IMPERIAL PARLIAMENT.

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

May 24.

WAR WITH FRANCE.

[CONTINUED.]

Lord Hawkesbury said, that after the indulgence which he had experienced from the house last night, he should be ashamed again to trespass upon their attention, except merely for the purpose of explaining a fact, upon which some degree of misunderstanding might arise, he meant with relation to one of the dispatches with regard to the guarantee of Russia. With regard to this dispatch he wished it to be understood, that even if Russia would accept the military protection of Malta, that would not be considered as a satisfactory adjustment of the differences relative to that island. It was stated that Russia was the only power into whose hands Great-Britain could in fact trust the protection of that island: but was it not stated that if Russia acceded to that proposal, that it would have been perfectly satisfactory to this government. His assertion had been grounded on this circumstance—the refusal of the court of Petersburg to accede to the guarantee, the correspondence which had taken place since the treaty of peace, and the sentiments which had been expressed by the Russian ambassador at this court. He wished also to observe, that the very messenger who had brought count Markoff his instructions to offer his good offices between the two countries had bro't similar instructions to the Russian ambassador at this court. He was not in possession of these instructions in an official manner, so as to be enabled to lay them before the house, but they had been communicated to him, and they did not contain one word that held out the idea that the emperor of Russia was disposed to take upon himself the military protection of Malta. They only contained general expressions of good will, and a desire to the Russian ambassador in this country to become, if it should be necessary, a channel for any explanation that could be carried on between the two countries. The only expressions with regard to Malta in those instructions, so far from holding out the idea of a military protection of Malta, stated that it was not his majesty's desire to accept even of the general guarantee, and that only upon the terms which had been previously mentioned.

Mr. Fox said, that after the long discussion that had taken place, after the very able manner in which the question had been argued on both sides, and particularly after the very full and able investigation of the subject last night by his honorable friend, he should be very unwilling to trouble the house at any length, if he did not feel that it was an absolute duty which he owed to the people of England to endeavor, if possible, to rescue them out of a situation of great danger, and at all events of certain misery, even if the contest in which they were about to engage should be attended with the most brilliant success. But before he entered into the general question, he wished to say a word or two upon the manner in which it had been taken up by different gentlemen. Those who had spoken in favor of the original address had expressed an apparent wish to confine the discussion entirely to the justice of the war, and to treat it as an entirely separate question from the conduct of his majesty's ministers. Now with respect to the justice of the war, it could not, in his opinion, be by any possibility separated from an examination of the conduct of administration, because the question of the justice of the war, might in a very great degree, depend upon the refusal on the part of France to give explanation, satisfaction, or redress, and it would be necessary to know when and in what manner ministers had applied for such explanation and redress, but it was impossible to contend that by voting for the original address, they would not vote their approbation to ministers for their conduct, because the address went to thank his majesty for his uniform efforts to preserve peace, which he could not do until he had more complete proofs of the fact. The honorable gentleman who sat below him, would, perhaps, concur in declaring that ministers had been uniform in their desire to preserve peace, but would they concur in thanking ministers for the whole of their conduct in the negociation? A right honorable gentleman had said, that there was not a word in the amendment to which he was not ready to accede; but that he would vote for the original address, though it contained some passages to which he could not give his consent without a long explanation, and without entering his protest. It was then surely better to vote for the amendment, in which all could codcur, than to vote for the address, which required so much explanation.

