

A
LETTER

TO THE

Right Hon. George Canning, M. P.

ON THE

Origin and Continuance

OF THE

WAR WITH AMERICA.



BY ULYSSES.

“How could a Nation, evidently civilized, conduct itself at Washington with as much Barbarity as the Old Banditti of Attila and Genseric.”

FRENCH NEWSPAPER.

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A LETTER, &c.



SIR,

THE most enlightened statesmen may differ in their opinions, and the purest intentions may vary in the objects of their pursuit, therefore when I consider and address you as a promoter of the American War before it commenced, and as one of its most strenuous supporters since, I do not mean to build any question on the strength of your judgement or on the integrity of your principles. In the early part of last year, in the House of Commons, in a speech that certainly had much eloquence to recommend it, you called for "some signal instance of British vengeance to be hurled against America." As a letter must be addressed to some one, you will permit me to place this under your auspices, without any other apology. The late destruction of Washington, and my recollection of your words render the moment so tempting, I will offer no further excuse for deviating from the subject I had intended to discuss, in a letter to be addressed to the Earl of Liverpool.

The object of this letter is not to comment on any particular feature of the war, but, in a very brief way, to offer my opinion on its origin, the policy of its continuance, and its probable result. These are points not likely to be much affected by that instance of British vengeance lately wrecked on America in the destruction of Washington, and communicated to the public with so much unfounded exultation. The declaration of war came from the United States; the declaration is a mere form with which civilized nations usually precede hostilities, but occasionally dispensed with, as was the case when the Spanish frigates, *full of money*, were captured, and as also was the case when Copenhagen was bombarded and pillaged by the English. The present war between England and America, must be considered as the choice of the power that created it by a series of aggressions. That power was Great Britain. The domineering conduct of England at sea, is regarded with hatred by all the world, and we well know continental wars, which the interest of England provoked and supported, have been the only obstacles to an European league in support of the maritime rights of mankind. We have seen such a league partially formed, and then dissolved by territorial disputes, and we have reason to believe the seeds of such a compact are now germinating anew.

Perhaps the aid of America, which her attachment to England would not then permit her to

grant, was alone wanting to establish, on a secure base, the maritime system contemplated by Catharine of Russia. Of all foreign powers, America was the most interested in the question, because she gave the greatest promise of future naval and commercial greatness, for which the United States are so well adapted by their coast, their situation, their internal wealth, their free government, their enterprising industry, by the habits of the people, and by their physical and moral constitution so similar to our own. From the rapid fulfilment of her promise, of all foreign powers the United States became the most obnoxious to England, and at the same time the most capable, and the most desirous of resisting her pretensions.

The ignorance of uncivilized man in remote antiquity, circumscribed the world by the adjacent seas, or considered the Ocean as a boundary placed by Heaven between people and people, which it was a profanation to pass. The progress of human knowledge taught mankind the utility of the sea, and demonstrated the practicability of a passage over it. The sea was then considered as a highway, common to the whole world, and as it is impossible to establish on it the permanent settlements of mankind, it cannot truly be considered in any other light. It should be still considered so, and it can never be the just right of any country, to exercise a sovereign superiority

beyond its own bays, or to dictate to other nations the terms on which they shall navigate. This control is, and may be supported by brutal force at any time, and by any nation, but it cannot be defended by reason, justice, or humanity. It is now possessed and exercised by England, but Providence has not wedded it for ever to one country; it has belonged to Spain, and to Holland, it may belong to Russia, to France, or to any other power in turn; superiority cannot be chained to our fleets, nor are naval powers more secure than others, from their stated periods of rise and decay; we were not always sovereigns on the ocean and may not always be.

The assumption of sovereignty on the seas is not founded on natural right, and it is but just we should consider the subject in the plenitude of our strength, as we should relish its application in a weaker condition. This is interwoven closely and materially with the subject of my letter. The Americans, independent of the interest and spurning the system of European Governments, have reverted to the plain rights of man, and the first principles of society as one great family; they take the sea for what Providence designed it, the highway of all nations, and as such, claim its unrestricted use. As America advanced in resources, in population, in power, and in comparative importance, England grew jealous of her dawning prosperity, and when America promised to become

the future rival of England, she became the immediate object of indirect enmity. From these principles, fomented into national hate by antipathy to her republican government, have sprung the oppressive conduct, and wanton vexations showered by the English navy on American commerce. These causes, and a desire to check the inconvenient trade of American neutrals produced our Orders in Council, and from their enforcement sprung the aggressions that produced the present war with America ; hence the connection of these considerations with the subject of my letter, and so much for the origin of the war.

