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ADDRESS

In answer to the

KING'S SPEECH.

The Address in Answer to the King's Speech (which is always its echo) having been moved by Sir W. W. Wynn, Mr. Grey proposed an amendment, which he prefaced by the following eloquent observations:

I MUST confess, Sir, that my feelings are strong on the present occasion; but they are not those of despondency, but rather they are such apprehensions as the perfect state of the nation may naturally excite in the most confident. Such confidence has not been increased in me, by the tenor of his Majesty's Speech; in which I perceive no hope held out of a change in that policy which has brought upon this country the most unexampled calamities; and still less can I hope for peace, when we are called to trust to the time-declarations of wishing for peace, which from year to year have disappointed our hopes, and increased the calamities of war. I agree, Sir, that it is better not to enter at present upon subjects not immediately before the house. God knows, there is enough immediately within our contemplation. But I must beg that no improper inference may be drawn from my silence, as if, although I opposed the union when it became a subject of Parliamentary discussion, I now confessed my former error. I do not wish now to enter into a debate as to the policy which induced that measure, but this I must say, that notwithstanding all I have heard and seen on the subject, it continues to be my firm and conscientious opinion, that the most likely union to be permanent is an union of heart and affection, formed on the basis of the adjustment of 1786. I have never been able to trace the evils stated as the cause of the necessity of this union, to the declaration of Irish Independence; but I trace them to that system, which from the moment that the Irish Independence was declared, made the subversion of that independence the object of all its measures. The good effect of the measure of union is argued from the quiet of the people of Ireland; but let me ask, is that the quiet of affection? Or have we shown any disposition to repeal any of the laws so objectionable to the bulk of the people of Ireland. If, in virtue of the union, any of those severe laws were to be repealed, the system of imperious policy to be relaxed, and the blessings of the British constitution to be extended to the people of Ireland, then indeed we might argue from the good effects of this measure. But Ireland was quiet even a year before the union was acceded to. Shall it then be argued on a measure so recent, and which more remains yet to be done, that this quiet is a proof of the satisfaction of the people of Ireland? I am, however, inclined to look forward rather than backward, and I must say, that I heartily wish my opinion to be mistaken, and that all the good effects may result from this union which are argued from it. One thing of which I am persuaded, is, that the best mode calculated to produce those effects, is by adopting a system of liberal policy, which may tend to the delectation of the people in Ireland, and may impart to them the benefits of the British constitution. The honorable member hinted something of a dubious tendency, when he talked of securing the liberties of Ireland, by maintaining the present ascendancy. On this point I can only express my hope, that the extending to Irish Catholics the privileges of other Irish subjects, will be one of the first measures of the United Parliament.

The next topic adverted to, is the melancholy situation in which this country is now placed, with respect to the war in which we are engaged, and which is now enlarged into a contest with almost every power in Europe. And here I think it is not fair to place the conduct of the courts of Sweden and Denmark on a level with that of the court of Russia. In my opinion the Emperor of Russia has been guilty of an act of great injustice, and violence towards this country, in the detention of British ships and subjects; a conduct in direct violation of existing treaties; and requiring ample reparation and satisfaction. And yet I cannot agree with the honorable member, that his Majesty's ministers are free from all blame. The conduct which has produced violence, may be censurable. I have seen, Sir, a manifesto by the court of Russia, containing a legitimate assertion; that Malta should be surrendered to Russia. But disposed as I am to acquit ministers, yet I think the subject is deserving enquiry; and particularly whether the stipulation was or was not of a reciprocal nature; and I must say, that if they were apprized of the personal character of the Emperor of Russia, (on the importance of an alliance with whom much was formerly said) they should also have seen the prudence of avoiding a dispute with him, by conceding to this power a port in the Mediterranean; for such I consider would have been our true policy. Our efforts to preserve the balance of power in Europe, have ended, Sir, in a total destruction of that balance. His Majesty's ministers ought to have considered how they could have found another power to have brought into the scale, in order to obtain the balance. Such a power would have been Russia, which, by getting a footing in the Mediterranean, by the cession of Malta, would have been a counterbalance of France. At all events, however, whether ministers had broken the convention with Russia, or whether they had mistaken the character of Paul, my opinion is that this country is entitled to satisfaction. But my sentiments respecting the other powers, are not similar to those with regard to Russia. Nothing in consequence of the differences with the latter power, ought to have induced us to take measures against Denmark and Sweden, when we should not have taken independently of the difference with Russia. I shall not give a direct opinion with respect to the maritime rights of nations; I would only guard the public against assuming as a fact, that the conduct of the two northern powers has been such a direct aggression, as to justify this country in an open war against them. I have not, Sir, been able to find in the writers upon the laws of nations, or in the custom and practice of Europe, any thing like this assumed practice

