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## State Legislature.

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

Friday, December 13,

### DEBATE

On the Address to the President of the United States.

The following speech of Mr. GASTON, of Newbern, was made after considerable debate; and with a view that the Address lie on the table indefinitely and without order.

Mr. Speaker—I very much regret the necessity which compels me to address you. Cheerfully would I have declined trespassing on your attention, if a sense of duty did not forbid me to be silent. I find myself constrained by the most imperious obligations to submit to you a motion different from any yet proposed, calculated to relieve us from the unpleasant embarrassments in which we are involved, and entitled by our rules to a priority of decision.

It will, I hope, sir, be distinctly remembered, that three weeks have now elapsed since the original resolution for addressing the President of the United States was introduced to our notice. At the request either of its author or of its patrons, its consideration has been postponed from day to day, from week to week. Whenever the period arrived which had been assigned for its discussion, some opposite sickness was always occurred either of the mover or of his coadjutors to render a further postponement decent and necessary. Yet this unfortunate indisposition appears not to have prevented their attention to the other business of the session. In common with the rest of mankind, I have been accustomed to consider uniformity and consistency as strong proofs of design, and utterly at variance with accident. It was impossible, therefore for me not to suspect that this procrastination was premeditated; the result of a fixed and concerted plan. For some time I charitably believed that the advocates of the address had become sensible of its impropriety; that the sickness which afflicted them was merely a sickness of the subject; and fondly hoped that after postponing it from day to day, they would at length consent to postpone it forever. I need not say sir, how unfounded, how delusive was this hope. It has been succeeded by an apprehension to which my mind has reluctantly yielded. I now fear—I now believe, that the resolution was postponed because the temper of the house was for a long time, unfavorable to its adoption. It was perceived that their good sense revolted at the terms in which it was couched. It was deemed necessary to procure for passion, the ascendancy over reason; to blow the sparks of faction into a flame; to awaken the dormant animosities of party spirit by taunts and other unwarrantable means, to get together a band of determined followers, who by their blind and well disciplined adherence to their leaders, should alarm the timid, drive away moderation, and enforce a victory. Such means have been used—I know they have been used. An opportunity will now be presented of ascertaining whether they have been used with success. The result of the motion which I shall now submit, will enable us to judge with certainty of the effect of these artifices.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the original resolution and the amendments proposed to it, lie on the table indefinitely, and without order. Upon this motion, sir, I presume it would not be regular to examine either of the propositions with a minute scrutiny. I shall therefore forbear to enlarge on the submissive tone, the supplicating language of the original address—language better calculated for the meridian of Turkey than of America—better suited to the trembling slave who falls prostrate at the feet of his despot, than to the Legislature of a free, sovereign and independent State. I shall not now advert on the fulsome adulation, the whining cant of the amendment proposed by the gentleman from Pasquotank, nor shall I notice its higher claims to distinction, the poetic genius with which it invents facts that have no existence—the calumniating audacity, which attributes to virtuous men, villainous conduct and villainous motives—and the puerile depravity of taste, which mistakes bombast for sublimity. Nor will I now point out all that I do not approve of, in the amendment proposed by my friend from Craven, an amendment which I must admit is infinitely less liable to objections, than either of the other propositions. It shall be my part to keep constantly in view the objects contemplated by them all, and to enquire whether for these objects the President ought to be addressed by this Legislature.

They all have in view the expression of our decided approbation of the whole of Mr. Jef-

erson's public conduct, and particularly of the measures he has taken relative to the unhappy dispute between the United States and Great-Britain.

It is incumbent on those, sir, who recommend a measure, to shew its propriety and expediency. It is particularly incumbent on those who propose an extraordinary measure, to suggest a sufficient cause for its adoption. During the discussion which has already taken place, I have listened to the gentlemen with the most patient attention, to discover, if possible, the reasons on which the propriety of an address is attempted to be supported. Two only have been assigned, and it is not in my power to anticipate others. It has been said that Mr. Jefferson is an illustrious character, and it is fit that we should declare to him the admiration which we entertain of his exalted talents and eminent virtues. It is certainly true that I do not entertain this extravagant admiration which one of the gentlemen has expressed. That the President possesses talents, that he is not without his virtues, it would be uncandid in me to deny. But I am far, very far from believing that they merit the encomiums which have been poured forth with such unsparing profusion. I have seen something to approve, and much to censure during his administration. But it is not necessary to my present purpose, to enter into an investigation of his public conduct. Be it admitted, to give the argument its full force, that he is an illustrious man—that he has rendered his country great services; is the legislature of North-Carolina therefore bound to address him? Carry this mode of reasoning to its proper mark, and whither does it lead us? We are to address Mr. Jefferson because he is illustrious. It must then be our duty to address every illustrious man. Mr. Munroe is said to be on his return home from a most important and delicate negotiation. How he has conducted it, and what is its result, we as yet know not; but if fortunately it should prove that he has behaved with firmness and address, with diligence and zeal, and brought it to a prosperous and honorable issue, shall we not address him also? When members of Congress, secretaries of state, governors of our sister states, gain the splendid appellation of illustrious, will not they too prefer an equally well founded claim to our addresses? If this principle is adopted, I should humbly suggest a more economical mode of carrying it into execution. Instead of the legislature devoting themselves to the agreeable amusement of rounding phrases and polishing sentences that they may steal upon the tympanum of the ear with a musical suavity, let us at once appoint a Laureat who shall compose addresses for all our illustrious characters. We do it at an expense to the people little short of seven hundred dollars a-day. A less salary would induce many an ingenious young man, of fervid fancy and apt talents for panegyric, to manufacture addresses by the wholesale. We should have them in abundance, always ready for use, of every size and every variety of colouring. In this age of economy, I hope this proposition will not be deemed unworthy of attention.

