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DOCUMENTS.

Accompanying the Presidents Message of the 22d of March.

[CONTINUED.]

NO. II.

Correspondence between Mr. Monroe and Mr. Canning, in relation to the attack on the Chesapeake, with Mr. Monroe's letters to the Secretary of State on the same subject.

(Private.)

FOREIGN OFFICE,
Saturday, July 25, 1807.

Mr. Canning presents his compliments to Mr. Monroe, and with sentiments of the deepest regret hastens to inform him that intelligence has just been received of a transaction which has taken place off the coast of America, between a ship of war of his majesty,a and frigate belonging to the United States; the result of which has been the loss of some lives on board the American frigate.

The particulars of this transaction and the grounds of the justification of the British officer,and of the admiral, under whose orders he acted, Mr. Canning is not at present enabled to communicate to Mr. Monroe.

If Mr. Monroe should have received any accounts of it, Mr. Canning trusts that he will lose no time in communicating them to Mr. Canning.

But whatever the real merits and character of the transaction may turn out to be, Mr. Canning could not forbear expressing without delay the sincere concern and sorrow which he feels at its unfortunate result; and assuring the American minister, both from himself and on the behalf of his majesty's government, that if the British officers should prove to have been culpable, the most prompt and effectual reparation shall be afforded to the government of the United States.

James Monroe, Esq.
&c. &c. &c.

To Mr. CANNING.

Mr. Monroe presents his compliments to Mr. Canning, and is much obliged to him for the information communicated in his note of Saturday.—Mr. Monroe has heard with extreme regret the account it contains of a rencontre between a British ship of war and an American frigate off the coast of the United States. He has no knowledge of the subject except what Mr. Canning's note has furnished, but will not fail to communicate the earliest intellingence which he may receive of an event so deeply to be lamented. Mr. Monroe derives in the mean time much satisfaction from the friendly assurance of Mr. Canning, that this unfortunate occurrence was not authorised by his majesty's government, and that suitable reparation will be made for the injury, if on enquiry the British officer shall be found the aggressor.

Portland Place, Monday, July 27, 1807.

The Right honorable George Canning, &c. &c. &c.

To Mr. CANNING.

Portland Place, July 29, 1807.

SIR—Although I have no instruction from my government on the subject, it is my duty to request the attention of his Britannic majesty's government to a late aggression on the sovereignty of the United States,of a very extraordinary nature. The circumstances of the transaction are too distinctly marked to leave any doubt of the extent of the outrage, or of the reparation which it obviously claims. By accounts which are entitled to full confidence, it appears, that on the 23d of June last, his majesty's ship the Leopard attacked an American frigate off the coast of the United States, with a view to assert and enforce the unfounded and most unjustified pretention to search for deserters, and after having killed and wounded a number of her men, entered on board and carried away forcibly several of the crew. The conduct of the British officer which in itself forms an act of complete hostility, is rendered more reprehensible from the consideration that just before this aggression, he held a station within the jurisdiction of the United States, in the waters of the Chesapeake, where, while he enjoyed the rights of hospitality, he projected this attack against the ship of a neutral power, whose commander relying on the good faith of his majesty's government, and the friendly relations subsisting between Great Britain and the United States, could not have suspected the design. I might state other examples of great indignity and outrage, many of which are of recent date, to which the United States have been exposed off their coast,and even within several of their harbors, from the British squadron; but it is improper to mingle them with the present more serious causes of complaint. I have called your attention to this subject in full confidence that his majesty's government will see in the act complained of, a flagrant abuse of its own authority, and that it will not hesitate to enable me to communicate to my government without delay a frank disavowal of the principle on which it was made, and its assurance that the officer who is responsible for it shall suffer the punishment which so unexampled an aggression on the sovereignty of a neutral nation justly deserves.

I have the honor to be, with great consideration, sir, your obedient servant,

(Signed) JAMES MONROE.

The Right honorable George Canning, &c. &c. &c.