of European nations. It has been said, that the right assumed by the British nation, never had been disputed till the end of the American war; but I find it questioned in the latter end of the last century, as well as in the year 1749, by the then King of Prussia, and also by the Dutch in 1768; and towards the close of the American war, the contrary principle to that on which we relied, was maintained in a convention that was then signed and afterwards known by the name of the Armed Neutrality. The more that gentlemen examine this question, the more they will see, that so far from the right alluded to being a clear and certain principle, it is one to the support of which they ought not immediately to pledge themselves. The first enquiry was, whether our claim was founded upon immediate justice?—For my part, I am convinced that there can be no true policy incompatible with justice. It is a regard to this which makes all the difference between a sound, enlightened statesman and a tricking politician. But I say, that whatever the advantages of our system may be, they cannot be put in competition with the successful vindication of the claim, accompanied with hostility towards other nations; and however much I participate with my countrymen in the exploits of our navy, I should be sorry to think that our maritime ascendancy could depend upon any thing inconsistent with the rights of others; and if we could only maintain it by such measures as must make this country appear odious to every other power in Europe. But if I do not succeed in deprecating a determination upon this point by an immediate address of thanks to his Majesty, it is but justice to our fellow-citizens to prove, that even our claim, valuable as it is, may be over-ruled, since the blood and treasure of our fellow-citizens must be spent to maintain it. I perfectly agree in sentiment with one who was a respectable member of this house, that "we could never go to war for an unprofitable right, any more than for a profitable wrong." His Majesty's ministers ought to show wherein consisted the utility of this right. They should prove that this right is essential to the welfare of this country. I say, Sir, we ought to make a sober estimate of the value of this right, before we pay for it at the expense of the blood and treasure of this country. I wish the house to pause before they pledge themselves to a measure which will lead, in its consequences, to a contest with almost every power in Europe. There is another consideration; I mean, Sir, that existing circumstances may be such as to render a right acknowledged to be in such point of justice and general utility, and yet events may occur to induce a partial infringement of it, and that the danger of inflicting upon it, may be greater than even the dereliction of it. If we could abstain from a discussion of this claim at the present moment, every kind of policy ought to have induced us to do so. The injury from allowing the claim of our enemies, would be that of the carriage of naval force, &c. into the ports of France; but I say, that under the present circumstance of the war, the danger arising from our not asserting the right of searching, would not be so great as that of inflicting upon it; for, Sir, when I consider the present exhausted state of the French marine, I think the could not avail herself of the connivance to any great extent. Even in the convention of 1780, in the declaration of the Emperor of Russia; the right of supplying a blockaded port was abandoned. Now, when I consider the present state of this country, and the close blockade which it enables us to form of the principal ports of France, I feel little or no apprehension arising from the effects of this connivance. But supposing France should be enabled to import the stores of the Baltic to any amount, that would not enable her to raise a marine in a day, a month, or a year. But the consequence of this dispute is, that we shall give, as allies to France, the fleets of our new enemies. From Archangel to the Bosphorus, and from the Tagus to the Gulf of Venice, there will not be a single port of our own possessions, where a British fleet can take shelter; and here I do not except Naples, which I consider already as conquered—Portugal, nor Turkey, which, before the end of this year, will be ceneffed with our enemies. Will it then be possible for our navy, with all its skill and prowess, to stretch along such an extent of coast? Or will it prevent an attack on that valuable part of our empire, an union with which has been the subject of congratulation this night? Are gentlemen so confident that, with the enemy's power of attacking Ireland, both from North and South, we shall be able sufficiently to be on our guard? But great hopes may be entertained of the superiority of our navy, and of the destruction of the trade of our enemies. But for my part, I have painful apprehensions, that nothing will so much threaten the extinction of our trade, as the new war. Will not the northern powers be able almost entirely to shut us out of the European markets? We should consider also, what we got from them in the articles of naval stores. And is it not probable that these will be withheld from us? No dependence can be placed upon the argument, that by so doing, their interests would suffer, especially when the character of the Emperor Paul is considered. Add to this the benefit which we receive at present from the supply of grain from the Baltic, &c. This source of supply will be at once dried up; and I ask the house whether it will at once divest the country of any hope of such relief? Notwithstanding all this, it may be replied, that unless we resent the recent injury, the national honour will be stained. But here it will be necessary first to enquire whether ministers by their conduct have not actually provoked this aggression? Their former violent and vexatious acts towards Genoa, Copenhagen, &c. are well remembered. At all events, it ought to be enquired whether the dispute might not have been avoided? In order to this, a more illustrious to our country might have been desired. True policy would have been, for his Majesty's ministers to have avoided this dispute, as was the policy of Lord Chatham in 1756, as stated by Lord Camden. The opinion of Lord Camden with respect to the conduct to be pursued towards neutral powers was, that our enemies must be cut off to the utmost from the supply of naval stores; but that great caution should be taken not to alarm or offend neutral powers, that their com-

