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THOMAS PAINE,

TO THE

PEOPLE OF ENGLAND.

In casting my eye over England and America, and comparing them together, the difference is very striking. The two countries were created by the same power and peopled from the same stock, what then has caused the difference? Have those who emigrated to America improved, or those whom they left behind degenerated. There are as many degrees of difference in the political morality of the two people, as there are of longitude between the two countries.

In the science of cause and effect, every thing that enters into the composition of either must be allowed its proportion of influence. Investigating, we must take into the calculation the difference of the two systems of government, the *hereditary* and the *representative*. Under the hereditary system it is the government that forms and fashions the political character of the people: In the representative system it is the people that forms the character of the government.—Their own happiness as citizens forms the basis of their conduct and the guide of their choice. Now is it more probable that an hereditary government should become corrupt, and corrupt the people by its example, or that a whole people should become corrupt and produce a corrupt government; for the point where the corruption begins becomes the source from whence it afterwards spreads.

While men remained in Europe as subjects of some hereditary potentate, they had ideas conformable to that condition; but when they arrived in America they found themselves in possession of a new character, the character of sovereignty; and like converts to a new religion they became inspired with new principles. Elevated above their former rank, they considered government and public affairs as part of their own concern, for they were to pay the expence, and they watched them with circumspection. They soon found that government was not that complicated thing, enshrined in mystery, which church and state, to play into each other's hands, had represented it; and that to conduct it with proper effect was to conduct it justly. Common sense, common honesty, and civil manners qualify a man for government; and besides this, put man in a situation that requires new thinking and the mind will grow up to it, for like the body it improves by exercise. Man is but a learner all his lifetime.

But whatever be the cause of the difference of character between the people and government of England and those of America, the effect arising from that difference is as distinguishable as the sun from the moon. We see America flourishing in peace, cultivating friendship with all nations, and reducing her public debt and taxes, incurred by the revolution. On the contrary we see England almost perpetually in war, or warlike disputes, and her debt and taxes continually encreasing. Could we suppose a stranger, who knew nothing of the origin of the two countries, he would, from observation, conclude, that America was the *old* country experienced & sage, & England the *new*, eccentric and wild.

Scarcely had England drawn home her troops from America after the revolutionary war than she was on the point of plunging herself into a war with Holland on account of the stadtholder; then with Russia; then with Spain on account of Nootka *catskins*, and actually with France to prevent her revolution. Scarcely had she made peace with France, and before she had fulfilled her own part of the treaty, than she declared war again to avoid fulfilling the treaty. In her treaty of peace with America she engaged to evacuate the western posts within six months, but having obtained peace she refused to fulfill the conditions and kept possession of the posts and embroiled us in an Indian war. In her treaty of peace with France they engaged to evacuate Malta within three months, but having obtained peace she refused to evacuate Malta and began a new war.

All these matters pass before the eyes of the world, who form their own opinion thereon, regardless of what English newspaper may say of France or French papers say of England. The non-fulfilment of a treaty is a case that every body can understand. They reason upon it as they would on a contract between *two* individuals, and in so doing they reason from a right foundation. The affected pomp and mistification of courts make no alteration in the principle. Had France declared war to compel England to fulfill the treaty, as a man would commence a civil action to compel a delinquent party to fulfill a contract, she would have stood acquitted in the opinion of nations. But that England still holding Malta, should go to war for Malta, is a paradox not easily solved; unless it be supposed that the peace was insidious from the beginning, that it was concluded with the expectation that the military ardour of France would cool, or a new order of things arise, or a national discontent prevail, that would favour a non-execution of a treaty, and leave England arbiter of the fate of Malta.