FROM Mr. CANNING.

Foreign Office, Aug. 3d, 1807.

SIR—I have the honor, to acknowledge the receipt of your official note of the 29th ult. which I have lost no time in laying before the king.

As the statement of the transaction to which this note refers, is not brought forward either by the authority of the government of the United States, or with any precise knowledge of the facts on which it is founded, it might have been sufficient for me to express to you, his majesty's readiness to take the whole of the circumstances of the case, when fully disclosed, into his consideration, and to make reparation for any alleged injury to the sovereignty of the United States, whenever it should be clearly shewn that such injury has been actually sustained, and that such reparation is really due.

Of the existence of such a disposition on the part of the British government, you, sir, cannot be ignorant: I have already assured you of it, though in an unofficial form, by the letter which I addressed to you on the first receipt of the intelligence of this unfortunate transaction: and I may perhaps be permitted to express my surprise, after such an assurance, at the tone of that representation which I have just had the honor to receive from you.

But the earnest desire of his majesty to evince, in the most satisfactory manner, the principles of justice and moderation, by which he is uniformly actuated, has not permitted him to hesitate in commanding me to assure you, that his majesty neither does, nor has at any time, maintained the pretension of a right to search ships of war, in the national service of any state, for deserters.

If therefore the statement in your note should prove to be correct, and to contain all the circumstances of the case, upon which complaint is intended to be made, and if it shall appear that the act of his majesty's officers rested on no other grounds than the simple and unqualified assertion of the pretension above referred to, his majesty has no difficulty in disavowing that act, and will have no difficulty in manifesting his displeasure at the conduct of his officers.

With respect to the other causes of complaint [whatever they may be] which are hinted at in your note, I perfectly agree with you, in the sentiment which you express, as to the propriety of not involving them in a question which is of itself of sufficient importance to claim a separate and most serious consideration.

I have only to lament, that the same sentiment did not induce you to abstain from alluding to these subjects, on an occasion which you were, yourself, of opinion, was not favorable for pursuing the discussion of them.

I have the honor to be,with great consideration, Sir,your most obedient humble servant,

(Signed,) GEORGE CANNING.

James Monroe, Esq.
&c. &c. &c.

London August 4th, 1807.

Sir—I avail myself of the opportunity afforded by Mr. Biddle, to communicate to you a copy of a correspondence, and the substance of a conference, between Mr. Canning and myself, relative to the late aggression on the peace and sovereignty of the United States, by the British ship Leopard, in an attack on the Chesapeake, off the capes of Virginia.

Mr. Canning's private letter of July 25, which gave the first intelligence of the occurrence, left it doubtful whether the British officers had been culpable in it, and as I knew how very reprehensible their conduct had been on our coast, on many other occasions, and to what height the sensibility of our citizens had been excited by it, I thought it not improbable that something might have occurred to divide the blame between the parties. It was under that impression that my answer was written. On the next day the leading features of the transaction were presented to the public through the medium of the gazettes, which were taken from private accounts received directly from Halifax, by a vessel which had been dispatched by admiral Berkeley with the official one. By these it was evident that the British officer was completely the aggressor,in an outrage of great enormity,attended with circumstances which increased the offence. It was understood likewise from good authority, that the official intelligence, which the government had received, corresponded with and confirmed the other accounts already before the public.

On full consideration of these circumstances, I concluded that it would be highly improper for me to leave the affair on the ground on which Mr. Canning had placed it. I could see no other motive in him to obtain further information relative to the transaction, than for the purpose of ascertaining whether the men said to be deserters, and for whom the attack was made, were American citizens or British subjects; to which it was impossible for me to give any countenance. I thought it indispensable therefore to call on the government to disavow the principle and to engage such other reparation to the United States, as their injured honor obviously required. It appeared to me, that any delay in taking that step which depended on an abstract principle, and required no argument to illustrate, or facts to support it, would have a tendency to weaken a claim which was unquestionable, and to countenance the idea that it would not be supportable with suitable energy.

