



"Ours are the Plans of fair delightful Peace,
"Unwarp'd by Party Rage to live like Brothers."

Vol. I.

TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 1800.

3.

CONTINUATION OF THE DEBATE

ON
Mr. Nicholas's Proposition
For repealing certain Parts of the Act for raising an additional Army.

MR. GALLATIN said, that the gentleman of South-Carolina had mistaken the opinion expressed by Mr. Nicholas and himself. It was not that the reduction of the army would be most desirable in a state of war, but only, that, as it was already provided by law, that the troops should be disbanded in case the negotiation with France should succeed, the resolution on the table was peculiarly applicable to the case of a failure of negotiation. And therefore was it, that he had given his reasons at large why those troops would be useless even in that case. The principal of these reasons was, that there was no rational apprehension of an invasion. Yet the gentleman of South-Carolina, drawing his own deductions from a supposed opinion of his own creation, had gone so far as to suppose that we would also avow similar sentiments even in case of an actual invasion. The whole of the superstructure which he has erected on that false foundation must fall with the foundation itself.

The gentleman of South-Carolina supposes that this motion will encourage the French to attempt an invasion; and in order to support that opinion, he insisted much on the knowledge which France had acquired of our means and resources. Yet all the arguments and positions of the gentleman tend to shew the extent of our resources. If those positions are true, and the information of France as correct as he supposes it to be, it is impossible to believe that that nation should draw an inference from the disbanding of this army, that we are unable to support it. They will, view this measure as we consider it ourselves, as a question of internal policy and economy.

But it is said that France will ascribe the motion to motives different from those we avow, different from those which actuate us. Are we then to take for our guide, on subjects of legislation, the opinion which foreign nations may form of our motives! instead of being governed by the intrinsic merits of the question itself, on which we are called to decide? But this motion is calculated neither to debilitate our own government, nor to impress on France an opinion of imbecility in our councils, or of internal weakness.

Different opinions are entertained as to the motives which have induced France to shew a disposition to treat with us on equal terms. That disposition has by some gentlemen been ascribed solely to the spirit of resistance evinced by America, and to the state of hostility adopted by the last Congress. Were I, said he, to hazard an opinion on that subject, I would say, that the refusal of our Envoys to accede to the terms first proposed by France, a public loan and a private bribe, and the subsequent determination not to treat through the medium of a minister selected out of the three by the government of that country, a determination adopted by that minister himself, contributed to produce a change on their part. I would even add, that from Mr. Gerry's correspondence, it appears probable to me that that refusal and that determination alone would have been sufficient to produce the present negotiation. But, I consider that discussion as unconnected with the motion now under consideration; and I am willing to grant, at present, for the sake of argument, that the present state of things has been solely produced by the system of resistance and hostility adopted by America. And on that ground I say, that the reduction of the military establishment can neither change the amicable disposition of France, nor deprive our government of the means of obtaining equally advantageous and honourable terms.

Mr. G. urged reasons in support of this opinion. There was but one circumstance that can produce abroad an unfavorable impression of our situation; it is the state of our finances; it is the knowledge that

our revenue does not exceed nine millions of dollars, and our expenditure amounts to fourteen. Men, and freemen, we have, and we never, therefore, can want soldiers to repel an invading foe. But our monied resources are limited, and the only source of danger to us is our consuming those resources for useless objects, and exhausting ourselves for the fear of imaginary dangers. And I would ask, added Mr. Gallatin, which situation is best calculated to impress foreign nations with an idea of our strength and wisdom—an annual expenditure reduced to the level of our revenue, without this army—or a deficiency of five millions, and this army without any means of paying it but ruinous loans!

That trite topic of the necessity of certain measures, because they are called measures of defence, that cry of alarm that we are, or will be considered as a divided people, those charges of party spirit, disorganization, and jacobinism, have for a long time been uniformly repeated on this floor, upon almost every subject of any importance. They have not been confined to debates upon taxes, navies or armies; the sedition and the alien laws were also proposed, and have since been supported, as an indispensable measure of defence; those who opposed them were branded with the appellation of enemies of their government; and the fate of the conquered countries in Europe, held up to our view as a warning of the approaching danger. I is true that the burthen of the song is now somewhat altered. Formerly it was Venice that was the constant subject of the lamentations of some gentlemen. With the fate of Venice we were perpetually threatened. At present Venice seems to have altogether escaped the recollection of those gentlemen. We hear not a single voice raised to remind us of the fate of Venice. Indeed, Sir, I hear no more of Venice in Europe than on this floor. We are yet to learn, that since the whole of the possessions of that Republic has been wrested by the Emperor of Germany, he has restored to her her ancient independence. Is it then because the conqueror is not the same, and because the charge of ambition and rapacity is transferred from one power to another, that gentlemen have become silent on that subject? For my share, I sincerely believe that all the great powers of Europe, France as well as Austria, Prussia, England, or Russia, and these as well as France, are actuated by similar motives, and have similar objects in view. I can see no sensible difference between the overthrow of Tipoo Saib, the division of Poland, or the annexation of Venice, and the conquest of Holland, Egypt, or Switzerland. Inordinate ambition and insatiable avarice equally govern them all, and they seem equally to disregard the dictates of justice and integrity. These are the exclusive attributes of the weaker European nations, and seem to have no better foundation than their weakness.

