IMPERIAL PARLIAMENT.

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

MAY 18.

The chancellor of the exchequer moved that the papers relative to the negociation ſhould be laid on the table.

Mr. Grey moved for the papers neceſſary to ſhew that armaments were going on in the ports of France and Holland at the time of the king's firſt meſſage, calculated to inſpire fear of an invaſion.

Mr. Addington ſaid theſe parts were of a ſecret nature, and could not be produced without injury to his majeſty's ſervice.—Adjourned.

MAY 19.

Mr. Grey, in conſequence of the refuſal of the right honorable gentleman oppoſite (the chancellor of the exchequer) to anſwer a queſtion which he put to him yeſterday, in a manner in which he might have anſwered it, without any violation of his duty, at the ſame time that it would be affording great convenience to the houſe, roſe to renew his motion of laſt night. He was not ſorry for the delay, as it had given him an opportunity of looking over the papers that had been preſented, and of ſeeing, though he could not pretend to have examined them with perfect accuracy, that there were many points in them on which it was his duty to call for farther information; and this information was ſo neceſſary that he thought much argument would not be required to induce the houſe to command it. He ſhould therefore abſtain from all argument that could tend to prejudice the general queſtion to be diſcuſſed next Monday. The only thing on which he ſhould commit himſelf was, by ſtating, that on the moſt ſtriking points, thoſe points which are ſtrongly ſtated and clearly made out by miniſters, as affording the beſt and moſt juſtifiable grounds of war, no information at all was given, or at leaſt very little. The firſt point he ſhould notice, was, the violence ſtated to be offered to his majeſty's veſſels, without proper redreſs or complaint being made. If any thing could be a ſatisfactory cauſe for war, this was certainly the moſt ſatisfactory; and the houſe would recollect with what unanimity it had ſanctioned and ſupported the meaſures taken by government, on the ſame principle, with reſpect to Nootka Sound. This point, however, which it was of ſo much importance to have made out clearly, was but ſlightly and incidentally mentioned in the papers preſented. He ſhould therefore move, in the firſt inſtance, that there be laid before the houſe copies of all papers relative to repreſentations of violence offered to his majeſty's ſhips and veſſels made to the French government from the 1ſt March, 1802, to the 1ſt March, 1803, together with the anſwers thereto. The next point he ſhould notice was the appointment of perſons in the deſcription of commercial agents, but whoſe real character together with the inſtructions given to them, gave reaſon to think that their miſſion was of a hoſtile and treacherous nature. This was alſo a great point in the juſtification; but he could find in the papers preſented no particular ſtatement of repreſentation made, and ſatisfaction refuſed. He ſhould, therefore, move for copies of all repreſentations relative to the perſons appointed as commercial agents from France in the ports of Great Britain and Ireland, together with the anſwers to the ſame. There was alſo mentioned in the papers preſented, a paper directed to a perſon of the name of Fauvelet, at Dublin, directing him to procure the ſoundings of the harbor. In order to form an accurate judgment of this matter, the time ſhould be particularly ſpecified, that the houſe ſhould be clear as to what, if clearly eſtabliſhed was a more juſt cauſe of complaint, and if explanation was refuſed, on complaint, was a juſt cauſe of war. He therefore moved, for the dates of the inſtructions of Talleyrand to Fauvelet, and the anſwers of Talleyrand, ſpecifying the dates. The next matter related to the French troops in Holland, which appeared to have been taken up rather late as a ground of complaint. He ſhould move for repreſentations on this ſubject, previous to the 8th of March laſt, together with the anſwers. He came next to the ſubject of the conſul's expreſſions to the legiſlative body on the 22d of February, and ſhould move for copies of all repreſentations thereupon, together with the anſwers. He next came to Switzerland; for it appeared now, that miniſters had taken ſome ſteps about that country. He ſhould move for a copy of the note verbale preſented to M. Otto, relative to Switzerland, on the 10th October, 1802, together with the anſwer thereto, if any. In the next point, dates and times were extremely important. It was known that orders were ſent out to evacuate the Cape, according to the treaty of Amiens: It was known that in October orders were ſent out to retain poſſeſſion of it, contrary to that treaty, and that contrary orders were ſince then ſent out, in conſequence of which the Cape was evacuated. He ſhould therefore, move for copies of all orders relative to the Cape of Good-Hope, with the dates. As the power of France and its great increaſe were ſtated in the declaration as a cauſe for departing from the treaty of Amiens, till our power ſhould receive ſome addition to maintain the relative ſituation, it was neceſſary, that if France made any aſſignment of territory, which was ſo far a diminution of her power, parliament ſhould be acquainted with it. In this view, he would move for copies of all papers relative to the ceſſion of Louiſiana by France to America; if that important and beneficial ceſſion had really been made. Another gentleman had given notice of a motion for papers relative to the annexation of Piedmont and the iſland of Elba; he therefore ſhould not touch upon them. Having ſaid this much, in addition, he came now to the immediate matter of his notice, which was the ſubſtance of all intelligence relative to armaments in the ports of France and Holland. His majeſjeſty's meſſage turned on two points, the exiſting diſcuſſion and the military preparations. It was important, therefore, to know the truth of the exiſtence of the armaments, and afterwards their nature and amount. On this point there was no information before the houſe, and France denied the fact. The French government aſſerted, that there was not a ſingle ſhip of the line in thoſe ports; that there were two frigates in the ports of Holland, and only three corvettes in the road of Dunkirk. The houſe had therefore to direct its judgment, no proof on one ſide, and a denial on the other; unleſs, indeed, the right honorable gentleman would make a diſtinguiſhment between military and naval preparations, with the ſame ingenuity with which he diſtinguiſhed between ſhips ready for ſea and ſhips manned. He diſclaimed, for the noble lord at the head of the admiralty, ſuch paltry ſubterfuges, as that when the public was taught to expect a fleet of 50 ſail, it was to be afterwards inſulted, by being told nothing was meant but 50 hulks. He loved and admired the noble lord at the head of the admiralty, but he had no heſitation in ſaying, that if he had not in every ſea a force ſuperior to any thing that was to encounter it, he deſerved the ſeereſt puniſhment. But he did not fear the teſt; and as he could not conceive how ſhips could be ready for ſea without being manned, ſo neither could he underſtand how ſoldiers, without the means of conveying them to any part of our territory, could be dreaded as invaders. He ſhould, therefore, move for the ſubſtance of all information relative to the force in thoſe ports. He knew the bar that would be ſet up againſt him, that it would be dangerous to take any ſteps that could tend to the diſcovery of the ſecret channels by which information was obtained. He was, however, prepared with precedents from the journals, of the ſubſtance of information being commanded and produced, merely concealing the names of perſons. There was one caſe in 1756, when an addreſs was voted for information relative to the force in Toulon for the invaſion of Minorca. Similar orders had been made in 1782, for information concerning the movements of the Spaniſh fleets in Cadiz and Ferrol; and the force that remained in Breſt after admiral Darby ſailed in 1781. He put it to the noble lord, whether there was not equal neceſſity for information now, and whether it would not be a ſufficient ſecurity for the channels by which the information was derived, if the names of the perſons were ſuppreſſed? He ſhould, therefore, move for the ſubſtance of all information relative to armaments in the ports of France and Holland, on the 3d of March, 1803.