To enquire how neutral bottoms make neutral goods, would lead me into a separate discussion ; but I may be permitted certainly to remark on the outrage and inconsistency of granting to an enemy under licence, the trade that we will not permit to a neutral ; and I may, without impropriety, inquire, supposing an enemy's goods free to capture, how can they be detected under a neutral flag, without first violating the neutrality of that flag by her detention and overhaul on the high sea ; except in breach of a close and actual blockade in its most limited sense ?

How long America was goaded, and how long her commerce was curtailed by our Orders in Council, and extravagant extention of blockades, you are well informed ; and you well know what sort of resistance she opposed to them, not active

hostility but a passive system. Unwilling to wage war, she opposed endurance to injury, adapting, what was called in America, the terrapin policy, and anxious to persevere in peace, America even adopted the costly expedient of a spontaneous temporary abandonment of commerce, however advantageous; she withdrew her ships from the ocean, and retired within herself. The genius, the productions, and the capital of America could not be wholly inert, and as Franklin predicted, when driven from commerce, found employment in the establishment of manufactories, thus opening another source of rival wealth, and by thus wounding the pride and prosperity of England, added to her former offences a crime beyond forgiveness. The impolicy of our Orders in Council has been demonstrated, and their repeal has taken place, but it came too late, our own commerce had been injured, our manufactories had diminished to be extended in America, and the war had been declared. It is no palliation to say the decrees of the Emperor of France were as unjust as our Orders in Council. The crime of one should be a beacon to prevent, but can never justify the commission of crime in another. The adoption of the Embargo and Non-intercourse Bills by America have been erroneously regarded as proofs of hostile intentions towards England, but the opinion is quite unfounded, they were measures, not of choice but of a necessity, not adopted from a hostile feeling

and a thirst for war, but from a wish to preserve peace by barely screening herself from injury. A short examination will suffice to prove the assertion.

I shall take as the basis of this examination an official document, being a message to the House of Representatives, from Mr. Jefferson, then President of the United States, and bearing date the 17th January, 1806, in which he desires their “attention to the oppression of their commerce
“and navigation, by the irregular practices of
“public and private armed vessels, and to the
“introduction of *new* principles, derogatory of
“the rights of neutrals.” In the same message the President continues. “The right of a neutral
“to carry on commercial intercourse with a bel-
“ligerent, was believed to have been decided
“between Great Britain and America, by the
“sentence of their commissioners, and by the
“actual payment of the damages awarded by
“them, against Great Britain for infractions
“of that right. When the same principle was
“revived with others more novel, extending the
“injury, remonstrances were made by the Min-
“ister of the United States at the Court of Lon-
“don. He has been instructed to urge this
“subject anew, to bring it to the bar of reason,
“and to insist on rights too evident and too im-
“portant to be surrendered.” I have not thought it necessary to clog this letter with the whole

message, but its purport is faithfully extracted, and shews the very temperate means recommended by the President, to obtain an exemption from the continuance of outrages too great for any nation to endure without some sort of opposition.

Under the maritime code of England, which every day enlarged its pretensions and extended its operation, the commerce of America suffered immense delapidations, almost without hope of relief, under excuses the most frivolous and fluctuating; yet to all these, the United States opposed only remonstrances against their injustice. The Americans averse to war on principle, and attached to England by affinity of blood, by similarity of habits, and more than all, by identity of language, were more eager to appeal against the repetition of injury, than to revenge the injuries they had received. I know this to be their feeling, I know the flattering cordial reception it induces them to give an Englishman in all parts of the United States, from the President, down through every gradation of Society; nor am I the first to notice it. This disposition on the part of the Americans has been noticed and commented on in a short essay by the Prince of Benevente, with an elegance and ability peculiar to himself, and has received one striking illustration. He remarks in proof of his opinion how soon they forgot the war England had inflicted on them, and how completely their natural attach-

ment to England, founded on the similarity of their habits, and the identity of language, prevailed against the services and efforts of France, to maintain a superior interest among them. The attachment of the Americans to England, so truly described by the Prince of Benevente, though weakened by repeated provocations, and now superseded by war, is not yet destroyed. The continued capture of their merchantmen, the restraint placed on their neutral rights, the impressment of their native seamen all united to justify, but did not produce a war. At length the attack and capture of the frigate Chesapeake, by the Leopard, described by the President, as “a deed transcending all they had hitherto seen or suffered, brought the public sensibility to a serious crisis, and their forbearance to a necessary pause.” Want of sufficient atonement for this last outrage, perseverance in the denial of their neutral rights, in the interruption of their commerce, and in the impressment of their seamen, united to the tergiversating policy of Great Britain towards them, and the continuance of every practice they had complained of, and remonstrated against in vain, at length triumphed over every obstacle opposed by their attachment, and finally produced the war.

