

1st CONGRESS.]

No. 13.

[2d SESSION.

ABOLITION OF SLAVERY.

COMMUNICATED TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MARCH 5, 1790.

Mr. FOSTER, from the committee to whom were referred the petitions of the people called Quakers, and of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, made the following report:

That, from the nature of the matters contained in those memorials, they were induced to examine the powers vested in Congress, under the present constitution, relating to the abolition of slavery, and are clearly of opinion—

1st. That the General Government is expressly restrained from prohibiting the importation of such persons “as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, until the year 1808.”

2d. That Congress, by a fair construction of the constitution, are equally restrained from interfering in the emancipation of slaves who already are, or who may, within the period mentioned, be imported into or born within any of the said States.

3d. That Congress have no authority to interfere in the internal regulations of particular States, relative to the instruction of slaves in the principles of morality and religion; to their comfortable clothing, accommodations, and subsistence; to the regulation of their marriages, and the prevention of the violation of the rights thereof, or to the separation of children from their parents; to a comfortable provision in cases of sickness, age, or infirmity; or to the seizure, transportation, or sale of free negroes; but have the fullest confidence in the wisdom and humanity of the Legislatures of the several States, that they will revise their laws, from time to time, when necessary, and promote the objects mentioned in the memorials, and every other measure that may tend to the happiness of slaves.

4th. That, nevertheless, Congress have authority, if they shall think it necessary, to lay at any time a tax or duty, not exceeding ten dollars for each person of any description, the importation of whom shall be by any of the States admitted as aforesaid.

5th. That Congress have authority to interdict, or (so far as it is or may be carried on by citizens of the United States for supplying foreigners) to regulate the African trade, and to make provision for the humane treatment of slaves, in all cases, while on their passage to the United States or to foreign ports, as far as it respects the citizens of the United States.

6th. That Congress have also authority to prohibit foreigners from fitting out vessels, in any port of the United States, for transporting persons from Africa to any foreign port.

7th. That the memorialists be informed that, in all cases to which the authority of Congress extends, they will exercise it for the humane objects of the memorialists, so far as they can be promoted on the principles of justice, humanity, and good policy.

1st CONGRESS.]

No. 14.

[2d SESSION.

APPLICATION OF STEAM TO NAVIGATION.

COMMUNICATED TO THE SENATE, JULY 2, 1790.

NEW YORK, June 22, 1790.

To the honorable the Senate of the United States of America: the petition of John Fitch, now of the city of Philadelphia, humbly sheweth:

That your petitioner, in the spring of the year 1785, conceived the idea of applying steam to the purposes of propelling boats or vessels through the water; that fully satisfied, in his own mind, of the practicability of such a scheme, of its great immediate utility, and the important advantages which would in future result therefrom, not only to America, but to the world at large, if the scheme should be carried into effectual operation, he divested himself of every other occupation, and undertook the arduous task, not doubting that, when perfected, he should be amply rewarded. In his first attempts to procure assistance from Congress, and the Legislatures of many of the States, from the peculiar situation of their finances, and the seeming improbability of the success of his scheme, he met with no relief. Not entirely discouraged by those disappointments, he continued his application to his project, and prayed several of the States for an exclusive right to the use of fire and steam to navigation. That New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Virginia granted him an exclusive right, agreeably to the prayer of his petition, for fourteen years.

That the impracticability of procuring experienced workmen in America, your petitioner's total ignorance of the construction of a steam engine, together with the necessary deviation from the form described in the books, in order to accommodate its weight and bulk to the narrow limits of a vessel, have caused him not only to expend about eight thousand dollars in successive experiments, but nearly four years of some of his grants have expired, before he has been able to bring his engine to such perfection as to be carried into use. That, having at length fully succeeded in his scheme, (proofs of which he is prepared to offer to this honorable House,) he trusts he now comes forward, not as an imaginary projector, but as a man who, contrary to the popular opinion, has really accomplished a design, which, on examination, will clearly evince the many and important advantages which must result therefrom to the United States; some of which your petitioner begs leave to enumerate: The Western waters, which have hitherto been navigated with great difficulty and expense, may now be ascended with safety, convenience, and great velocity; consequently, by these means, an immediately increased value will be given to the Western territory; all the internal waters of the United States will be rendered much more convenient and safe,