

Edenton Gazette

FRIDAY, APRIL 14, 1809.

EDENTON: PRINTED BY JAMES WILLS.

VOL. IV.—NUM. 164.

[BY PARTICULAR DESIRE.]

Extract of a letter from the Hon. Matthew Lyon, to a friend in Vermont, February, 1809.

DEAR SIR,
Your favour of the — is before me. I rejoice to see that there is one Vermont republican who is not so far gone in the wilds of Jeffersonian idolatry, as to consider me an impostor. By the letters I receive from Vermont generally, it seems to me that those republicans whom I held in the highest estimation, have mostly forgotten that there is another God than Thomas Jefferson. It is a folly dear sir, for men to call themselves publicans, while they are man-worshippers. His sort of worship is more criminal, and more foolish too, than the worship of stocks and stones, of bulls and goats.—Those who indulge in the latter sort of worship, very judiciously reserve their confidence for something else, or some other power; but man-worshippers are apt to impute infallibility to their idols; and to resign to them all their understanding; all their confidence is placed in those idols; they believe in their dogmas, however repugnant to that reason which was given to them by the God of Nature. I remember well, when the lower class of clericalists were almost made to believe, that the fine showers and the pleasant sun-shine they enjoyed, and the good crops they reaped, ought to be attributed to John Adam's wise and virtuous administration. I hoped then that their folly was so conspicuous, that the republicans would never pattern after it. When John Adams told the nation that the anger of Heaven pointed to war, the republicans, one and all, laughed at him. John Adams got over this folly, and in his latter days made every exertion to leave the nation at peace; he repented, and left us in peace. Thomas Jefferson was a good man when he came into office. But he had never been a politician, nor a big merchant; he had never been practically conversant with commercial money matters. He was a Virginia gentleman; and Virginia gentlemen, for a long time, seeing the trade of their country carried on by those poor Scotchmen who were set out on hire, by the London merchants, under a prohibition which did not permit them to keep good company, or even to marry in America. Being possessed also of the aristocratic notions which filled the heads of European nobility, that a merchant and all kinds of mercantile business are beneath the notice of a gentleman; it was next to impossible that Mr. Jefferson could have any practical or correct ideas of commerce — he had read abundance on commerce, on trade, and on manufactures; and without practical knowledge, he erroneously thought he could weave out fine theories, which might be brought into practice. The democrats of America have too long allowed this fellow-man with less experimental knowledge than most of themselves, to think for them. When he cries down commerce and tells them to rely upon their own manufactures, they forget that he was the man who had most zealously asserted that Americans ought to keep their work-shops in Europe; that whenever they became manufacturers, their liberties would be endangered; and that in proportion as they loved liberty, they must adhere to their agricultural system. Their idolatry for this same man is such, that when he tells them that they must inhibit the exportation of the produce of that agriculture, which he so highly recommended, until they bring two of the most powerful nations on earth at his feet, to implore mercy and pardon, they eagerly lay hold of the opportunity to show their obedience and their faith. While one of those nations laughs at the project, and the other views it as pursued solely to conform to the will of our chief, the measure, hopeless at the outset, is persisted in, merely because the nation is told, embargo or war is their fate, and the man-worshippers believe it.

The embargo is gone; and of course it is not to be settled, whether the idolators are so totally lost to all reason as to follow this war-whoop. Democrats and republicans, and you and I amongst them, cried loudly against war in 1798. We called it folly in the extreme, because we could see nothing to be gained by it; not because there was not sufficient provocation; no; the French had, in violation of an existing treaty, plundered or robbed our fellow-citizens of every vessel they could find afloat; they insulted our ministers of peace; they avowed a determination to put to death every American seaman found in an English armed vessel, although such seamen were pressed; they demanded of us loans and tribute. But you and I painted to ourselves and to our neighbours the horrors of war, its unprofitableness, and its tendency to demoralize the nation. We, it seems, have not changed our sentiments; but others have; and I fear this man-wor-

ship is the cause of that change. War with France and England both, is the present theme. No such thing can be meant. No nation ever waged such a war. This talk is mere nonsense; for it is well known, that the moment we commence war with one nation, the other will grant us all we can ask for, during the continuance of that war; nay they will promise more. It is evident the war party have no idea of hostilities with France, although she has the fewest advantages to hold out to us as an inducement to engage on her side, and although her ruler is least to be trusted. What has become of his plausible treaty with the late King of Spain, by which that Monarch was to become Emperor of the two Americas? Have not all his treaties with the nations of the earth, been either mutilated or disregarded? Besides, France can do us the least harm in case of war. And yet Buonaparte's conduct towards us, and his decrees, are in their nature as provoking as the conduct and orders of England. Indeed over and above all that is threatened by England, Buonaparte says, if one of our vessels should be sailing towards England, (which she must do when leaving our port, even if bound to Germany) or if an English vessel should speak with her, although against the master's will, she is to be forfeited on coming within the reach of his power, by land or by water.