Lord Hawkeſbury hoped that although the honorable gentleman's motions were to be put ſingly, he ſhould be allowed to make a few obſervations on them collectively, without meaning to prejudice the general queſtion. And firſt there was one obſervation which it was material to lay before the houſe. If the honorable gentleman ſuppoſed, on reviewing the declarations, that many of the cauſes ſtated were not ſingly ſufficient ground for war, it was not the policy of the government to make it appear that war was reſolved upon on this fact or the other. There were a number of facts, of which ſome were, perhaps, ſingly, ſufficient ground for war; others, which though not ſufficient grounds in themſelves, yet when put together, were not leſs material than the greater facts, as affording evidence of the hoſtile intention. The houſe would bear in mind that the ſtatement was deſigned to ſhew the general peaceable conduct of the country, while the conduct of France gives the ſtrongeſt evidence of a hoſtile mind towards this country. It was fit that this ſhould be underſtood generally, before he came to particulars. The hon. gentleman ſtated too largely when he called for copies of repreſentations by ambaſſadors, and anſwers given or refuſed, in his firſt motion. The honorable gentleman ſtated that violence had been offered and that ſatisfaction had been refuſed. The fact was, that no ſatisfactory anſwer had been given, and there was ſome difference between that and an abſolute refuſal. The honorable gentleman was miſtaken if he thought there was no evidence of thoſe facts, for lord Whitworth had ſtated them, and had not been contradicted. He had no objection to this motion, for it was his wiſh to give every infomation that could be given with propriety. With regard to the ſecond motion, concerning the commercial agents, the honorable gentleman had greatly exaggerated the matter on one ſide, and gone beyond what the complaint would bear out. The complaint of his majeſty's government was this, that when no commercial regulation ſubſiſted between this country and France, a ſpecies of agents were ſent into this country, who were not recognized or received in any other country not connected with France by a commercial treaty. The circumſtance was ſtated as ſuſpicious, and likely to cover the reſidence of perſons improper to be received in this country. His majeſty's miniſters therefore adviſed that they ſhould be withdrawn, and they were ſo, with the exception of one, who was ſent away from the iſland of Jerſey: others had not gone to their deſtination. As to any written repreſentation, he was not clear whether there was any on this ſubject. With reſpect to any remonſtrance on the expreſſions in the legiſlative body, no formal repreſentation had been made upon them, nor did he ſee whether they were capable of that; at the ſame time that they may be conſidered as affording the ſtrongeſt manifeſtation of a hoſtile mind, when the general cauſe of complaint came to be ſtated to the public. With reſpect to Switzerland, the remonſtrance had been made in a *note verbale* to M. Otto, to which no written anſwer was returned by the French government: only an oſtenſible diſpatch was ſhewn by M. Otto, much to the effect of the note to the Batavian miniſter, which appeared in the Moniteur. The ſubſtance of this note was, without ſtating what the French government intended to do, that the independence of the Batavian republic ſhould be reſpected. Whether the ſubſequent acts of the French government correſponded with that, it was for the houſe and the public to judge.