Something like this, which was like a vision in the clouds, must have been the calculation of the British ministry; for certainly they did not expect the war would take the turn it has. Could they have foreseen, and they ought to have foreseen, that a declaration of war was the same as sending a challenge to Bonaparte to invade England and make it the seat of war, they hardly would have done it unless they were mad; for in any event such a war might produce, in a military view, it is England that would be the sufferer, unless it terminated in a wise revolution. One of the causes assigned for this declaration of war by the British ministry, was that Bonaparte had cramped their commerce. If by cramping their commerce is to be understood that of encouraging and extending the commerce of France, he had a right, and it was his duty to do it. The prerogative of monopoly belongs to no nation. But to make this one of the causes of war, considering their commerce in consequence of that declaration is now cramped ten times more, is like the case of a foolish man who after losing an eye in fighting, renews the combat to revenge the injury and loses the other eye.

Those who never experienced an invasion by suffering it, which the English people have not, can have but little idea of it. Between the two armies the country will be desolated, wherever the armies are, and that as much by their own army as by the enemy.—The farmers on the coast will be the first sufferers, for whether their stock of cattle, corn, &c. be seized by the invading army or driven off, or burnt, by orders of their own government, the effect will be the same to them. As to the revenue, which has been collected altogether in paper, since the bank stopt payment, it will go to destruction the instant an invading army lands—and as to effective government, there can be but little where two armies are contending for victory, in a country small as England is.

With respect to the general politics of Europe, the British ministry could not have committed a greater error than to make Malta the ostensible cause of the war; for though Malta is an unproductive rock, and will be an expence to any nation that possesses it, there is not a power in Europe will consent that England should have it. It is a situation capable of annoying and controlling the commerce of other nations in the Mediterranean; and the conduct of England on the seas, and in the Baltic, has shewn the danger of her possessing Malta. Bonaparte by opposing her claim has all Europe with him. England by asserting it loses all. Had the English ministry studied for an object that would put them at variance with all nations from the north of Europe to the south, they could not have done it more effectually.

But what is Malta to the people of England, compared with the evils and dangers they already suffer in consequence of it. It is their own government that has brought this upon them. Were Burke now living he would be deprived of his exclamation, that "the age of chivalry is gone;" for this declaration of war is like a challenge sent from one knight of the sword to another knight of the sword to fight him on the challenger's ground, and England is staked as the prize.

But though the British ministry began this war for the sake of Malta, they are now artful enough to keep Malta out of sight. Not a word is now said about Malta in any of their parliamentary speeches and messages. The king's speech is silent upon the subject, and the invasion is put in its place, as if the invasion was the cause of the war, and not the consequence of it. This policy is easily seen through. The case is, they went to war *without counting the cost*, or calculating upon events, and they are now obliged to shift the scenes to conceal the disgrace.

If they were disposed to try experiments upon France, they chose for it the worst possible time as well as the worst possible object. France has now for its chief the most enterprising and fortunate man, either for deep project or daring execution, the world has known for many ages. Compared with him, there is not a man in the British government, or under its authority, has any chance with him. That he is ambitious the world knows, and he always was so; but he knew where to stop. He had reached the highest point of probable expectation, and having reduced all his enemies to peace, had set himself down to the improvement of agriculture, manufactures and commerce at home, and his conversation with the English ambassador Whitworth, shewed he wished to continue so. In this view of his situation, could any thing be worse policy than to give to satisfied ambition a new object and provoke it into action. Yet this the British ministry have done.

The plan of a descent upon England by gun boats, began after the first peace with Austria, and the acquisition of Belgium by France. Before that acquisition France had no territory on the north sea, and it is there the descent will be carried on. Dunkirk was then her northern limit. The English coast opposite to France on the channel, from the straits between Dover and Calais to the land's end, about three hundred miles, is high, bold and rocky, to the height, in many places perpendicular, of three, four, or five hundred feet, and it is only where there are breaks in the rocks, as at Portsmouth, Plymouth, &c. that a landing can be made, and as those places could be easily protected, because England was mistress of the channel, France had no opportunity of making an invasion, unless she could first defeat the English fleet. But the union of Belgium to France makes a new order of things.

