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Gardiner, John S. J.

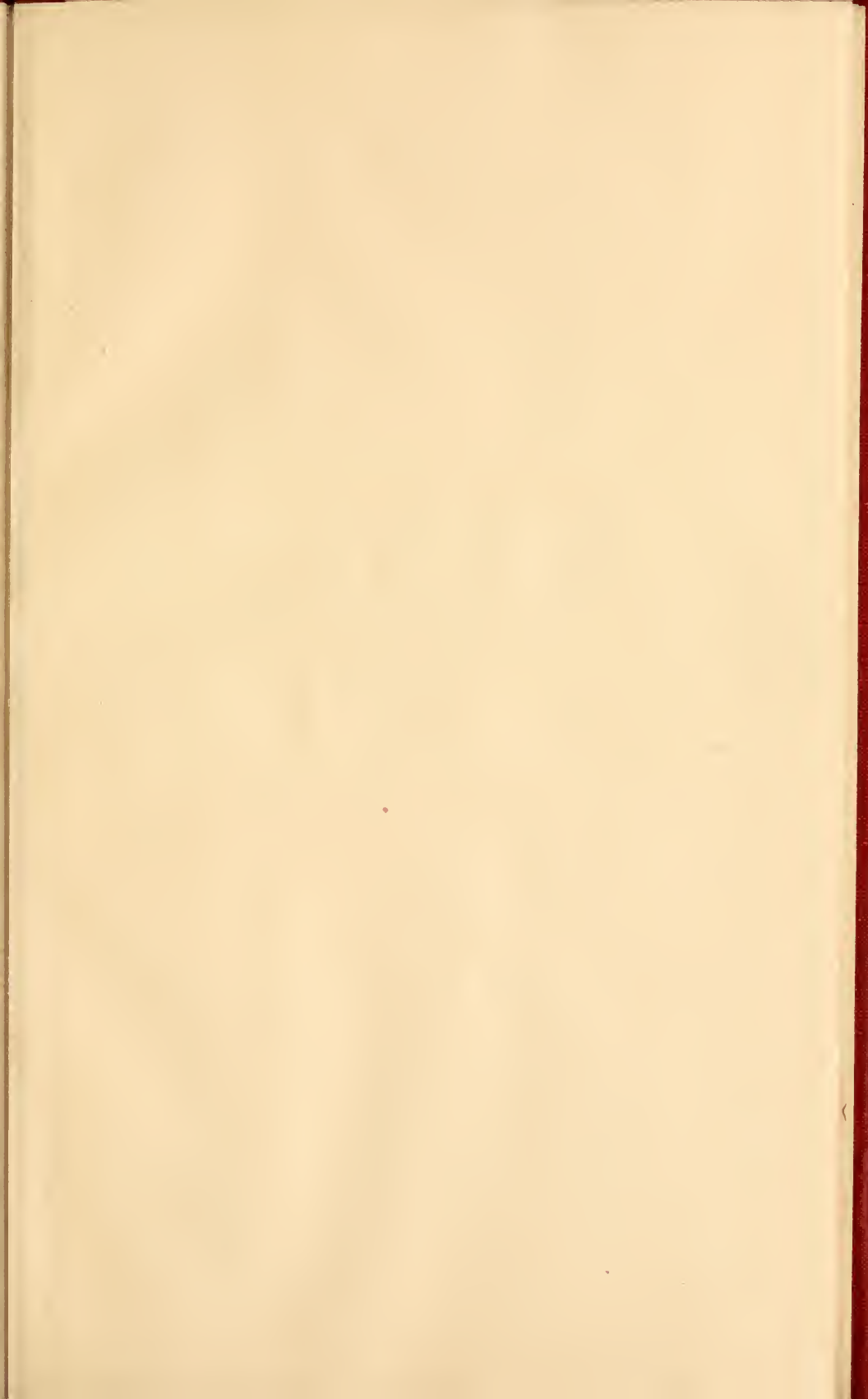
Discourse: I am for peace.

Boston, 1812.



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Book 683



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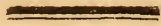
UPON THE

DECLARATION OF WAR AGAINST

GREAT-BRITAIN.

BY JOHN S. J. GARDINER, A. M.

RECTOR.



BOSTON:

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1812.



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I AM FOR PEACE.