With reſpect to the next queſtion, on which the honorable gentleman called for information, "the evacuation of the Cape-of-Good-Hope," the noble lord would not object to that motion. He was willing, that every document that could throw a light on the ſubject, ſhould be produced. As to the ceſſion of Louiſiana to the Americans, a document had been received on the important ſubject from the very reſpectable gentleman who repreſented the American government, and he had no objection to produce it: he ſhould, however, obſerve, that miniſters had not come to a knowledge of the fact till after the cloſe of the negociation. Without entering into a diſcuſſion of the negociation, he would ſubmit, whether the conduct obſerved by his majeſty's government might not have contributed to that event. With regard to the continuance of the French troops in Holland, he could ſtate that no repreſentation had taken place on that ſubject. As to the laſt motion of the honorable gentleman, for the ſubſtance of the information received concerning the military preparations in the ports of France and Holland, the noble lord thought it his duty to object to it. He ſhould not pretend to ſay that the houſe of commons could not inſiſt on ſuch information, if ſtrong circumſtances ſhould require it; but he felt it his duty to oppoſe the production of any papers which may be attended with conſiderable inconvenience, by breaking up the channels of communication. That there were conſiderable armaments in France no gentleman could deny, and the papers on the table ſufficiently proved. The armaments in this country were not the public act of his majeſty's government, but of the French government, which had armed with a view to produce an effect on the negociation. In the *expoſe* that government had declared its intention to put the army on the war eſtabliſhmdnt, only a fortnight before his majeſty's meſſage. That declaration was an evidence of the light in which the armaments in Holland ought to be viewed; and he would aſk any gentleman if ſuch a circumſtance would *not* juſtify his majeſty's government in calling out the militia, which could not be done without a meſſage? Under theſe impreſſions, he was confident that both the ſpirit and the terms of the meſſage were borne out, and that the exiſtence of conſiderable armaments in the ports, and a great military force in the interior, warranted precautionary meaſures on our part. He was deſirous to give the houſe every information it could fairly require, but he ſhould firmly oppoſe any communication from which conſiderable inconvenience may ariſe, without any adequate benefit.