Mr. Fox went over the whole ground of the correspondence between the two countries, and made comments on each particular part as he went along, by which he maintaided that it was manifest there was a great deal of shuffling on both sides, between the representatives of the two countries: he disapproved of the demand made by the chief consul of France, that any one member of the house of the Bourbon family should be ordered to quit this country; he had no idea, that under any pretence whatever an independent state was to be called on to deny to any unfortunate or persecuted emigrant, the right of hospitality. He considered the application made to us to abridge the liberty of the press, to be the offspring of the most profound ignorance of our laws and constitution, and a thing deserving only contempt and ridicule. He thought that much too great stress had been laid on several of the expressions of Bonaparte, by the commentaries of lord Whitworth, in his account of the conversation between his lordship and the chief consul; and that the report from memory of a long conversation was necessarily, and at best, a very defective thing; he ridiculed some conclusions that were drawn from the tone and manner of Bonaparte: that he was proud and haughty in talking of an attempt on our coast, and saying that it was an hundred to one that he would be destroyed in the attempt, and that he despaired of accomplishing his end; this, he said, reminded him of the most extravagant passage in the most extravagant work of the most extravagant, though admirable poet, Dryden, who had put into the mouth of one of his characters, speaking to the other—"You shall not dare to be so impudent as to despair." He ridiculed also the idea of supposing that Bonaparte would have been so extremely foolish (unless indeed we supposed him to be fit for Bedlam) as to tell our ambassador of his intention to go so soon to Egypt, if he really had that intention. It was true he had expressed a desire to go there, but certainly no design; but the desire of a person to do a thing was not a ground for war, else we should never have been at peace with the house of Bourbon; nor was the sending a person to Egypt to examine into that place, for that has been often done. As to the commercial commissioners, who came here in disguise to take the soundings of our coasts, he tho't that was a great breach of faith, and they ought to have been arrested, and satisfaction demanded; and if refused, that would have been ground for war; but there was nothing of that kind done. With regard to the general system of aggrandizement, unless it affected us immediately, we had no right to complain of it more than the French had to complain of us for our aggrandizement in India; if they accused us in this respect, by way of retaliation of our railing, he knew of no answer we could make, unless we imitated the lady who was accused of disregard of her virtue in many instances, said, "never before, upon my honor, on this side of the Cape of Good Hope." He ridiculed all the subjects of complaint made by us on these general topics, and maintained that none of them were just cause for war; and insisted, if they had been so, we ought to be at perpetual war with the regular government of the house of Bourbon, and that we ought to have gone to war with Prussia and Russia, for the partition of Poland; an act which notwithstanding all we had yet seen, still kept its pre-eminence in atrocity. In a word he saw no legitimate cause of war in any of these things. The most unjustifiable of all the conduct of Bonaparte on the subject of annexation of territory, was that of his behavior to Holland and to Switzerland, which was certainly most cruel; but he maintained, that we had not acted properly in these particulars.—With regard to the abuse of the one government towards the other, there were but two ways of disposing of that point, either to demand satisfaction, or to pass it over in contempt; neither of which we had followed, besides, the parties in this respect appeared to be pretty nearly on a level. His general blame upon ministers was, that if they had any subject of complaint, they did not specify it and demand satisfaction, and then, if satisfaction was refused, it would be time enough to think of going to war, for insult was no ground for war. It was the refusal of satisfaction for insult, after satisfaction was demanded, which was ground for war. This he applied to the whole of the case of aggravation and insult, as it was insisted upon on the part of our government; and he maintained that we had been deficient in our course in not demanding satisfaction for the insult whenever we met it, instead of waiting for an accumulation of insults, and then to make the total a subject of complaint; he accused both sides of a great deal of hypocrisy on this occasion, and charged us with having gone at last to war upon a sordid principle, that of the possession of Malta, and for which it was improbable we should have any allianees, because the thing in contest was interesting to none but ourselves. The remedy for all this he stated to be that of an appeal to the great monarch, the emperor of Russia, first to become guarantee for Malta, after arbiter between us, and then, if the French should persist in their career of injustice, the probability would be that we should have allies. because the matter in contest would then be generally interesting. He said that this was the only course that could wisely be taken by us. He then proceeded to take a view of the probable effects of war, and painted them in very glowing colors, and took occasion to observe upon the income bill and other taxes, which must be renewed if we go to war: he applied many of his observations to the eloquence of Mr. Pitt, who had recommended this war, and advised the house to be aware of the ruin of their country by the delusive arts of eloquence, on which he expatiated at great length. He observed, that the address stated a fact which but could assent to, namely, that ministers had been sincere in their endeavors to preserve peace, and which no one assented to without qualifying his vote; whereas the amendment stated that which every body admitted to be true; the way therefore to produce unanimity in the house, was to adopt that which every body admitted to be true, instead of proposing that which no body could assent to without qualification; for these, and a prodigious number of reasons, for which we have no room, (for Mr. Fox spoke for near three hours,) he concluded with saying he heartily concurred in the amendment.