I DOUBT not, my brethren, were the great majority of our fellow-citizens to speak their sentiments, their language individually would be that of the text: 'I am for peace.'

The greatest of national calamities has at length befallen us, and we are engaged, as the admirable proclamation of his Excellency expresses it, 'in war against the nation from which we are descended, and which for many generations has been the bulwark of the religion we profess.' It is a war unexampled in the annals of the world, wantonly proclaimed on the most frivolous and groundless pretences, against a nation, from whose friendship we might derive the most signal advantages, and from whose hostility we have reason to dread the most tremendous losses. It is a war, entered into at a moment the most unpropitious, when we have neither army, nor navy, nor money, nor inclination, to flatter us with the remotest probability of success, and which *must* terminate in the disgrace of our arms, and possibly in the loss of our liberties.

I shall consider in the following discourse, I. the causes which led to this war ; II. conclude with such observations as the subject may suggest.

I. The first cause of our present alarming situation was the French revolution. It was natural for a nation like ours, which had thrown off the yoke of the parent country, and, at the expense of much blood and treasure, established a republic, to sympathize with the French people in their attempts to form a free government. The gratitude felt towards France for the aid she afforded us during our own revolutionary struggle, though *that* aid, in which the nation had no voice, was granted solely by the king, at that time styled 'our great and good ally,' increased our sympathy, and gradually excited our enthusiasm. So far our gratitude to France was not reprehensible. Our vanity also was gratified at beholding a great nation following, as we supposed, our steps, and cherishing the holy flame of freedom, caught at the American altar, which was to enlighten all Europe; and our enthusiastic philanthropy exulted at the prospect of a political millennium, when the rod of oppression would fall from the grasp of tyrants, and the rights of man be universally respected. Little did we think that this flame, which was to purify the old governments of Europe, would prove a conflagration, that would set fire to the world. But when France, from a nation of 'gentlemen and cavaliers' degenerated to a nation of cut-throats, when she abolished by a formal decree all revealed religion, massacred her clergy, murdered her nobles, drowned innocent women and children, perpetrated the worst crimes in the very worst manner, and led to the guillotine Lewis the sixteenth, 'our great and

good ally,' the only Frenchman to whom we ever owed an obligation,...from that time all rational and thinking men abandoned her cause, and have ever since lamented the fatal success of her arms.

We should naturally have concluded that the American people would have felt justly indignant at the perpetration of such unheard of atrocities ; that a grateful people would have resented the murder of their benefactor ; that a religious people would have been shocked at the abolition of christianity ; that a moral and humane people would have turned with disgust from scenes of injustice, confiscation, and blood. That the sounder part of the community felt these sentiments, there can be no doubt. But an unaccountable infatuation seems to have seized upon a considerable number of our fellow citizens, to have turned their heads and steeled their hearts. At that period when the incendiary Genet landed in the southern states, and blew his trumpet of anarchy, had the present administration been at the helm, we should ere this have been, what we shall yet be, if we do not exert ourselves with the spirit of freemen, the vassals of France. But Washington was then alive ; and the father of his country, who had vindicated her rights and achieved her independence, saved her from the crimes and horrors of the French revolution. A war with England at that time would have been more just than at any period since, as she disregarded our rights, and committed depredations on our commerce. But Washington, sensible that a rupture with England must have produced an alliance with France, wisely preferred negotiation to war. In spite of factious demagogues, and at the hazard of his own popularity, he signed Mr. Jay's

treaty, by which he not only saved his country from ruin, but procured for her a degree of prosperity, unexampled in the annals of any nation. We were then, in the language of Mr. Jefferson, 'in the full tide of successful experiment;' but from the time *that* gentleman came into power, the tide has been gradually ebbing, till it is now completely at low water mark. Such was the baneful tendency of his measures, and such, continued and improved by his successor in office, have been their baneful effects.