Mr. Whitbread was ſenſible that the houſe muſt feel themſelves much indebted to his honorable friend for the motions he had this day brought forward, as they muſt afford to the houſe an opportunity of obtaining more ample and ſatisfactory information reſpecting the great queſtion which was ſo ſoon to come under their conſideration. The honorable gentleman then followed up the arguments urged by his honorable friend (Mr. Grey); he inſiſted that if offenſive expreſſions had been made uſe of by the firſt conſul in his communication to the legiſlative body, miniſters had failed in their duty at the time in not calling for an explanation of thoſe expreſſions. Miniſters had alſo laid much ſtreſs on the miſſion of the commercial agents in the more conſiderable ſea-port towns of the empire, and of the views and projects which they were commiſſioned to proſecute. But the noble lord confeſſed that this cauſe of complaint had been done away; for on a repreſentation of it to general Andreoſſi, thoſe agents who had already arrived were ſent away, and the arrival of thoſe who were preparing to come over was ſuſpended. This, in his mind, was a ſatisfactory explanation upon that point. As to the caſe of Switzerland, the *note verbale* upon that point was communicated both to the miniſters of our government, and to thoſe of the other governments of Europe. But there was another point upon which the houſe muſt undoubtedly be anxious to obtain ſome information. The point he alluded to was, what communications, if any, had taken place ſince the departure of lord Whitworth from Paris, between Mr. Talbot and the French government. In the preſent ſtate of the country, ſurely no information could be more material or more requiſite for the houſe to be in poſſeſſion of before they came to any deciſion on the great queſtion. Now as to the more immediate object of his honorable friend's motion, viz. the obtaining information reſpecting the armaments, their extent, deſtination, &c. &c. ſaid to be carrying on in the ports of France and Holland, he was at a loſs to diſcover what danger could be apprehended from granting ſuch information as was called for, eſpecially in the ſhape in which it was moved for by his honorable friend. His honorable friend called only for the ſubſtance of that information, but it was objected to on the ground of its being dangerous to cut off the ſources of ſuch intelligence. But the houſe would, no doubt, recollect the difference in ſuch caſes between a time of war and a time of peace. In time of war it might be difficult to obtain information, and dangerous even to communicate the ſubſtance of it; but in time of peace, as was ſtated by the right honorable gentleman (the chancellor of the exchequer) in time of profound peace, when acceſs was open to every Engliſhman to viſit what parts of France he thought proper, to inſpect the ports of Boulogne, Dunkirk, Cherburg, &c. &c. how could any objection be made to granting the ſubſtance of any information that might be communicated at ſuch a period? and indeed if any danger was to ariſe to the perſons who made the communication from the ſubſtance of the information being laid before the houſe, would they not be expoſed to that danger from the very fact of that information being alluded to in his majeſty's meſſage? Beſides, miniſters, by the meſſage they brought down from his majeſty, intimated a near and great alarm; and by ſounding this alarm they ſhut the mouth of the houſe, and called on parliament to leave their conduct, under ſuch circumſtances, free and unembarraſſed. They repreſented the preparations in the ports of France and Holland as not intended for colonial purpoſes; and that during a negociation it was proper to take every precaution againſt their being intended for any hoſtile project. They might have in view an invaſion of this country. But in the whole couſe of the negociation, and on the face of the papers laid before the houſe, there was not a ſingle word to prove a meditation of ſuch deſigns. It was a mere aſſertion on the part of miniſters, and that aſſertion was flatly denied by the French government. But miniſters ſay they are reſponſible; if ſo, let them not ſhrink from granting the information called for, and let the houſe go into an examination of their conduct on Monday, with all the evidence before them which can poſſibly be adduced to explain and clear up their conduct.

