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HOUSE OF COMMONS.

STATE OF THE NATION.

Mr. Grey, after ſome introductory matter, ſpoke to the following effect:—"The conduct of the late miniſters is not alone the ſubject I mean to enquire into, though I ſhall defy any man to ſay, that a view of their proceedings—their management of the public revenue—their direction of the war, but particularly their behaviour to the Northern Powers, ought not to be enquired into—that it could not be uſeful towards regulating the conduct of the preſent miniſters to point out the blunders and the criminality of their predeceſſors. We are now at the end of nine years, during which we have been involved in a moſt expenſive and ſanguinary war, with the addition of two hundred and ſeventy millions to our annual debt, and ſeventeen millions to our annual revenue; and about to engage with a new confederacy formed of our old allies, and leagued with our enemy, who with increaſed reſources and extended territory, and more than all with a wiſer adminiſtration, is preparing to attack us: while we, with diminiſhed reſources, and diminiſhed vigor—a ſcarcity approaching to a famine raging in the country—our relation with foreign powers almoſt completely ſubverted, and an adminiſtration in whoſe principles and capacity the public have no confidence, muſt contemplate the proſpect before us with apprehenſion. Do not all theſe circumſtances, combined with the melancholy ſituation of the ſiſter country, demand an enquiry? A right hon. gentleman, whom I now ſee in his place, has frequently declared himſelf ready to enter into a full vindication of the conduct of the war. I hope he will let his explanation be in detail on this occaſion, and not confine himſelf to the hackneyed boaſt that the war has been triumphant and ſucceſsful, &c. This leads me to conſider what is the evidence of ſucceſs in war:—the principal object of war is to procure a ſafe and honorable peace—will any man ſay that ſuch a peace is now within the reach of miniſters? In order to form ſome eſtimate of the conduct of the war, and the late miniſters, let us compare our ſituation now with what it was at the commencement of the war—let us compare it with that of France—and let us compare the peace which can be had, with what was attainable when the overtures of Bonaparte were rejected. I call upon the houſe not to be influenced by a diſplay of perſuaded victories, but to conſider the general reſult, and I will aſk them if ſuch has been the conſequence of victories, what would have followed from defeat? Thoſe brilliant naval victories, ſo much the theme of juſt panegyric, have not been productive of ſolid advantages to the country, for they have not tended to accelerate the return of peace, but rather encouraged the miniſters to proſecute hoſtilities with augmented fury. We engaged in the war to prevent the aggrandizement of France, and how have we ſucceeded? The power and the dominions of France have been enlarged beyond the hope of her moſt ſanguine friends. We engaged in the war in order to put down the principles of what is called Jacobiniſm, and I believe ſome gentlemen ſupported it with that view. But that object has completely failed, as indeed have all the objects, avowed or implied, with which it ſet out. Thoſe failures I conceive principally to have ariſen from the imprudent manner in which the war has been conducted—the powerful army committed to the direction of miniſters, which might have been employed with effect on the Continent, was divided and ſent on ill-judged expeditions to the Eaſt and Weſt Indies, there the climate was more fatal than the enemy: and while thoſe forces were employed in remote countries—remote indeed from the proper ſcene, and the original object of the war—France had the opportunity of laying the Continent at her feet. Formerly had miniſters availed themſelves of the opportunity, we might have made peace with France, and obtained from her ſome valuable colonies; and I have no heſitation in ſaying, perſuaded her to evacuate the greater part of the territories ſhe had then acquired—but the opportunity is gone, and I am led to think the preſent miniſters would not be diſinclined to make peace on the terms of leaving France in poſſeſſion of a dominion more extended and powerful than the wideſt dreams of Louis the XIVth could ever have aſpired to, and alſo of ſurrendering to her the chief of the acquiſitions we have made during the war. Such is the ſtate to which miſguided councils and incapable war miniſters have reduced us. That all the objects of the war have been loſt, I ſhall prove in detail, ſhould the houſe go into committee. From the Texel to the Adriatic not a port is open to us; every coaſt on which our troops have landed, have witneſſed the diſgrace of our arms, from the retreat of Dunkirk and the evacuation of Corſica to that wicked expedition to Quiberon, which no human mind can reflect on without horror. On thoſe occurrences I ſhall not dwell at preſent. I ſhall confine myſelf to more recent operations. About four years ago the miniſters made a requiſition of 100,000 men to defend the country from invaſion: they were raiſed almoſt in an inſtant, and there happened to be no occaſion for them in England. The miniſter then receiving no improvement from experience, deviſed the Quixotic expedition to Holland, in which a great part of that defenſive