But, sir, another reason has been assigned. We have been told that in consequence of the late outrage committed by a British ship of war on a frigate of the United States, addresses have been poured upon the President from all quarters, fraught with fervid expressions of attachment, and of the most unequivocal approbation of his public conduct. Has North-Carolina been backward on this occasion? Has she been wanting either in declarations of her just resentment at the insult to the nation, or in commendations of the virtues of the President? Is there a corner of the state from which he has not been addressed? Is there a gentleman among the advocates of either of these resolutions, who has not already had an opportunity of joining, who has not actually joined in such an address as was perfectly suited to his feelings and his taste? If the people then have already declared their sentiments, whence arises the necessity of a repetition by us? Must the tale be gain told? Must the musical strain be repeated? Is there a Da-Capo which it is the province of the legislature to perform? And here permit me to observe, that in this state the electors of the President are chosen by the people, not by the legislature. Chosen by the people, responsible to them at another election, there is a propriety in his constituents expressing on suitable occasions and in a suitable manner their approbation or censure of his conduct. But by us he is not chosen—to us he is not responsible.

Here, sir, perhaps I might safely stop. If the reasons assigned for the proposed measure are unfounded, and its propriety can not be made appear, no order should be passed upon

it. But I will proceed further. I will attempt to shew, and I believe it may be done, that for this legislature to vote any address to the President for the objects comprised in the resolution or its amendments, would be an unauthorised departure from their proper business; a precedent likely to be followed by pernicious consequences, & at the present moment peculiarly inexpedient. It is a fundamental principle of our government, that all power is originally derived from the people, and that the exercise of any authority not delegated by them, is a violation of their rights, an odious usurpation. Our grant, though extensive, is sufficiently specific. To us is delegated the legislative authority over the state of North-Carolina, and the power of appointing its principal officers. Within this province let us confine ourselves—It affords ample scope for the exercise of our best talents. The moment we step beyond its bounds, we are lost in infinity—we are unable to say thus far we shall go and no farther. The federal constitution adds to our duties and to our powers the obligation of appointing senators to Congress, and of directing the mode in which electors of President and Vice-President shall be chosen. Whence then comes the prerogative we are about to assume of sitting in judgment on the conduct of the supreme executive of the union? Where is the clause in our state constitution, or in the federal compact, which invests us with this privilege? Can it by any species of approved logic be inferred from the nature of this compact? Sir, the government of the union is not like the Lilliputian tie, by which the people of America were once connected, a mere confederacy of states, but to most purposes a national government. By the people not by the states, was it ordained and established. It was to secure their liberty, to provide for their defence, to insure their tranquility, to establish justice among them, and to unite them more perfectly, that it was framed and ratified. Its objects are national—its revenue is national—its public force is national.

But if this idea be incorrect, and the legislature of North-Carolina be authorised as a constituent part of the union to sit in judgment on the conduct of the national executive, but a little reflection is necessary to shew that this right should be exercised only in cases of great emergency. The precedent we are about to make is fraught with danger.—If we are to address the President for the purpose of expressing to him our sentiments on his conduct, I presume we are to express the sentiments we entertain, whether favorable or unfavorable. If we have the right to approve, we must also have the right to disapprove. The privileges of the other state legislatures are co-extensive with ours. Let the practice of addressing be sanctioned; let it grow into frequent usage, (and every precedent carries another in its train) and the period is not distant when we shall see the legislature of one state arrayed against the legislature of another; one approving, the other censuring; one commending with injudicious zeal, the other reprobating with passionate violence;—one pledging decisive support, the other menacing determined resistance. The people of each state will take a part with their legislature; the most dreadful animosities will follow these dissensions; the operations of the general government will be embarrassed and their councils distracted; the bands of union will be weakened—a dis-severance of the empire, universal confusion, civil wars complete the catastrophe. As we regard our own interests and those of our posterity; as we love our country and view the federal compact as the ark of its safety, let us not adopt a practice so teeming with mischief, till necessity permit us not to decline it.

