

Osborne Wright
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1799
A

SHORT ACCOUNT
OF THE
PRINCIPAL PROCEEDINGS
OF
CONGRESS,
IN THE LATE SESSION,
AND
A SKETCH OF THE STATE OF AFFAIRS BETWEEN
THE
UNITED STATES AND FRANCE

IN JULY, 1798:

IN A LETTER FROM

ROBT. GOODLOE HARPER, ESQ.

OF SOUTH CAROLINA,

TO ONE OF HIS CONSTITUENTS.

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THE UNITED STATES

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

COMMISSIONER OF LAND OFFICES

WASHINGTON

UNITED STATES AND TERRITORIES

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

WASHINGTON

JOHN G. COOPER & COMPANY

1888

A SHORT
ACCOUNT, &c.

Philadelphia, July 23d, 1798.

MY DEAR SIR,

ON the 16th instant congress adjourned after a session of more than eight months, during which a variety of important public measures have been adopted, which I omitted to inform you of as they passed, because I thought that it would be more satisfactory to wait till the adjournment, and then give a general view of the whole.

The two houses stand adjourned till the first Monday in December, the day fixed by the constitution for the annual meeting; but should the situation of affairs demand their attention in the interval, which is highly probable, the President, no doubt, will convene them at an earlier day.

When it was found by a message from the President, and the Instructions to our envoys in France, together with their Dispatches, all which you have no doubt seen, that although the utmost length of reasonable and just concession had been gone by our government, the French Republic refused to nego-

ciate on fair and honourable terms, or even to receive our messengers of peace; and on the contrary demanded a tribute, together with the most humiliating submissions, as the price of an interview, while they continued and increased their wanton depredations on our commerce; congress immediately discarded all further reliance on negotiation, and began to prepare for defending, by arms, the rights and honour of the country.

Three hundred and forty thousand dollars were immediately voted for fortifying the ports and harbours, and this sum has been since increased to four hundred and thirty thousand. One million three hundred thousand dollars were voted for cannon, small arms, ammunition, and military stores; of which thirty thousand stand of small arms, with proper accoutrements, are to be deposited in suitable places throughout the United States, for the use of the militia when called into service, or to be sold to them at costs and charges. Provision was made, besides, for the purchase of arms and equipments for four thousand cavalry, either militia or regulars; and the President was authorized to employ one hundred thousand dollars in the purchase of founderies for casting cannon, mortars, and shot. One regiment of artillery, twelve of infantry, and six troops of horse, were directed to be immediately added to the militia establishment of the United States; which, with the four regiments of infantry, one of artillery, and two troops of horse, now on foot, and ordered to be immediately completed, will raise the regular force of the United States to nineteen regiments, or about thirteen thousand rank and file. These new troops are to be enlisted "for and during the continuance of the existing differences between the United States and the French Republic, unless sooner discharged." About three thousand of the whole number, will

probably remain on the frontiers where they now are stationed; the rest will be for the general defence, to act with the militia and volunteers in case the country should be attacked. A great part of them will probably be raised and stationed in the southern states; it being there that an attack, if made, will be most likely to take place.

In addition to these nineteen regiments, the President has been authorized "in the event of a declaration of war against the United States, or of actual invasion of their territory by a foreign power, or of imminent danger of such invasion in his opinion discovered to exist before the next session of congress," to raise a body of ten thousand men, who are to be enlisted for a term not exceeding three years, and all whose officers he may immediately proceed to appoint; so that, should the occasion occur for bringing them into the field, they may be speedily enlisted and prepared for service. Their officers however are to receive no pay, or other emolument, till brought into actual service. This is called "the provisional army."

The President is also empowered to accept the service of any volunteer companies who may offer themselves as part of the provisional army, to organize them into regiments or legions, to appoint all their officers, and to furnish them with arms, out of the public magazines, either by sale or loan. In case of loan their officers are to be responsible. These volunteers are to be liable at any moment, during two years after the time of their enlistment, to be called into service by the President; and when in service are to receive rations and pay like regular troops, and be subject to the same regulations and discipline. They are to clothe themselves. The President may establish rules for their training and discipline when not in actual service; and during

the period of their enlistment, two years, they are exempted from ordinary militia duty.