To say more on the origin of the war would be superfluous, but to investigate the policy of its continuance is very necessary. It will be a matter

of some difficulty to point out the policy of a contest, that has grown out of our own aggressions, that is persevered in without any determined object of public gain to be derived from it, and that must terminate without advantage, notwithstanding any successful events that may mark its progress. Is the hope to chastise the Americans for any political offences, real or supposed, by inflicting on them taxation, distress, and the other fruits of war? Is it to augment Canada by depriving the United States of any part of their territory, and by wresting from them the indispensable navigation of the lakes? Is it to extinguish their commerce? Or is it to drive them into an abandonment of the principles they deem the law of nations? Whichever of these may be the hope, I can see but little probability of effecting it. America may indeed be distressed for a time by the war, but with an immense and rich country, daily expanding its resources, the expence may be well supported, and can be certainly retrieved: with a population, now exceeding ten millions, that doubles itself in fifteen years, to call these augmenting resources into active operation, the loss of blood would merge unfelt in the general mass of yearly mortality, even if not replenished by the aid of emigration from other countries, which now flows in to fill the ranks that battle thins. With an inexhaustible fund of future wealth, from the sale of lands, that the increasing

population must purchase, the Americans possess the means of obliterating any public debt the war may create. They have also the means of cancelling it by a sinking fund, which formed and increased at the same time, and in even comparative proportion with the debt, will certainly redeem it in a short time; and America, from its early application, may verify in one case what England vainly looks for in another, because the hopeless and encreasing amount of our public debt, must droop under its own weight, before the sinking fund can sufficiently redeem it.

If the hope of oppressing the Americans by taxation, and the charge of war be so small, the hope of augmenting Canada by conquest is still less. The population of Lower Canada is French by attachment, French in habits, religion, and in language, but I shall remark on it no further than to describe its affection. The population of Upper Canada is somewhat differently constituted, and partakes very largely of settlers from the United States, who attracted by gratuitous offers of land, have sold their highly improved farms in the United States, to emigrate into Upper Canada, transplanting with them, and extending all their republican desires, and confidently expecting, by the accession of Canada to the United States, to be reunited to their country. If these emigrants cannot weigh in the present scale of action, at least they disseminate principles of in-

dependence immediately unfavourable to the mother country, and which, when supported by example, are likely at last to produce a separation, in the hope of benefit by a closer union. To drive them from the lakes is a preposterous idea, they have there a superior fleet, and it surely must be an easier task for them to maintain, than for the English to crush it. The hope to effect this by negociation, I consider still more vain, we can scarcely wrest from them now, what they would not concede in the debility of their first independence, when unsettled, poor, and few in numbers. If the expectation be to deprive the Americans of commerce, it cannot be accomplished. They have spontaneously forsaken it during the existence of the war, and have no ships at sea, but fast sailing privateers, which distress our merchantmen in all directions, take from them every necessary supply, destroy what they do not want, and burn the vessels. She exposes no commerce to attack, but sustains her wants on that of England. This plan America can safely pursue, and the commerce she declines from obligation or policy to-day, she can easily regain to-morrow, because her productions are of prime necessity, and will always command a market. In this she possesses a vast advantage; her productions are a shure unshifting cause of trade, that when derived from other sources removeable in their nature, like manufactories, may change its course and

flow through new channels ; not only may, but certainly will. When gone, it cannot be recalled, but the productions of America, by commanding a market, can secure a trade. Some valuable branches of trade however, Great Britain may expect to interdict them from ; at least we flatter ourselves we can prevent their trade with India. To me this is not quite clear.*

The hope to make America depart from any of the principles she takes from the foundation of her neutral right, or as the basis of law between

* During a war between England and America, we may prohibit the commerce of America with British India, and if we can catch them, we may capture their vessels engaged in the China trade. I write with deference to better information on this subject, but I have been informed the entire loss of the usual American demand for coarse manufactures, would be found a great injury to our India territory, and the loss would be irrecoverable, because the same coarse goods that the Americans purchased at Calcutta, the Chinese are able and willing to manufacture for them, and to take from them in return, all the short Staple Cotton grown in the United States, instead of receiving it from Bombay, and Surat. This would offer the American planter a new and certain market at a profitable price, and at the same time advance the interest of the American ship owner, by giving him an outward freight. The Americans, by sending them across to the shore of the Pacific Ocean, would have their furs in Canton, before our furs reach London from Montreal, and would therefore undersell us. With Ivory, Bees Wax, Salt Petre, and Opium, they may be supplied at Rangoon, in return for manufactured goods, particularly Fire Arms.

nation and nation, is equally vain. These principles originate and are incorporated with the American Government; any change in them is perfectly inadmissible, unless we can conquer and compel her to change that form of Government; an event too impossible for the wildest dreamer to contemplate. The doctrine of America so much abused in this country by the appellation of "new fangled principles," she never will relinquish; if then we can gain nothing by the war, if we can neither oppress our enemy by its operation, nor conquer their territory in its progress, nor exclude them from the lakes, nor destroy their commerce, nor oblige them to abandon their "new fangled principles," on the law of nations, where is the policy of its continuance?

