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ADDRESS
OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
TO THE
PEOPLE OF MASSACHUSETTS.

Fellow Citizens.—The House of Representatives of Massachusetts, having nearly completed the ordinary duties of the session, upon the eve of an adjournment, are induced to delay their departure for their homes, by the intelligence just received of War declared by the United States, against Great Britain. Though the recent course of public affairs has led some of us to anticipate this event, as the natural and inevitable consequence of the infatuation which has presided in the national councils, and of the fatal desertion of your interests by some of your own Representatives in Congress; yet we are sensible that this calamity will fall upon most of you as a sudden and unexpected visitation; and be regarded by you as an instance of inconceivable folly and desperation. We also know, that it will be natural for you to look towards your State Legislature, for the suggestion of some means of relief from a condition so repugnant to your wishes and interests.—Most gladly would we devote our time and exertions to any means of repairing the mischief already begun, or of averting the ruinous consequences which await our country. But our dispositions, unless seconded by the active energies of the people, can be of no avail. The system deliberately adopted at a former Session for securing permanent power to a majority of the Senate in defiance of the voice of the people, impedes and defeats the expression of the public will. The approbation of War measures by a minority in this branch, and by certain members of Congress from this state, exhibits you as a divided people to those who triumph in your divisions, as a source of their own power, and the National Government has been induced to believe that your fears and dissensions combined with your sober habits, and natural aversion from the appearance of opposition to the laws, are sufficient pledges for your tameness in the abandonment of your local interests, and for your supporting, at the expense of your blood and treasure, a war, unnecessary, unjustifiable and impolitic; which, under the pretence of vindicating the independence of our country against a nation which does not threaten it must too probably consign your liberties to the care of a tyrant who has blotted every vestige of independence from the continent of Europe.

Having presented a temperate and respectful memorial to Congress, praying them to avert the evils of war, without effect; it no longer becomes us to conceal our sentiments upon the causes and tendency of the present war. The time perhaps approaches, when, like other minions of French power, and influence, we shall be expected to observe a timid and profound silence upon the measures of administration. A war begun upon principles so outrageous to public opinions, to the feelings and interests of this people, can be supported only by the violence which destroys the freedom of speech, and endangers the liberty of the citizens. But while our chamber is not yet encompassed by a standing army, and the writ of habeas corpus is not suspended, we will lift up a warning voice to our constituents, and apprise them of their danger.

When amidst the peaceful scenes, in which for thirty years, you have been accustomed to repose, you are made to realize that war exists;—when you find that to supply the exhausted treasury, paper money has been issued;—and that direct and burdensome taxes must be imposed upon your lands and your occupations, while the means of providing for their payment are diminished; we feel with what inquisitive anxiety you will look around you for the causes of your tribulation. No invasions of our country has been threatened.—No enemy was near. No enterprize upon your independence had been undertaken. Neither treason, insurrection, nor assistance to the execution of the laws, were to be apprehended; your commercial rights it is true have been exposed to violation by the belligerent nation, and in-

juries have been sustained, that were entitled to redress. But though the measure of injury cannot affect the right of preparation; it ought not to be disregarded by a wise nation in its attempt to procure atonement, by a resort to the last extremity.

Without stopping upon this most solemn occasion, to notice the insinuations and assertions so lavishly made, of a plot to dismember the Union, by the employment of secret emissaries, and the attempts to excite Indian hostilities, insinuations and assertions, wholly unsupported by proof, and which furnish conclusive evidence of a want of more important reasons; we may consider the causes assigned by government for this appeal to arms, to be, in substance,

First.—The impressment of American seamen.

Secondly.—The principles of blockade, imputed to the British government, by which ports not actually invested may be considered as subject to blockade.

Thirdly, and principally.—The Orders in Council.