Many corps of this kind have already been formed, particularly in the towns, and others are every where forming. In this city there is a legion almost complete, consisting now of two troops of horse, one company of grenadiers, one of artillery, and five of infantry. It is rapidly increasing; and, it is supposed, will soon amount to two thousand men.

The President has hitherto appointed those officers for the volunteers who have been elected by the companies; and I understand that it is his intention always to do so, where there is no particular objection to the person elected. These volunteers, it is expected, will form a very considerable force; which, on emergencies, will be always ready to aid the regular troops and the militia.

As to the militia, no new arrangements have been made. Some changes were attempted; but the subject was found full of difficulties; and it was, finally, thought best, in this moment of danger, not to make any alterations, which might, perhaps, derange the present systems, and create discontent or confusion.

For naval defence various provisions have been made. The three frigates some time ago ordered to be built, have been finished, equipped, and put to sea. Finer vessels, it is thought, have never appeared on the ocean. Two of them carry forty-four guns each, and the third thirty-six. These, and all other public and private armed ships of the United States, are authorized to capture and bring in for condemnation "any French *armed vessel* which shall be found within the jurisdictional line of the United States, or elsewhere on the high seas." Unarmed ships are not to be molested.

In addition to these three frigates, the President has been authorized to procure, equip, and send to sea for the protection of our trade, six vessels of not less than thirty-two guns each, twelve of not less than twenty nor more than twenty-four, six of not more than eighteen, and a number of revenue cutters, which carry from 8 to 14 guns each. To protect the harbours, bays and inlets, where large vessels cannot go, ten gallies are directed to be equipped immediately. These vessels carry two or three very large guns, and a number of men, and are so constructed as to go into very shallow water. They will be stationed in different places along the coast.

Of the six thirty-two gun frigates, five are already on the stocks. Eleven of those between twenty and twenty-four have been contracted for, and are now rapidly fitting for sea. One has already sailed, and several others are nearly prepared. One of eighteen guns has also gone to sea, and two others are contracted for and will soon be ready. Measures are taken to procure all the rest, as well as the gallies. So that our naval force will be daily increasing, and in a few months may be very respectable. When the armament now ordered is complete we shall have at sea nine large frigates, twelve sloops of war of from twenty to twenty-four guns, six of from sixteen to eighteen, about ten cutters of from 8 to 14, and ten gallies; making in the whole forty-eight ships of war: no inconsiderable force for the first effort of a nation which, three months ago, had not an armed vessel afloat, except some three small cutters.

An apprehension at first prevailed that we should find difficulty in manning our ships of war; but hitherto they have always got their complement of seamen within a few days after they were ready to receive them. These brave and hardy fellows, though they have, in general, so little to lose, shew

the greatest ardour to defend their country. Instances have occurred of their preferring to engage on board of armed ships, at lower wages than they might have received in those that were unarmed.

Several of these vessels are building by patriotic subscriptions of private persons, who loan the money to government at six per cent, repayable at its convenience, and superintend the work themselves, under the direction of the navy department. Thus the money is procured on very easy terms, and the vessels are built far cheaper, and in less time, than could be done by the public. It is thought that, at least, three large frigates, and nine or ten sloops of war will be built in this manner. The merchants of Philadelphia have undertaken one of forty-four guns, for which they have subscribed nearly one hundred thousand dollars. About the same sum has been subscribed at Baltimore, one hundred and twenty-five thousand at Boston, between sixty and seventy thousand, as nearly as I can recollect, at New York, and considerable sums at various towns in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, and at Norfolk, Alexandria, Richmond, and Petersburg in Virginia. The whole amount of private subscriptions is estimated at six hundred and forty thousand dollars. One gentleman at Boston subscribed ten thousand.

The merchant ships having been permitted to arm for their defence, and to capture French privateers, a very general armament of that kind is rapidly going on. Cannon was very scarce, and still is not plenty; but when a whole nation sets to work, and is in earnest, it soon surmounts every difficulty. The supply of arms is every day increasing; and we may expect that in a few months, our trade will be in a situation to defend itself, with the assistance of the public ships of war.

