

absurd and puerile assertion, if it were ever made? Has not the right honorable gentleman, in this House, said the same thing?

In this, at least, they resemble one another! They have both made use of this assertion; and I believe that these two illustrious persons are the only two on earth who think it!

But let us turn the tables. We ought to put ourselves at times in the place of the enemy, if we are desirous of really examining with candor and fairness the dispute between us. How may they not interpret the speeches of ministers and their friends in both Houses of the British Parliament? If we are to be told of the idle speech of Berthier and Monge, may they not also bring up speeches in which it has not been merely hinted, but broadly asserted, that "the two constitutions of England and France could not exist together?"

May not these offences and charges be reciprocated without end? Are we ever to go on in this miserable squabble about words? Are we still, as we happen to be successful on the one side or the other, to bring up these impotent accusations, insults, and provocations against each other; and only when we are beaten and unfortunate, to think of treating? Oh! pity the condition of man, gracious God! and save us from such a system of malevolence in which all our old and venerated prejudices are to be done away, and by which we are to be taught to consider war as the natural state of man, and peace but as a dangerous and difficult extremity!

Sir, this temper must be corrected. It is a diabolical spirit, and would lead to an interminable war. Our history is full of instances that where we have overlooked a proffered occasion to treat we have uniformly suffered by delay. At what time did we ever profit by obstinately persevering in war? We accepted at Ryswick the terms we had refused five years

before, and the same peace which was concluded at Utrecht might have been obtained at Gertruydenberg; and as to security from the future machinations or ambition of the French I ask you what security you ever had or could have. Did the different treaties made with Louis XIV serve to tie up his hands, to restrain his ambition, or to stifle his restless spirit? At what time, in old or in recent periods, could you safely repose on the honor, forbearance, and moderation of the French government? Was there ever an idea of refusing to treat because the peace might be afterward insecure?

The peace of 1763 was not accompanied with securities; and it was no sooner made than the French court began, as usual, its intrigues. And what security did the right honorable gentleman exact at the peace of 1783, in which he was engaged? Were we rendered secure by that peace? The right honorable gentleman knows well that, soon after that peace, the French formed a plan, in conjunction with the Dutch, of attacking our India possessions, of raising up the native powers against us, and of driving us out of India; as they were more recently desirous of doing, only with this difference, that the cabinet of France formerly entered into this project in a moment of profound peace and when they conceived us to be lulled into a perfect security.

After making the peace of 1783 the right honorable gentleman and his friends went out, and I, among others, came into office. Suppose, sir, that we had taken up the jealousy upon which the right honorable gentleman now acts, and had refused to ratify the peace which he had made.

Suppose that we had said—No! France is acting a perfidious part; we see no security for England in this treaty; they want only a respite, in order to attack us again in an important part of our dominions, and we ought not to con-

firm the treaty. I ask you, would the right honorable gentleman have supported us in this refusal? I say that upon his present reasoning he ought.

But I put it fairly to him, would he have supported us in refusing to ratify the treaty upon such a pretence? He certainly ought not, and I am sure he would not; but the course of reasoning which he now assumes would have justified his taking such a ground. On the contrary, I am persuaded that he would have said, "This security is a refinement upon jealousy. You have security, the only security that you can ever expect to get. It is the present interest of France to make peace. She will keep it if it be her interest. She will break it if it be her interest. Such is the state of nations; and you have nothing but your own vigilance for your security."

"It is not the interest of Bonaparte," it seems, "sincerely to enter into a negotiation, or, if he should even make peace, sincerely to keep it." But how are we to decide upon his sincerity? By refusing to treat with him? Surely, if we mean to discover his sincerity, we ought to hear the propositions which he desires to make.

"But peace would be unfriendly to his system of military despotism." Sir, I hear a great deal about the short-lived nature of military despotism. I wish the history of the world would bear gentlemen out in this description of it. Was not the government erected by Augustus Cæsar a military despotism? and yet it endured for six or seven hundred years. Military despotism, unfortunately, is too likely in its nature to be permanent, and it is not true that it depends on the life of the first usurper.