We were, however, very seriously admonished, on this occasion, with the destiny of Holland; while there does not exist the least similarity between the parties of this country and those of Holland. Here, men, perfectly equal in their rights and expectations, differ about the propriety of measures adopted or rejected by a majority; and that majority fluctuates with the opinions of the people expressed in their elections. Here men differ on the measures, and not on the form of the Government. Here we have no influential family, possessed of an immense hereditary power, supported by one half and detested by the other half of the nation. In Holland, civil dissensions and wars on the subject of the Orange family, have been almost coeval with the existence of the Republic. The Stadtholdership has been abolished and reinstated six times before the present war. The present Prince of Orange was, sometime before the French Revolution, expelled by a majority of the people of Holland aided by foreign aid; and he was within a short time reinstated, against their will, by the armies of

the King of Prussia. Doubtless a people governed by a Sovereign who had, but a few years before, been imposed upon them by a foreign power, could not be supposed to exert much energy in his defence. But, if for that reason, they afford inducements of invasion to France, can any inference be drawn applicable to America? Unless the gentlemen suppose that our government was imposed on the people of America, against the will of a majority and by force; or unless they suppose the existence in this country of a party, who wish to subvert our government, and to establish here an hereditary Stadtholder, they must acknowledge the fallacy of their inferences.

Any comparison between Egypt and the United States would be so evidently absurd, that it would be wasting the time of the committee to dwell on the subject. But Switzerland had been mentioned. An appeal to the opinion of a member of this house, personally acquainted with that country, had been made by the gentleman from S. Carolina. I believe, said Mr. G. that I am the only member who may be supposed to possess some personal knowledge of Switzerland; and although I do believe that it is not altogether fair to draw any arguments from opinions of a member of this body, which have never certainly been declared on this floor, and which must therefore have been expressed in a loose manner and in private conversation, I will beg the indulgence of the committee, whilst I state the facts alluded to, so far as I am acquainted with them.

The population of Switzerland is estimated at less than two millions of souls, and the Canton of Berne includes about one-third of the whole. Less than 400,000 souls from the population of that part of the Canton called the "German country." Between two and three hundred thousand inhabit that part called "Pays de Vaud," which was conquered by Berne from the house of Savoy. The government of that Canton was monstrous in theory, but gentle, and, it may be, good in its administration. Out of two hundred families, and at the exclusion of all the other citizens, a council of 250 was elected for life, filling their own vacancies out of those families only, and uniting the supreme legislative, executive, and even judiciary powers. It was a complete hereditary aristocracy. Yet the people were protected in their property; justice was administered with tolerable impartiality; individual acts of oppression were rare, taxes were light, the administration on the whole might perhaps deserve the appellation of perpetual; even the conquered inhabitants of Pays de Vaud, although subjects in the true meaning of the word, could boast that they lived under the most gentle servitude; the people of the whole Canton enjoyed a greater share of physical happiness than those of any other European nation; and the only rational cause of discontent was the hereditary, insuperable exclusion from any share in the government of that nominal republic of which they were nominal citizens. The causes of so much real happiness, under a form of government so little calculated to bestow it, are worthy of attention, and not altogether inapplicable to the present question.

In the first place, that Canton, together with the other parts of Switzerland, had enjoyed two centuries of peace. Firmly attached to a system of neutrality, and having neither armies nor other expensive establishments; light taxes and a frugal economy enabled them to support the necessary expences of government, and even to enrich the individual members of that government, and to accumulate a public treasure, without having recourse to any extended system of taxation, much less to a system of accumulating funded debt. This was the first cause of the happiness of the body of the people. Their government kept clear of foreign wars, supported no army, and was not under the necessity of wresting the fruits of the labour of the governed, in order to support the expence and parade of a military, un-

productive, establishment. But as they had no military standing force, the defence of the country rested with the people themselves. Hence every man was armed and trained to arms. The people were the best, indeed the only militia of Europe. And this was their best security against oppression. The existence of an arbitrary government, destitute of military standing force, depended on the will of its armed subjects; and this accounts for the great moderation and gentle administration of that government.

Of the other parts of Switzerland, it will be sufficient to say that they consisted of a number of small independent republics, feebly united by any general government, some of them governed by aristocracies as vicious in practice as in theory, and others enjoying perfectly free governments.

