

MARYLAND GAZETTE

THURSDAY, MAY 15, 1783.

L O N D O N . HOUSE OF COMMONS. MONDAY, February 17.

R. Thomas Pitt opened the debate in declaring to the house, that it was with a mixture of pain and pleasure that he at length saw the day arrive, so long wished for, which, putting a period to a ruinous war, restored to the British empire the blessings of peace...

Although this latter sentiment will not be so readily adopted as the former; although it is unhappily true, that mankind are more inclined to manifest discontent, than their joy and satisfaction; and, of course, experience has constantly demonstrated, that peace, how ardently soever it may be desired, becomes always unpopular as soon as it is made; nevertheless, apparent to every impartial mind, is, however the loss and gain may be balanced at the close of a war, peace is always a blessing. But two reasons concur, in the first moments, to present it to us on another point of view. If the war has been glorious, and the supposed humiliation of the enemy; if, on the contrary, it has been, like that from which this nation is just beginning to respire, only a series of disasters, our national pride can barely stoop to exact no more. But if we disdain even moderation like this, ought such unfeeling arrogance to prolong the war, till we are not only unable to support it, but even to preserve our being as an independent people? Too deeply impressed with this just reflection, it is not without pain that I undertake the task which has this day fallen to my lot. How reasonably soever my humble abilities may represent the matter, I know how ill that I have to propose will be received; I already anticipate the clamours of prejudice; but it is without passion and common sense, and I submit myself to the candour which distinguishes this honourable house.

When two nations enter into a war, neutral spectators always have some reasons to determine which of them will have the advantage. The complication of interests, the combination of causes, which have succeeded against us, have too well justified the opinion of foreigners, and the fears of our own people, for the confederation of our enemies would at length be found too powerful for the naked, unsupported strength of this nation. These fears have been realized; our enemies have determined their superiority; and by an incontestible truth alone we must be governed in determining whether peace was, or was not necessary.

If gentlemen will repeat here, what has been said of doors, that we might have made a better peace, let them produce the means, and let the most prejudiced minds pronounce on the possibility or impossibility of putting them in execution. Alas, this is a point on which one cannot fix a moment's attention, without uttering a painful sigh at those execrable first steps, which inevitably drew after them every succeeding calamity! That invaluable branch of this empire, which, at the close of last war, extended from Boston's Bay to the gulph of Mexico, at the very beginning of this, was almost confined within the narrow limits of the former French possessions in America. Thus we were no longer that powerful nation, which in twenty years before could have defied a confederacy of Europe. A decline of power announces a diminution of success—it was impossible to recover our lost territories, since the whole nation had determined that America was lost for ever to the British crown. It was in this wilderness of calamities, when we had nothing but future misfortunes in perspective, that our ministers seized a moment of victory, the only moment, perhaps, in which the safety of the nation was practicable, to listen to those terms of peace, which prejudice alone can consider as unfavourable. What must we have done? Answer me this single question; whether it was better to continue the war, than to accept peace, of which the worst that can be said is, that it does not correspond to the wishes of a people accustomed to conquer and elevated by previous successes. Let before any gentleman will answer in the affirmative, let me call their attention to the following sketch of the state of the nation at that time, when his majesty's ministers resolved that peace was indispensable. The papers I shall lay before the house cannot be sufficient, since they contain the report of the committee appointed for this purpose, in order to prepare the grounds for that discussion which must have taken place on this, or some other day, and to convince them of the true state of the public finances. As this enquiry was demanded by myself, my conduct in this respect has been plain and consistent; I have uniformly reported the American war; and I shall now demonstrate, that the pursuit of that war alone has so fatally embarrassed the finances of this country. For this purpose, I shall lay before the house a comparative state of our present situation, and of that before the contest with America. In January, 1776, the amount of the national debt was 123 millions, the annual interest of which was £.4,411,856.

Mr. Pitt then proceeds to shew, that a war of five years cost five millions more than all the wars of the last age, including the splendid and important victories of the duke of Marlborough; and concludes with demonstrating, that the present annual interest of the national debt amounts to £.9,393,137—The civil list expenses, to £.900,000—The expenses of government, in time of peace, to £.3,500,000—Total of annual expense, £.13,793,137, without including the arrearage of the civil list, amounting to £.2,500,000, which, he says, must be paid by some means or other—while the present taxes, all of which must be continued, produce only £.12,500,000.

