

Before the negotiation commenced, we were apprized that the first consul had decided to offer to the United States, by sale, the whole of Louisiana, and not a part of it. We found in the outset that this information was correct; so that we had to decide as a previous question whether we would treat for the whole, or jeopardize, if not abandon the hope of acquiring any part. On that point, we did not long hesitate, but proceeded to treat for the whole. We were persuaded that, by so doing, it might be possible, if more desirable, to conclude eventually a treaty for a part, since being thus possessed of the subject, it might be easy, in discussion, at least, to lead from a view of the whole to that of a part, and with some advantages peculiar to a negotiation on so great a scale. By treating for the whole, whereby we should be enabled to ascertain the idea which was entertained by this government of its value; we should also be able to form some estimate of that which was affixed to the value of its parts. It was, too, probable that a less sum would be asked for the whole, if sold entire to a single purchaser, a friendly power who was able to pay for it, and whom it might be disposed to accommodate at the present juncture, than if it should be sold in parcels, either to several powers or companies of individuals: it was equally so, if this government should be finally prevailed on to sell us a part, that some regard would be paid in the price asked for it, to that which was demanded for the whole; lastly, by treating for the whole, whereby the attention of this government would be drawn to the United States as the sole purchasers, we might prevent the interference of other powers, as also that of individuals, which might prove equally injurious in regard to the price asked for it, whether we acquired the whole or any part of the territory. We found, however, as we advanced in the negotiation, that M. Marbois was absolutely restricted to the disposition of the whole; that he would treat for no less portion, and of course that it was useless to urge it. On mature consideration, therefore, we finally concluded a treaty on the best terms we could obtain for the whole.

By this measure, we have sought to carry into effect to the utmost of our power, the wise and benevolent policy of our government, on the principles laid down in our instructions. The possession of the left bank of the river, had it been attainable alone, would, it is true, have accomplished much in that respect; but it is equally true that it would have left much still to accomplish. By it our people would have had an outlet to the ocean, in which no power would have a right to disturb them; but while the other