The first blow was struck some weeks ago by the capture of a French privateer on our coast, which

had made prize of some of our ships, and then had the impudence to run into our harbours for protection against the English cruisers. She was taken by one of our sloops of war, and has been condemned.

In the mean time, as a method of bringing France to reason, and saving our merchants from her wanton seizures, all commercial intercourse with her or her dominions has been suspended, till an accommodation of the differences between this country and her shall take place; and as she has not only violated, in numerous instances, the treaties between the two countries, but continues to do so, and refuses to listen to any demand of reparation, a law has been passed by congress declaring those treaties no longer binding on the United States. In consequence of this law, the President has suspended the French consuls in this country from the function which they exercised under those treaties.

Thus far have we gone defensively. We take French armed ships, which cruise for the purpose of annoying our trade, and we prepare with vigour for repelling their attacks by sea and land: but we do not attack her unarmed ships, or make reprisals for the injuries she has done us. Many persons were of opinion that we ought to go the last lengths, and declare war; which they deemed the most manly and honourable course, as well as the safest: but others thought it best to confine ourselves to defence and preparation, and leave the French either to discontinue their attacks, or to declare war, as they might think best. This course was finally adopted. Nothing is more difficult than to conjecture what will be the conduct of France in consequence of our measures. She may perhaps draw back, and by some apparent concessions try to avoid an open war. This perhaps would be her true policy; but I am inclined to think that she will

purſue a contrary courſe, and endeavour at all events, to enforce her demands. Earlier reſiſtance, and vigorous preparation a year ago, on our part, might probably have prevented her from taking the ground; but having taken it, her pride, the paſſions of her rulers, and perhaps their policy, will probably forbid her to recede. Whatever may be her determination, I am convinced that with the union and ſpirit now diſplayed by this country, we have nothing to fear from her vengeance. We poſſeſs, I have no doubt, the means of creating a maritime force ſuperior to any ſhe can bring againſt us, even ſhould ſhe make peace with England. And as to invading our country, ſhould ſhe have the raſhneſs to attempt it, ſhe will ſoon find that the Americans have infinitely increaſed in means ſince '76 without decreaſing in ſpirit. Her forces would not advance far into the country, before they would be met by an army of one hundred thouſand men, led on by Waſhington, and compoſed of freemen fighting, and prepared to die, for their laws, their religion, and their families. This is a ſort of reſiſtance to which ſhe has not hitherto been accuſtomed.

The meaſures already adopted are conſidered as the beginning, only, of preparation. Should France drive us into a ſerious war, far other exertions will be called for, and will, I have no doubt, be made.

The expence of theſe preparatory meaſures, including one year's ſupport of the additional troops, is eſtimated at nine millions of dollars, viz. 340,000 for fortifications; 1,300,000 for arms, military ſtores, &c. 200,000 for equipments of cavalry and carrying into effect the proviſional army bill; 3,370,000 for the naval armament; and 3,700,000 for the new troops. Should the proviſional army be brought into ſervice, its expences for a year would amount aſeſtimated, to 3,500,000 dollars; and the volunteers and militia, if called out, will alſo require a confi-

derable expence. These objects, however, are contingent, and not likely soon to happen. The certain expences, directed by law, amount to nine millions.

To defray these expences, we possess the following means. First, a balance of our ordinary revenue above our ordinary expenditure. In the last year, the year 1797, the impost and tonage duties produced, 7,549,649 dollars; a million more than the product of 1796, and about two millions more than that of 1795. New imposts, to the estimated amount of at least 500,000 dollars, have been added since 1795, but did not operate on the revenue of 1796 or 1797. This, added to the product of 1797, without any allowance for increase, would raise the product of 1798 to eight millions. But if we allow one million for decrease, on account of the present circumstances, which is more than I believe will take place, still we shall have seven millions for the product of impost and tonage duties in the present year. The internal duties last year, arising from stills, spirits, carriages, retailers' licenses, sugar refiners, and auctioneers, produced, 575,491 dollars. In the present year 600,000 may be expected from them; perhaps more. The post office produces 50,000; and public stock and bank shares held by the United States, 160,000. From the sale of western lands 40,000 may be expected. The stamp-act went into operation on the 1st of July, and may be taken at 400,000 annually, which, for the remaining half of this year, is 200,000. These various sums added together, give eight millions and fifty thousand dollars for the permanent revenue of the present year.

