

# MARYLAND GAZETTE.

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## Miscellany.

COBBET'S LETTER TO THE KING,  
ON THE MARITIME WAR AGAINST FRANCE.

### LETTER I.

SIR,  
WHEN every eye in the nation, at the end of 16 years of war, which has been a part of every man's estate to be taxed, under the name of Redemption of the Land Tax, which has banished guineas from the land, and made bank notes a legal tender, which has seen the Habeas Corpus or Personal Safety Act for many years suspended—which has drained the kingdom of its youth and its vigour, leaving the next generation to be the offspring of decrepitude, deformity and imbecility—which has thus entailed upon the nation ugliness, and weakness, and disease—and which, while it has robbed the land of thousands upon thousands of the best of its citizens, in order to convert them into denizens of Sicily, and other foreign countries, has introduced thousands and thousands of foreigners to defend the same land.—At such a time, when every eye in the nation is anxiously fixed upon the great, and, in all probability, the last attempt about to be made against the enemy, it appears to me, that it may be useful, publicly to state certain facts, relating to the mode of carrying on a war of such enormous length and such desolating consequence; and that this statement may, from its manner, lose none of its intrinsic importance, for the second time in my life, presume to address myself directly to your majesty, taking care, that in this instance, no keeper of special papers shall, as in a recent one, have in his power to garble, or to suppress any part of that which I write.

That your majesty is not well informed as to the great and interesting matters upon which I am addressing you, I, without the slightest hesitation conclude: First, because the assurances of your servants, through whom information must come, are in no wise calculated for the real state of things; and, secondly, because, supposing those servants to possess both talents and zeal sufficient for all the purposes of their respective stations, their conduct, from the moment they entered those offices, has been almost wholly engrossed by endeavours to defend themselves, and to annoy and degrade their own political enemies and your Majesty's late servants. As men may be misled by too much light, so a people may be misled in error, may be deceived and ruined, by the means of the press, which, unperverted, is well calculated to ensure the constant triumph of truth; and I have for my part no objection, that with all our parade of publicity, in all our ostentation of unreserve, there is, in the whole world, no people, who, in proportion to their magnitude, understand so little of their public affairs as is understood by the people of this kingdom. Were not this the case, it would be impossible that the press should be in its present flourishing state, with respect to his internal and other concerns, while England possesses such means of putting off those resources.

The general opinion in this country is, that France is in a miserable state—that the people are starving—and that as to commerce there is more doubt of its going on in the dominions of Napoleon than upon any of the islets of the Thames, about Windsor or Hampton. This too, I conclude to be the opinion of your Majesty; because, as I before observed, your information as to such matters is derived from your servants, prove, by their express declarations, as well as by their conduct, that such is their view of the situation of the empire of France. As to whether the subjects of Napoleon like or dislike his government, or whether they be better or off now than they were under their former sovereigns, these are questions which I discuss to no profit, because we possess no facts whereon to reason—but with respect to the commerce of France, and that of commerce which is the only valuable source, I possess from the best possible source a sufficiency of facts to shew, that upon this subject at least this has been the most common opinion of nations, and your majesty the most of sovereigns.

The sort of commerce to which I allude, is that which we in England call the coasting trade; in the dominions of Napoleon, or countries under his sway, it is to be considered as somewhat more important than it is with us. There is no doubt that the trade between England and the Coal Mines is of a million more value to England than all her foreign commerce put together; but if we cast our eyes over the map of Europe, we shall see,

that the coasting trade of Napoleon embraces climates, and that a maritime communication between his several countries must be not only of vast benefit to him, but in some cases, necessary to the existence of the people. Some of these countries must supply the others with corn. Without the oil and the silks, and the cotton, these countries might exist; but the southern could not, in many cases, possibly exist without the necessaries of life from the north; and of carrying on this commerce there are no means other than those of a maritime nature.

The extent of this commerce, in the dominions of Napoleon, is scarcely to be credited by those who are not acquainted with the facts. Along the coast of Naples, Tuscany, Genoa, and Piedmont; from the southern provinces of France and Marseilles, through Cete, and the grand canal of Louis XIV. to Bourdeaux, and thence along the Atlantic coast of France, the whole of the coast of Holland, and into the Elbe; in short, from the Baltic to the southern point of Italy, all the countries are connected by a chain of commercial intercourse as complete, perhaps, as ever existed in the world, and as advantageous as it is extensive. This commerce is, by your Majesty's servants, spoken of under the degrading appellation of "a mere coasting trade;" but this is precisely that trade which is really advantageous to a nation.—If England were cut off from all communication with the nations lying round in point of strength and happiness suffer nothing at all. But cut off the communication between London and the Coal Mines, the inhabitants of London must perish or disperse. There are several branches of our coasting trade, of a degree of importance to us, greater than all our foreign commerce put together. If, for instance, only one year's interruption were to take place in the exchange of coals for timber between Cumberland on the one part, and Hampshire and Sussex on the other part, the woods of these latter counties must be burnt to keep the people from perishing; whereby, as the exchange now going on, these woods are preserved, the people have fuel in plenty, and that fuel, after having given comfort in that capacity, becomes a valuable manure for the land. One year's interruption of this exchange would do England more harm than would be done by the sinking of all foreign countries to the bottom of the sea. This is, however, only one instance, out of hundreds, which might be enumerated; and, without any thing more being said, it must, I think, be as clear as the sun at noon-day, that if the enemy were able to put a stop to our coasting trade, it might at once be asserted, that he had it in his power to reduce us to his own terms, be they what they might.

