

as those who will not see. You shut your own eyes, and to blind those of other people you go into conclave and slink out again and say—"a great affair of State!"—*C'est une grande affaire d'État!*

It seems that your sensibility is entirely confined to the extremities. You may be pulled by the nose and ears, and never feel it; but let your strong-box be attacked, and you are all nerve—"Let us go to war!" Sir, if they called upon me only for my little *peculium* to carry it on, perhaps I might give it: but my rights and liberties are involved in the grant, and I will never surrender them whilst I have life.

The gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. Crowninshield] is for sponging the debt. I can never consent to it. I will never bring the ways and means of fraudulent bankruptcy into your committee of supply. Confiscation and swindling shall never be found among my estimates, to meet the current expenditure of peace or war. No, sir. I have said with the doors closed, and I say so when they are open, "Pay the public debt." Get rid of that dead weight upon your government, that cramp upon all your measures, and then you may put the world at defiance.

So long as it hangs upon you, you must have revenue, and to have revenue you must have commerce—commerce, peace. And shall these nefarious schemes be advised for lightening the public burdens? will you resort to these low and pitiful shifts? will you dare even to mention these dishonest artifices to eke out your expenses when the public treasure is lavished on Turks and infidels; on singing boys, and dancing girls; to furnish the means of bestiality to an African barbarian?

Gentlemen say that Great Britain will count upon our divisions. How! What does she know of them? Can they

ever expect greater unanimity than prevailed at the last Presidential election? No, sir, 'tis the gentleman's own conscience that squeaks. But if she cannot calculate upon your divisions, at least she may reckon upon your pusillanimity. She may well despise the resentment that cannot be excited to honorable battle on its own ground—the mere effusion of mercantile cupidity.

Gentlemen talk of repealing the British treaty. The gentleman from Pennsylvania should have thought of that before he voted to carry it into effect. And what is all this for? A point which Great Britain will not abandon to Russia you expect her to yield to you. Russia indisputably the second power of continental Europe, with half a million of hardy troops, with sixty sail of the line, thirty millions of subjects, a territory more extensive even than our own—Russia, sir, the storehouse of the British navy—whom it is not more the policy and the interest than the sentiment of that government to soothe and to conciliate; her sole hope of a diversion on the Continent—her only efficient ally. What this formidable power cannot obtain with fleets and armies you will command by writ—with pot-hooks and hangers.

I am for no such policy. True honor is always the same. Before you enter into a contest, public or private, be sure you have fortitude enough to go through with it. If you mean war, say so, and prepare for it.

Look on the other side—behold the respect in which France holds neutral rights on land—observe her conduct in regard to the Franconian estates of the King of Prussia: I say nothing of the petty powers—of the Elector of Baden, or of the Swiss: I speak of a first-rate monarchy of Europe, and at a moment too when its neutrality was the object of all others nearest to the heart of the French Emperor. If you make



him monarch of the ocean you may bid adieu to it forever.

You may take your leave, sir, of navigation — even of the Mississippi. What is the situation of New Orleans if attacked to-morrow? Filled with a discontented and repining people, whose language, manners, and religion all incline them to the invader — a dissatisfied people, who despise the miserable governor you have set over them — whose honest prejudices and basest passions alike take part against you. I draw my information from no dubious source — from a native American, an enlightened member of that odious and imbecile government. You have official information that the town and its dependencies are utterly defenceless and untenable — a firm belief that, apprised of this, government would do something to put the place in a state of security, alone has kept the American portion of that community quiet. You have held that post — you now hold it — by the tenure of the naval predominance of England, and yet you are for a British naval war.

There are now two great commercial nations. Great Britain is one — we are the other. When you consider the many points of contact between your interests, you may be surprised that there has been so little collision. Sir, to the other belligerent nations of Europe your navigation is a convenience, I might say a necessity. If you do not carry for them they must starve, at least for the luxuries of life, which custom has rendered almost indispensable. And if you cannot act with some degree of spirit towards those who are dependent upon you as carriers, do you reckon to browbeat a jealous rival who, the moment she lets slip the dogs of war, sweeps you, at a blow, from the ocean? And *cui bono?* for whose benefit? — The planter? Nothing like it. The fair, honest, real

American merchant? No, sir — for renegadoes; to-day American — to-morrow, Danes. Go to war when you will, the property now covered by the American will then pass under the Danish or some other neutral flag. Gentlemen say that one English ship is worth three of ours: we shall therefore have the advantage in privateering. Did they ever know a nation get rich by privateering?

This is stuff for the nursery. Remember that your products are bulky — as has been stated — that they require a vast tonnage. Take these carriers out of the market — what is the result? The manufactures of England, which (to use a finishing touch of the gentleman's rhetoric) have received the finishing stroke of art, lie in a small comparative compass. The neutral trade can carry them. Your produce rots in the warehouse — you go to Statia or St. Thomas's, and get a striped blanket for a joe, if you can raise one — double freight, charges, and commissions. Who receives the profit? — The carrier. Who pays it? — The consumer.