In regard to the impressment of our seamen, the British government have at no period pretended to the right of taking them, knowing them to be such. They claim the right of visiting neutral ships in search of their own subjects; and in the exercise of it, abuses, though to a much less extent than the people have been led to believe, have been practised. But the conclusive remark upon this subject is that Mr. Monroe, now Secretary of State, and Mr. Pinkney, the present Attorney General, had made an arrangement with the British government, for the protection of our seamen, which in their judgment would have been perfectly competent to that object. But this arrangement, President Jefferson, evidently and fatally determined to preserve every source of irritation, refused to confirm. Since that period the British government has always professed a willingness to enter upon new arrangements—their minister has lately explicitly offered to obtain the restoration of every American seaman, upon being furnished with a list of them. We cannot but add, that the Senate of this Commonwealth has refused to concur with the House in the means of procuring from every town a list of their impressed citizens; the number of which we have reason to believe would appear quite inconsiderable in comparison with the exaggerated allegations of our administration, as well as with those who by this act of their own government, are now exposed to capture and to confinement in prison ships.

Upon the question of constructive blockades, separate from the orders in council, which rest on special circumstances, there can be no pretence for a controversy, involving the necessity of war. The British government has declared, in "official communications," that to constitute a blockade "particular ports must be actually invested, and previous warning given to vessels bound to them not to enter." To this definition it is understood that the American government assents. But it is alleged that Great Britain violates her professed limitation of this right of blockade, by her orders in council, which are, in effect, a constructive blockade of France, and her dependencies.

It is far from the disposition of your representatives to investigate the reasons advanced by Great Britain in defence of this measure, which her present administration consider essential to the maintenance of her independence. But we may confidently appeal to your good sense, for a confirmation of the solemn truth, that war against Great Britain alone, at the moment she declares her Orders in Council repealed, whenever a revocation of the French decrees shall have effect, is a measure stamped with partiality and injustice.—By the operation of these orders our commerce is excluded from the ports of France and her dependencies. But were they repealed, the municipal regulations, heavy duties, and other embarrassments in those ports, would be obstacles to that commerce, not less effectual than the British edicts. Thus to obtain the right to traffic with France, which would not be worth pursuing, we renounce a participation in a lucrative commerce, with the rest of the world. To indemnify the merchant for his partial losses his whole property is exposed to capture. To secure retribution for occasional depredations, and individual outrage upon solitary vessels by British cruisers, the entire navigation of the coun-

try and your brave seamen will fall a prey to their fleets, which cover the ocean.

This cursory view of the alleged cause of hostility, compared with your own observation, and recollection of the course of events, will enable you to judge not only of the sincerity of the administration, but of the solidity of their motives. We beg you also to recollect that the French Decrees while they were much more outrageous in principle, were long anterior in time, and therefore first demanded resistance from our government, and that it appears by public documents, that the Orders in Council would have been revoked, had not our administration thought proper to connect the revocation with a claim for the relinquishment of principles of blockade, which are now recognized as conformable to the Law of Nations. From these considerations we are constrained by a sense of duty to express our fears and persuasion, that the deplorable event which has now come to pass, is attributable to other causes. The most prominent of these is the embarrassment arising from the precipitate declaration of the President of the United States, that the French decrees, which violated our commercial rights, were repealed. This assurance has been contradicted by a series of events and circumstances, which leave no room for doubt. By the sinking and burning of our vessels on the high seas; by the formal declaration of the French government enforcing and amplifying those decrees; and finally, by the language of the last Presidential message to Congress, which, while it still asserts the repeal of those decrees, explicitly admits, "her government has authorised illegal captures by its privateers and public ships, and that other outrages have been practised on our vessels and our citizens; and that no indemnity has been provided or pledged for French spoiliations on the property of our citizens." It is thus manifest, that the mock revocation of those decrees is an insult to common sense. Yet to disguise the imposition practised upon our executive, to gratify its wounded pride, and evade the retraction of error, we are called upon to hazard all that is dear to a nation.

Another and more remote cause of this war, we are compelled to refer to a disposition in many, whose influence predominates in our national councils, to aggrandize the Southern and Western States at the expence of the Eastern section of the Union. It is unquestionably true, that the partial local interests of the people of the different states might, by a spirit of accommodation, be so blended and reconciled as to produce a great and harmonious whole, capable of securing the highest degree of national felicity and strength. But we cannot disguise our conviction, that a system coeval with the formation of our Constitution was digested, and has been unceasingly pursued to create and secure a preponderance of weight and power over the commercial States. Whatever tends to check the growth of the navigating interest, and prevent the accumulation of wealth in those states; whatever discourages the increase of their population and encourages emigration from them; whatever will contribute to the extension of territory in the Southern and Western region, by conquest or otherwise, will materially contribute to the attainment of that object. The war now commenced is adapted to produce these effects.