The ordinary expenditure will amount to 6,721,787 dollars; of which 1,121,494 are for the support of the civil government in all its various branches; 352,000 for paying awards under the

British treaty; 1,238,730 for the old military establishment; and 4,009,561 for the interest of the public debt and the reimbursement of the principal. This aggregate of ordinary expenditure deducted from the amount of revenue stated above, leaves a balance of 1,328,213 dollars, to be applied to the extraordinary expences. Add to this the sum of two millions laid, for one year, on lands, houses, and slaves, in a manner which will be hereafter explained, and the sum of 640,000 dollars, estimated as the amount of subscriptions for building vessels, and they give an aggregate of about four millions for defraying the extraordinary expences. Deduct this sum from the amount of those expences, which is nine millions, and there remains a balance of five millions still to be provided. This the President is authorised to borrow on the best terms that can be obtained, and the surplus of impost and tonage duties, beyond the permanent appropriations charged on them, is pledged to pay the interest and principal of the loan. These duties, we have seen, amount, on the most moderate estimate, to seven millions of dollars; the permanent appropriations charged on them, which are for the civil list, and the interest of the public debt, do not exceed 4,500,000. So that the fund, as solid an one as any government possesses, is amply sufficient for loans to the amount of twenty millions instead of five, should it be necessary to borrow to that extent. The faith of the United States is moreover pledged to make up any deficiency. In short, I am persuaded that the pecuniary resources of this country, like its military and maritime resources, have, as yet, been but slightly touched. Our whole system of taxation, including the direct tax of two millions laid by congress in the present session, amounts only to about ten millions of dollars; which divided among a population of probably six millions of souls, gives one dollar and

one-third for the annual contribution of each person. In many parts of the country this is one day's labour; in most parts not more than two; and no where more than three. If we suppose one-fourth of this six millions to consist of persons capable of supporting themselves, and paying taxes, by their labour, and then divide the whole amount of the taxes among that fourth, it will come to something more than six dollars each; a sum which, with common industry, a person may earn in ten days or less. Thus we find that the whole of our contributions to government, as now increased, amount to about ten days labour in the year, for each person capable of labour. Let this be compared with the state of other countries, even such as are most flourishing and happy, and it will be found that we pay nothing in comparison with them. I have no doubt, for my own part, that we might pay twice as much, or even three times, were it necessary, without inconvenience; provided a skilful system were adopted for the collection, and steadily pursued.

I must beg your pardon, my dear sir, for this digression, if such it should be thought. I intended it by way of answer to the insinuations of those, and such there are, who are so fond of telling us that we are not able to support the expence of protecting our property and our rights.

This leads me to explain the nature of the direct tax, and the manner in which it is apportioned, laid, and collected. All the details cannot be brought within the compass of a letter; and they are the less necessary, since the laws themselves have been published, and some pains have been taken to distribute them through the country: but I will present you with the out-line.

The tax, amounting to two millions of dollars, is laid on lands, dwelling-houses, and slaves. This is perfectly equal; because, although there are slaves in

some states, and not in others, yet, as each state has its part of the tax fixed, it must pay that part whether it has slaves or not; and what it does not raise from slaves, it must raise from lands and dwelling-houses. All slaves under 12, and above 50, are exempted, as well as all such as are exempted by the laws of the state where they are. The others pay half a dollar each. All dwelling-houses, which, with the out-houses belonging to them, and the lot on which they stand, not exceeding two acres for any one house, are worth less than 100 dollars, are also exempted; and so are all lands which are exempted by the laws of the state where they lie. All other lands and dwelling houses are to pay according to a valuation. The dwelling-houses are to be valued with the out-houses belonging to them respectively, and the lot on which they stand not exceeding two acres in any case; and the lands, with all wharfs and other buildings upon them, except dwelling houses, above the value of one hundred dollars.