Yes, my dear sir, the threatened war is to be with England. And what is this war for? What can we hope to accomplish by it, even if we enter most heartily into it? Every modern civilized war has had some object professed for its commencement. What shall we declare to be our motive for engaging in a war with England? It is, the freedom of the seas; we must join Buonaparte in contending for this principle. Well, suppose we should, after seven years warfare, after having expended one hundred and fifty millions of dollars, and got ourselves one hundred millions more in debt, succeed in obliging England to yield the trident—what security have we that Buonaparte will permit us to enjoy any share of it? what ground have we for believing that he will treat us better than he has treated Spain, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, the United Netherlands, or any of those nations to whom he has promised freedom on the land? If we were to succeed in obtaining, in concert with Buonaparte, what he calls the liberty of the seas, we should just put it in his power to enslave us. We deserve his hatred more than any other nation; because, by showing to the world that a republican government can exist, we give the lie to that declaration, the pretext on which his usurpation rests; I mean his assertion, that a republican government cannot exist.

Let us assist him in obtaining what he means by the freedom of the seas, and he will enslave us, as he has done all his friends; for by the freedom of the seas he means, "Let me triumph on the ocean as well as on the land." Our safety depends on the shortness of his arm. I do not see any prospect of finishing such a war in a state of greater prosperity than we began it; nor do I believe we can help Buonaparte much, in effecting the conquest of the ocean. We talk of raising 50,000 men, but I believe they are not destined to assist in the conquest of Spain; although we understand that he is to accomplish the liberty of the seas by his success upon the land. No; I suppose we are to operate by sea while he conquers by land. We are to send out our twelve frigates and sloops, together with our gun-boats, to conquer their 1400-ships of war, wherever they are to be found; we are also to send out our privateers to plunder their commerce, and we are to take Canada. The two latter things we can really do. The militia of Vermont can take all that part of Canada worth having, in ten days, whenever the ice shall favour the undertaking by given them a passage to Montreal; and something may be gained by our privateers. But will the possession of the frozen regions of Canada, while the St. Lawrence is always blocked up by ice or a few British vessels, or will the plunder obtained by our privateers on the ocean, compensate for the continual blockade of the Mississippi, the St. Mary's, the Chesapeake, the Delaware, &c.? Will they compensate for the havoc that may be made on our coast, extended some thousands of miles, and which can never be fully prepared for an attack?

I have said enough on this subject to convince you, my dear sir, that I am opposed to the war which this country is threatened by Messrs. Jefferson, Madison and Co. I need not tell you, sir, that I feel as indignant as any person can feel at the injuries inflicted on this nation by G. Britain; nor need I say that there is no man in the nation who would, if we had the power, sooner make the ultimate appeal for satisfaction. But I wish others to look at the injuries we have sustained from France; and I want to pursue the wisest

course which we can adopt under the present circumstances; and that is, to let war alone. When I was a boy, and a man injured or insulted me, I was consoled with the reflection that I should soon be a man myself, and able to take my own part—in the mean time I thought it best to take no notice of it.

We are really led into our present dilemma by the devotion of the republicans to a great national idol. In a few days the mantle will be transferred to Mr. Madison, with all its charms—he will then become the object of adoration.

Since I commenced writing this letter, an essay has appeared in the Monitor, a newspaper set up here (as it is understood) for the express purpose of promoting Mr. Madison's election, and now considered as the echo of his sentiments. In this essay it is contended that the southern States ought to separate themselves from the Northern, declare war against Great-Britain, and instantly form an alliance with Buonaparte. The advantages of such an alliance are pointed out with a degree of zeal and precision that bespeak the production to be no common origin.

For some time past I have really considered the noise of war as a mere outcry to operate upon the British, and in aid of the Embargo, to coerce them into a compliance with our demands. But since the introduction of Mr. Nicholas' resolution, which goes to the granting of letters of marque and reprisal, I am convinced that the "finger" of Messrs. Jefferson, Madison & Co. "points to war" in earnest. I am therefore alarmed. I can never forget the toils, the dangers, the anxieties of a war that gave us all that is valuable—the right of self government, and independence. I can never forget the many difficulties, we had to surmount to keep the people in heart, and to keep alive that spirit which finally produced our success. How often were we asked by the people who supported it. How long is this war to continue? It was a war in which every thing that was dear to us and to our progeny was involved; and we scrupled not to say and to do every thing to cheer and comfort the faint-hearted and depressed. At that time we were defending our homes and our property, as well as our liberty, on our own terra firma. We knew our enemy had three or four thousand miles to come to fight us; and we knew that when we had destroyed one army, it would take them some time to collect and transport another. In that war we had every thing dear to us to gain by success, and nothing but our lives to lose. In the proposed war, all that we could gain, after expending our blood and treasure, would be to wrest the command of the ocean from Britain and to give it to Buonaparte. Can an American wish for such a state of things? I can say, I do not wish it; I say our efforts can be of no avail to effect it; I say, let this nation grow, and she will be able herself (when Buonaparte's ill gotten power shall have vanished away, and the kingdoms of Europe shall have become divided amongst his successors in much the same proportion as he found them) to maintain a formidable attitude. Let this nation increase for 60 years in the manner it has done, and it will possess a population of 50 millions of souls, and an annual revenue of 150 millions of dollars. Our extensive territory is favourable to that industry, economy and manly enterprise, which has made us a respectable nation in the shortest time ever calculated on by the most sanguine philanthropist. Why shall this growth be stopt? Will the people of America be guilty of this suicide because their idol, their oracle has said they must have war or Embargo? They have tried one of his alternatives: They have at an immense expence, by an incalculable sacrifice, weighed the Embargo, and found it wanting in all its healing powers, in all those saving properties which its friends pledged themselves it possessed. Is it not time for the republicans of America to awake from their slumber and shake off the delusion before they find themselves involved in a war from which they cannot extricate themselves without the consent of their enemy, Britain, and their ally, Buonaparte? One nation can make war, but it takes two or more to make peace. If this war should be commenced, it will not last three years before the people will be calling out in town meetings and country meetings for peace; they will be instructing their representatives, to procure them peace, when peace is not in their power. It is now in the power of their representatives to maintain peace; and one word from the people now, would be worth more, than an hundred volumes two or three years hence. War cannot now be constitutionally declared, without the concurrence of a majority of the immediate representatives of the people; but war once declared, cannot be concluded without the consent of the two other branches of government, as well as that of our enemy and our ally.