Though half of the Roman emperors were murdered, yet the military despotism went on; and so it would be, I fear, in France. If Bonaparte should disappear from the scene, to

make room, perhaps, for a Berthier or any other general, what difference would that make in the quality of French despotism or in our relation to the country? We may as safely treat with a Bonaparte, or with any of his successors, be they whom they may, as we could with a Louis XVI, a Louis XVII, or a Louis XVIII. There is no difference but in the name. Where the power essentially resides, thither we ought to go for peace.

But, sir, if we are to reason on the fact, I should think that it is the interest of Bonaparte to make peace. A lover of military glory, as that general must necessarily be, may he not think that his measure of glory is full; and it may be tarnished by a reverse of fortune and can hardly be increased by any new laurels? He must feel that in the situation to which he is now raised he can no longer depend on his own fortune, his own genius, and his own talents, for a continuance of his success. He must be under the necessity of employing other generals, whose misconduct or incapacity might endanger his power, or whose triumphs even might affect the interest which he holds in the opinion of the French.

Peace, then, would secure to him what he has achieved and fix the inconstancy of fortune. But this will not be his only motive. He must see that France also requires a respite—a breathing interval, to recruit her wasted strength.

To procure her this respite would be, perhaps, the attainment of more solid glory, as well as the means of acquiring more solid power, than anything which he can hope to gain from arms and from the proudest triumphs. May he not, then, be zealous to secure this fame, the only species of fame, perhaps, that is worth acquiring? Nay, granting that his soul may still burn with the thirst of military exploits, is it not likely that he is disposed to yield to the feelings of the French

people and to consolidate his power by consulting their interests?

I have a right to argue in this way when suppositions of his insincerity are reasoned upon on the other side. Sir, these aspersions are, in truth, always idle and even mischievous. I have been too long accustomed to hear imputations and calumnies thrown out upon great and honorable characters, to be much influenced by them. My honorable and learned friend [Mr. Erskine] has paid this night a most just, deserved, and eloquent tribute of applause to the memory of that great and unparalleled character who is so recently lost to the world.

I must, like him, beg leave to dwell a moment on the venerable George Washington, though I know that it is impossible for me to bestow anything like adequate praise on a character which gave us, more than any other human being, the example of a perfect man; yet, good, great, and unexampled as General Washington was, I can remember the time when he was not better spoken of in this House than Bonaparte is at present.

The right honorable gentleman who opened this debate [Mr. Dundas] may remember in what terms of disdain, of virulence, even of contempt, General Washington was spoken of by gentlemen on that side of the House. Does he not recollect with what marks of indignation any member was stigmatized as an enemy to his country who mentioned with common respect the name of General Washington?

If a negotiation had then been proposed to be opened with that great man, what would have been said? Would you treat with a rebel, a traitor! What an example would you not give by such an act! I do not know whether the right honorable gentleman may not yet possess some of his old prejudices on the subject.

I hope not: I hope by this time we are all convinced that a republican government, like that of America, may exist without danger or injury to social order or to established monarchies. They have happily shown that they can maintain the relations of peace and amity with other states. They have shown, too, that they are alive to the feelings of honor; but they do not lose sight of plain good sense and discretion. They have not refused to negotiate with the French, and they have accordingly the hopes of a speedy termination of every difference. We cry up their conduct, but we do not imitate it.

At the beginning of the struggle we were told that the French were setting up a set of wild and impracticable theories, and that we ought not to be misled by them; that they were phantoms with which we could not grapple.

Now we are told that we must not treat, because, out of the lottery, Bonaparte has drawn such a prize as military despotism. Is military despotism a theory? One would think that that is one of the practical things which ministers might understand, and to which they would have no particular objection. But what is our present conduct founded on but a theory, and that a most wild and ridiculous theory?