But what deductions, said Mr. G. can be drawn from these facts, connected with the event of the invasion and conquest of that country? When that invasion took place, the subjects of most of those aristocracies, except that of Berne, and a considerable part of the inhabitants of the Pays de Vaud, either joined or did not resist the French. The citizens of the free Cantons, and even those of the Canton of Berne made every resistance in their power, and were subdued merely by a superior force. No inference can thence be drawn, except that the subjects of a government, bad in practice and theory, may wish for a revolution, or for a change of masters, and that the citizens of a free country, and even the subjects of a government bad in theory, but gentle in its administration, may safely be trusted with the defence of their country against an invading foe. Want of success was not owing to want of exertions, but to immense inferiority of power. As to the divisions of the Councils of Berne, so much insisted on by the gentleman of South-Carolina, they had not the least effect on the event. When those divisions he alludes to took place, the event was decided; the enemy was at the gates; the smallness of the population has been mentioned. No hope of success remained, and the only division at that time was on the question whether it was proper to sacrifice or preserve the lives of a handful of enthusiastic and devoted people. Unfortunately, indeed, divisions had previously existed in those councils. In 1792, when the Duke of Brunswick invaded France, and perhaps at other subsequent times, when the alarm was proclaimed that the French revolution endangered every government, a party in the Council of Berne favoured the views of the coalition, and although they could not obtain a majority in favour of war, a departure from the ancient strict rules of neutrality occasionally took place, which afforded afterwards, when the favorable moment of a suspension of war with Germany took place, a pretence to the unjustifiable invasion of France. France, it is true, has been enabled to conquer by superior numbers, a small country lying at her door, and whose immense importance to her as a military position, in her approaching contest with the continental powers, has been evinced by the fate of this campaign. It would be ridiculous to dwell on the immense difference resulting in favour of America, from her distance, extent of territory, population, union and government.

Before he would take leave of these extraneous historical digressions, Mr. G. said, that he could not help noticing one of the observations of the gentleman from S. Carolina. That gentleman had remarked, that the French conscripts, carried, as he said, by force and chained to the army, fought with uncommon bravery against a foreign enemy. Thus it appeared that Frenchmen, living under the worst tyranny, even that of Robespierre, and at a time when their country was torn by the most inveterate and bloody internal factions, did not hesitate, although dragged in chains to a camp, to fight, and had succeeded in repelling an invading foe, or even in prosecuting war in foreign countries. Why did not the

gentleman apply that instance also, and draw its proper deduction as applied to America? If the French people in that situation, and amidst those divisions, had been found equal to the task of combating foreign nations, could it be supposed that the free citizens of America would, on account of some divisions merely of opinion, be less willing and less capable to defend themselves and their independence, at the time of real danger, against a foreign invader?

The arguments given in support of the possibility of an invasion were not certainly susceptible of being absolutely disproved by reasoning. They were grounded, not on probabilities, but on possible events. And there was perhaps nothing which could be proved to be altogether impossible. But that kind of argument did not apply particularly to the present motion, or to the present time. For there could be no possible time, nor any possible situation of Europe, which would not justify some hypothetic statement as plausible as that given by the gentleman from South-Carolina, and on as solid ground justify a permanent military establishment of considerable magnitude.

Amongst other inducements which were offered to invasion, that gentleman had, however, mentioned one of an extraordinary nature. In his enumeration of the objects of plunder which might attract a French rapacity, he counted our funded capital. As our funded capital is the same thing with our funded debt, I must confess for my share, said Mr. G. that I have no objection to give it to the French, or to any other nation that will take it. It would be the most negative gift ever bestowed by one government on another.

The gentleman from South-Carolina had indulged himself in a number of observations on a supposed party, whose views he had represented at one time to be to carry elections by means of insurrections, at another to estrange the people from their government. But he had concluded his observations rather unexpectedly; for, after having stated the strength of that party as extremely formidable, their views as extremely dangerous, not less indeed than to persuade the militia, the people of this country, that they should consider French invaders as their deliverers, he told us that they were too weak in numbers, and too contemptible to be considered as in any degree dangerous. Did I believe the reality of all the positions of that gentleman, relative to party, I must confess that I should not consider that party as too contemptible to create any danger. And if he did believe they were so harmless, to what purpose did he expatiate so much at large on their existence and designs? But the gentleman from Delaware views this subject in a different light. His conclusion was, that knowing the existence of such party, it was necessary to have an army, in order to defend the country against an invasion, inasmuch as a considerable part of the militia could not be trusted with its defence. If a party does exist, so inimical to our government, as to join an invading enemy, in order to subvert it, they must be supposed to subvert it without an invasion. It is impossible to mistake the meaning of the gentlemen. When they ground the necessity of an army on the supposed existence of a party, let them express themselves as they please, either they mean nothing, or they mean that an army is necessary not only against an enemy, but against a party of the people. Let the gentlemen be silent about party, or let them candidly acknowledge that this army is intended to suppress party.

Mr. Gallatin then proceeded to make some observations on the financial statements of the gentleman from S. Carolina. The result of that gentleman's remarks had been to shew a deficiency of only four millions. It was immaterial to the present question whether that deficiency was four or five millions. But the details on which the gentleman had grounded his result were in some degree incorrect. Mr. G. here examined Mr. H.'s statement,