plaints should be attended to, and great moderation exercised towards them. But I may be told that a convention has actually been signed by the Northern powers; and that the only alternative is, either to abandon or assert our rights. But we must see what the nature of the convention is.—We are told that it has been formed upon the ground of the convention of 1780; but I never heard that it had been objected to Lord North, that he did not go to war with the power in consequence of this convention; yet Lord North's conduct in this respect, was in a measure sanctioned by the new Rockingham administration, and that which succeeded it.

In the treaty of peace, all mention of the armed neutrality was omitted; the exercise of our claim had been suspended. One of the first acts of the Right Hon. gentleman's administration, was the commercial treaty with France. In it the full principles of the Armed neutrality were carried into effect; and since we had acceded to this demand in the case of one great maritime power, was it sufficient cause of war to object to the same claim, advanced by other powers? In 1793, the provisional treaty was made between this country and Russia, which renewed former treaties, granting to Russia the carrying of all articles, the produce of that country, to enemies' shores, with an exception of contraband. It may be said, that this convention being signed by Denmark and Sweden with Russia, with whom we have another dispute, shows the hostility of the measure; but the mere signature of a convention by two powers with a third with whom we are at war, does not give us a just ground of attack. It may be also replied, that we are not now in the state of weakness as we were at the end of the American war. It is true our naval superiority is at present decided; we are not now so situated, avoiding the fleets of France and Spain in the Channel; but are there not in the internal state of the country, such circumstances as would (if they were) incur a heavy principle of forbearance, and to avoid every fresh act of hostility? On these accounts I think his Majesty's ministers act very imprudently, and are involving the country in great danger. I call upon the house to pause and enquire, and not pledge itself to adopt their determination, at least till it has found their conduct to be conceded with the national safety, and honour. When we consider our state at the end of an eight year's war, which has brought unparalleled distress on this nation, and the miseries of millions of our fellow-citizens, and the miseries of millions of our fellow-citizens, but that after national humiliations for defending the present claim we shall at last be reduced to the necessity of abandoning it, even when the abandonment will prove inefficual to restore tranquillity to Europe; and I say, Sir, that we are about to exact from ministers an account of that conduct which has excited from almost every country of Europe (although at first league with us against France) nothing but hatred and revenge. But this confederacy against us could not have been the work of a day. If ministers fore-saw it, why then did they reject the overtures for peace made by Buonaparte last year? And if they did not foresee the approaching storm, where was their wisdom? From what happened respecting the detention of the Swedish envoy, the disposition of that Power was evident, nor were the sentiments of Prussia much less doubtful. Ministers thought last year that the overtures made by France to Austria should be rejected. Austria acted accordingly, and what was the consequence, but that by their advice, a dreadful chasm was occasioned from the map of Europe! Nor was it one of the least fatal effects of our policy towards Austria, that Austria herself might entertain hatred against us, and become a party to the new treaty. We refused to negotiate with France when a bankrupt in credit and resources; and