For what are we fighting? Not for a principle; not for security; not for conquest; but merely for an experiment and a speculation, to discover whether a gentleman at Paris may not turn out a better man than we now take him to be.

My honorable friend [Mr. Erskine] has been censured for an opinion which he gave, and I think justly, that the change of property in France since the Revolution must form an almost insurmountable barrier to the return of the ancient proprietors.

"No such thing," says the right honorable gentleman,

"nothing can be more easy. Property is depreciated to such a rate that the purchasers would easily be brought to restore the estates."

I think differently. It is the character of every such convulsion as that which has ravaged France that an infinite and undescribable load of misery is inflicted upon private families. The heart sickens at the recital of the sorrows which it engenders.

The Revolution did not imply, though it may have occasioned, a total change of property; the restoration of the Bourbons does imply it; and such is the difference. There is no doubt but that if the noble families had foreseen the duration and the extent of the evils which were to fall upon their heads, they would have taken a very different line of conduct; but they unfortunately flew from their country.

The King and his advisers sought foreign aid, and a confederacy was formed to restore them by military force. As a means of resisting this combination the estates of the fugitives were confiscated and sold. However compassion may deplore their case, it cannot be said that the thing is unprecedented. The people have always resorted to such means of defence.

Now the question is, how this property is to be got out of their hands. If it be true, as I have heard it said, that the purchasers of national and forfeited estates amount to one million and a half of persons, I see no hopes of their being forced to deliver up their property; nor do I even know that they ought. I doubt whether it would be the means of restoring tranquillity and order to a country, to attempt to divest a body of one million and a half of inhabitants, in order to reinstate a much smaller body. I question the policy, even if the thing were practicable; but I assert that such a body of

new proprietors forms an insurmountable barrier to the restoration of the ancient order of things. Never was a revolution consolidated by a pledge so strong.

But, as if this were not of itself sufficient, Louis XVIII, from his retirement at Mittau, puts forth a manifesto in which he assures the friends of his house that he is about to come back with all the powers that formerly belonged to his family. He does not promise to the people a constitution which might tend to conciliate their hearts; but, stating that he is to come with all the old régime, they would naturally attach to it its proper appendages of *bastilles*, *lettres de cachet*, *gabelle*, etc.; and the *noblesse*, for whom this proclamation was peculiarly conceived, would also naturally feel that if the monarch was to be restored to all his privileges they surely were to be reinstated in their estates without a compensation to the purchasers. Is this likely to make the people wish for the restoration of royalty? I have no doubt but there may be a number of Chouans in France, though I am persuaded that little dependence is to be placed on their efforts. There may be a number of people dispersed over France, and particularly in certain provinces, who may retain a degree of attachment to royalty; how the government will contrive to compromise with that spirit I know not.

I suspect, however, that Bonaparte will try. His efforts have been already turned to that object; and, if we may believe report, he has succeeded to a considerable degree. He will naturally call to his recollection the precedent which the history of France itself will furnish.

The once formidable insurrection of the Huguenots was completely stifled, and the party conciliated, by the policy of Henry IV, who gave them such privileges, and raised them so high in the government, as to make some persons appre-

hend danger therefrom to the unity of the empire. Nor will the French be likely to forget the revocation of the edict; one of the memorable acts of the house of Bourbon, which was never surpassed in atrocity, injustice, and impolicy by anything that has disgraced Jacobinism.

If Bonaparte shall attempt with the Chouans some similar arrangement to that of Henry IV, who will say that he is likely to fail? He will meet with no great obstacle to success from the influence which our ministers have established with the chiefs, or in the attachment and dependence which they have on our protection. For what has the right honorable gentleman told them, in stating the contingencies in which he will treat with Bonaparte? He will excite a rebellion in France. He will give support to the Chouans, if they can stand their ground; but he will not make common cause with them; for, unless they can depose Bonaparte, send him into banishment, or execute him, he will abandon the Chouans and treat with this very man whom at the same time he describes as holding the reins and wielding the powers of France for purposes of unexampled barbarity.