It requires, my brethren, no depth of political knowledge, no profound reasoning, to appreciate duly the merits of the two administrations, the administration of Washington, and the administration of Jefferson, in the latter of which I include Mr. Madison's, who is his pupil, if not his puppet, acting and speaking as he is prompted from behind the scenes. It is a matter of fact and of history, and you are capable of judging for yourselves. Look then on this picture, and on this. In the administration of Washington the affairs of the country were conducted with the utmost wisdom. Every office was filled with men of distinguished talents and unimpeachable integrity. The greatest impartiality was displayed towards the belligerents. Our commercial fleets whitened every ocean with their sails, carrying out the produce of our own country, and bringing home the various products of every clime, adapted either for use or ornament. Our merchants grew rich, our mechanics were fully employed, and our farmers met with a rapid sale and a high price for the fruits of their labour. Our seaports were improved with magnificent houses, and works of public utility, and an immense capital was

acquired by the successful enterprize of a protected commerce. Our land smiled with abundance, and the American nation advanced with rapid strides towards solid power, and national aggrandizement. We were at peace with all nations, and generally respected by all. Our credit was good, and our treasury full. Look now on the other picture, which represents the present situation of our country. Important offices filled by men without character and without capacity; the grossest partiality and even servility shown to one of the belligerents, and the other treated with injustice, calumny and violence; our commerce annihilated by embargoes and non-intercourses; our merchants ruined, our mechanics without employment; our farmers discouraged from raising more than what is necessary for home consumption; our seaports exposed to the attacks of the greatest naval power in the world, wantonly provoked; our floating property, to an immense amount, a prey to his numerous cruisers; an unjust and unnecessary war, involving French alliance, and, in that alliance, the loss of every thing dear to man, the loss of religion, of morality, of independence; an empty treasury, and impending taxes. Let any man of fair mind contrast these two pictures, and whatever may be his political sentiments, he will be compelled to acknowledge that a country could not have degenerated so rapidly from the highest state of prosperity to the lowest depth of distress, but from gross misconduct in its rulers.

After the anarchy of France, for liberty she never possessed, terminated in a military despotism, she no longer disguised her views of universal dominion, but trampled with equal indifference on the majesty of monarchies and the freedom of republics.

Here we thought, that our republican fellow citizens would surely open their eyes, and forever abandon a nation which had become the instrument of oppression under a merciless tyrant, who had proved himself destitute of every moral principle, and particularly hostile to republican institutions. What ! a free people admire a tyrant ! republicans become friends to a military despotism ! Tell it not in Gath ; publish it not in the streets of Ascalon.

There must surely be something fascinating to our rulers in the character and conduct of Napoleon, since their admiration of him, and subservience to his views, seem to increase with his atrocities. He insults our ambassadors,...prohibits our commerce,...confiscates our property,...burns our merchantmen,...imprisons our seamen,...declares war for us,...and tells our government that they are without honour, without just political views. Well, does not the republican spirit rise indignant at these injuries and insults ? Will not the southern patriots, the slave-holding declaimers in favour of the rights of man, demand instant vengeance ? Will not Mr. Madison, sensibly alive to his own honour, and to that of his country, demand reparation for the injuries, and satisfaction for the insults ? Alas ! philosophy is made of milder stuff, and southern patriotism consists, not in vindicating the rights of America, but in making war upon commerce, and in uttering philippics against the country of our ancestors. The southern patriots, as Mr. Randolph observes, expend all their sympathies on the Little Turtle and the savage tribes, whom they are anxious to furnish with blankets, to enable them to make a more successful attack upon us, and with scalp-

ing knives and tomahawks to murder our women and children. With regard to those, who speak the same language, and are governed nearly by the same laws as ourselves, their rancour is implacable, unrelenting as the grave. But with regard to France they are true spaniels, and fawn upon the hand that scourges them. At the nod of their imperial master they lay embargoes, they pass nonintercourses, they declare war.

A second cause that led to the present war is the antipathy to England, which has prevailed more or less in the great body of our fellow citizens throughout the Union, since our revolution. In those, who lost friends or property during the contest, the prejudice was natural and pardonable. But so similar are the interests of the two countries, so mutually advantageous their commercial intercourse, that this antipathy would long since have expired, had it not been kept alive by the spirit of party, and cherished by artificial means. The French revolution gave it additional vigour, and has rendered it so virulent and implacable among the semi-barbarians of the southern states, that it can never be cured but by the experience of French domination. When their property shall be seized by revolutionary Frenchmen, and their slaves excited to insurrection, they may discover, that Great Britain, of whose real character they are at present rather more ignorant than the Hottentots, is not the most tyrannical of nations, and that a British navy may prove some protection to the remaining liberties of man. In the commercial states, where the people are well-educated and enlightened, this antipathy is less violent, but still in a considerable degree exists. Even among those, whose views are

