

Recd. 22 March '64 at 5.45 pm

N^o 859.

Department of State,
Washington, 2nd March 1864.

Sr.

Your dispatch of February 11th, N^o 595, has been received, together with reports of the debates which have been held in Parliament upon the condition of our relations towards Great Britain.

On the 11th of July, last, the information which was before this Department seemed to oblige the Government of the United States to take into immediate consideration a probable failure of all its friendly appeals to Her Majesty's Government against suffering a deeply concerted and rapidly preparing Naval war to be waged against the United States from British ports in Europe and America by British subjects, in British built and armed vessels.

Charles Francis Adams Esq. } Events
to } to } to }

Events which have transpired since that time, such as the intended invasion of Johnson's Island from Canada, the case of the Chesapeake, the escape of the Rappahannock, the enlistment of seamen and sailors, the persistent proceedings in the construction of Laird's rams, under false pretences of foreign ownership, and, especially, the report of Mallory, the Pretended Secretary of the Navy of the insurgents, have proved that the crisis thus apprehended in July was not overestimated, nor too soon anticipated by this Department. The Government of the United States took the subject into consideration with all the seriousness and anxiety that could not fail to be awakened by the seeming approach of a naval conflict with Great Britain, in aggravation of our existing civil war.

The result of this deliberation was set down in the dispatch which I had the honor to address to you on the day before mentioned. That
dispatch

dispatch was addressed to you because the interests of the Government and people of the United States seemed to require that, as the Representative of the United States charged with the conduct of their correspondence with the Govt. of Great Britain, you should be fully informed of the views which had been adopted by your own government. At the same time, in this case, as in all others when you are not specially directed to submit an instruction to Her Majesty's Government, it was left to your own discretion to make so much or so little use of the knowledge thus imparted to you of the views of this Government as you should deem expedient, and to use it in such manner, and at such time, as should seem to you best calculated to avert the evils apprehended.

Nevertheless, in communicating those views to you, I scrupulously took pains, equally to leave no ground for misapprehension of their directness,
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and to avoid expressing myself in any way that could offend the dignity or wound the sensibility of the British Government or the British people.

The constitution of the United States requires the President, from time to time, to give to Congress information concerning the state of the Union. In the beginning of our Government a practice obtained according to which the President communicates this information on the assembling of Congress, in a full and comprehensive annual speech or message, to which are appended all the important reports and documents which have been placed by the Heads of Departments before the President as the sources and evidences of the information to be by him submitted to Congress. It is hardly necessary to say that the interest of Congress and the people of the United States in the transactions of the Executive Department, always earnest,

became

became intensified with the breaking out of the civil war. Our foreign affairs have ever since the war began been a subject of anxiety as deep as that which is felt in regard to military and naval events. The Government constantly depends on the support of Congress and the People, and that support can be expected only on the condition of keeping them thoroughly and truthfully informed of the manner in which the powers derived from them are executed. Mutual confidence between the People and the Government is a condition of our national life.

It has seemed to the President more satisfactory and more in harmony with our system to give to Congress the information prescribed by the constitution, with all possible fulness at the beginning of each meeting of Congress, rather than to await their special calls for it in particular cases, as is generally done in Constitutional governments, where the Executive or its Ministers hold seats in the Legislature.

Congress

Congress and the country, at the beginning of the present session, had a right to be put fully in possession of a complete history of conflicting claims which had arisen between the United States and Great Britain subsequently to the last preceding annual exposition which had been submitted by the President. They had the same right to see my dispatch to you of the 11th of July, 1863, that they had to see any other parts of the Executive correspondence concerning foreign affairs. The history would be incomplete without that document. It was the President's duty to communicate it, unless special reasons of a public nature existed for withholding it. Only two such special reasons could be allowed, namely, one that the publication would be incompatible with the public interest by affecting a friendly negotiation on an exciting question. But the question which had called out the dispatch had been for a time put at rest, and mutually satisfactory explanations

explanations between the two Governments had been made. The other reason was that the publication might give offence to Great Britain. But the document was a communication from this Government not to Her Majesty's Government, but to its own agent, and the paper was believed to be as respectful to the British Government as it manifestly was earnest and sincere. On the other hand, to withhold so important a portion of the Executive correspondence, would have seemed to imply a confession that it was improper in itself, while to practice reserve on so great a question, would be liable to be deemed an abuse of the confidence which Congress and the people had so freely reposed in the Government.

The President now learns with regret that British Statesmen whose opinions he would be the last to undervalue, have declared that in their judgment portions of that communication are disrespectful and

menacing

menacing towards Her Majesty's Govern-
ment.

Comity is not only a proper, but even
an indispensable element, in diplomatic
intercourse. A just and enlightened
Government may readily admit, without
any sacrifice of its own self respect,
that every other Government is entitled
to judge for itself what expressions
occurring, in its needful intercourse with
foreign states, are exceptionable.

You are therefore authorized to
say to Earl Russell, that nothing menacing
or disrespectful was intended by any
expressions in the despatch before referred
to, and that the Paper is now freely
referred by the President to Earl Russell's
own criticism, with the request that whatever
expressions contained in it he shall con-
sider exceptionable be deemed to
be hereby withdrawn, with regret on
the part of this Government that those
expressions, although inadvertently,
had been incorporated in a paper,
the object of which was, not to offend,
but to remove out of the way a stumbling block

of national offence; - not to provoke
war, but, by a generous and con-
ciliatory final effort, to save peace
and restore harmony between Great
Britain and the United States.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

William A. Seward.