Sir, I wish the atrocities of which we hear so much, and which I abhor as much as any man were indeed unexampled. I fear that they do not belong exclusively to the French. When the right honorable gentleman speaks of the extraordinary successes of the last campaign, he does not mention the horrors by which some of these successes were accompanied. Naples, for instance, has been, among others, what is called "delivered"; and yet, if I am rightly informed, it has been stained and polluted by murders so ferocious, and by cruelties of every kind so abhorrent, that the heart shudders at the recital.

It has been said, not only that the miserable victims of the

rage and brutality of the fanatics were savagely murdered, but that in many instances their flesh was eaten and devoured by the cannibals who are the advocates and the instruments of social order!

Nay, England is not totally exempt from reproach, if the rumors which are circulated be true. I will mention a fact, to give ministers the opportunity, if it be false, to wipe away the stain that it must otherwise affix on the British name. It is said that a party of the republican inhabitants of Naples took shelter in the fortress of the Castel de Uovo.

They were besieged by a detachment from the royal army, to whom they refused to surrender; but demanded that a British officer should be brought forward, and to him they capitulated. They made terms with him under the sanction of the British name. It was agreed that their persons and property should be safe, and that they should be conveyed to Toulon. They were accordingly put on board a vessel; but, before they sailed, their property was confiscated, numbers of them taken out, thrown into dungeons, and some of them, I understand, notwithstanding the British guarantee, actually executed.

Where then, sir, is this war, which on every side is pregnant with such horrors, to be carried? Where is it to stop? Not till we establish the house of Bourbon! And this you cherish the hope of doing because you have had a successful campaign. Why, sir, before this you have had a successful campaign. The situation of the allies, with all they have gained, is surely not to be compared now to what it was when you had taken Valenciennes, Quesnoy, Condé, etc., which induced some gentlemen in this House to prepare themselves for a march to Paris. With all that you have gained, you surely will not say that the prospect is brighter

now than it was then. What have you gained but the recovery of a part of what you before lost?

One campaign is successful to you; another to them; and in this way, animated by the vindictive passions of revenge, hatred, and rancor, which are infinitely more flagitious, even, than those of ambition and the thirst of power, you may go on forever; as, with such black incentives, I see no end to human misery.

And all this without an intelligible motive. All this because you may gain a better peace a year or two hence! So that we are called upon to go on merely as a speculation. We must keep Bonaparte for some time longer at war, as a state of probation.

Gracious God, sir! is war a state of probation? Is peace a rash system? Is it dangerous for nations to live in amity with each other? Are your vigilance, your policy, your common powers of observation, to be extinguished by putting an end to the horrors of war? Cannot this state of probation be as well undergone without adding to the catalogue of human sufferings? "But we must pause!"

What! must the bowels of Great Britain be torn out—her best blood be spilled—her treasure wasted—that you may make an experiment? Put yourselves, oh! that you would put yourselves in the field of battle and learn to judge of the sort of horrors that you excite!

In former wars a man might, at least, have some feeling, some interest, that served to balance in his mind the impressions which a scene of carnage and of death must inflict. If a man had been present at the battle of Blenheim, for instance, and had inquired the motive of the battle, there was not a soldier engaged who could not have satisfied his curiosity and even, perhaps, allayed his feelings. They were fighting, they

knew, to repress the uncontrolled ambition of the Grand Monarch. But if a man were present now at a field of slaughter, and were to inquire for what they were fighting—"Fighting!" would be the answer; "they are not fighting; they are pausing."

"Why is that man expiring? Why is that other writhing with agony? What means this implacable fury?"

The answer must be, "You are quite wrong, sir, you deceive yourself—they are not fighting—do not disturb them—they are merely pausing! This man is not expiring with agony—that man is not dead—he is only pausing! Lord help you, sir! they are not angry with one another; they have now no cause of quarrel; but their country thinks that there should be a pause. All that you see, sir, is nothing like fighting—there is no harm, nor cruelty, nor bloodshed in it whatever: it is nothing more than a political pause! It is merely to try an experiment—to see whether Bonaparte will not behave himself better than heretofore; and in the meantime we have agreed to a pause, in pure friendship!"