sufficiently enlarged to enable them to see that Great Britain is fighting for the freedom of the world, there is no cordiality towards her, though they are fully sensible that the independence of their own country depends on her success. Our former extensive commerce often brought us in collision with some of her numerous cruisers. Sometimes a seaman would be impressed, sometimes a ship would be carried into port. Whether the impressed man was a Briton or an American, whether the cargo was lawful or contraband, the merchant would feel resentment in proportion as he suffered either from detention or condemnation. The outcries of the republicans against the pirates of the ocean, as they styled them, were often re-echoed by the federalists, who, though they detested France, still cultivated strong prejudices against England. The public prints, some of which, in the pay of the administration, are edited by fugitive felons escaped from British justice, have for years teemed with the grossest abuse of that nation, and, under the cloak of American patriotism, have thus avenged the stripes or imprisonment received and merited by their authors. So far from there being British partizans in this country, it is difficult to find an individual candid enough to do that nation common justice. I am sensible that this language is not popular, but is it not true? and when was truth ever popular? Are not Mr. Pickering and Mr. Randolph the most unpopular men in the country? And why? because with a noble independence, regardless of popular delusion, they have told the people the truth; for many of our fellow citizens, like the Israelites of old, seem to exclaim, ‘Speak unto us smooth things; prophecy deceits.’

Mr. Burke somewhere observes, that if you allow a man to tell you the same story every day for a year together, however absurd and improbable it may be, you will at length believe him. Hence the senseless clamour against the orders in council, orders perfectly justifiable as retaliating on France her own injustice, and which never would have been executed, had we resisted with becoming spirit the French decrees. France prohibits all trade with England, and confiscates every neutral that is spoken with by a British cruiser. What is England to do? Is she patiently to submit to this? Is she, the undisputed mistress of the ocean, quietly to behold her enemy's ports crowded with commerce, and her own deserted? No. She declares that if neutrals do not compel France to rescind her decrees, that in justice to herself she shall be obliged to retaliate. She waits a whole year, and finding no effectual steps taken by neutrals to bring France to reason, she *does* retaliate. And what right have we to complain, especially since from the conduct of France, and her increased duties on neutral commerce, were the British orders rescinded, a trade with her would be neither safe nor profitable. And yet what an outcry have these orders excited in all parties throughout the Union, as if their repeal would bring back the golden days of the immortal Washington! 'Are the orders in council repealed? No....but they will be, for there is a change of ministry.' What consequence is it to you, whether they be repealed or not, if you are sold to Napoleon, as you have strong reason to believe, by the slaves who have abused your confidence? Do you suppose that the repeal of the orders would have ensured an accommodation with England? Be

assured it would not. Nothing short of the surrender of every maritime right on the part of Great Britain, and her entire prostration, would satisfy Napoleon and his American proconsul. We have every reason to form this conclusion from the conduct of the administration. From Mr. Jefferson's embargo to Mr. Madison's war the French continental system has been in operation in this country, as far as the people would bear it. Every provocation has been offered to Great Britain on our part, and our resentment has risen in proportion as she has shown a conciliating spirit, whilst our servility towards France has increased with her insolence, and has at length terminated in a war ruinous to ourselves, of which she only will reap the advantage. Suppose that Great Britain had enticed away our seamen, had refused to restore them on application, had laid embargoes, had passed a nonintercourse with this country, had refused to accept an apology for an act unauthorized by our government, had dismissed our ambassador of peace, quarrelled with another ambassador cloathed with plenipotentiary powers, for no reason that any man of sense could ever understand, in a compact with a third ambassador had inserted a studied insult on our chief magistrate, in her parliament had overwhelmed this country with the grossest calumny and abuse from the mouths of her leading orators, should we have suffered it, should we have endured it for a moment? No.... from Georgia to Maine every voice would have cried out for immediate war, and all hearts would have been united in the contest. Yet all this Great Britain has endured from *us*. We have enticed away her seamen, we have refused to restore them on application....we

have laid embargoes, and passed a nonintercourse,...we have refused to accept an apology for an act unauthorized by her government, though it has been accepted since,...twice we have dismissed her ambassadors of peace,...we have insulted her chief magistrate,...our orators in Congress have overwhelmed her with calumny and abuse ; and finding her still patient beyond their expectations, they have declared war. All these facts tend to prove incontrovertibly that a strange and unaccountable antipathy towards England has been one leading cause of our present misfortune.