The English coast on the north sea, including the counties of Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, and Lincolnshire, is as level as a bowling green, and approachable in every part for more than two hundred miles. The shore is a clear firm sand, where a flat bottomed boat may row dry a ground. The country people use it as a race ground, and for other sports, when the tide is out. It is the weak and defenceless part of England, and it is impossible to make it otherwise; and besides this, there is not a port or harbor in it where ships of the line or large frigates can rendezvous for its protection. The Belgic coast and that of Holland, which joins it, is directly opposite this defenceless part, and open a new passage for invasion. The Dutch fishermen know this coast better than the English themselves, except those who live upon it; and the Dutch smugglers know every creek and corner of it.

The original plan, formed in the time of the directory (but now much more extensive) was to build one thousand boats, each sixty feet long, sixty feet broad, to draw about two feet water, to carry a twenty-four or thirty-six pounder in the head, and a field piece in the stern, to be run out as soon as they touched ground. Each boat was to carry an hundred men, making in the whole one hundred thousand, and to row with twenty or twenty-five oars on a side. Bonaparte was appointed to the command, and by an agreement between him and me, I was to accompany him, as the intention of the expedition was to give the people of England an opportunity of forming a government for themselves, and thereby bring about peace. I have no reason to suppose this part of the plan is altered, because there is nothing better Bonaparte can do. As to the clamour spread by some of the English newspapers, that he comes for plunder, it is absurd. Bonaparte is too good a general to undiscipline and dissolute his army by plundering, and too good a politician as well as much accustomed to great atchievements, to make plunder his object. He goes against the government that has declared war against him.

As the expedition could chuse its time of setting off either after a storm, when the English fleet would be blown off, or in a calm, or in a fog; and as thirty-six hours rowing would be able to carry them over, the probability is it would arrive, and when arrived no ship of the line or large frigate could approach it on account of the shoalness of the coast; and besides this the boats would form a floating battery close in with the shore of a thousand pieces of heavy artillery; and the attempt of Nelson against the gun-boats at Boulogne shews the insufficiency of ships in such situations. About two hundred and fifty gun-boats were built when the expedition was abandoned for that of Egypt, to which the preparations had served as a feint.

The present impolitic war by the English government has now renewed the plan, and that with much greater energy than before, and with national unanimity. All France is alive to chastise the English government for recommencing the war, and all Europe stands still to behold it. The preparations for invasion have already demonstrated to France, what England ought never to have permitted her to know, which is, that she can hold the English government in terror and the whole country in alarm whenever she pleases, and as long as she pleases, and that without employing a single ship of the line, and more effectually than if she had a hundred sail. The boasted navy of England is out-done by gun-boats! It is a revolution in naval tactics! But we live in an age of revolutions.

The preparations in England for defence are also great, but they are marked with an ominous trait of character. There is something sullen on the face of affairs in England. Not an address has been presented to the king by any county, city, town or corporation since the declaration of war. The people unite for the protection of themselves and property against whatever events may happen, but they are *not pleased* and their silence is the expression of their discontent.

Another circumstance, curious and awkward, was the conduct of the house of commons with respect to their address to the king in consequence of the king's speech at the opening of Parliament. The address which is always an echo of the speech, was voted without opposition, and this equivocal silence passed for unanimity. The next thing was to present it, and it was made the order of the next day that the house should go up in a body to the king with the speaker at the head for that purpose. The time fixed was half after three, and it was expected the procession would be numerous, three or four hundred at least, in order to shew their zeal and their loyalty and their thanks to the king for his intention of taking the field. But when half after three arrived, only thirty members were present, and, without forty, (the number that makes a house) the address could not be presented. The sergeant was then sent out, with the authority of a press warrant, to search for the members, and by four o'clock he returned with just enough to make up forty, and the procession set off with the slowness of a funeral, for it was remarked the procession went slower than usual.