I had, before the knowledge of this event, obtained the appointment of an interview with Mr. Canning on other business, to take place on the 29th ult. We met according to the appointment; I observed, in opening the conference, that although the topics which had brought us together, were important, the late occurrence at the entrance of the Chesapeake had in a great measure put them out of sight. He expressed his regret that such an event which would at all times furnish cause of concern, should have happened at the present time. He asked if the men in question were American citizens, or British subjects? I replied that that was a point which could not come into view in the case: that it was one which, according as the fact might be, would make the cause more or less popular, in either country, but could not affect the principle: that on principle, a ship of war protected all the people on board and could not be entered to be searched for deserters, or for any purpose, without violating the sovereignty of the nation whose flag she bore; that in the present case I had been assured, that the men were American citizens, and that the British minister at Washington had been made acquained with it. He said little on the subject, but,by the tendency of what he did say,seemed to imply that his government could not lose sight of the consideration above alluded to,nor indeed did he admit by any thing that escaped him, that the abstract principle itself would not be insisted on. His remarks however were generally of a conciliatory and friendly character, without pledging himself on any point, he seemed desirous to satisfy me, that no new orders had been issued by the present ministry to the commandant of the British squadron at Halifax. I observed, that as the note which had passed between us,were informal, and on a very limited view of the subject, on my part, it would be proper for me now,that the circumstances were better known, to present him an official note on it: he admitted the propriety of it.

I then drew Mr Canning's attention to the subjects on which I had asked the interview; being the case of the Imperuex,captain Love's correspondence,the conduct of captain Douglas, and of the British squadron generally on our coast. I observed that I had heretofore postponed any official communication on these points from a desire to connect them with the greater objects depending between our governments,and of course, from motives the most friendly; that I brought them to his view at this time, in consequence of Mr. Pinkney and myself having commenced the other business, as he knew had been done; he promised to attend to them.

On the 29th July, I wrote Mr. Canning the note which I had promised him in the late interview. I addressed it in terms which I thought suitable to the occasion, observing to state in it, that I took the step from a sense of duty, applicable to my station as the resident minister, and without authority from my government. I considered the act as that of the British officer, in which the government had no agency, was not bound to support, and which it would be honorable for it to disavow. I flattered myself that some advantage might arise from the measure, and that under the circumstances in which it was taken, no injury possibly could. His reply is dated on the 3d instant, which though addressed in rather a harsh tone,may be considered as conceding essentially the point desired. It is my intention to say nothing more to him on the subject, till I hear from you, and in the mean time to observe the most conciliatory conduct that circumstances will admit.

Such is the state of this country at the present crisis, that it is impossible to foresee what will be its course of conduct towards the United States.—There has been at all times, since the commencement of the present war, a strong party here for extending its ravages to them. This party is composed of the ship owners,the navy,the East and West India merchants, and several political characters of great consideration in the state. So powerful is this combination, that it is most certain that nothing can be obtained of the government on any point,but what may be extorted by necessity. The disasters to the north ought to inspire moderation, but with respect to the northern powers, it seems to have produced directly the oppposite effect. A fleet of about 25 ships of the line,with a suitable number of frigates, &c. and above 20,000 men has been lately equipped, and sent to the Baltic, as it is said, to take possession of the the Danish and Russian navies. This measure is imputed to an understanding which it is supposed has been established between the cabinets of Russia and Paris by the late peace, and which has for its object a concert of measures for the purpose of attempting to force on this country a maritime code, more favorable to neutral nations. The motive assigned for the expedition, is that of taking possession of the Danish fleet,to keep it out of the hands of the French; that the Russian fleet is one of the objects is not so generally believed, tho' perhaps not less probable.

Mr. Pinkney and myself have taken the first step in our business. We will write you in a few days the state of it. You may be assured that we shall do every thing in our power to promote, in the mode most likely to succeed, the object of our instructions and the interests of our country. Want of time prevents my going into further detail.