The first result will be a wide and wasteful sweep of our vessels by capture. The shipping of Massachusetts is her main sinew. The loss of it is irretrievable, as it constitutes capital. But to a southern planter, this is at most a temporary evil, as foreign bottoms will carry his crops to market. By the embarrassments and losses thus attendant upon commerce, it is the expectation of some politicians, that it will be deemed unworthy of protection and cease to be represented, and that the attention of men may be diverted from commercial pursuits and their emigration promoted to countries acquired or intended to be acquired by conquest or purchase, which form no part of the original territory of the United States, and were not included in our national compact.

Another cause of the present war must be referred to a spirit of jealousy, and competition with Great Britain, to a mistaken belief that she would yield to the pressure of the continental system established by the Tyrant of Europe, and to a propensity to co-operate in that system, in the hope of sharing in the glory of its suc-

cess, and perpetuating in our Country the party influence and power of its advocates. By adopting and pertinaciously adhering to his system, the party in power, advanced so far to retreat without discredit. They have calculated that a change of their measures would be a confession of error, and that this must be followed by the forfeiture of their claim to public confidence. But in war, the worst that can befall them is the loss of office and of power; and they are not without hope of finding a refuge from censure and contempt, in the more violent passions which are inseparable from a state of war.

It is by these means, fellow-citizens, in our apprehension, that you are now involved in War. The event forms a new era in our national history. It is an event awful, unexpected, hostile to your interests, menacing to your liberties, and revolting to your feelings. It destroys your confidence in the protection which the constitution intended to afford against all wars repugnant to the interest and will of the people; and proves that your Congress is in greater subjection to Executive influence, and to the passions of the few, than to the ascendancy of dispassionate councils. But your duties are great in proportion to the magnitude of the exigency, and the trial imposed upon your fortitude and patriotism.

You are the citizens of one country, and bound to support all constitutional laws until by a peaceable change of men, you can effect the repeal of such as are obnoxious. You must also defend your country against invasion by any foreign enemy without weighing the justice or necessity of the war. We pray you to discourage all attempts to obtain redress of grievances by any acts of violence or combinations to oppose the laws. Your habits of obedience to the dictates of duty, your just and temperate views of your social & political obligations, your firm attachment to the Constitution, are pledges for the correctness of your conduct.—When a great people find themselves oppressed by the measures of their government, when their just rights are neglected, their interests overlooked, their opinions disregarded, & their respectful petitions received with supercilious contempt, it is impossible for them to submit in silence. In other countries, such occurrences produce tumults, rebellion and civil war. But in our country, a peaceable remedy may be found for these evils in the Constitution. Situated, however, as you now are, every man must be quick to discern, and active to apply this remedy. It must be evident to you, that a President who was made this war, is not qualified to make peace; and that the men who have concurred in this act of desperation, are pledged to persevere in this course, regardless of all consequences. Display then the Majesty of the people in the exercise of your rights, and sacrificing all party feelings at the altar of your country's good, resolve to displace those who have abused their power, and betrayed their trust. Organize a peace party throughout your country, and let all other party distinctions vanish. Keep a steadfast eye upon the Presidential Election, and remember that if he, whose fatal policy plunged you into this unexampled calamity, is again raised to the chair; and if the abettors of war are to be entrusted with conducting it, you will have nothing to expect for years to come, but "the sound of the warrior, and garments rolled in blood;" and that if you should by your aid accelerate the fall of Great Britain, you would merely deliver over your exhausted country and enslaved posterity to the dominion of a tyrant, whose want of power alone restrains him from the exercise of unlimited despotism on the ocean, and the same tyranny in the new world which he has imposed upon the old.

To secure a full effect to your object, it will be necessary that you should meet & consult together for the common good in your towns and counties. It is in dark & trying times, that this constitutional privilege becomes invaluable. Express your sentiments without fear, and let the sound of your disapprobation of this War be loud and deep. Let it be distinctly understood that in support of it, your conformity to the requisition of law will be the result of principle and not of choice. If your sons must be torn from you by conscriptions consign them to the care of God; but let there be no volunteers, except for defensive war.

Remember this, if unsuccessful, will be the last effort of a free republic; you must