For the purpose of making these valuations, each state is thrown into a suitable number of divisions, with a commissioner in each; and the commissioners in the state form a board for superintending and conducting the business.* This board divides the state in a proper number of assessment districts, and appoints in each, one principal assessor, and a suitable number of assistant assessors, whose duty it is to collect lists of all the lands, dwelling-houses, and slaves, and to value the former, under the direction of the commissioners. The property is to be described in

* In South Carolina, for example, there are five divisions, and a proportionate number in every other state. The first division in that state, consists of Charleston and Georgetown districts; the second of Cambden and Cheraw; the third of Pinckney and Washington; the fourth of Ninety-six; and the fifth of Orangeburg and Beaufort.

a very particular manner, and every precaution is used to prevent the valuations from being unequal.

The valuations being finished, and a record of them, and of the lists whereon they are founded, being made in each assessment district, an abstract of the whole, together with the original lists, is transmitted by the board of commissioners to the secretary of the treasury; and he issues orders to the supervisor of each state, to proceed to the assessment and collection of the tax; for which purpose the supervisor may appoint as many collectors as he thinks fit. Having before him the valuation of every house, and tract or lot of land, in the state, and an enumeration of all the slaves liable to taxation, he proceeds to ascertain how much will be raised on the slaves, and deducts the amount from the sum payable by the state. He then assesses on every dwelling-house valued, with the out-houses, and lot, at more than one hundred and not more than five hundred dollars, one fifth per cent. or twenty cents in the hundred dollars, on the amount of its valuation; on those above five hundred and not more than one thousand, three tenths per cent.; on those above one and not more than three thousand, four-tenths per cent; on those above three and not more than six thousand, five-tenths, or one half; on those above six and not more than ten thousand, six-tenths; on those above ten and not more than fifteen thousand, seven-tenths; on those above fifteen and not more than twenty thousand, eight-tenths; on those above twenty and not more than thirty thousand, nine-tenths; and those above thirty thousand, one per cent. Having ascertained what, according to these proportions, will be raised upon dwelling-houses within the state, he deducts that amount also from the sum payable by the state, and the balance, if any, is laid upon the lands, according to the valuation, and at such rate per cent.

as will be sufficient to make it up. This rate the supervisor fixes.

Should the slave and house tax amount to more than the sum payable by the state, the supervisor must reduce the rates on houses, so as to bring it down to that sum: and there will, in that case, be no tax on the lands.

Hence it appears that houses of a high value pay much more, in proportion, than those of a low one. A house worth 100 dollars, for instance, pays but one-fifth per cent. or twenty cents; while one of 30,000 dollars value, and there are many such, especially in the great towns, will pay one per cent, or 300 dollars: five times as much in proportion as the former. This goes upon the principle of a tax upon *expence*, not a tax upon *capital*; that being considered as the true criterion whereby taxes ought to be apportioned: and it is supposed that the house in which a man lives will afford, generally speaking, a tolerably exact indication of his means of expense, and of paying taxes; consequently that a man who lives in a house worth 30,000 dollars must have an income which will enable him to pay 300 dollars, as easily as one inhabiting a house worth only 100 dollars can pay 20 cents. Thus the burden is made to fall on those who are able to bear it, and on every one in proportion to his ability.

When the proportions to be paid by slaves, houses, and lands, respectively, are thus fixed, the supervisor issues his warrant to certain officers to be appointed in each assessment district, called surveyors of the revenue, whose duty it is to ascertain the amount payable by each person in the district, and make out collection lists accordingly. This done, the lists are delivered to the collectors, who proceed to the collection of the tax. Each collector must, as soon as he receives his list, advertise, in at

least four places within his district, for all persons to come and pay the tax, and he must call on those who do not attend, and demand it from them. If they do not pay within twenty days after the demand, he may proceed to collect it by distress of their goods, except beasts of the plough, arms, household furniture, and the necessary apparel of the family. Should the tax, or any part of it, remain unpaid for a year, lands may be sold; but the owner may redeem them, at any time within two years after the sale, by the payment or tender of the amount of the tax, with costs and charges, and twelve per cent. interest.