And is this the way, sir, that you are to show yourselves the advocates of order? You take up a system calculated to uncivilize the world—to destroy order—to trample on religion—to stifle in the heart, not merely the generosity of noble sentiment, but the affections of social nature; and in the prosecution of this system you spread terror and devastation all around you.

Sir, I have done. I have told you my opinion. I think you ought to have given a civil, clear, and explicit answer to the overture which was fairly and handsomely made you. If you were desirous that the negotiation should have included all your allies, as the means of bringing about a general peace, you should have told Bonaparte so. But I believe you were

afraid of his agreeing to the proposal. You took that method before.

Aye, but you say the people were anxious for peace in 1797. I say they are friends to peace now; and I am confident that you will one day acknowledge it. Believe me, they are friends to peace; although by the laws which you have made, restraining the expression of the sense of the people, public opinion cannot now be heard as loudly and unequivocally as heretofore. But I will not go into the internal state of this country. It is too afflicting to the heart to see the strides which have been made, by means of and under the miserable pretext of this war, against liberty of every kind, both of power of speech and of writing; and to observe in another kingdom the rapid approaches to that military despotism which we affect to make an argument against peace. I know, sir, that public opinion, if it could be collected, would be for peace as much now as in 1797; and that it is only by public opinion, and not by a sense of their duty or by the inclination of their minds, that ministers will be brought, if ever, to give us peace.

I conclude, sir, with repeating what I said before: I ask for no gentleman's vote who would have reprobated the compliance of ministers with the proposition of the French government. I ask for no gentleman's support to-night who would have voted against ministers if they had come down and proposed to enter into a negotiation with the French. But I have a right to ask, and in honor, in consistency, in conscience I have a right to expect, the vote of every honorable gentleman who would have voted with ministers in an address to his Majesty diametrically opposite to the motion of this night.

MIRABEAU



MIRABEAU (ABRIEL HONORE DE RIQUETTI, COUNT DE MIRABEAU, French statesman, was born at Bignon, in Provence, France, March 9, 1749, and died at Paris, April 2, 1791. As a youth, he had a bad upbringing and had a tyrant for his father, though his inherent disposition was vicious and erratic, and his manhood was one of wild, disease-breeding indulgence, save when he was in prison. In spite of these vices, his personal deformities, and lack of moral sense, his countrymen, when he died, expressed an intoxicating admiration of the man and an almost frenzied sorrow at his decease. This was due, in part, to Mirabeau's sympathy with the masses, and, though he was no lover of anarchy, to his attitude against the monarchy preceding the Revolution; and in part to his commanding genius and passionate eloquence in the Assembly, where he took the foremost place until his death in his forty-third year, his health being undermined by his early excesses and the burden of his labors. Had he lived, France might have been saved many of the horrors of the Revolution, for few could command the masses as he could; while even royalty, under wholesome restraints, might have been restored and purged of its errors and feebleness. Brief as his career was, his name cannot be forgotten in the history of his country. His chief writings, the outcome of his temporary exile in Prussia, are "History of the Prussian Monarchy under Frederick the Great" and "Secret History of the Court of Berlin." See the "French Revolution," by Taine, and the "History of the French Revolution," by Carlyle. Appended is Mirabeau's speech in the States-General with reference to the financial proposals of Jacques Necker, the statesman and financier of the era.

SPEECH ON NECKER'S FINANCIAL PROJECT

SEPTEMBER 26 AND OCTOBER 2, 1789

GENTLEMEN,—In the midst of so much tumultuous debate can I not restore the deliberation of the day by asking a few very simple questions?

Condescend, gentlemen, condescend to reply.

Has not the First Minister of Finances presented the most frightful picture of our present situation?

Has he not told you that any delay aggravates the danger?—that a day, an hour, a moment may make it fatal?

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