constituted into new States, which must be either free States or slave States. The original States divided according to their own divers practices—the free States seeking so to direct federal legislation and action as to result in multiplying free States, and the slave States so to direct them as to multiply slave States. The interest became more

intense because the several States have equal representation in the Senate of the United States. This controversy soon disclosed itself in the popular elections, and more distinctly than ever before in the recent canvass, which resulted in the accession of the present administration.

It is now to be observed that, from the earliest agitation of the subject until that last election, the decisions of the people were practically favorable to the interest of the class which favored the extension of slavery, and yet their opponents always acquiesced. Under these circumstances the executive administration, the national legislature, and the judiciary, were for practical purposes in the hands of that party, and the laws, with the administration and execution of them, conformed to their own policy. The opposite class prevailed in the late election so far as to bring in the President and Vice-President, the citizens they had preferred, but no further—Congress and the judiciary remained under the same bias as before: The new President could not assume his trust until the fourth of March, 1861, and even after that time, as before, the laws and the execution of them must remain unchanged. He could not, without consent of his opponents in Congress, change either, nor appoint a minister or a ministerial officer, nor draw a dollar from the treasury even for his own defence or support. It was under these circumstances that, on the very day when the election closed and its result became known, four months before the new administration was to come in, the disappointed party took their appeal from the ballot-box to arms, and inaugurated their revolution.

I need not further elaborate the proposition that the revolution is without a cause ; it has not even a pretext.

It is just as clear that it is without an object. Moral and physical causes have determined inflexibly the character of each one of the Territories over which the dispute has arisen, and both parties after the election harmoniously agreed on all the federal laws required for their organization. The Territories will remain in all respects the same, whether the revolution shall succeed or shall fail. The condition of slavery in the several States will remain just the same whether it succeed or fail. There is not even a pretext for the complaint that the disaffected States are to be conquered by the United States if the revolution fail ; for the rights of the States, and the condition of every human being in them, will remain subject to exactly the same laws and forms of administration, whether the revolution shall succeed or whether it shall fail. In the one case, the States would be federally connected with the new confederacy ; in the other, they would, as now, be members of the United States ; but their constitutions and laws, customs, habits, and institutions in either case will remain the same.

It is hardly necessary to add to this incontestable statement the further fact that the new President, as well as the citizens through whose suffrages he has come into the administration, has always repudiated all designs whatever and wherever imputed to him and them of disturbing the system of slavery as it is existing under the Constitution and laws. The case, however, would not be fully presented if I were to omit to say that any such effort on his part would be unconstitutional, and all his actions in that direction would be prevented by the judicial authority, even though they were assented to by Congress and the people.

This revolution, thus equally destitute of just cause and legitimate object, aims, nevertheless, at the dismemberment of the federal Union, and, if successful, must end in the overthrow of the government of the United States. If it be true, as the consent of mankind authorizes us to assume, that the establishment of this government was the most auspicious political event that has happened in the whole progress of history, its fall must be deemed not merely a national calamity, which a patriotic government ought to try

to prevent, but a misfortune to the human race, which should secure for us at least the forbearance of all other nations.

It cannot be maintained that disunion would leave it still existing in its true character, and for its proper ends, although in two not very unequal and similar parts. Its integrity as a federal government, embracing all of the American independent, contiguous, and homogeneous States, protecting them all against foreign dangers and internal commotions; securing to them all a common property, greatness, dignity, influence and happiness, is an indispensable feature of its constitution.

Dismemberment would be less effectually subversive of the character, objects, and purposes of the Union, if the two confederacies, which it is proposed shall succeed it, could severally be expected to exercise its great functions within their respective dominions. But this would be impossible. The several States are now held in union with each other by a confessed obligation of cohesion that only their common consent could dissolve, and that moral law, hitherto acknowledged by all, is substituted for the central military authority which, in other systems, secures the integrity as well as the peace and harmony of States. But if the revolution shall prevail and dismemberment ensue, the federal obligation in that case will be broken, its moral force spent, and in its place there must come up the principles which are the acknowledged elements of the revolution, namely, first, that in either confederacy each State is at liberty to secede at pleasure; and secondly, the minority in each confederacy, and even in each State, may, whenever the will of the majority is ascertained, take an appeal from the ballot to the sword. It is manifest that the success of this revolution would therefore be not only a practical overthrow of the entire system of government, but the first stage by each confederacy in the road to anarchy, such as so widely prevails in Spanish America. The contest, then, involves nothing less than a failure of the hope to devise a stable system of government upon the principle of the consent of the people, and working through the peaceful expressions of their will without depending on military authority. If the President were addressing his countrymen at home on this occasion, instead of one of their representatives going abroad, he would direct me to set forth the consequences which obviously must follow the dissolution of the American Union. The loss of the ambition, which is a needful inspiration to a great people; the loss of the respect of mankind, and the veneration and respect of posterity; the loss of the enterprise and vigor which makes us a prosperous nation; and with the loss of sustained and constant culture, which makes us an intellectual people, the loss of safety, both at home and abroad, which directly involves the greatest calamity of all, the loss of liberty. It is sufficient only to allude to these possible evils on this occasion to afford you the grounds for assuring the government of France that the President regards the revolution as one which in every event must and will be prevented, since it is manifest that the evils which would result from its success would be as incurable as they would be intolerable.

It is, indeed, an occasion of much regret that it has been found needful to employ force for this purpose. It is contrary to the genius and the habits of the people, as it is repugnant to the sentiments of the government of the country and of mankind. But the President believes that the country will accept that alternative with the less regret because sufficient time has been allowed to try every expedient of conciliatory prevention, and civil war is at last proved to be unavoidable. The responsibility of it must rest with those who have not only inaugurated it, but have done so without cause and without provocation. The world will see that it is an evil that comes upon us not from any necessity growing out of administration or out of our Constitution itself, but from a necessity growing out of our common nature.