By this time your mind may be drawn to a question which has often been propounded to me, and as often answered—"What would my friend Lyon have done in the present critical situation of our country and of the world?"—I answer for myself again, I did think and do think it was an audacious thing in Mr. Jefferson to send the treaty negotiated by Messrs. Munroe and Pinckney back to England, without laying it before his constitutional council, the Senate. He would not have thought of doing such a thing, had he not been too sensible of the adoration paid to him. The treaty was as good as could be expected. The American seamen were provided for by an informal arrangement virtually authorized by himself; and as to the note affixed to it, if the Senate had thought proper to ratify the treaty, there might have been a note added to it expressive of their understanding that the object of the British note was considered, so far as concerned Great-Britain to have been complied with, and, so far as concerned this country, a matter for our own special consideration, and to which we should not fail to pay due attention, that in case the note should be considered by Great-Britain as connected with any stipulation in the treaty, then their ratification was not to be considered as complete; and that, otherwise, it might go into operation. This being done, I am confident we should have received a favourable answer, and that every thing, even the affair of the Chesapeake, would have been satisfactorily settled. I know this is only what ought to have been done; yet it points out the course in some measure, which in my opinion ought now to be pursued. I am not to dictate. I have no more claim to confidence in my opinions than others. Although I do not believe we can coerce Great-Britain into a compliance with our measures, I would allow those who wish to try experiments in that way, every reasonable latitude. I would allow them non-importation, non-intercourse and heavy duties. I would allow all our merchant vessels to arm and defend themselves against the pirates of any nation. I would allow them to change their system as often as they pleased; but I would not allow them to involve the nation in an absolute war or a perpetual embargo.

I wish to inquire of my friends in Vermont, who are disposed to think I have changed my sentiments, if they can see any change of principle in this letter? Was I ever in favor of involving this nation in war? No; I most strenuously opposed the war project in '97, '98, and '99—I could do no more. Mr. Jefferson, and all the republicans I acted with at that time, did the same; not for the sake of France—no; it was for the sake of our own country; and for the same reason I am now opposed to a war with England. We had provocation enough to go to war then; we have enough now: I wished to avoid it then; I do no more now. Mr. Jefferson advised an embargo last winter; and a majority of Congress agreed to it. In order to justify themselves, they said there must either be an embargo or war; and now, when the embargo has become hopeless and insupportable, and no nation will declare war against us, it seems as if the administration majority intended to involve us in a war merely to make good their own assertions.

I have already written you a long letter, and have scarcely touched upon the subject which was uppermost in my mind when I first took up the pen; I mean the charge some gentlemen prefer against me, of apostasy. Who has apostatized? When we obtained Louisiana, men calling themselves republicans contended for giving that country a government in all respects resembling that of Spain; they were for driving by military force, all the people from the lands of the Spanish government had given them for the three years preceding and for punishing by fine and imprisonment, all such claimants who should persist in their titles. The bill passed the lower house in the shape I speak of. It was owing to federal votes that those principles were not carried into effect.—The law as it now stands is a disgrace to the nation. For my opposition to this bill, and to the odious principles it contained, I was first denounced. The same principle of wresting from the judiciary their constitutional power, and from the people their property, has often been attempted by the men in power calling themselves republicans. A law now holds a place in the American code to that effect; and Mr. Jefferson has ordered it to be carried into effect by the military power, directly made in the face of a recent and solemn adjudication in the high court of chancery of that country. Republican majorities have often decided, contrary to the old republican doctrines of '97, '98, and '99, on giving up the principle of short grants for salaries to the officers of government; and it is owing to the votes of men called federalists, that the House of Representatives will have it in