He proceeds—“These facts, I think, are sufficient to convince this house, that a decree from Heaven, that should have condemned this nation to another year's war, would have, in effect, condemned her to certain destruction: and if I am not deceived in this belief, I think I may assume it as a principle, and of course as a rule for the conduct of parliament, that a peace, such as the ministers have concluded, is an object extremely to be desired. I know that, unhappily, expectations may always be made to the most accurate general observations; I know that certain partial considerations of commerce militate with my general principle; but trade has infinite and prompt resources, which landed property has not; and this property, which constitutes the radical strength of every country, was lessening its value every day. I am not ignorant, that there is a certain description of men, who, without any other motive than the malignant pleasure of finding fault; without any other view than to tease men in office, say among themselves—“Where was the mighty hurry? Why not take the chance of another campaign?” Mighty fine truly! This is the precise language of a mad gambler, who crying out, “One throw more, and the last,” just completes his ruin. If these considerations are just, I flatter myself, the house will turn a deaf ear to the clamours of two sorts of men, equally to be suspected; I mean those who have been, and those who wish to be, ministers. I consider these persons as dealers in the same market, who depreciate the commodities of other people, in order to raise the value of their own. I confess, I am always armed against them both; and if they present themselves only to say, it is a bad peace, I answer, their bare assertion is insignificant. If they offer to prove it, let me ask them, whether they could have made a better? If they say, yes—come, then, say I, tell us how—Here they are at a dead nonplus, and can only return to the watchword of their parties—It is a bad peace!—We shall be able to form an idea of the prejudices of men of this class, by a knowledge of the following fact. I have addressed myself, indirectly, to Mr. Fox, and Lord North, to engage the first not to interrupt the quiet of his country, by examining, in detail, a negotiation, which ought to, and can be judged only in the mass; and advising the second to seize this opportunity of making some reparation to this nation for the errors and calamities of his ill-starred administration, by justifying a treaty, which the miseries of the American war have forced upon her. If, before we proceed to vote upon the question which I shall submit to the house, these two honourable members will answer my first question, and say, they could have made a more advantageous peace, let them do me the favour to determine, whether the prospect of advantage was equal to the hazard of another campaign, and the certain expense of twenty millions sterling.”

He goes on to observe, that the cessions made to France and Spain were of no great importance, and then says—“It is true, that by the treaty with the United States of America, we acknowledge their independence; but all the world knows, that in so doing, we only seem to give them what God and Nature have already put into their hands: and in defining their limits, we still reserve Nova-Scotia and Canada, countries large enough for all the speculations of commerce.”

I pass now to the only article that afflicted, cruelly afflicted me, at the first reading; that, I mean, which relates to the loyalists. There are, however, some observations to be made on this matter. All the individuals, comprehended under the general term of loyalists, are not equally interesting to us. I distinguish them into two classes; one of which is composed of them whom I honour and revere, with whom I would divide my only crown, and my last mouthful of bread; but I detest and abhor the other; I consider them as an impure, corrupted nest of vipers and traitors, as the most abandoned and flagitious scoundrels in the universe; who, by treachery to America, and constant deceit to this nation, have well nigh brought down destruction on both countries. God, who knows my heart, knows how sincerely I wish it were possible to do something more for the first class of them; and God only knows whether such a possibility exists. But I ask, whether to save a handful of deserting subjects, Great-Britain ought to run the hazard of her own ruin?—Whether on their account alone, it can be thought expedient to continue the war? If any gentleman says yes, I would then make two other enquiries—1st, Whether the efforts, necessary to be made, could be proportionate to the object in view? And 2d, Whether, after the utmost exertion, success would be certain or even probable? I do verily think that, even for these unhappy men, matters have taken the most favourable turn they could. Congress is solemnly bound to recommend them to the several states; and we cannot doubt they

will do it with equal zeal and integrity. In short, if parliament testifies any aversion to the treaty with America, it may be remembered, it is the work of parliament itself. And with respect to the preliminaries with France and Spain, it is not long since Mr. Fox said, in a full house, and many gentlemen repeated the cry, “That we must have peace, whatever should be the price of it.”

