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REMARKS  
ON A LATE PUBLICATION,  
STYLED  
THE HISTORY  
OF  
THE POLITICS  
OF  
GREAT BRITAIN & FRANCE,  
&c. &c.



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By WILLIAM BELSHAM.

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REMARKS

# REMARKS

ON A LATE PUBLICATION,

STYLED

## *THE HISTORY OF THE POLITICS* OF GREAT BRITAIN AND FRANCE.

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**T**HE celebrated question, Whether upon Great Britain or France rests the charge of aggression in relation to the present bloody and destructive war? has been so long and so ably contested, that little, either in regard to facts or reasoning, for some years past, apparently remained to be added; and it gradually and silently gave place to the more momentous enquiry, in present circumstances, by what means it might with most facility be terminated. It was therefore a subject of some surprise when two octavo volumes were announced upon this exhausted topic, from the pen of a writer well known and justly esteemed in the literary world, which boasted to contain such decisive information respecting this point, as to leave those without excuse who

hesitated

hesitated to acknowledge their perfect conviction that the criminality remained exclusively with the French Government, and that the conduct of the English Ministry was not only faultless throughout this business, but in the highest degree meritorious.

In a tone of arrogance, for which great authorities may indeed be pleaded, Mr. Herbert Marsh, the author of the work in question, tells us (vol. I. p. 218), "That though the number of those who were originally deceived was very considerable, at present every man who *chooses* to see must see their error." And again, p. 370, "That Ministers precipitated their country into " a war with France, is an opinion which no-  
" thing but party malevolence could suggest." Having upon a variety of occasions stated my opinion fairly and fully, that the present Ministers *did* precipitate the nation into a war with France, and still retaining that opinion with the same unwavering firmness, after an attentive perusal of the chief speeches and publications which have appeared upon the subject, and last of all the publication of Mr. Marsh himself, I, and very many others whose mode of thinking is as little likely to alter on this topic, must expect to be consigned by this gentleman to that class

class of incorrigibles whose obstinacy and malevolence render them insensible to the clearest demonstrations of reason. In what light we, who consider the heads of the present administration as the grand and original aggressors in this fatal quarrel (for the French Government must bear its share of blame), may appear to Mr. Marsh, is indeed a matter of perfect indifference; but it is of consequence that we should clear ourselves to the public and to posterity. And whoever brings forward a charge of this nature against Ministers should be prepared to sustain it, not in the spirit of wantonness or caprice, and much less of "party malevolence," but in the strictest regard to truth, justice, and historical impartiality.

With this intent, and conscious of being actuated by no other motives, I propose to enter into an examination of the principal arguments adduced by Mr. Marsh in vindication of the conduct of the British Government, avoiding for the most part the discussion of those *minutiae* which occupy so large a proportion of the volumes now before me, but which serve in reality less to enlighten than to embarrass the question.

## SECTION

## SECTION I.

*Containing Remarks on Chapters I, II, III.*

THAT in the month of August, in the year 1791, a conference took place at Pilnitz, in Saxony, between the Emperor Leopold and the King of Prussia, which terminated in an agreement or convention purporting designs in the highest degree alarming to France, is acknowledged. That these designs were not then and there digested into a formal treaty is extremely probable: and upon this point the declaration of Lord Grenville, in his dispatch of June 20, 1797, to Lord Malmesbury, at Lisle, is sufficiently satisfactory. But, upon the decisive evidence of M. de Bouillé and M. de Moleville, it is certain that the project of the Emperor was nothing less than to form a league between all the powers of Europe, in order to compel the French nation to submit to such conditions as those powers might think fit to impose. The latter indeed pretends that the Emperor meant to effect his purpose by intimidation merely; but  
this



this account of the matter is too puerile to merit the least credit or attention.

To this league Great Britain, much to the honour of its Government at that period, and to the disappointment of the combined Courts, refused to accede; and in relation to this famous, or rather infamous, coalition, as well as in other respects, she appears to have acted a part rather friendly than inimical to France.

During the dreadful state to which the island of St. Domingo was reduced towards the close of the Summer of 1791, in consequence of the insurrection of the negroes, the town of Cape François being surrounded by an army of the insurgents, the most seasonable and effectual relief was afforded them by the generosity of Lord Effingham, Governor of Jamaica: and the British Ambassador at Paris notified to the Court of France his Britannic Majesty's approbation of this proceeding; which being taken into consideration by the second National Assembly, November 5, that body, so inferior in temper and wisdom to their predecessors, disrespectfully and petulantly passing over the message of the King of England, whom they believed personally and inveterately adverse to the French Revolution,

voted

voted thanks to the English Nation, and in particular to the Earl of Effingham \*. On this occasion Mr. Marsh puts in a very extraordinary claim of merit on the part of the English Government, in not embracing so favourable an opportunity of making themselves masters of the capital of St. Domingo; and this *generous conduct* (p. 57), "than which," according to Mr. Marsh, "no stronger proof of friendship could be given" (vol. II. p. 200), he asserts to have been requited with the blackest ingratitude.

To the circular letter written by the King of France, September 1791, to announce his acceptance of the new Constitution, the Court of London replied early and in terms of respect and friendship; while Sweden returned the letter unopened, and Spain gave for answer that the act of acceptance could not be regarded as an act of freewill.