now we are told in the speech that we are ready to treat with the enemy when he shows a more moderate disposition; that is when France is restored in power and credit, and threatening us with an invasion, which we are deterred by our allies! I might advert to the internal state of the country, but shall only say that in case of an alarm of invasion, it is impossible not to regret the conduct of ministers, in littering away, and disposing of the militia and standing force of the country in the manner they have done. Add to all this the depreciation of the paper currency, the burden of taxes, and a scarcity of labour; yet I wish not to discourage the country, but rather that we may from a just appreciation of the circumstances in which we are placed, and how to extricate ourselves from the danger; much ability and activity were wanted; our resources were still considerable. I trust a system of strict economy will take place of a lavish expenditure, and that true principles of the constitution may become the sole ground of our proceedings; Sir, the spirit of the people is not extinguished, and I trust that our courage will be raised in proportion to our danger.

What confidence may we not place in the efforts and industry of a great people exerting themselves under the inspiring auspices of wisdom, justice, and good conduct? But I call upon the house to check the career of ministers, who although entrusted with every means, have brought nothing but disgrace, and proving themselves incapable of retrieving the affairs of the nation; and I trust that no gentleman will any longer continue to give his assent to ministers who, at the same time, he secretly disapproved of. It had been seen in former instances, that the minority in that house had spoken the language of the majority of the people; and I trust that in the vote of this night, gentlemen lamenting what has been lost, and considering what may yet be regained, will make the public interest their sole motive to guide their determination.

Mr. Grey then concluded with moving an amendment, in substance, to assure his Majesty "that the house would proceed with all possible dispatch to enquire into the late of the nation, and the connection with foreign powers; and to assure his Majesty that if the representations which his Majesty had directed to be laid before foreign courts should be unwilling to promote an accommodation, and that the impossibility of an amicable adjustment should render a contest unavoidable, his Majesty's faithful Commons would give every support to maintain his just rights, &c. in the just hope from his Majesty's pe-

ternal care of his people, that he will be graciously pleased to give orders to prevent an improvident waste of the public treasure, and to promote a provident administration of public affairs."

Mr. PITT.—The Hon. Gentleman has advanced a proposition, which can alone account for the confidence he seems to feel in the arguments urged by him this night; I mean the proposition in which he states, upon the authority of a distinguished member of this house, that the minority speaks the sense of the majority of the nation. Undoubtedly, Sir, if the minority is urging the various principles and doctrines, in recommending the various measures proposed from time to time on that side of the house, is speaking the sense of the nation, then it follows, that all the exertions which have been making for nine years past, to arrest the calamities which have overwhelmed to great a portion of the continent of Europe, all the zeal and energy which we have displayed in the progress of a most arduous contest in which, if we have not succeeded to our wishes for the happiness and safety of others, have placed this country in a situation, which forms a splendid example to surrounding nations, were the exclusive merit of the majority of the nation. 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