A third cause that has produced this war is the choice of improper representatives.

The time was, when there existed in no part of the world a national assembly more august than the Congress of the United States. Washington and Adams, Hamilton and Pickering, filled the most important offices of state, whilst the two houses were composed of heroes, patriots and sages from all parts of the Union ; men of distinguished abilities and incorruptible integrity. Why Congress has continued to degenerate from that illustrious period, is a question best answered by those who have chosen its members. Do you wish to know the character of your present national rulers ? Hear it from Mr. Walsh, your best political writer. ' The agents of this abominable collusion with the fell tyrant of France,' says he, speaking of the embargo, ' are not, as every administration ought to be, the nation speaking and acting in the discourse and conduct of particular men, but a body of impudent empirics, who have wormed themselves into place, and usurped the public confidence by means of pretences and juggles, of which

the gross imposture, and the ruinous tendency, are every day becoming more and more visible to all descriptions of men.* 'If,' says this eloquent writer, in another passage, 'it has really happened, that the embargo was recommended and adopted pursuant to the dictates of the French minister, and secondarily, with a view to deprive the British and Spaniards of supplies for their armies in the Peninsula, there are no terms of reprobation which may not be justly applied to so foul an act of malevolence and servility. On this supposition, a greater degree of baseness has been displayed, a more criminal breach of trust has been committed, a grosser outrage practised on the national character, the spirit of the constitution, and the cause of justice and humanity, than history records in the conduct, we would almost say, of the rulers of any nation whatever. The people of the United States have been more cruelly betrayed and more miserably degraded, than were the people of England, when their monarchs of the house of Stuart sold themselves and their country to France, or even than were the Spaniards, when surrendered by their wretched sovereign, into the hand of Bonaparte, at Bayonne.†

If such be the feelings of this excellent writer, excited by the embargo, what will he say to the war that has succeeded it?

When our constitution was framed, and universal suffrage admitted, it was presumed, that the people, from their own interest, would elect men of sense and integrity to conduct the national affairs. It could hardly be foreseen that from a jealousy of wealth and of talents, and from party motives, they would entrust their dear-

* Walsh's American Review, No. VI. p. 328.

† P. 327.

est interests to persons deficient in character and capacity. And what has been the consequence? A Bidwell and a Gannet have turned out notorious knaves, and yet the character of those virtuous republicans, previously to their detection stood much higher than some patriotic members of congress who have voted for the present war. But if the people will choose persons to govern them, poor enough for temptation, and unprincipled enough not to withstand it, what can they expect but treachery, knavery, and meanness?

They have received a severe but salutary lesson, and if they do not improve by it, they will seal their own ruin. If they do not elect men of sense and integrity to govern them, they will experience again and again, what they have already experienced, a loaded cannon pointed at the commercial states, and a madman with a lighted match at the touch-hole, to let it off.

II. I proceed, secondly, to make a few observations that arise from the subject.

1. Let no considerations whatever, my brethren, deter you at all times, and in all places, from execrating the present war. It is a war unjust, foolish, and ruinous. It is unjust, because Great Britain has offered us every concession short of what she conceives would prove her ruin. It is foolish, because it must be waged by generals without soldiers, by naval officers without ships, by an administration without credit, with a treasury without money, without a definite object, with a large majority of the people disaffected and indignant. It is ruinous, because it exposes our defenceless merchantmen to capture, our merchants and mechanics to poverty, our poorer citizens to beggary, our seaports to destruc-

tion, the whole mass of our population to unnecessary privations and distress. It is ruinous because it involves a French alliance, an alliance with the enemy of the human species,* a monster redeemed by no virtue.