Such a circumstance in such a critical juncture of affairs, and on such an occasion, shews at least, a great indifference towards the government. It was like saying, you have brought us into a great deal of trouble and we have no *personal* thanks to make to you. We have voted the address as a customary matter of form, and we leave it to find its way to you as well as it can.

If the invasion succeed, I hope Bonaparte will remember that this war has not been provoked by the people. It is altogether the act of the government without their consent or knowledge; and though the late peace appears to have been insidious from the first on the part of government, it was received by the people with a sincerity of joy.

There is yet perhaps one way, if it be not too late, to put an end to this burthensome state of things and which threatens to be worse; which is for the people, now they are embodied for their own protection, to instruct their representatives in Parliament to move for the fulfilment of the treaty of Amiens, for a treaty ought to be fulfilled. The present is an uncommon case accompanied with uncommon circumstances, and it must be got over by means suited to the occasion. What is Malta to them?—The possession of it might serve to extend the patronage and influence of the crown on the appointment to new offices, & the part that would fall to the people would be to pay the expence. The more acquisitions the government makes abroad, the more taxes the people have to pay at home. This has always been the case in England.

The non-fulfilment of a treaty ruins the honor of a government, and spreads reproach over the character of a nation. But when a treaty of peace is made with the concealed design of not fulfilling it, and war is declared for the avowed purpose of avoiding it, the case is still worse. The representative system does not put it in the power of an individual to declare war of his own will. It must be the act of the body of the representatives, for it is their constituents who are to pay the expence. The state which the people of England are now in, shews the extreme danger of trusting this power to the caprice of an individual, whatever title he may bear. In that country this power is assumed by what is called the crown, for it is not constituted by any legal authority. It is a branch from the trunk of monarchical despotism.

By this impolitic declaration of war, the government of England have put every thing to issue, and no wise general would commence an action he might avoid, where little is to be gained by gaining the battle, and every thing is to be lost by losing it. An invasion and a revolution, which consequently includes that of Ireland, stand now on the same ground. What part the people may finally take in a contest pregnant with such an issue is yet to be known.—By the experiment of rising the country *in mass*, the government have put arms into the hands of men whom they would have sent to Bottany Bay but a few months before, had they found a pike in their possession. The honour of this project, which is copied from France, is claimed by Mr. Pitt; and no project of his has yet succeeded in the end, except that of raising the taxes and ruining the bank. All his schemes in the revolutionary war of France failed of success, and finished in discredit. If Bonaparte is remarkable for an unexampled series of good fortune, Mr. Pitt is remarkable for a contrary fate; and his want of popularity with the people, whom he deserted, and betrayed on the question of a reform of Parliament, sheds no beams round his projects.

If the present eventful crisis, for an eventful one it is, should end in a revolution, the people of England have, within their glance, the benefit of experience both in theory and fact. This was not the case at first. The American revolution began on untried ground. The representative system of government was then unknown in practice, and but little thought of in theory.—The idea that man must be governed by effigy and shew, and that superstitious reverence was necessary to establish authority, had so benumbed the reasoning faculties of man, that some bold exertion was necessary to shock them into reflection. But the experiment has now been made. The practice of almost thirty years, the last twenty of which has been of peace, notwithstanding the wrong headed tumultuous administration of John Adams, has proved the excellence of the system, and the NEW WORLD is now the *preceptor* of the old. The children are become the fathers of the progenitors.

With respect to the French revolution, it was begun by good men and on good principles, and I have always believed it would have gone on so, had not the provocative interference of foreign powers, of which Pitt was the principal and vindictive agent, distracted it into madness and sown jealousies among the leaders.

The people of England have now two revolutions before them. The one as an example; the other as a warning. Their own wisdom will direct them what to chuse, and what to avoid, and in every thing which regards their happiness, combined with the common good of mankind, I wish them honor and success.

THOMAS PAINE.

America, March 4, 1804.

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PHILADELPHIA, Feb. 1—tw&ugtf

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