Each collector, before receiving a tax list for collection, must give bond and security for double the amount contained in the list. He must account monthly for the monies he receives, and may be removed and compelled to deliver up his lists, if guilty of any misconduct, besides being liable to the action of the party injured. He must make a final settlement of his accounts within 13 months, under pain of becoming liable for the whole amount of his lists, and having his lands and goods, with those of his securities, sold to raise the money. Many other precautions are used to prevent abuse, and insure a speedy collection and payment by the collectors.

The commissioners receive three dollars per day each, while employed in the duty of their office, besides the sum of 150 dollars as a general compensation. The principal assessors have one dollar and an half per day, while so employed; and the assistant assessors, from one dollar to one and an half, according to the nature of their business. The surveyors of the revenue, who are to be permanent officers, are compensated by certain fees on the business they do. The supervisors have one half per cent. on the amount of all monies received and

paid over by them under the act, the inspectors one quarter per cent. and the collectors five per cent. The expense of collecting the tax therefore will be about seven per cent. That of the valuation will be more considerable; perhaps 200,000 dollars, or ten per cent: but a valuation once made will serve for several years, probably ten or twelve; and when renewed will cost less than the first time.

This tax is laid for only one year, and is not intended to be made permanent, unless the state of the finances should absolutely require it. Probably, however, it will be continued from year to year for some time. Perhaps it may be reduced, and it is far from being impossible that the public exigencies, especially in case the war should become such as to require great exertions, may render an increase of it absolutely necessary.

The whole sum, two millions of dollars, is divided among the states according to their respective numbers, including two-fifths of the slaves. By this apportionment, New-Hampshire pays 77,705 dollars; Massachusetts 260,435. Rhode-Island 37,502. Connecticut 129,767. Vermont 46,864. New-York 181,687. New-Jersey 98,387. Pennsylvania 237,177. Delaware 30,430. Maryland 152,599. Virginia 345,488. Kentucky 37,643. North-Carolina 192,697. Tennessee 18,806. South-Carolina 112,997, and Georgia 38,814. Of the whole amount, it is supposed that slaves will pay 130,000 dollars, dwelling houses about 1,000,000, and lands, consequently, about 870,000.

Such is the nature, amount, and mode of collection, of this tax, which would not have been necessary had not the conduct of France compelled us to arm; but which, I am fully persuaded, the Americans will most cheerfully pay, when they reflect that the money is to be employed, not in paying tribute to a foreign nation, but in defending

their own rights, honour, and independence. For such objects as these, I am even persuaded that double the amount would, if necessary, be paid with cheerfulness.

The last advices from our commissioners were received about the 20th of June, and bear date on the 3d and 4th of April. General Marshall, one of the commissioners, brought them. It appears by these dispatches that Generals Pinckney and Marshall, finding all hope of an accommodation, on other than disgraceful terms, to be quite at an end, resolved to return home, to which the French government, not finding them disposed to yield up the honour of their country, made no objection. General Marshall, therefore, embarked for America, and General Pinckney went to the south of France where his daughter's health made it necessary for her to remain some time. The directory detained Mr. Gerry, with a view, as he states in his letter to the President, of drawing him again into discussions about a *loan*; in other words a *tribute*; but he declares his intention of concluding nothing in the absence of his colleagues. He is known, by this time, to have received the new instructions sent by the President on the arrival of the first dispatches; and, in consequence of them, he is, probably, on his way home; for they direct the commissioners to listen to no proposition about a loan, to hold no intercourse with the French government, except through agents publicly and regularly accredited, and to leave France immediately, unless officially received by the directory, in a manner suitable to their character, and to the dignity of their nation. It being, moreover, judged improper that one of these commissioners should remain in France to conduct, alone, a business for which three had been appointed, the President as soon as he found that Generals Pinckney

and Marshall were dismissed, sent Mr. Gerry positive orders to return immediately.

