

there is a very material error, that not only he, but other European historians, have fallen into: none of them have assigned the true cause why the British proposals were rejected; and all of them have assigned a wrong one.

In the winter 1777, and the spring following, Congress were assembled at York-town in Pennsylvania, the British were in possession of Philadelphia, and General Washington with the army were entamped in huts at the Valley Forge, twenty-five miles distant therefrom. To all who can remember, it was a season of hardship, but not of despair; and the Abbe, speaking of this period and its inconveniences, says,

"A multitude of privations, added to so many other misfortunes, might make the Americans regret their former tranquillity, and incline them to an accommodation with England. In vain had the people been bound to the new Government by the sacredness of oaths, and the influence of religion. In vain had endeavours been used to convince them, that it was impossible to treat safely with a country in which one parliament might overturn what should have been established by another. In vain had they been threatened with the eternal resentment of an exasperated and vindictive enemy. It was possible that these distant troubles might not be belanced by the weight of present evils.

"So thought the British Ministry when they sent to the New World public agents authorised to offer every thing except independence to these very Americans, from whom they had two years before exacted an unconditional submission. It is not improbable, but that by this plan of conciliation, a few months sooner, some effect might have been produced. But at the period at which it was proposed by the Court of London, it was rejected with disdain, because this measure appeared but as an argument of fear and weakness. The people were already re-assured. The Congress, the Generals, the troops, the bold and skilful men in each colony, had possessed themselves of the authority; every thing had recovered its first spirit. *This was the effect of a treaty of friendship and commerce between the United States and the Court of Versailles, signed the 6th of February, 1778.*"

On this passage of the Abbe's I cannot help remarking, that, to unite time with circumstance, is a material nicety in history; the want of which frequently throws it into endless confusion and mistake, occasions a total separation between causes and consequences, and connects them with others they are not immediately, and sometimes not at all, related to.

The Abbe, in saying that the offers of the British Ministry, "were rejected with disdain," is right as to the fact, but wrong as to the time; and this error in the time, has occasioned him to be mistaken in the cause.

The signing the treaty of Paris the 6th of February, 1778, could have no effect on the mind or politics of America until it was known in America; and therefore, when the Abbe says, that the rejection of the British offers was in consequence of the alliance, he must mean, that it was in consequence of the alliance being known in America; which was not the case: and by this mistake he not only takes from her the reputation, which her unshaken fortitude in that trying situation deserves, but is likewise led very injuriously to suppose that had she not known of the treaty, the offers would probably have been accepted; whereas she knew nothing of the treaty at the time of the rejection, and consequently did not reject them on that ground.

The propositions or offers above-mentioned were contained in two bills brought into the British Parliament by Lord North on the 17th of February, 1778. Those bills were hurried through both houses with unusual haste; and before they had gone through all the customary forms of Parliament, copies of them were sent over to Lord Howe and General Howe, then in Philadelphia, who were likewise Commissioners. General Howe ordered them to be printed in Philadelphia, and sent copies of them by a flag to General Washington, to be forwarded to Congress at York-Town, where they arrived the 21st of April, 1778. Thus much for the arrival of the bills in America.