I have the honor to be, with great consideration, sir, your most obedient servant,

JAMES MONROE.

James Madison, Esq.
Secretary of State, Washington.

From Mr. Canning to Mr. Monroe.

Foreign Office, August 8, 1807.

Sir—Having received from his majesty's minister, an unofficial printed paper, purporting to be a copy of a proclamation of the President of the United States,I have to request that you will be pleased to acquaint me, whether you have received any communication from your government which enables you to pronounce if such paper be authentic?

In the event of your being empowered to admit its authenticity, I have further to request of you, that you will inform me whether you are also authorised to announce it to be the intention of the government of the United States to carry into effect the measures stated in the proclamation of the President, without requiring, or waiting for, any explanation, on the part of the British government, with respect to the late unfortunate transaction, upon which the determination to resort to these measures is professed to be founded?

I have the honor to be, &c.

(Signed) GEORGE CANNING.

P. S. I have the honor to inclose an American newspaper, containing a copy of the paper in question.

Mr. Monroe to Mr. Canning.

Portland Place, August 9, 1807.

Sir—I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your note of yesterday, and should not hesitate to communicate the information which you have desired, if I possessed it; but as I have not heard from my government on the subject of the unfortunate occurrence alluded to, it is not in my power to state to you any thing on the part of my government respecting it. I have no doubt that I shall be instructed in a very few days,to make a communication to his majesty's government on that highly interesting event,in which I shall be enabled to furnish a full and just view of all the circumstances attending it.—As soon as I receive instructions I shall hasten to apprise you of it. I have the honor to be, &c.

(Signed) JAMES MONROE.

Mr. Monroe to the Secretary of State of the United States.

London, August 14, 1807.

Sir—I had the honor to transmit you with my letter of the 4th inst. a copy of a correspondence with Mr. Canning, relative to the late aggression in the case of the Chesapeake frigate. You will receive with this a copy of a more recent one on the same subject.

By Mr. Canning's queries in his last note, I was led to consider as preparatory to an embargo on American vessels. I could not conceive why he should request information of me, whether the President's proclamation was authentic, and when it would be carried into effect,if it was not intended to found some measure on my reply of an unfriendly nature. The information desired was not necessary to remove any doubts of his government on the points to which it applied or to enable it to do justice to the United States, in regard to the aggression of which they complained. The presumption that an embargo was intended gained strength from the circumstance that most of the gazettes had recommended,and that the public mind seemed to be essentially prepared for it. It was my most earnest wish to prevent,as far as in my power,so unjust and pernicious a procedure. As the measure contemplated, whatever it might be, seemed to be suspended for my answer, I was extremely solicitous, by the manner, to deprive this government of all pretext for any of the kind alluded to. By replying generally that I had no instructions from my government,and could state nothing on its part respecting the late occurrence, I avoided giving a direct answer to Mr. Canning's queries; and by drawing his attention to the application which it was to be presumed would soon be made on the part of my government, on that subject, I endeavored to shew more strongly the impolicy and injustice which would stamp any such measure on the part of Great Britain in the present stage.

No step has yet been taken by this government of an unfriendly character towards the United States; and from the communication which Mr. Canning made to the House of Commons on the day he received my last note,which you will find in the gazettes sent, I am persuaded that things will remain in the state in which they are, till your dispatch is received. I trust that a disposition exists to make such reparation on the point in question,as will be satisfactory to the United States, and that it will be practicable and not difficult to preserve the friendly relations between the two countries. The party however in favor of war, consisting of the combined interests mentioned in my last, is strong and active,so that it is impossible to foresee the result. I have the honor to be, &c.

(Signed) JAMES MONROE.

TO Mr. CANNING.

No. 10.

Mr. MONROE presents his compliments to Mr. Canning, and has the honor to inform him, that he has just re-

(Continued in last page.)