Mr. Pitt concluded by moving, “That an humble address be presented to his majesty, containing the thanks of this house for his gracious condescension in communicating the different treaties which his majesty has concluded; and that we have considered them with that attention which their importance demands—For to express to his majesty, in the most grateful terms, how much we are satisfied, that, in consequence of the powers with which he has been vested, his majesty has, by the provisional articles concluded with North America, laid the foundation of a treaty of peace, which, we have reason to hope, will establish and secure between the two countries a reconciliation and perfect friendship—That, in confidence of this we dare express to his majesty our just expectations, that the several states of North-America will execute, in the most effectual and satisfactory manner, the measures which the congress is so solemnly engaged, by treaty, to recommend in favour of the persons who have suffered for the part which they have taken in the war; and that we shall consider these circumstances as the surest indication of the return of friendship.” The remainder of the motion expresses great satisfaction with the preliminaries of peace concluded with France and Spain; and that every attention will be given in the extension of commerce.

The above motion, after undergoing some amendments, was passed by a majority of sixteen.

L O N D O N , February 4.

A true copy of a letter from a British officer on board one of the transports lying in the harbour of Charles-town, the day after that important garrison was evacuated. Though in the hurry and confusion of writing, the date is omitted, it is nevertheless a genuine letter verbatim.

I TAKE up my pen, my dear friend, in the midst of noise and confusion, just to give you a short account of the redelivery of this town to the Americans. Yesterday morning closed the melancholy scene.

The evacuation and re-possession of Charles-town, rendered supremely melancholy on account of the unhappy loyalists, has been in other respects the most liberal of any transaction that has taken place since the commencement of the war. It was evacuated and entered by treaty; signals were agreed upon and adhered to; of course, every thing was conducted with the utmost decency and decorum. The embarkation lasted two days. I did not quit the town till the American horse made there appearance below the state-house. I then thought it high time to decamp.

The inhabitants and merchants who thought proper to remain in town, were directed to keep within their houses; all stores and warehouses were shut up. The streets, formerly crowded and cheerful to the view, now presented one mournful scene of the most complicated wretchedness. The poor unhappy loyalists whom the British government, not many months before, had solemnly pledged its faith to protect in their persons and properties, were now to be left victims to their merciless enemies, or to be sent on board vessels for the West-Indies, to encounter, with their distressed families, every misfortune, and to suffer every species of indigence and want in a strange land. Many, indeed, remained in the town, preferring the risk of immediate death to the cruel uncertainty of adhering any longer to a government, whose perfidy and treachery stands unparalleled in the annals of history. But by far the greater number, whose activity in the cause of their king and the British constitution, left no hopes for mercy, embarked. As these part the windows of their friends and acquaintances, in their way to the places of embarkation, they silently, with grief unutterable, bowed their last farewell. This melancholy scene was returned with feelings that could only be expressed by tears and sobs. A gloomy despair sat on every countenance; and all was wretchedness and woe. The scene was too affecting for description, too great for human feelings. Even the most obdurate and unprincipled of your patriots, had he been present at this awful view, must have felt some remorse for the part he has acted, and lamented the falsities he has palmed on parliament as facts, and which have brought the most complicated misery and ruin on thousands and thousands, whose only crime has been loyalty to their king, and affection for their parent country.

Throughout the whole of this transaction, though the most melancholy one I ever beheld, it must be observed, to the honour of the officer who commanded, that the whole has been conducted with the utmost attention and humanity, as far as it rested with him. Certain places were appointed for embarkation. Sentinels were fixed to prevent plunder being taken off by the soldiers and seamen. The vessels were all searched, and whatever plunder was found, was returned to the inhabitants of the town from whom it was taken.

Feb. 28. Vast quantities of shoes, linen, and woollens, are shipped on board the fleet bound to the West-Indies, and these, among various other articles, are intended for sale in America.