Is it not then worth the while of your Majesty's servants—is it not worth the while of those who are intrusted with the conducting of the war, to inquire what is the extent of the coasting trade of the French empire, and to inform themselves as to the means of destroying, or, at least, interrupting that trade? To attack, or to oppose, Napoleon in Spain, Naples, Sicily, Sweden, Denmark, Hanover, or in the East or West-Indies, is what it would be for an army to attack us in Nova-Scotia, Canada or in any of our colonies, where though a defeat might produce mortification, it would not seriously affect us either in our comforts or in the sources of our national strength.—We should regret the loss of Canada, perhaps, or of a West-India Island; but the loss, like that of a child out of a numerous family, would not be felt in our affairs.—We should still be as rich and as strong as before; but cut off the means of sending corn and timber, and iron, and tin, and coal, along our coast, from one part of the kingdom to the other, and the distress is instantly felt. In fact, the different parts of the kingdom can no more dispense with the coasting trade, than the farmer can dispense with the aid of the blacksmith and the wheelwright.

Thus, it will, perhaps, be said, is not the case with the countries under the dominion of Napoleon. But will it then be asserted that those countries, though extending almost across the whole of the European Continent, and including such a variety of climates, are nevertheless so circumstanced as to be able to exist, and contentedly too, without any commerce with each other; that is to say, without any exchange of natural productions, or of manufactures? The truth is, that the commerce between the several parts of this vast empire is so great, that convoys of eighty, a hundred, and even of two hundred sail, are frequently seen, and by your Majesty's fleets too, carrying on this trade in perfect security. These consist chiefly of luggers, or zebecs, of a light draught of water, from 80 to 120 tons burthen, and are navigated by a proportionate number of seamen. There are employed in this commerce, from the river of Bourdeaux alone, thirty thousand seamen and

upwards. The coasts of the Mediterranean teem with commerce. Its ports, harbours and bays, swarm with vessels; and at no time was the commerce so great between France and Italy on the one side, and between France and Holland and the North, on the other side, as it is at this moment, while your Majesty's servants are boasting that they have a navy that scours the ocean, and that "England engrosses the commerce of the world." While they amuse themselves, and the nation, with this empty vaunting, the commerce of France, and her vassal states, carried on almost within the reach of the naked eye of our admirals, far exceeds, in the means of contributing towards national strength, the commerce of England and of all our allies. The general persuasion here is, that all the people under the sway of France, are suffering from causes almost similar to those which affect the inhabitants of a besieged town; that the people of the North can get no wine nor oil, and that those of the South can get no corn; that there are no materials to make goods of any sort, and that all is decay and misery, and that, surely the poor, beggared, pinched people must, surely, they soon must be pushed to desperation; must revolt, and must tear Napoleon and his government to morsels. This has been the expectation for years, in like manner as, for years before, Mr. Pitt and the foreign pensioner, Sir Francis D'Alvernay, kept alive the constant expectation, that France would become a bankrupt and would then be compelled to submit to her enemies. As the nation was deceived then, so it is deceived now; and so, I greatly fear, it will continue to be deceived, until a knowledge and belief of the truth will come too late. One thing, indeed, has staggered many of even the credulous part of the nation; and that is the fact, of France being able still to renew her squadrons and her maritime expeditions. For this astonishing power of creating a maritime force is altogether incompatible with the assertions of your Majesty's servants respecting the ruined state of the commerce of France. The commerce of France being "annihilated," we cannot help wondering that the ports of Brest and Rochefort should be continually sending forth their squadrons;—we cannot help being surprised and somewhat vexed at seeing a Squadron of 10 or 12 sail of the line come out of the ports of France in the space of a few months after we have been congratulating ourselves upon the destruction of the last of the enemy's ships. The fleet in Bafque Roads is said by one of your Majesty's servants to have been worth several millions of pounds sterling, and that the Calcutta alone was worth six hundred thousand pounds, being full of military and naval stores.—To have effected the destruction of the whole of this fleet would have been a subject of great joy; to have effected the destruction of part of it was a subject of joy; but, in our haste to express such joy, we forgot to ask, how all these stores came to be found in the port of Rochefort so many years after we had "so completely annihilated the commerce of France," agreeably to the ten thousand times repeated assurances of your Majesty's servants. The fact is, that not only from the Elbe and the Scheldt are the ports of France supplied, by the means of the coasting trade, with an abundance of naval stores, but also from that part of Spain lying near the Atlantic coast, whence they receive iron, pitch, tar, rosin, and ship timber of various sorts, and in vast quantities, at a rate much cheaper than some of these articles can possibly be brought to the arsenals of Portsmouth and Plymouth. If this be the case, and I scruple not to assert that it is the case, what are we doing? What is the use which your Majesty's servants are making of the immense means which the industry and patience of your people put into their hands? If there be a commerce, such as I have described, carried on between the different ports of Napoleon, of what use, as the means of keeping him in check, are the thousand ships of war now employed? Of what use is it, if this commerce is to go on uninterrupted; and of what use is it that the sea is covered with your Majesty's ships, and that history will record the valour of your fleet? Of what avail is it, that we destroy French ships of war, while we leave in full vigour all the means of creating others to supply their place? If this be the way of making war, it must be clear to every one that we can never have peace without being exposed to imminent danger; for it will require but a short space of time for France to raise a navy equal, in number at least, to any that we can possess.