The chancellor of the exchequer said, that he never heard with more admiration the talents of the honorable gentleman, nor had greater occasion to lament that the effusions of his great and exalted mind should have been employed for the purpose for which they were then applied. It certainly was not the intention of that honorable gentleman to produce the effect of unhinging and unnerving the house, at a period the most important for the consideration of the most momentous subject that could come before parliament; and he could not help lamenting that the powers of such should have been so employed, and to give encouragement where there ought not to be encouragement given, namely to our enemies; not that it could be so intended, although it might be considered as likely to have such effect. He would put it to the candor of that honorable gentleman's mind, and would ask him upon reflection, whether he thought the language he had used was not likely to accomplish an object, which he could not wish to have accomplished? Whether he did not think, that describing that subject in the manner in which he had described it, was necessary for any good purpose; and whether he thought it fair to make such an appeal as he had done to the feeling of mankind, for the purpose of enlisting them, as it were to fight against their public duty? Such might be the effect of the eloquence of the honorable gentleman that night; but he had a firm reliance on the good sense and fortitude of the people of this country; and he had a perfect conviction that at that moment they felt the danger of their situation, and would not be led away by any artifice or eloquence whatever. He should not follow the honorable gentlemen into a minute detail of this case; he should rest it upon its plain and obvious good sense. Having been one of those who advised his majesty to send to parliament the message on which the address now before the house moved, he was satisfied to rest with the house, the consideration of his motives, and that of his colleagues upon this occasion, and he hoped the house were satisfied that no reluctance had ever been shewn on his part to enter into that discussion: that he had been desirous to have it considered by the house, and that he had frequently expressed his mind to that effect, for that he had said, that he should not shrink from the moment of discussion; but on the contrary, had waited with impatience for the arrival of this moment; that every part of his conduct might be canvassed by the house. He earnestly wished also to obtain, and he trusted he should obtain, the concurrence of the house, in every part of his conduct in this particular. The hope which he entertained that such a discussion would take issue before the house, was now fulfilled. He had hoped it would be the general opinion of the house that night, that his majesty's ministers had been sincere in their conduct, and their endeavors to preserve peace, although the honorable gentleman who spoke last, had said they were not so, and had objected to the address on that account. Now, what were the words of the address in that particular? "That this house entertains a just sense of his majesty's anxious and uniform endeavors to preserve to his people the blessings of peace." Such were the words, and he never expected to hear in that house, that such endeavors for the preservation of peace had not been sincere. He now, however, knew there were many; he wished to God there were not so many, who thought they were not sincere in such endeavors, and there were others who thought that although they were sincere, they had not been wise in their endeavors to preserve peace. He then proceeded to take notice of what had been stated by Mr. Fox by way of comment on the declaration of his majesty on the subject now before the house—on the point of the indemnities—on the subject of the French troops not evacuating Holland—of the subject of Parma and Placentia, and the annexation of Piedmont—of the case of Switzerland, and on the various other topics stated in that declaration. Upon all which topics the hon. gentleman seemed to insist that his majesty's ministers had not performed their duty, inasmuch as they had omitted to make specific remonstrances to France in each of these cases as they occurred, instead of waiting for the accumulation of them all.