To refuse to treat with two commissioners of characters so highly respectable, and retain the third in hopes of wheedling him into conditions dishonourable and ruinous to his country, is very conformable to French policy and French systems; but it is highly insulting to this country, and leads to consequences, which, if not resisted, must prove wholly destructive of its independence. It amounts to saying, "when you have a dispute to settle with us, you shall not choose the negociators, but we will chuse them; they shall not be such persons as you can trust, but such as we like, as we may think the most manageable. When a nation submits to conduct like this, its independence is a mere shadow; the substance is gone.

From this it appears that the arrival of General Pinckney and Mr. Gerry may be hourly expected; but nothing has been heard from either of them since the 4th of April.

We have, however, much more recent intelligence from Europe; as late indeed as the 12th or 15th of May. These accounts contain some indications, though as yet not clear or certain, of a new and approaching rupture between France and the great continental powers of Europe. It is very generally reported in Europe, and many appearances tend to confirm the opinion, that the Emperors of Russia and Germany, and the King of Prussia, alarmed, most justly no doubt, at the subjugation of Switzerland, and the evident designs of France against the independence of all neighbouring states, designs which experience proves that no faith of treaties, no regard to the rights of others or her own engagements, can restrain her from attempting to accomplish, have projected, and are on the point of forming, a new coalition for the purpose

of checking her progress, repressing her ambitious enterprises, and restraining her within her ancient limits. If such a coalition be formed, every friend of mankind, I think, must wish its success. There is no danger of any attempt being made by it on the independence of France, and to rescue that of other nations from her deadly gripe, must be a most laudable undertaking; for however imperfect the governments of those nations may be, they have found, to their woe, that their former state was blissful compared to that whereto France, under pretence of making them free, has reduced those who have trusted to her deceitful promises, or sunk beneath her power.

The history of all ages proves that no oppression is so dreadful as that of a foreign master. Of this bitter cup the Dutch, the Belgians, the Italians, the Swiss, and part of the Germans, are now drinking; and other nations will drink to the very dregs, unless by a vigorous, timely, and combined resistance, they repress the progress of these deceitful and merciless destroyers.

By the latest accounts there appears reason to believe that the invasion of England, so long threatened, is at length given up. At least on the 15th of May there was no appearance of its being attempted. England is well prepared to resist with unanimity and vigour, should a landing take place. In the mean time her fleets still block up those of France, Spain, and Holland in their own ports. It is difficult to conceive how an army is to be sent to England, when hardly a ship, or even a boat, of her enemies, can put to sea without falling into her hands.

As to the internal situation of France we know but little, all the presses being held under the most slavish control by the Directory, and permitted to publish nothing at which it can take umbrage. It

has appeared, however, that the late elections were very tumultuous, and that the Directory influenced them by the most open and violent means. Some persons disagreeable to it were, notwithstanding, returned; but they were excluded from their seats, to the number of about eighty, without the least ceremony, or any other proof than a message from the Directory.

Thus we see that the constitution is completely subverted, the legislature perfectly enslaved, the right of election wholly annihilated, and a military despotism, in the hands of the Directory, firmly established! Such is the liberty which France has gained by seven years of civil and external war, by the slaughter of two millions of her people, the utter subversion of property, the banishment of religion, the total corruption of morals and manners, and the destruction of so many monuments of human art and industry both in her own territories and those of her neighbours!