All your produce that finds its way to England must bear the same accumulated charges, with this difference: that there the burden falls on the home price. I appeal to the experience of the last war, which has been so often cited. What, then, was the price of produce and of broadcloth?

But you are told England will not make war — she has her hands full. Holland calculated in the same way in 1781. How did it turn out? You stand now in the place of Holland, then — without her navy, unaided by the preponderating fleets of France and Spain, to say nothing of the Baltic powers. Do you want to take up the cudgels where these great maritime powers have been forced to drop them? to meet Great Britain on the ocean and drive her off its face? If you are so far gone as this, every capital measure of your



policy has hitherto been wrong. You should have nurtured the old and devised new systems of taxation — have cherished your navy. Begin this business when you may, land taxes, stamp acts, window taxes, hearth money, excise, in all its modifications of vexation and oppression, must precede or follow after.

But, sir, as French is the fashion of the day, I may be asked for my *projet*. I can readily tell gentlemen what I will not do. I will not propitiate any foreign nation with money. I will not launch into a naval war with Great Britain, although I am ready to meet her at the Cow-pens or Bunker's Hill. And for this plain reason.

We are a great land animal, and our business is on shore. I will send her no money, sir, on any pretext whatsoever, much less on pretence of buying Labrador or Botany Bay, when my real object was to secure limits which she formally acknowledged at the peace of 1783. I go further — I would (if anything) have laid an embargo. This would have got our own property home and our adversary's into our power. If there is any wisdom left among us the first step toward hostility will always be an embargo. In six months all your mercantile megrims would vanish. As to us, although it would cut deep, we can stand it. Without such a precaution, go to war when you will, you go to the wall. As to debts, strike the balance to-morrow, and England is, I believe, in our debt.

I hope, sir, to be excused for proceeding in this desultory course. I flatter myself I shall not have occasion again to trouble you — I know not that I shall be able — certainly not willing, unless provoked in self-defence. I ask your attention to the character of the inhabitants of that southern country on whom gentlemen rely for the support of their

measure. Who and what are they? A simple agricultural people, accustomed to travel in peace to market with the produce of their labor. Who takes it from us?

Another people devoted to manufactures — our sole source of supply. I have seen some stuff in the newspapers about manufactures in Saxony, and about a man who is no longer the chief of a dominant faction. The greatest man whom I ever knew — the immortal author of the letters of Curtius — has remarked the proneness of cunning people to wrap up and disguise, in well-selected phrases, doctrines too deformed and detestable to bear exposure in naked words; by a judicious choice of epithets to draw the attention from the lurking principle beneath and perpetuate delusion. But a little while ago, and any man might be proud to be considered as the head of the republican party. Now, it seems, 'tis reproachful to be deemed the chief of a dominant faction.

Mark the magic words! Head, chief. Republican party, dominant faction. But as to these Saxon manufactures. What became of their Dresden china? Why, the Prussian bayonets have broken all the pots, and you are content with Worcestershire or Staffordshire ware. There are some other fine manufactures on the Continent, but no supply, except, perhaps, of linens, the article we can best dispense with. A few individuals, sir, may have a coat of Louviers cloth, or a service of Sèvres china; but there is too little, and that little too dear, to furnish the nation. You must depend on the fur trade in earnest, and wear buffalo hides and bear skins.

Can any man who understands Europe pretend to say that a particular foreign policy is now right because it would have been expedient twenty or even ten years ago, without abandoning all regard for common sense? Sir, it is the states-



man's province to be guided by circumstances, to anticipate, to foresee them, to give them a course and a direction, to mold them to his purpose.

It is the business of a counting-house clerk to peer into the day-book and ledger, to see no further than the spectacles on his nose, to feel not beyond the pert behind his ear, to chatter in coffee-houses, and be the oracle of clubs. From 1783 to 1793, and even later (I don't stickle for dates), France had a formidable marine — so had Holland — so had Spain. The two first possessed thriving manufactures and a flourishing commerce. Great Britain, tremblingly alive to her manufacturing interests and carrying trade, would have felt to the heart any measure calculated to favor her rivals in these pursuits; she would have yielded then to her fears and her jealousy alone.

What is the case now? She lays an export duty on her manufactures, and there ends the question. If Georgia shall (from whatever cause) so completely monopolize the culture of cotton as to be able to lay an export duty of three per cent upon it, besides taxing its cultivators in every other shape that human or infernal ingenuity can devise, is Pennsylvania likely to rival her or take away the trade?