force was employed; and the manner in which they were conducted, the country will recollect with regret and indignation. An enquiry was applied for on that occaſion and refuſed; but if my motion is acceded to, it ſhall be among the firſt to be inveſtigated, and certainly it claims the firſt attention. A formidable Britiſh army, with a large auxiliary force, after ſeveral victories, ſtipulating with a French army much inferior in number, for permiſſion to retreat. Either the original plan, or the manner in which it was executed, deſerves the higheſt cenſure. I ſhall not pronounce which ought to be blamed, but certainly it loudly calls for enquiry. Of the ſupplementary militia, the right hon. gentleman oppoſite to me aſſerted that only 800 men were loſt. If he perſiſts in that aſſertion, I ſhould aſk him what is become of the remainder of that body, or why have they not been employed againſt the enemy? And, I contend, a force ſo conſiderable and better appointed, no Engliſh miniſtry ever had at their diſpoſal. In December 1799, Buonaparte made his overtures to negociate with this country, which miniſters ſo contemptuouſly rejected; and in juſtification of their conduct, they told us, that the armies of France were diſorganized, and their finances in confuſion—that our allies were ſo faithful it would be baſe to deſert them, that they were fluſhed with ſucceſs, and invigorated in reſources—nothing being neceſſary but our cordial co-operation to enſure a complete ſucceſs, and to terminate the war immediately. Let the late miniſter then come forward and explain why they ſo dreadfully deceived the public and this houſe—Why they gave ſuch poſitive aſſurances, without even calculating on the chances of war. But I am perſuaded that had they judiciouſly employed the military force under General Abercrombie, they might have poſtponed the reduction of the emperor. Had that force which too late appeared before Genoa, been landed time enough to join the Auſtrian army, the fate of the battle of Marengo might have been very different. When miniſters found they were rather late to attack France, they ventured on Spain, and hence we come to the diſgraceful attack on Cadiz; and certainly any miniſters that could be capable of planning an attack upon a garriſon, ſuffering as Cadiz then was, under the ſevere inflictions of Providence, if they had any knowledge of it, would deſerve the execration of all mankind. Such has been the military career of the late miniſters—ſuch the unfortunate and unſucceſsful manner in which they have managed the war—with all the means they deſire, or the country could grant, a force of not leſs than 168,000 rank and file, excluſive of the troops of the Eaſt India company and thoſe of the Iriſh eſtabliſhment. When the military glory of England was carried to the higheſt pitch of fame, during the reign of Queen Anne, or when the battle of Minden was obtained, Great Britain poſſeſſed not half that number. Laſt year miniſters reckoned confidently on the diſſolution of the French army, but ability, activity, vigor, and enterprize will collect an army, will create reſources, when little minds would ſink into dejection and deſpondency, this the great genius of Buonaparte has proved. Will the admirers of the late adminiſtration compare them with that extraordinary ſtateſman and warrior?—they had abundance of money, a formidable army, a nation tranquil and obedient to the laws—he had quite the contrary in every reſpect, and yet he has ſubdued them in the field and in the cabinet—he has given ſecurity to the French nation, and tranquility to the French people. Why did miniſters ſuffer that ſeaſon for action to paſs by when they repreſented the French army as weak and diſorganized, or why if they did not believe them ſo, ſhould they deceive this Houſe? This particularly calls for enquiry. I ſhall not purſue this ſubject farther, but haſten to matters more preſſing. I beg the houſe to contraſt the conduct of the late miniſters, when in high and lofty ſtrains they refuſed to treat with M. Chauvelin, and diſmiſſed him with contempt, with their recent ſolicitations to M. Otto to remain here. Here was a change!—When miniſters had it in their power to confine France within her ancient limits they refuſed peace. Wiſe men reflecting on the impolicy of their former conduct, would be forward to ſeize any opportunity that might afterwards occur of repairing it. Such opportunities did offer to miniſters, even after they had full means of aſcertaining that it was impoſſible to dictate a government to an armed nation. Still truſting to an alliance which had no firm bond of union, becauſe it had no common intereſt in view, they continued to perſevere in the war, in contempt of experience, and in defiance of ſound political wiſdom. I ſhall not, however, urge theſe topics as a ground for enquiry, becauſe I am aware of a plea in bar, the houſe has ſanctioned theſe proceedings; but the houſe, when it voted the addreſs of approbation on the rejection of Buonaparte's overtures, at leaſt many members declared they gave their vote from a confidence in miniſters. The fatal conſequences of that vote ſhould convince thoſe gentlemen of the propriety of examining that affair fully. The motion I propoſe to ſubmit will give them an opportunity for ample inveſtigation, as the whole of that caſe has not been yet developed. The houſe at that time received the moſt