\* M. Dumourier styles the King of England "the Monarch" "in Europe the most enraged against the French Revolution." This may perhaps be true; but in proportion to the King's personal dislike of the Revolution was his public merit in conforming so far as he had hitherto done to the *existing circumstances*, which very strongly enforced the policy of acting upon the laudable system of equity and moderation.

In

In November 1791, Sir Richard Strahan, Captain of the *Phoenix*, meeting with some merchantmen on the coast of Malabar under convoy of a frigate, determined to examine their sea-letters and certificates, as he deemed himself warranted to do by the tenor of the Commercial Treaty. The French frigate refusing to permit this, an engagement ensued and the frigate struck, after sustaining the loss of her captain and many of her men. Of this "act of hostility," as Mr. Marsh styles it, the Court of London complained to the Court of France in terms of great moderation. But when the note of the Ambassador was read in the Assembly, far from offering *satisfaction*, they passed to the order of the day—probably thinking that the English Court was in possession of sufficient satisfaction already. The inference Mr. Marsh is pleased to draw from this transaction, and which those no doubt *must* see who are not wilfully blind, is, "that it shows the English Government to have been desirous to maintain peace, and the French Government totally indifferent about it." (P. 65.)

## SECTION II.

*Containing Remarks on Chapters IV, V, VI, VII.*

ON the 31st January 1792, the session of Parliament was opened by a Speech from the Throne, penned in a truly pacific spirit, and even recommending some immediate reductions in the naval and military establishments, which accordingly took place. And Mr. Pitt was sanguine enough to affirm the probability of fifteen peaceful years in uninterrupted succession. Mr. Marsh speaks of the genuineness of the Treaty of Pavia as doubtful. It may however safely be pronounced spurious, and therefore it is wholly superfluous to vindicate England from the charge of having either actively or passively acceded to it. The disposition of the British Ministry at this time was unquestionably pacific; while, on the contrary, according to Mr. Marsh (p. 78), the inclination of the National Assembly was to involve themselves in a war by sea as well as by land.

The sole proof of this extraordinary assertion is, that on the 18th March Theodore Lameth,  
in

in the name of the Committee of Naval Affairs, delivered a report to the Assembly, in which he said "that about 80,000 sailors would be necessary in order to man the vessels now at the disposition of the state; and which the honour of the nation as well as the interest of its commerce does not permit us to reduce." The Committee further requested the National Assembly to take the speediest measures for the organization of the Navy. It might naturally be supposed, judging from the representation of Mr. Marsh, that 80,000 sailors were at this time actually engaged in the service of France; whereas M. Lameth meant merely to state, that completely to man the navy of France *in case of a naval war* would require that number; and no addition whatever was in fact made to the naval force then on foot\*. Indeed this would have been a strange time to have indulged their *inclination for a naval war*, with a land war in full prospect, when, according to the report of M. de Moleville, the Marine Minister quoted by Mr. Marsh himself *some pages before*, the French sailors were almost universally in a state of insurrection, and he even declared that he should

\* Viz. twenty-one ships of the line and twenty-eight frigates. *Vide REPORT.*

have found it difficult to induce any officer to accept the command of a ship of war.

No wonder then that M. Lameth should recommend it in strong terms to the Assembly, to adopt measures for the re-organization of the Navy. On the 20th April 1792, war was declared by France against Austria; on which great occasion, England still maintained its professions of neutrality, with the sincerity of which the French Ambassador, M. Chauvelin, appears to have been perfectly satisfied. "War," says the Ambassador, "is not agreeable to the taste of the

Nation; preparations are neither made in the ports or the arsenals. It is certain that the system of neutrality *debated* in council was adopted there." So strongly were the new Ministers of France, M. Roland and his colleagues, persuaded of the favourable disposition of the English Nation, and even of the English Court, at this period, that the King of France was advised by them to write (May 1st) a confidential letter to the King of England, thanking that Monarch "for all the marks of affection he had given him, and especially for not having become a party to the concert formed by certain powers against France." The letter then proceeds to touch upon topics of the most important

important and interesting nature, and refers to the secret instructions given to the Ambassador.

“ Between our two countries,” says the French Monarch, “ new connections ought to take place.

“ I think I see the remains of that rivalry,

“ which has done so much mischief to both,

“ daily wearing away. It becomes two Kings

“ who have distinguished their reigns by a con-

“ stant desire to promote the happiness of their

“ people, to connect themselves by such ties as

“ will appear to be durable in proportion as

“ the two nations shall have clearer views of

“ their own interests. I consider the success of

“ the alliance, in which I wish you to concur

“ with as much zeal as I do, as of the highest

“ importance. I consider it as necessary to the

“ stability of the respective constitutions, and

“ the internal tranquillity of our two kingdoms;

“ and I will add, that our union ought to com-

“ MAND PEACE TO EUROPE.”

Never was there a more glorious opportunity afforded of advancing to an height before unknown, and of establishing on a broad and solid basis, the great and permanent interests of mankind. Had the alliance so earnestly sought by France been acceded to with equal sincerity and good will on the part of Great Britain, how incalculable