But, sir, it seems that we who are opposed to this resolution are men of no nerves — who trembled in the days of the British treaty — cowards (I presume) in the reign of terror! Is this true? Hunt up the journals; let our actions tell. We pursue our unshaken course. We care not for the nations of Europe, but make foreign relations bend to our political principles and subserve our country's interest. We have no wish to see another Actium, or Pharsalia, or the lieutenants of a modern Alexander playing at piquet or all-fours for the empire of the world. 'Tis poor comfort to us to be told

that France has too decided a taste for luxurious things to meddle with us; that Egypt is her object, or the coast of Barbary, and at the worst we shall be the last devoured.

We are enamored with neither nation — we would play their own game upon them, use them for our interest and convenience. But with all my abhorrence of the British government I should not hesitate between Westminster Hall and a Middlesex jury on the one hand, and the wood of Vincennes and a file of grenadiers, on the other. That jury trial which walked with Horne Tooke and Hardy through the flames of ministerial persecution is, I confess, more to my taste than the trial of the Duke d'Enghien.

Mr. Chairman, I am sensible of having detained the committee longer than I ought — certainly much longer than I intended. I am equally sensible of their politeness, and not less so, sir, of your patient attention. It is your own indulgence, sir, badly requited indeed, to which you owe this persecution. I might offer another apology for these undigested, desultory remarks; my never having seen the treasury documents. Until I came into the House this morning I have been stretched on a sick bed.

But when I behold the affairs of this nation, instead of being where I hoped, and the people believed they were, in the hands of responsible men, committed to Tom, Dick, and Harry — to the refuse of the retail trade of politics — I do feel, I cannot help feeling, the most deep and serious concern. If the executive government would step forward and say, "Such is our plan, such is our opinion, and such are our reasons in support of it," I would meet it fairly, would openly oppose or pledge myself to support it. But without compass or polar star I will not launch into an ocean of unexplored measures which stand condemned by all the information to



which I have access. The constitution of the United States declares it to be the province and duty of the President "to give to Congress, from time to time, information of the state of the Union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge expedient and necessary." Has he done it? I know, sir, that we may say, and do say, that we are independent (would it were true); as free to give a direction to the executive as to receive it from him. But do what you will, foreign relations — every measure short of war, and even the course of hostilities — depend upon him. He stands at the helm and must guide the vessel of state.

I think our citizens just as well entitled to know what has passed as the Marquis Yrujo, who has bearded your President to his face, insulted your government within its own peculiar jurisdiction, and outraged all decency. Do you mistake this diplomatic puppet for an automaton? He has orders for all he does. Take his instructions from his pocket to-morrow, they are signed "Charles Maurice Talleyrand."

Let the nation know what they have to depend upon. Be true to them, and trust me, they will prove true to themselves and to you. The people are honest; now at home at their plows, not dreaming of what you are about. But the spirit of inquiry that has too long slept will be, must be, awakened. Let them begin to think; not to say such things are proper because they have been done, but, what has been done? and wherefore? — and all will be right.

## WILLIAM WIRT



WILLIAM WIRT, an able American lawyer, author, and orator, was born at Bladensburg, Md., Nov. 8, 1772, and died at Washington, D. C., Feb. 18, 1834. After an education obtained at several classical schools, he studied law, was admitted to the Bar in 1792, and began the practice of his profession at Culpeper Court House, Va. Having won notice as a lawyer, he removed in 1799 to Richmond; there becoming, first, clerk to the House of Delegates, and later, chancellor of the eastern district of Virginia. He was in 1807 assisting-prosecuting counsel in the trial of Aaron Burr, the principal speech which he delivered on this occasion occupying four hours. It still remains his most admired effort and is familiar to most readers. Less noted, but still noteworthy, speeches by Wirt are those on the deaths of Jefferson and Adams in 1826, and one delivered in 1830 at Rutgers College. In 1817, Wirt removed to Washington, on his appointment as Attorney-General of the United States, in Monroe's administration, but resigned this post in 1829, and for the remainder of his life pursued the practice of his profession at Baltimore. Wirt's early style of oratory was ornate, but in later life it assumed a more sober, dignified character, his speeches being then remarkable for their close reasoning, discrimination, and keen analysis. He was unusually fine looking and possessed a clear, melodious voice and a calm, self-possessed manner of delivery. His writings include "Letters of a British Spy" (1803); "The Old Bachelor," a series of essays, (1812); "The Two Principal Arguments in the Trial of Aaron Burr" (1808); "Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry" (1817), and various addresses.

### SPEECH IN THE TRIAL OF AARON BURR

[In May, 1807, Aaron Burr was arraigned in the Circuit Court of the United States, held at Richmond, Virginia, for treason in preparing the means of a military expedition against the possessions of the King of Spain, with whom the United States were at peace. Under the direction of President Jefferson Mr. Wirt was retained to assist the United States attorney in the prosecution, and in the course of the trial he spoke as follows:]

**M**AY IT PLEASE YOUR HONORS,—It is my duty to proceed, on the part of the United States, in opposing this motion. But I should not deem it my duty to oppose it if it were founded on correct principles. I stand here with the same independence of action which belongs to the attorney of the United States; and as he would certainly