For my own part, I am inclined to think that the military power of France, by which her people have hitherto been dazzled, and kept blind to the miseries of their own situation, is approaching fast to the period of its decline, if not already arrived there. Her vast expenses, supported rather by domestic and external plunder than by a regular system of taxation, already exceed her means, as it is said, in the proportion of one third; or a million of livres, about 200,000 dollars each day. A regular and judicious system of taxation, however extensive, has a tendency, when combined with good government and the protection of persons and property, to invigorate industry, and thus constantly reproduce the means of its own support. Plunder, on the other hand, destroys industry, by destroying the capitals wherewith it is carried on, and taking away its strongest, perhaps its only effectual incitement,

the hope of possessing its fruits in security. It realizes the fable of the boy and the golden eggs, and resembles the conduct of a man, who, instead of employing his money and living on the income, should put it into his chest, and live on the principal. This is the condition of the French Government. *It subsists by plunder, and the sources of plunder are very soon exhausted.* Already its pecuniary embarrassments are excessive. It with great difficulty pays its army; its civil officers it does not pay at all. They subsist by *private* plunder and corruption, as the government does by *public*. Hence the anxiety of Talleyrand to get money from us, for his private purse and that of certain members of the directory. Hence the anxiety of the Directory to obtain a loan. Hence the corrupt agreement between Merlin, one of its members, and the owners of privateers, whom he protected in their piracies for a share of the spoil. These embarrassments, from the nature of things, must increase. At length it will become impossible to pay the armies, who will then revolt or desert, or perhaps do both in part; and then the government, which exists not but by their support must fall to the ground. Strong symptoms of the approach of this state of things have already appeared.

On the other hand, the great neighbouring powers must be every day more and more alarmed at the hostile designs and ambitious plans of France, becoming daily more manifest and exorbitant. They cannot long remain silent spectators of her progress. They must oppose, or be devoured. In the mean time her excessive tyranny, her insolent conduct, her exorbitant and insatiable exactions, must increase, day by day, the hatred and animosity of those nations over whom, by fraud or force, she has obtained dominion; and they will, in all probability, receive with open arms, and aid with all their

might, the armies which shall enter their countries for the purpose of attacking her. It was among the peasants of Germany, once her friends, that, after they had tasted the cup of her abominations in her invasion of 1795-96, she found the most deadly foes; and, most probably, it will be among the Swiss, the Italians, the Dutch, and Belgians, that, on the slightest reverse of fortune, she will find the most dreadful implements of Divine Vengeance.

Nor can she expect to be supported by that enthusiasm which has been, heretofore, so efficacious in rendering her arms triumphant. It was an enthusiasm created in the French by the idea of resisting a foreign yoke, in support of their national independence; and it induced them to sacrifice every thing, submit to every thing, and suffer every thing. But how can this enthusiasm be felt for the defence of foreign conquests, and the glory of a government the most detestable, and probably the most detested, that ever was on earth! A government which openly professes every species of profligacy, subsists by universal pillage, and maintains its power by perpetual acts of the most atrocious despotism!

It is for these reasons that I have thought the power of France likely to fall as rapidly as it has risen: and they should induce us to be the more determined in our resistance, from a hope that it will be successful without any painful efforts. But I declare to you, my dear sir, that I find reason enough for resistance, independently of these. So, I have no doubt, will you. Were France in possession of England, the most formidable bulwark against her power in the old world, and were Austria, Russia, and Prussia humbled at her feet, as Spain and Sardinia are, still I should have no idea of yielding. After fighting her on the ocean, to the last, and contending every inch of ground with her on the atlantic shore, I should be for retiring

with the remnant of the nation, beyond the mountains or the Mississippi, and there, like our brave forefathers, who, for the love of freedom, penetrated these, at that time, inhospitable wilds, opening to ourselves, amidst deserts and their savage inhabitants, an asylum for self-government and national independence. This, in my mind, and, I have no doubt, in your's too, would be happiness compared with the dominion of a French proconsul; who, under the name of a minister, should dictate to our government, and insolently ride over the heads of our constituted authorities; or place in power those among ourselves, whose worthlessness should render them fit and acceptable instruments of his pleasure.

That she will attempt to invade us, unless her affairs in Europe keep her too fully employed, I think highly probable. The only way to avert the danger, is to be prepared to meet it; to shew a good countenance, make vigorous preparations, and stand ready to give her a good reception. Seeing this, she may probably keep away.

Having troubled you, my dear sir, with this long letter, for which my desire to give you all the information in my power about our public affairs, must be my apology. I conclude with begging you to be assured of the very sincere respect and good wishes of

Your very humble servant,

ROB. G. HARPER.

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