

BRITISH PARLIAMENT.

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

MONDAY, Feb. 3.

Mr. Secretary Dundas moved that the order of the day for taking his Majesty's message into consideration, should be read.

The Speaker then read the message as follows:

GEORGE REX.

The supplies in the consequence of the present session having been calculated to provide only for the first months of the year, his Majesty now recommends to the House, to make such further provision as they may judge necessary, under the present circumstances, for the several branches of the public service and for the vigorous prosecution of the war; and his Majesty has given directions that the proper estimates for this purpose should be laid before the House.

His Majesty has thought proper on this occasion to direct, that there should be laid before the House copies of communications recently received from the enemy, and the answers which have been returned thereto by his Majesty's command.

His Majesty entertains the fullest confidence that those answers will appear to this House to have been conformable to that line of conduct which was required from his Majesty on this occasion, by his regard to all the most important interests of his dominions; and his Majesty having no object more at heart than that of contributing, as soon as the situation of affairs shall make it practicable, to the re-establishment of the general tranquility of Europe, on a sure and solid foundation, and of providing effectually for the security and permanent prosperity of his faithful people, places a firm reliance on the continued support of this Parliament, and on the zeal and perseverance of his subjects, in such measures as may best tend to confirm the signal advantages which have been obtained to the common cause in the course of the late campaign and to conduct the great contest in which his Majesty is engaged, to a safe and honorable conclusion.

G. R.

The Speaker having read the message, Mr. Secretary DUNDAS rose to move an address (which he prefaced with a speech of considerable length and minuteness of detail) returning the thanks of that House to his Majesty for rejecting the overtures of peace made by the first Consul of the republic of France.

Mr. Dundas was followed by Mr. CANNING, on the same side.

Mr. ERSKINE, in an able and eloquent speech, considered the present as a new era of the war. He observed that the object to which the attention of the House should be directed was not an enquiry into the events of the late campaign, but whether they approved of the answer returned by his Majesty to the overtures made by the government of the French republic. The question was, whether the answer which his Majesty had been advised to return was wise and prudent?

Mr. PITT said, though he did not mean to detain the House with long or minute details, on a subject which had already been so well discussed by two of his honourable friends, he was induced to offer himself at this particular period, by observing that the learned gentleman who last addressed them, had, towards the close of his speech, put the question in its proper point of view, or at least brought it to a shorter issue. From the tenor of his observations in general, it seemed as if he believed the destiny of the French revolution was not to be controlled, and that it was in vain to make any attempts at impeding it, in the course marked out for it, as it were by a sort of predestination. The honourable gentleman at the same time admitted unequivocally the wickedness of that revolution, which was indeed the most dreadful visitation that Providence ever permitted to fall upon man, and still promises to put human virtue to new trials. Upon this subject the public were before favoured with the written opinions of

that learned gentleman upon this subject, in a work which was said to have undergone thirty-two editions; and he had now given the House an opportunity of comparing them with that he had this night delivered when "cum audissetis ipsam." The first consideration was, whether we had any adequate security for the maintenance, for the stability of any treaty, we should conclude with the new government? If the picture given of the French revolution was by any means a true one, it was not consistent with the safety of other states.—Here Mr. Pitt entered at length into the discussion on the origin of the war, and concluded that France was the aggressor.—The decree of the 19th of November, he observed, was directed against England. Upon the whole, then, it must be left to the good sense of the House to consider whether it was better & safer to be at open hostility, than to suffer an armed nation to go into foreign countries preaching to the people that they were all slaves.—Even in the midst of negotiations, order were enclosed to all the generals of the French armies, containing a general declaration of war, and the blank formula of an address to the different people exciting them to insurrection. The instructions to the generals were to demolish all established government, overthrow all orders in society, and all religions; and, in fine, to overturn every thing which was contrary to their notions of liberty and equality. This was not confined to the countries with which they were then at war, but extended to all indiscriminately; and where the people did not show a disposition to revolt, they were to be treated in the way of conquered nations; such was the spirit of the decree of 13th December, and the same spirit applied to those parts of Europe, where their armies found a footing up to the present day; and, in fact, they have since been at open war with every state in Europe except two, and even those had of late thought it right to recall their Ministers from Paris. The most unequivocal proof that could be given of our pacific disposition was the reduction of our military establishment in 1781, which continued in the same state till war was declared against us in 1783. The hopes of being able to observe that neutrality was perhaps too long adhered to by the government of this country, notwithstanding so many acts of unprovoked and outrageous aggression. With the Emperor of Germany we had at that time no connection or communication whatever; but to Prussia we declared our determination of remaining neutral, and not interfering with the internal affairs of France. No minister of this country at foreign courts had any authority to treat on that subject with foreign states, till after the decree of the 9th November, and the wanton aggression of France after the battle of Jemappes. Prussia had been previously in concert and alliance with us; and it was thought right to open a communication with the allies, in order to enquire into the objects to be pursued and quality of the force to be employed. The dispatches for that purpose were dated on the 29th December; and he had not the least objection, to state with candour the nature of the instructions. The first was an explanation of the grounds of complaint against the enemy; then the conduct that was to be pursued previous to a declaration of war, and the steps most advisable to be taken. What the British cabinet recommended, was to propose terms of peace to France, to withdraw the allied troops from that country, and to publish a declaration, disclaiming any interference with internal affairs, or any form of government the nation should think proper to establish. If these proposals should not be accepted it recommended active measures, and an indemnification for such expenses as must necessarily be incurred in the war.—With this explanation, he would leave to any impartial man to become an arbiter between the two parties at issue, and decide whether this was any more than to repel aggression, and carry on a ne-