There are, sir, peculiar reasons which render the adoption of any of the proposed addresses highly inexpedient. We are called on in all of them to declare our unequivocal approbation of the measures which have been taken by the President in relation to our unhappy misunderstanding with Great-Britain. Will some gentleman be good enough to inform us what these measures are? It is understood that soon after the disgraceful outrage off the Capes of Virginia, that dispatches were sent from the executive to Mr. Munroe, and it is further understood that these dispatches contained instructions as to the nature of the reparation demanded on our part. But who will inform us, who can inform us what these instructions were? Who can tell us whether they were consistent with the honor, and yet not regardless of the interests of our country? That they were spirited, yet not blustering, dignified, yet not imprudent? Whether they expressed the sentiments of an insulted, yet not enraged nation—of a calm valour that fears

no danger necessarily incurred in the vindication of its rights, and not of an insolent temerity that may irritate, may inflame, but will never obtain atonement, and will evaporate when atonement is refused? Was the requisition of reparation for the outrage made a distinct object, or was it blended with the various subjects of the negotiation so long in train between the two countries? Is there any one who can communicate this desired intelligence? No Sir—All is yet a mystery, a profound state secret. And are we to declare our approbation of measures of which we know nothing? Dare we give our sanction, and pledge that of our constituents to what both they and we are utterly ignorant of? I hope for the honor of the legislature and the state we will forbear this premature anticipated approbation.

If the emergency be such as to justify a departure from our proper business and to demand of us a declaration of our confidence in the general government, it ought to be made in such terms that no honest man, no American, can refuse to join in it. Could it have been expected that either of the proposed addresses would receive this united support? Could it be believed that a portion of this house, who if not numerous, are respectable, are not influential, are honest, if prejudiced, are not deficient in intelligence, would belie their avowed opinions, abandon their fixed principles and incur the stigma of disingenuousness by concurring in an address which commends in toto Mr. Jefferson's administration? Can it be wise, can it be expedient in this national crisis to throw amongst us the firebrand of discord, to awaken those animosities which it was hoped by every friend to his country were forever buried?—shall we add to the dissensions which have agitated the legislature on the subject of the judiciary system, those more violent dissensions which arise from national politics? The session approaches to its close, and we have yet done nothing. We have wasted much of our time, let us waste no more—let us apply ourselves to the discharge of our proper duties. Much has been expected of us; much ought to be done by us; there remain but a few days to do it in. I fear that, however industrious we may be, on our return home we shall render but a beggarly account to those who sent us here. In the work of the ritual we shall be compelled to acknowledge that we have left undone the things which we ought to have done. I trust we shall not vote an address that we may be enabled to add we have done the things which we ought not to have done.

These observations, sir, come from one who belongs to the proscribed sect of Federalists. This circumstance alone may be with some a sufficient reason why they should be disregarded. Already has the gentleman from Pasquotank admonished the house in classical language, to beware of those Greeks who bring them presents. To these, and such as these I do not address myself. These and such as these it would have been madness to entertain a hope of convincing. They are welcome, perfectly welcome, to their mean jealousies and illiberal suspicions. Let no man envy them their enjoyment. It is to those whose minds are not cased with prejudice, whose understandings are not impervious to truth, who admit that some good may come out of Nazareth that my remarks are directed. They will not consider whether the man entertains heretical or orthodox tenets. They will reflect whether his positions be well founded, his inferences correctly deduced. If his arguments have weight, they will be attended to; if they have not, let them be disregarded.

\* In the original address was contained this sentence: "The General Assembly beg leave to solicit you to permit your name to be held up as a candidate at the next presidential election."

† In the amendment here alluded to, it was declared "that the safety of the nation was endangered by the machinations of a party who seek to subvert because they cannot direct the government." The phrase was afterwards altered as it appears in our last number.

After the motion of Mr. Gaston was rejected, Mr. Porter of Rutherford, moved that the address be referred to a select joint committee, in order that it might be so modified as to meet with the approbation of a greater portion of the members. This motion was also rejected. The question then recurring on the final passage of the address proposed by Mr. Hamilton,

MR. HENDERSON, of Salisbury, made the following speech in opposition. I regret extremely that the resolution which is the subject of debate, was introduced to the consideration of this House. I see no possible good it can answer, and I fear it will excite feelings and rouse passions which I had