But we shall be marked, we shall be pointed out. Who will mark, who will point you out? Are you not men? Are you not freemen? Are you not shielded by the majesty of the laws, which, in all free governments, allow liberty of speech, without which freedom cannot exist? If the war party, which is composed chiefly of placemen, pensioners, and expectants, neither formidable for their numbers nor respectable for their talents, should once succeed in silencing your tongues, they will soon cry, off with the heads of the Boston rebels. Away then with such poltron stuff. Speak your minds boldly.... rally round your chief magistrate and legislature, and zealously promote every measure, which they in their wisdom shall adopt for the acquisition of peace. 'Think it,' says the Roman satirist, 'the height of wickedness to prefer life to honour, and for the sake of life to lose the causes of living.'†

2. As an alliance is probably already made between our administration and the French usurper, resist its baneful effects by all constitutional means. Suffer no French soldier to pollute your territory,.... admit no French ship of war into your ports. You cannot forget, my brethren, when the names of our most respectable fellow citizens were exposed on the mast of a French frigate in this very harbour, with the evident design of exciting the revolutionary ruffians to murder them;

* *Monstrum nullâ virtute redemptum.* *Juvenal.*

† *Summum crede nefas animam præferre pudori,*

Et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas. *Juv. sat. 8, l. 83.*

and had it not been for the spirited exertions of some gallant individuals, our streets might have been deluged with the best blood of our metropolis.

3. As Mr. Madison has declared war, let Mr. Madison carry it on. We shall suffer enough in our property, without risking our lives in an impious contest, in which our administration has thought proper to league with the tyrant of the world against its remaining liberties.

‘ War is a game, which, were their subjects wise, kings should not play at’ ; no....nor presidents either ; especially where that war is ruinous to the property of the people, and highly dangerous to their independence. We have, surely, no more reason to confide in a president, the creature of our own making, than an Englishman in his legitimate and hereditary sovereign. Yet hear the sentiments of an English poet on this subject, the author of the Task, who, in the retirement of solitude led the life and died the death of a saint. If instead of king you understand president, and apply the generous sentiments of the passage to the peace-party, and the servile sentiments to the war-party of this country, you will find the quotation by no means inapplicable to our present situation.

..... We love
 The king who loves the law, respects his bounds,
 And reigns content within them : him we serve
 Freely and with delight, who leaves us free :
 But, recollecting still that he is man,
 We trust him not too far. King though he be,
 And king in England too, he may be weak,
 And vain enough to be ambitious still ;
 May exercise amiss his proper pow’rs,

Or covet more than freemen choose to grant ;
 Beyond that mark is treason. He is ours
 T' administer, to guard, t' adorn, the state,
 But not to warp or change it. We are his,
 To serve him nobly in a cause *that's just*,
 True to the death, but not to be his slaves,
 Mark now the diff'rence, ye that boast your love
 Of kings, between your loyalty and ours.
 We love the man ; the paltry pageant you.
 We the chief patron of the commonwealth ;
You the regardless author of its woes.
 We, for the sake of liberty, a king ;
You, chains and bondage, for a tyrant's sake ;
 Our love is principle, and has its root
 In reason, is judicious, manly, free ;
 Yours, a blind instinct, crouches to the rod,
And licks the foot that treads it in the dust.

Whose freedom is by suff'rance, and at will
 Of a superior, he is never free.
 Who lives, and is not weary of a life
 Expos'd to manacles, deserves them well.
 The state that strives for liberty, though foil'd,
 And forc'd t' abandon what she bravely sought,
 Deserves at least applause for her attempt,
 And pity for her loss. But that's a cause
 Not often unsuccessful : pow'r usurp'd
 Is weakness when oppos'd ; conscious of wrong,
 'Tis pusillanimous and prone to flight.
 But slaves, that once conceive the glowing thought
 Of freedom, in that hope itself possess
 All that the contest calls for ; spirit, strength,
 The scorn of danger, and united hearts ;
 The surest presage of the good they seek.*

4. I would observe that as the southern states were unanimous in favour of this war, and of the commercial states there were only fifteen votes *for*, and more than