cessary and defensive war. He did not make this statement with a view to challenge the applause and admiration of his country; perhaps, considering the character of the French revolution, the flow and tortuosity of conduct which ministers adopted ought to have been reverted, but it would serve to show a least, that to them was not to be ascribed the origin of the war, declared and terminated upon the maps of the nations of Europe, and extended to countries in remote parts of the globe, in following up a principle which must be opposed by an equal exertion, and never be compromised till the strength of it be exhausted. With the two exceptions before made of Denmark and Sweden there was not a nation in Europe, on our side, against which France did not, since the revolution, either declare war or dictate some treaty, or infringe some principle of the law of nations.—The wanton attack of the Papal States, by the seizure of Avignon, was one of the first instances of the atrocious perfidy of her revolutionary spirit; also the capture of Pogradum, belonging to the bishop of Basse. Of the same nature was the conquest and incorporation of Savoy. Their hostile views against Austria and the Empire also, manifested themselves at an early period, under the pretence of a league of Sovereigns against her, of which all the documents she has attempted to produce were nothing more than forgeries.—The object of the declaration of Pultitz was to deliver Louis XVI. from captivity, and not to dismember France. The Jacobins of Paris, however, by the clamours of a mob, had the war minister Deslart displaced, and Dumouriez substituted in the room of him. An ultimatum was then issued, by which Austria was called upon to disband; and that France would allow an indemnity for its encroachments on the rights of the Princes of the Empire. This then was manifest aggression against Austria, as was the encroachments upon the Princes of Lorraine and Alsace, an aggression against Prussia, which declared that any hostilities against the Empire or the Emperor would be considered as a declaration of war. Without going through the history of the political wickedness of France, in its aggressions against every particular nation, he would likewise observe that the war with Spain was made to accompany that against England, though neither the feelings of consanguinity, nor an attachment to religion, nor a love of order, was sufficient to compel that cabinet to any exertions against that enemy of which it has since suffered his subjects to become the tools and slaves. Of Holland it was needless he should say any thing. The Republic carried on war against Portugal, though she had not declared any, and when that country had paid a sum as the price of peace, it was not for a moment suffered to enjoy the purchase. This was done under the pretence of a treaty between Portugal and this country, which in time of war gave her as an auxiliary, from which he could derive but a very feeble kind of support. To proceed in that dull uniformity of transgression, which was calculated to disgust and shock the revolutionary character, he referred to the personal insult offered to the king of Naples by a French fleet which then was without a rival in the Mediterranean.

He then went through the various other hostilities which progressively swelled the catalogues of injured nations to the revolutionizing of the Italian states, and the plunder of that property which they promised to protect, the establishment of new republics, and the transfer of Venice to the Emperor, after representing themselves as its deliverers. On that occasion he acknowledged, that Austria, unable to resist the press of the French arms, had unwisely, not to say dishonourably, compromised with French perfidy; but, perhaps, upon the whole, it may be considered as fortunate for Venice, inasmuch as it had been relieved from the fraternal embraces of the republicans. He then remarked upon the expression in the

note, that France, pressed on all sides, was obliged to have recourse to the resources of her power and courage, in carrying her arms in all directions. If the hon. gentleman opposite him meant to maintain, that a state attacked by one nation has a right to avenge herself upon others, however innocent, it was a new principle of the law of nations, from which he for one must take the liberty of demurring; (Mr. Erskine here observed that he asserted no such thing) he said he would not dispute any member's meaning, but certain he was of having heard something extremely like it, and as the hon. gentleman was so forward in arguing what he called our aggressions, it might be expected that he who did not entirely secede from his parliamentary attendance, might have come forward at a certain period, and let the aggressions of France come in for some share in his animadversions.—It was not true that there was any thing of rancour or resentment in the negotiations offered by this country. England had made numerous conquests, was complete mistress of the seas, possessed all the colonial wealth, had annihilated the French commerce, and more than doubled its own; yet England offered to restore all she had taken, and only seeks some compensation in the acquisitions made upon Holland. Austria threw no impediment there; but France thought fit to incorporate the Netherlands, and thus was the law of nations to be repealed by the municipal laws of the Republic. France, he insisted, was not then pressed on all sides, any more than she had at any time been pressed by the states of Italy, from which she extorted millions after millions, on condition, of sparing the churches & palaces, which she afterwards indiscriminately ravaged. Buonaparte's name went down in every page of the records of all this violence and perfidy.