ſolemn pledge from the miniſter, that the allies were indiſſolubly connected. I call upon the right hon. gentlemen oppoſite me to account for that aſſertion. Had he then no reaſon to ſuſpect the attachment of the Emperor Paul. Had he no ground to apprehend the northern confederacy? Had he nothing to plead but a want of foreſight—ſuch, I contend, as would diſqualify any miniſter from ever aſſuming the character of a ſtateſman? There were ample grounds to form a judgment of the deſigns of the Ruſſian monarch, from the departure of his army from Italy, and from what followed the failures in Holland. There were ſteps taken long ſince by the Northern Powers, to maintain the right now in diſpute, particularly by Sweden. The captain of the convoy which was captured by us, was ſentenced to death for ſurrendering, and was only reſpited at the place of execution. With ſuch evidence before them of the deſigns of Ruſſia, and the other Northern Powers why ſhould they reject the overtures of Bonaparte? Does this alone demand enquiry? I approved the conduct of the miniſters laſt ſummer in refuſing Bonaparte a naval armiſtice, but I do not approve of their policy when he afterwards propoſed a ſeparate negociation, not to accept of it. They had no obligations of good faith to their allies then to reſtrain them: The convention, after the battle of Marengo, and that of Hohenlinden, completely ſet aſide any pretext of that nature. The next object for our enquiry which preſents itſelf is, the Northern Confederacy, with the cauſes which have produced it. With reſpect to the right of neutral bottoms making neutral property, it ſtrikes me as very obvious that this country would profit by allowing this right more than any other nation in Europe, becauſe it is clear that the country which has moſt trade, muſt have the greateſt intereſt in protecting it. At this moment, I underſtand, we carry on a commerce with France in neutral bottoms; and perhaps it will be particularly for our advantage to preſerve this communication undiſturbed, for it, as is more than probable, if the French government ſhould contrive to ſhut out our ſhipping from all the European ports, we might be enabled to carry on our trade with the continent through the medium of France herſelf. So much for the policy of the right, ſo as to regard us: but then as to the prudence of aſſerting it at this particular time, I am decidedly againſt it. If we ſhould even ſucceed in forcing the Northern Powers to give up this right to us now, we could not ſecure it; it will at all times be a mere queſtion of power. Therefore I would prefer the policy dictated by the treaty of 1780, to that purſued by miniſters at preſent. We are told, indeed, if we abandon this right now, we may as well order our ſhips to be burnt: A more extravagant abſurdity never fell from the lips of man; that privilege was granted to Holland in 1674, yet during the laſt century our navy has flouriſhed beyond example. It was alſo allowed to France, and confirmed to them by the treaty of 1786. Therefore no ſuch dangerous conſequences as are apprehended can ariſe from the admiſſion of the right of neutral nations to trade with the enemy, to the fulleſt extent; certainly not by any means, ſo much as by the aſſertion of that right at preſent. The notes of Lord Grenville and Lord Carysfort attempt to maintain that the treaty of the Empreſs of Ruſſia recognized this right: a treaty which, in fact, had nothing to do with it. That was an act of violence independent of all right, and without even a reference to the law of nations. The very circumſtance would entitle the houſe to go into an enquiry. If it is incumbent on us to aſſert this right, why not proceed againſt Pruſſia? The affair of the ſeizure of Cuxhaven, and the trick of making the timid citizens of Hamburgh purchaſe the ſhip, and to reſtore her to his Pruſſian majeſty to appeaſe his wrath, was beneath the magnanimity of a great nation. Pruſſia is alſo a party of the armed neutrality; why not proceed againſt him as againſt Sweden and Denmark? The conduct of miniſters on this occaſion, puts me in mind of a ſtory told of a gentleman who ſubmitted patiently to be kicked by a noble lord, and in a few days afterwards, this gentleman who had ſo ſubmitted, kicked another gentleman down ſtairs. The nobleman being preſent, aſked him how he could act ſo inconſiſtently with his former conduct to him, he anſwered, "You and I, my lord, know whom we kick." Juſt ſo the miniſters of this country can go forward to kick Sweden and Denmark, but they can brook any inſult from Pruſſia. I hope on all theſe grounds the houſe will aſſent to the enquiry. Let the houſe conſider the ſtate in which miniſters have left the country on their retirement. They may perhaps ſay, in their accuſtomed ſtyle of gaſconade, that the country is proſperous; but aſk the manufacturers of Yorkſhire and Warwickſhire is the country proſperous? Put the queſtion to the periſhing inhabitants of Weſtminſter. There are petitions at preſent on your table from 21 townſhips of Yorkſhire, praying relief from the poor rates. In one of thoſe petitions it appears, that where they paid only 522l. per ann. before the commencement of the war, they paid in 1800, 2,445l. in the laſt quarter at the rate of 2,000l. The families inhabiting this townſhip are 818; 252 are receiving the poor rates, and 242 are exempted from paying them on account of