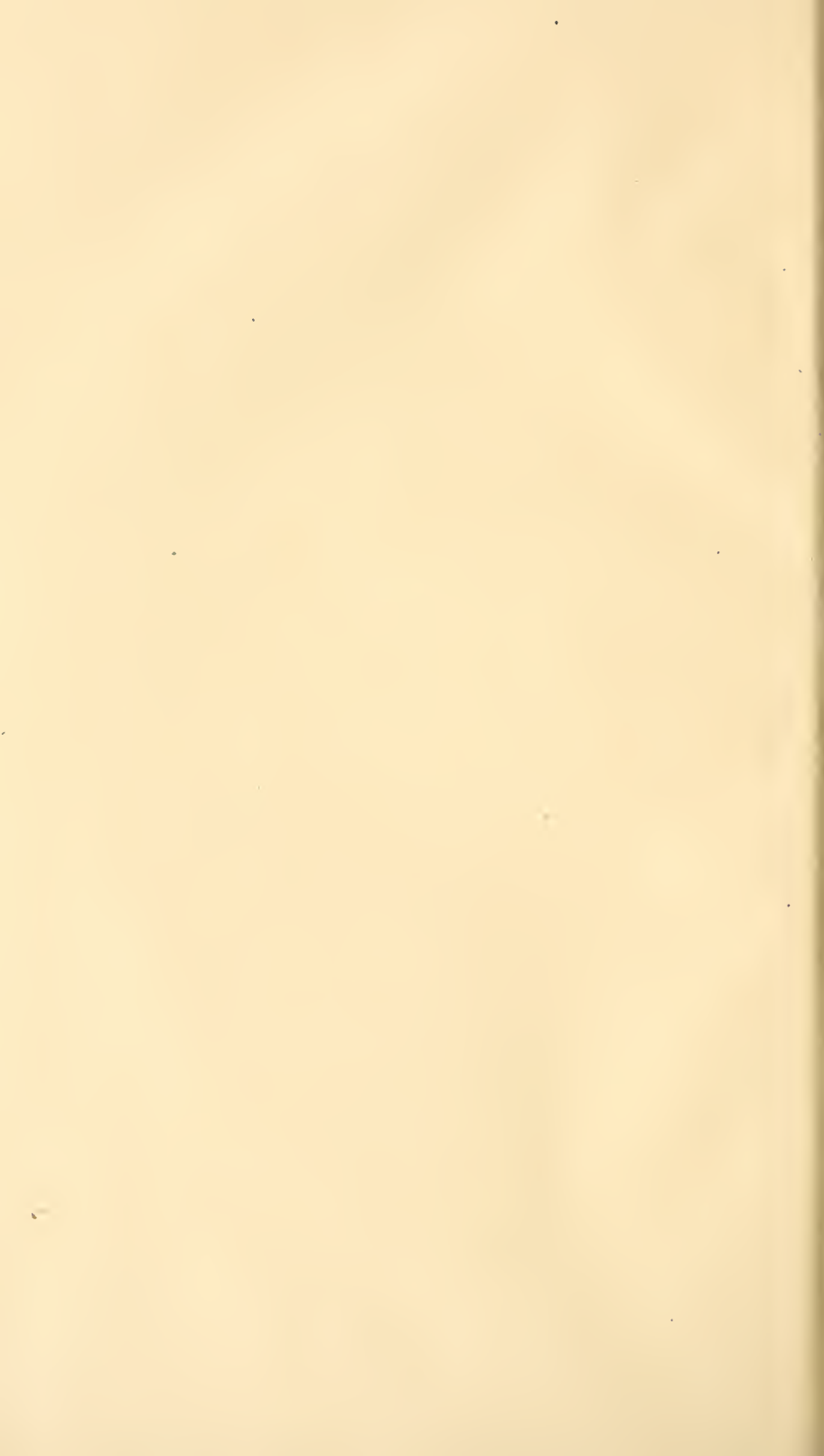
* Cowper's Task, book v

forty *against* it, the conclusion is inevitable, that there is an essential difference of interests between the southern and eastern states of the union. The alternative then is, that if you do not wish to become the slaves, of those who own slaves, and who are themselves the slaves of French slaves, you must either, in the language of the day, *cut the connexion*, or so far alter the national constitution, as to ensure yourselves a due share in the government. The union has long since been virtually dissolved, and it is full time that this portion of the *dis-united* states should take care of itself. But this, as Mr. Burke expresses it, is 'high matter,' and must be left to the united wisdom of a northern and eastern convention. The voice of the people, who are our sovereigns, will then be heard, and must be respected. To continue to suffer, as we have suffered for eight years past, from the incapacity of a weak if not corrupt administration, is more than can be expected from human patience, or christian resignation. The time has arrived when common prudence is pusillanimity, and moderation has ceased to be a virtue.

5 and lastly. Let us implore the protection and favour of Almighty God, humbly acknowledging, and repenting of our manifold sins ; entreating him to put a speedy end to this disastrous war ; to preserve to us our liberties and independence, and to inspire every man among us to say, with heart and voice,

' I AM FOR PEACE, '

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