It must not, however, be inferred that the reluctance of the government to employ force so long has demoralized the administration or can demoralize the American people. They are capable of a high, resolute, and vigorous defence of the Union, and they will maintain that defence with only the more firmness and fidelity, because they are animated by no hostile spirit, but, on the contrary, by a friendly and even fraternal one, being satisfied that its benefits will result equally to those who are engaged in overthrowing and those who are engaged in defending the Union.

I have thus, under the President's direction, placed before you a simple, unexaggerated, and dispassionate statement of the origin, nature, and purposes of the contest in which the United States are now involved. I have done so only for the purpose of deducing from it the arguments you will find it necessary to employ in opposing the application of the so-called Confederate States to the government of his Majesty the Emperor for a recognition of its independence and sovereignty.

The President neither expects nor desires any intervention, or even any favor, from the government of France, or any other, in this emergency. Whatever else he may consent to do, he will never invoke nor even admit foreign interference or influence in this or any other controversy in which the government of the United States may be engaged with any portion of the American people. It has been simply his aim to show that the present controversy furnishes no one ground on which a great and friendly power, like France, can justly lend aid or sympathy to the party engaged in insurrection, and therefore he instructs you to insist on the practice of neutrality by the government of the Emperor, as all our representatives are instructed to insist on the neutrality of the several powers to which they are accredited.

Not entertaining the least apprehension of the departure from that course by his Majesty's government, it is not without some reluctance that the President consents to the suggestion of some considerations affecting France herself, which you may urge in support of it. France is an agricultural and manufacturing country. Her industry depends very largely on a consumption of her productions and fabrics within the United States, and on the receipt, in exchange, of cotton, or other staples, or their equivalent in money, from the United States. The ability of the United States to thus consume and furnish depends on their ability to maintain and preserve peace. War here will in any case be less flagrant, and peace, when broken, will be restored all the more quickly and all the more perfectly if foreign nations shall have the sagacity, not to say the magnanimity, to practice the neutrality we demand.

Foreign intervention would oblige us to treat those who should yield it as allies of the insurrectionary party, and to carry on the war against them as enemies. The case would not be relieved, but, on the contrary, would only be aggravated, if several European states should combine in that intervention. The President and the people of the United States deem the Union, which would then be at stake, worth all the cost and all the sacrifices of a contest with the world in arms, if such a contest should prove inevitable.

However other European powers may mistake, his Majesty is the last one of those sovereigns to misapprehend the nature of this controversy. He knows that the revolution of 1775 in this country was a successful contest of the great American idea of free popular government against resisting prejudices and errors. He knows that the conflict awakened the sympathies of mankind, and that ultimately the triumph of that idea has been hailed by all European nations. He knows at what cost European nations resisted for a time the progress of that idea, and perhaps is not unwilling to confess how much France, especially, has profited by it. He will not fail to recognize the presence of that one great idea in the present conflict, nor will he mis-

take the side on which it will be found. It is, in short, the very principle of universal suffrage, with its claim to obedience to its decrees, on which the government of France is built, that is put in issue by the insurrection here, and is in this emergency to be vindicated, and, more effectually than ever, established by the government of the United States.

I forbear from treating of questions arising out of the revenue laws of the United States, which lately have been supposed to have some bearing on the subject. They have already passed away before the proclamation of the blockade of ports in the hands of the revolutionary party. Nor could considerations so merely mercenary and ephemeral in any case enter into the counsels of the Emperor of France.

You will, naturally enough, be asked what is the President's expectation concerning the progress of the contest and the prospect of its termination. It is, of course, impossible to speculate, with any confidence, upon the course of a revolution, and to fix times and seasons for the occurrence of political events affected by the excitement of popular passions; but there are two things which may be assumed as certain: First. That the union of these States is an object of supreme and undying devotion on the part of the American people, and, therefore, it will be vindicated and maintained. Secondly. The American people, notwithstanding any temporary disturbance of their equanimity, are yet a sagacious and practical people, and less experience of evils than any other nation would require will bring them back to their customary and habitual exercise of reason and reflection, and, through that process, to the settlement of the controversy without further devastation and demoralization by needless continuance in a state of civil war.

The President recognizes, to a certain extent, the European idea of the balance of power. If the principle has any foundation at all, the independence and the stability of these United States just in their present form, properties, and character, are essential to the preservation of the balance between the nations of the earth as it now exists. It is not easy to see how France, Great Britain, Russia, or even reviving Spain, could hope to suppress wars of ambition which must inevitably break out if this continent of North America, now, after the exclusion of foreign interests for three-quarters of a century, is again to become a theatre for the ambition and cupidity of European nations.

It stands forth now to the glory of France that she contributed to the emancipation of this continent from the control of European states, an emancipation which has rendered only less benefit to those nations than to America itself. The present enlightened monarch of France is too ambitious, in the generous sense of the word, to signalize his reign by an attempt to reverse that great and magnanimous transaction. He is, moreover, too wise not to understand that the safety and advancement of the United States are guaranteed by the necessities, and, therefore, by the sympathies of mankind.

I am, sir, respectfully, your obedient servant,

WILLIAM H. SEWARD.

Hon. WILLIAM L. DAYTON, &c., &c., &c.

Mr. Faulkner to Mr. Black.

No. 111.]

LEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES,
Paris, March 19, 1861.

SIR: I had the honor to-day to receive your despatch, No. 45, touching certain recent political movements in the United States. I had, of course, through the public journals, been made acquainted with the painful facts to