Lord Caſtlereagh would have wiſhed that no general reaſoning had been reſorted to on the preſent occaſion. The honorable gentleman who had juſt ſat down, had ſtated, that on the face of his majeſty's meſſage, and the face of the papers, there appeared no ground of armaments on the part of this country. If the honorable gentleman had read the papers, he would have found ſufficient reaſons to juſtify the meaſures which his majeſty's miniſters had adopted. The expedition for Louiſiana alone in the port of Helvoetſluys, amounting to not leſs than 6000 troops, though avowedly for colonial deſtination, was ſufficient to induce his majeſty's miniſters to adviſe the crown to make the communication. If gentlemen would enquire, they would be ſatisfied that conſiderable armaments were preparing in other ports. In the converſation of the firſt conſul with lord Whitworth, he declared that if it were an object to him to renew the war he could have taken poſſeſſion of Egypt with the troops deſtined for Louiſiana. Suppoſe armaments were to be made in the ſouthern ports of France, and the firſt conſul ſhould endeavor to follow up his menaces of invaſion, how eaſy would it be for him to throw in ſome troops upon Ireland? Any military man would admit that ſuch an attempt could be moſt ſucceſsfully made either from the weſtern ports, or the ports within the Straits. Two days before the meſſage, a conſiderable expedition ſailed from Breſt for the Eaſt-Indies. Another had been diſpatched from Havre, a ſhort time before for St. Domingo. It was well known alſo, that very conſiderable armaments were preparing in different ports in France; and that circumſtances fully juſtified the precautionary ſteps which miniſters had taken. Thus his majeſty's government was borne out by the armaments in their efforts to provide for the ſecurity of the country. The honorable gentleman (Mr. Whitbread) had ſpoken of the armaments, as ſtated in the meſſage to be avowedly intended for the colonies, and had aſked why miniſters if they apprehended any other diſpoſition, had not demanded and inſiſted on explanation! The meſſage the noble lord admitted had ſo ſtated it; but if the firſt conſul could talk with lord Whitworth of means he poſſeſſed of invading this country, he would put it to the feelings of gentlemen whether it was not the duty of his majeſty's miniſters to place the country in a reſpectable ſtate of defence. The queſtion was now, not not whether miniſters were criminal, but whether it appeared on the face of papers, that there were conſiderable arments in France. As to the complaint that his majeſty's meſſage had not been ſufficiently explicit, he was ſure the houſe would feel the propriety of that circumſtance, and confide in the anxious wiſhes of his majeſty's miniſters to preſerve the peace, in that ſtage of the negociation, by not loading his majeſty's meſſage with more circumſtances than the neceſſity of the caſe required. They had ſtated the broad fact, upon which their policy reſted. As to the other motions his noble friend had ſo ably obſerved upon them, that it would not be neceſſary for him to advert unto them. As to the commercial agents the honorable gentleman ſeemed to think their removal a complete end of the tranaction. If made a ground of war it might be true. But it ſhould be conſidered, with what diſpoſitions, what deſigns, what means they had been ſent, and then he would aſk, if the bare withdrawing them was a ſufficient cauſe of reparation, any diminution of the original intention? The honorable gentleman had deſired to know, if any communication had been made to Mr. Talbot at Paris, after the departure of lord Whitworth. The tranſaction to which the honorable gentleman had alluded had taken place previous to lord Whitworth's leaving Paris. As to the complaint of indiſpoſition on the part of his majeſty's government, to give information, he was ſatisfied the houſe would not be diſpoſed to condemn them. No government had ever undergone a ſeverer ordeal ſince the treaty of Amiens to the preſent hour.—The papers on the table had been carefully ſelected, for the purpoſe of giving the houſe every ſatisfactory information. If any gentleman ſhould deſire more, his majeſty's miniſters were ready to give all that was conſiſtent with their duty and the public intereſt.

Lord Hawkeſbury and Mr. Whitbread explained.