Upon this subject, however, he begged leave to say, the honorable gentleman had not done justice to ministers, for representations had been made upon almost every one of these topics. He then proceeded to prove this, by reading from different parts of the correspondence, the instructions which were given to our ministers, Mr. Liston at the Hague, and to lord Whitworth at Paris. He said he should not go over all the grounds of these instructions. With regard, however, to Switzerland, he would observe, as the honorable gentleman had particularly noticed our conduct in that respect, and maintained that we had a right to interfere in the case of Switzerland, because it was the case of the strong overpowering the weak, and justified the conduct of his majesty's ministers in the instructions which they gave to Mr. Moore in that respect—their object was to maintain the independence of Switzerland, and they expressed that object by Mr. Moore, and intended to support the Swiss, until it became impracticable by their being overwhelmed. However, the interference of this country had not been totally useless in that respect, for although our wishes were not accomplished, yet much had been accomplished by our exertions, for he had reason to apprehend that our exertions had been the means of preventing the first consul from declaring himself their first magistrate; this had been effected by the efforts of his majesty's ministers, and it was a gratification to them to find it so. He was convinced of this from the information of those who had an opportunity of observing what passed in Switzerland, and from which he learned that the interposition of his majesty's ministers in that respect had been beneficial to the people of Switzerland. More might have been done, had their disposition been properly supported, and more would have been endeavored by ministers in that case, but it was discovered that there was no corresponding disposition in the other great powers of Europe, to make a common cause with the people of Switzerland.—There were therefore no farther means left in this country for that purpose. The course which he should take would be to shew that the whole of the conduct of the government of France, taken collectively, was manifestly the *animus* to injure and insult this country, and that it was under conviction of this *animus*, that the question of peace or war was properly to be decided. He maintained that all the parts taken collectively, manifested that *animus*. An imputation had been cast on his majesty's ministers, as if they had neglected their duty, in not having demanded satisfaction upon points, as they occurred; but it did appear to the house, that satisfaction had been demanded on each particular case which required it. He then referred to the correspondence in several particulars relating to the report of Sebastiani, from which, he contended, it appeared to be the determination of the French government to interfere with respect to Egypt, and to conduct itself contrary to the express provisions of the treaty of Amiens, which provided for the integrity of the Turkish empire; and to various other parts of the correspondence between lord Whitworth and the French minister, as well as to the long conference therein detailed, as it took place between lord Whitworth and the chief consul himself; and also to what related to Malta in particular, and maintained that it appeared from these extracts, that his majesty's ministers had never omitted any part of their duty, but had with great care and attention endeavored to perform it. Having expatiated upon these topics for a considerable time, he maintained that it appeared in every article that it was the disposition of the French government to avail itself of every opportunity that occurred, to shew its hostile temper, and to manifest a determination of going to war, or of rendering war inevitable; and proceeded to shew that they had made preparations for the purpose, by an augmentation of their forces, for, that it appeared that from the 4th of February to the 4th of March, 1803, an army was to be paid 243 millions of livres, voted for that year; and the charge of the navy was larger in proportion for the same period, amounting to 129 millions of livres. He then went over the material parts of the correspondence, as they applied to the offer that was made for the guarantee of Malta by the emperor of Russia, &c. and alledged the reason why such guarantee did not take place.—He made several comments upon this part of the case, tending to shew it was not the fault of this country that this part of the treaty was not carried into full execution.

The honorable gentleman had said, that he believed the war might yet be avoided: the war could certainly not be avoided, because the war was already begun; but if the emperor of Russia or any other considerable power, should be pleased to interfere, with friendly intentions, and make any proposition of a practicable nature, by which peace may be restored, he was sure there was not any individual in the house, or in this country, who would be more glad to attend to it than himself; and he would go further and say, that he should betray his duty to his soverign and to his country, if he did not endeavor to forward such an understanding, always remembering, that such an object should appear practicable before it should be recommended to the consideration of his majesty, and also consistent with the honor of the crown, and also of advantage to the country; he meant not the apparent advantage in the opinion of some persons, but the real advantages of the people, and to give them the advantages of peace; to give us the prospect of peace. He was not so vain as to talk of a permanent peace; but a real prospect of the real enjoyment of peace. Whenever that proposition should be tho't adviseable to be made, he should feel a great satisfaction in being the instrument of laying it before his majesty, and in advising his majesty to shew that which he had indeed invariably manifested, an inclination to peace, when peace can be obtained with honor, and a repugnance to war, when war was avoidable; but under the present circumstances, he should deceive the country, if he said he saw any thing in the disposition of the French government which warranted such an expectation. We ought therefore to prepare for meeting all the difficulties of an arduous contest. If by any false advice we were to be lulled asleep, or to relax in our endeavors for the preservation of the state, and by which our security was maintained, and leave all our chance to the caprice of fortune, not only should we then not discharge our duty to the country, but the country itself might not then be at any great distance from ruin. He was desirous this should be impressed on the mind of every individual member who did him the honor to attend to him, that he did not, and that he could not ask for support on any thing less than a conviction that he who does support this system, must make up his mind to great sacrifices in a case which required them, and which had been proved to be necessary, as he had stated already, and which had been recommended by the highest force and authority in the house yesterday, (that of Mr. Pitt.) We must provide effectually for our domestic security; many persons, he was aware, must be put to great inconvenience, and they must suffer great deprivations for the purpose of having the country secured against the danger and the hatred with which it was already menaced. He wished to impress upon the house these truths; that the present war was founded on unavoidable necessity, and that there is in his majesty's ministers a sincere disposition to terminate this war whenever it can be terminated with honor; but he was also anxious to impress upon the house, that it must make up its mind to meet our difficulties properly, in the face. The only regret he felt was, that state to which the house was necessarily driven, by the want of unanimity; he would therefore indulge a hope, that the honorable gentleman opposite to him, who had moved the amendment last night (Mr. Grey), would sacrifice a private opinion in this case to the advantages of unanimity.