The security of this extensive and most valuable commerce of the French dominions arises, in great part, from the use of land signals, or telegraphs, so constructed, placed and managed, as to keep the vessels upon the coast at all times correctly informed of what is

passing upon the whole line of coast. From Flushing to Bayonne a report is exchanged times a day; at daylight, 10 o'clock, A. M. 2 P. M. and just before sunset. So that at Flushing they know four times a day what is passing at sea, within sight of the highest hill in the neighbourhood of Bayonne, and of course they are informed of what is passing near all the immediate ports of the coast. The same system is established along the coast of the Mediterranean, from the Gulf of Spezzia to Rochefort. The coasting vessels thus instructed how to move, thus kept constantly in a state of perfect knowledge as to the situation of the fleets or cruisers, are able to sail in safety carrying on their trade in as much security as if those ships were not in existence; and this only, as I shall hereafter prove to your Majesty, from causes which prevent the necessary exertions from being made, and which causes may instantly and easily be removed.

The advantages to the nations (for there are many) which carry on this commerce, are not greater than they are to Napoleon himself, in his views of conquest and dominion. From this commerce, notwithstanding our opinion to the contrary, he derives no small part of his revenue through the means of a stamp-tax, imposed upon every article exported or imported; and hence he is able to dispense with direct taxes, which are always odious, and which are, indeed, those which have uniformly ended in exciting the feelings and producing the acts, under which so many governments have perished. This is a great point. By the means of this commerce he disguises from his people the burdens which they bear. It is indeed a gross imposition to tell a people, that commerce pays taxes, the fact being that those taxes still fall upon the people themselves; but, as your Majesty must have observed, it is an imposition, it is a fraud, it is an act of duplicity and knavery, the success of which, in other countries, warrants the belief, that it must be greatly useful to your Majesty's implacable and powerful enemy. Very much, then, are your Majesty's servants deceived, when they suppose, that the Emperor Napoleon has no custom-house wherewith to collect duties. His scale may not be so noble as to afford him Dukes for receivers; he may not have Marquises for collectors, Barons for wine-tasters, and Knights of the Eagle for wine-tasters; but I am of opinion, that his custom-house yields him a much greater clear revenue than is derived from any similar establishment in the world—and that it affords him the means of drawing upon other sources of taxation with so sparing a hand, that his people, especially within the ancient boundaries of France, have reason to congratulate themselves upon the comparative lightness of their burthens.—A great many of your Majesty's subjects, including some in high station, have at different times expressed their astonishment, and indeed their vexation, that the people of France should be slow in rebelling against their Emperor, with whom your Majesty made a treaty of peace and "amity" only about seven or eight years ago; but if they had been informed of the facts here stated, relative to the commerce of France, and especially relative to the revenue yielded by that commerce, together with the relief given thereby to all the other sources of taxation, itself not appearing as a tax; if they had been duly informed of these facts, and had been possessed of but a very moderate portion of that sort of knowledge which enables men to trace popular discontent to their real causes—they never would have entertained a hope of seeing a rebellion in France.

But great as are the financial advantages of this commerce, Napoleon derives from it the still greater advantages attending such a nursery of seamen. It has been most clearly proved, over and over again, that for our navy the nursery is our coasting trade.—There requires, therefore, nothing more to satisfy us, that from a coasting trade such as I have described, the advantage to Napoleon is so great as to excite well-grounded alarm in the mind of every reflecting Englishman. It is from this copious source that the Emperor of France has drawn those hundreds of thousands of seamen with whom he has manned his fleets and squadrons for many years past, and which fleets and squadrons, though always hitherto defeated, and in many instances captured and destroyed, by the superior skill and valour of your Majesty's fleets, answer the terrible purpose of causing us to keep up a force, by land as well as by sea, so immense, so disproportionate to our population and our pecuniary means, that the country is stripped of its youth and its vigour.—The fields are left to be filled by the poor and the decrepit—and the taxes are so general and so heavy, and the anticipations upon them so great—that Hope, which alleviates all other burthens, here refuses her assistance.