Mr. Windham ſupported the motion of the honorable gentleman who introduced the diſcuſſion with his uſual force and energy. He conceived that one important point of information had been already gained by the diſcuſſion, and that was the declaration of miniſters that no information had been communicated. A good deal of argument had been employed reſpecting thoſe perſons whom, under the character of commercial commiſſioners, the French government had choſen to ſend into this country. It was not enough that remonſtrance had been employed by miniſters, and that in conſequence of theſe remonſtrances they were forced to withdraw. The houſe had a right to know on what grounds they were in the firſt inſtance received in the country, for after they were admitted it was no ſufficient cure for the evils which their appearance might have created, that they ſhould be diſmiſſed from the kingdom. It was a matter of very ſerious conſideration that, in time of peace, a ſet of men had appeared in this country, poſſeſſed of no definite character, but under the pretence of acting as commercial agents in the abſence of any treaty of commerce, acted as ſpies, and employed themſelves in collecting information hereafter to be employed in facilitating any plans of national annoyance. The houſe were entitled to know whether this had ever been a ground of remonſtrance on the part of miniſters, and in what manner theſe remonſtrances had been received by the French government. But, paſſing from this point, the honorable member adverted particularly to the ſubjects of the armaments, as deſcribed in his majeſty's meſſage delivered in March. When peace or war was to be founded on theſe armaments, it was no matter of light conſideration. It had been ſaid by a noble lord (lord Caſtlereagh) that armaments were nothing independent of circumſtances. With this opinion he perfectly coincided. But it was not to be forgotten, that in theſe circumſtances there was nothing of peculiar alarm, independent of armaments. The great queſtion to be conſidered was, whether the armaments were ſuch as might in all caſes be expected to exiſt, extended as the military force of France now was; or whether they were armaments which might be pointed to any ſpecific object, or made the ground of any peculiar alarm? The honorable gentlemen, with great acuteneſs, illuſtrated his argument on this point; he ſaw no reaſonable argument againſt the motion for aſcertaining on what grounds miniſters had ſtated the exiſtence of the military preparations in the ports of Holland and France. The manner in which the motion was made for the production of this information, met his entire approbation. As nothing more than the ſubſtance of the information in the poſſeſſion of miniſters was required, he ſaw no ſolid reaſon for refuſing to accede to the motion. It was abſurd to urge any reaſons drawn from a wiſh of concealing this information. In a time of peace, where there was a conſtant ſucceſſion of travellers, from all the different parts of France and Holland, an affectation of myſterious means of information was ridiculous. Whatever was neceſſary to be known might be diſcloſed to the houſe without any danger. Miniſters had, for a very long period, enveloped the whole of their proceedings in impenetrable myſtery. They at length condeſcended to lay ſome documents before the houſe; but no ſooner did any member advert to a blank in theſe documents, than they took ſhelter under the ſame ſyſtem of myſterious reſponſibility. After the houſe and the country had been ſo long famiſhed for want of knowledge of the proceedings of miniſters, complaint was very natural, when it was attempted to ſatisfy them by ſupplies of information furniſhed in ſo ſcanty and unſatisfactory a manner. After urging ſome ſtrong conſiderations in reply to the laſt ſpeaker, Mr. Windham ſat down, by giving his hearty ſupport to the motion.

The chancellor of the exchequer diſclaimed, on the part of miniſters, every wiſh to conceal any part of their proceedings. It was from a wiſh to have their whole conduct fully and fairly conſidered, that they had not limited the papers to the particular points included in the late negociation, but had referred to all the intercourſe betwixt the two governments ſince the definitive treaty. The right honorable gentleman in the courſe of his obſervation, went over the grounds inſiſted on by two noble lords who preceded him in the debate. He illuſtrated and confirmed their ſtatements. He endeavored to ſhew that the expreſſions of his majeſt's meſſage relative to the armaments in the ports of France and Holland, were ſtrictly juſtified by circumſtances, and that if miniſters had acted in any other way than that which they had purſued, they could not have acted conſiſtently with the honor of their country. In corroboration of his ſtatements, he on ſeveral occaſions referred to the correſpondence betwixt the two governments. The information required on this ſubject could anſwer no uſeful end.