The honorable gentleman opposite to him, who opened this debate to-night, had well and patriotically said, there was no sacrifice consistent with conscience, which he would not make for the sake of unanimity in this case. He said the same thing, and ministers intreated that no member in the house would feel the slightest expression of approbation on any part of the conduct of ministers either to preserve peace, or to any terms here made. Under these circumstances, what the motive could be for depriving the country of the benefits of unanimity on this most important occasion he could not possibly discover—the difference between the sentiments contained in the address and those in the amendment, in the opinion of any man of plain common sense, was literally nothing. There was no reason for depriving the country of the advantages arising from a general concurrence of sentiment on this occasion. He should therefore entertain a hope the honorable gentleman would examine attentively the words of the address propounded by his noble friend, and also the amendment moved by the honorable gentleman, and then he should leave it to the gentlemen on the other side of the house to see if they could have any ground for resisting the address. With respect to the papers now on the table, she should say nothing of them by way of comment, he should leave them to speak for themselves. He was satisfied they furnished abundant materials for satisfying the house, that the French were pursuing a course of aggrandizement, which was inconsistent with the honor of this country: In a word, the cause we had to sustain was founded on incontrovertible justice, against insult and aggression—a cause which had left to his majesty or parliament no alternative.

Sir L. Parsons spoke in favor of the address and observed, it was highly necessary to check the power and ambition of the first consul.

The Attorney-General assured the house he did not mean to trespass on their attention many minutes; but he could not suffer the eloquence of the honorable gentleman (Mr. Fox) to pass unnoticed, as it was a cloak to sentiments which were calculated to destroy the unanimity of the house. The amendment he did not so much object to, as his speech that accompanied it; the arguments which the honorable member had offered to the house were calculated to do much mischief, as they were founded in ingenuity. He had talked much of the value of the blessings attending peace; the house also knew the value of peace as well as the honorable gentleman, but he would say, that peace could not be valuable to the country, when maintained at the hazard of our ruin, and perhaps the loss of our nation. The honorable gentleman had made an appeal to the feelings of the house with great success, and described the miseries of war with a very animated pencil, but the house was to be directed by wisdom, and not eloquence; let any man look over the papers now on the table relative to the negociation between this country and France, and he was sure it would be immediately acknowledged, that the French wished to destroy the British power. Every person who has considered the subject without prejudice, must see the necessity to check the ambition and overgrown power of the first consul. The honorable gentleman had laid down principles, which would serve Bonaparte, and also furnish him with arguments for the justification of his conduct. Mr. Fox had observed that the war was quite unnecessary, but he thought if ever a war was commenced on an honorable principle, it is the war we are about to enter into, and he hoped there would be but one opinion on the question, that we may be able to stop the alarming increase of a foreign power. The amendment, supported by the honorable gentleman (Mr. Fox) tells us to give our hearty support to the war; but that honorable gentleman's speech went to destroy the loyalty of the people, and his sentiments were quite opposite to the meaning of the amendment. He did not wish, at this late hour, to intrude on the time of the house, otherwise he had materials before him that would convince the house of the immediate necessity to commence a war against a powerful and dangerous enemy.

Mr. Windham said, it was not his intention to trouble the house many minutes, but the arguments offered by Mr. Fox appeared to him as fallacious, and he could not but express his disapprobation of the sentiments delivered by that honorable gentleman. The question before the house was certainly of considerable moment; he could not approve of the honorable gentleman's (Mr. Fox) arguments, if arguments they may be called: that gentleman had told the house that it was his wish to suspend hostilities, in order to see whether the negociation may not be kept open for