While France surrounded herself on all sides that were not washed by the sea, with dependent and tributary Republics, not sparing the government of Switzerland, who were proverbial for their simplicity and innocence, England was left alone, after fruitless negotiations, to carry on the war, yet had courage to sustain it. The avarice and injustice of France had all the character of the revolution they sprung from.

"They grew with its growth, and strengthened with its strength." But never were known to diminish with its misfortunes. The mask was now completely thrown off and no common barrier was sufficient to fence us against its corrupt and baleful influence. What was to be thought of the aggression against Egypt? The capture of Malta, which preceded it, might be thought comparatively trivial, if it were not that objects however small cannot escape the all searching eye of the French revolution. An aggression of the perfidy was to be observed in entering Egypt, in the name of the murdered king Louis XVI, and representing themselves as acting in concert with the Porte, and for the benefit of the Grand Signior, affected at the same time all the zeal of devout Mahometans, while their real object was to open a road to India, and share in the partition of what they conceived an expiring power. To India also they sent their Jacobin emissaries to prepare new revolutions, and administer oaths of hatred to all monarchy except in the person of their dear friend and faithful Ally Citizen Tippoo. This alliance, however, was perhaps the more congenial, as Citizen Tippoo was then in the precise situation which was soon after to be assumed by Buonaparte, namely, that of a military despot. Such had even been the revolutionary spirit in all the rulers from Brissot to Rewbell, Barras, and also Buonaparte. What a horrible alliance then would gentlemen court with a state which presents the dreadful paradox of a nation bleeding at every pore, covered with crimes which call aloud for punishment from God and man; and yet possessing such gigantic means for the disturbance and over-

throw of other countries, and converting robbery, and confiscation, into national resources!

Mr. FOX rose next. He began by saying that the hour was too late, and the House too much exhausted, for him to undertake to follow the right honourable gentlemen into all the details of circumstances, which formed the past causes of the war, and constituted the proofs of the first aggression. The present, as his hon. friend, (Mr. Erskine) had said, formed a new era in the war, and it was infinitely of more importance in the present moment to enquire into the use which ought to be made of the overtures of negotiation, than to discuss which of the two parties was the aggressor. The right hon. gentleman, however, had occupied a very long time in going over all these topics, which he had often before too successfully preiled on the House, and by which he had drawn them into an approbation of his measures. In this new era of the war, when we were again come to the favorable point so anxiously desired, when negotiation was offered us; were we to be told that we ought to hold out because there were appearances that promised us success? Gracious God! after being told five year ago that France was to completely sink into the gulf of bankruptcy, that it was an argument against treating for peace that they might not have an opportunity to recruit their finances again to molest us, and, after seeing the gigantic efforts that they had made since this pretended ruin, were we again to be deluded with reports of favorable appearances as an argument against negotiation? He lamented, in common with every genuine friend to peace, the harsh and unconciliating language which was held in the answer to the proposition, as well as in the House. He remembered with pleasure the language of Lord Malmesbury at Paris, in answer to the haughty and improper terms used by La Croix—that reproachful language was not the way by which two nations could approach one another towards reconciliation. For this reason, also, he must lament that the right hon. gentleman thought it necessary to go with such minuteness in the early circumstances of the war. He certainly did not agree with him in several of his assertions. He still continued to think that this country was the aggressor; and that Austria and Prussia were clearly aggressors was a fact which no clear and impartial mind could for a moment hesitate to believe. It would be vain for the right hon. gentleman to set up long and ingenious reasonings against the evidence of documents which were in every one's hand, & which demonstrated, beyond all refutation that not only the unfortunate monarch himself, and his confidential advisers had entered into negotiations with foreign powers, not to partition France, but to dictate by force of arms to France and to compel them to depart from the system which they thought necessary to their own internal happiness. The treaty of Pavia, as it has been called, may have been a forgery, and if you please, (said Mr. Fox) a non entity; but are gentlemen prepared to deny the truth of the declaration made by the emperor at Mantua? Are gentlemen prepared to deny the story as it is related by M. Bertrand de Moleville? It is true, that neither this, nor the declaration of Pultitz were treaties for the partition of France; but what is the exact nature of the latter of these? Austria and Prussia declare themselves resolved to attack France and force the French people to restore their ancient Kings as soon as the other Princes agree to cooperate with them in the laudable design. Is not this aggression? Suppose that any powers should make a similar declaration against England and should say, we mean to attack you, but not yet; we present the dreadful paradox of a nation bleeding at every pore, covered with crimes which call aloud for punishment from God and man; and yet possessing such gigantic means for the disturbance and over-