The result of the present contest with the United States, must be marked by disaster; notwithstanding the immense power of Great Britain, the magnitude of her fleet, and the gallant conduct of her troops. Much as our ministers may plume themselves on any successful enterprise, much as they exult in the destruction of Washington; these will prove unavailing, and will weigh nothing in the final balance of the war. Already they discover the fallacy of the hopes they had formed, from the possession of Washington, whose public buildings were not spared by a British army, though a horde of Cossacks spared all Paris. They had marked the

consequences of obtaining possession of European capitals, and absurdly expected to dictate a peace to the Americans in their capital. They had lately observed in Europe, a dynasty changed by a foreign army in possession of a capital, and that change of dynasty followed by a change of measures. They wanted to deduce like effects from unlike causes, they most absurdly talked of dictating a peace to Mr. Madison, in his capital, and of driving him from the Presidency, as they would a King from his Throne. These things are practicable in Europe, where the capitals concentrate so great a proportion of the population, wealth and influence of a kingdom, where they half decide every question, where family interests and prejudices have so large a share in the determination of wars, and where a monarch, tottering on a throne, considering his personal interest to keep the rest, might surrender half his kingdom. But in the United States, where twenty-five years since, not a single house of their capital was built, where even the situation was then scarce determined, and where the seat of Government has not yet been fixed fourteen years, to expect any material advantage from its possession, seems a fallacy too gross to be one moment entertained; and in a government like that of America, it is, if possible, a still greater absurdity to found any hope on the personal fear, or individual concession of the President, who is the mere depository of

executive power, without further weight or influence; who holds his office by election for the short space of four years, and who then returns to the common mass of citizens without any other distinction or reward than their approval, and the "solid worth of self applause." Washington has been entered by a British force, and its Arsenal has been destroyed by a very fair principle of war, but in a city, newly founded, unprepared for defence and entered without resistance, it seems rather an unwarrantable severity to destroy public buildings, not of a military nature.

Neither the capture of Washington, nor any other success that may attend combined operations of our sea and land forces, by landing on the shores, and threatening the sea-ports of America, can compensate for the expense with which such expeditions are fitted out, or for the loss attendant on their execution; they offer us no prospect of gain, they inflict on the Americans no irreparable loss. The difficulty and the expense of recruiting, and of maintaining an army at such a distance, where all the supplies must come from England, where the climate is in many parts highly malignant, where independent of regular opposition, the resistance of a whole population, well accustomed to the use of fire-arms, and always prepared with rifles, present the most harassing and most destructive species of warfare.

I wish to bring the general outline of the con-

test with America, under a temperate review, with full reference to our present situation, so greatly changed since the war commenced. At this moment we have no other enemy to cope with, and may direct our whole force against her, but even that force is wholly incompetent to subjugate America. The continuance of a remote and very expensive war drains our treasure, our forces continually diminish by battle and by sickness, and the American privateers, at the same time, are left to prey on our commerce. We may burn Washington, defeat a body of Americans, or have any partial brilliant success, but that success can neither make the war advantageous nor alter its result; can neither defray its cost, repair the damage to our commerce, remunerate our merchants for excessive insurance, nor remedy the distress of our manufacturers, therefore I wish its termination.

We are not situated as we were when the war commenced, nor may be very long situated as we now are. However justified America may have been in declaring war, she must submit its termination to the same chances that have operated lately in every other place; she must in some degree yield to necessity what justice cannot demand; and I am firmly persuaded she is ready to act under this impression, and to give up now most of the points involved in the origin of the war. America will never consent to have any ad-

ditional demand engrafted on the original dispute, merely because we have fewer enemies to contend with at present, than we had when the war began, and if Great Britain persevere in the attempt to get as the basis of a peace, more than the origin of the war, no peace can be made, and if we neglect the present advantageous moment, in the progress of the war, unexpected events may make us desirous of peace on terms less satisfactory than we can now command.

The combined powers of Europe have prevailed against the continental sway of the Emperor Napoleon. The success of one league for what was called the liberty of Europe, may inflame them with zeal to league again for the liberty of the Seas. The sentiments lately observable in the French papers strongly favour the belief; and to a maritime league, America would be a most formidable accession. From Russia, France, and Holland, Ministers have been sent to the United States, and not only are American privateers fitted out in French ports, but their equipment, and success seem joyfully announced in the French papers. Before these embryo principles of a naval coalition can acquire strength, I wish to see America detached from them by peace; the task is easy now, but if neglected may be hereafter difficult or impossible. This favourable moment to make peace with America it would be criminal to lose. To the unexpected termination of the war

in Europe, America must make a considerable sacrifice, and if we snatch the instant of success, we may treat with her on advantageous ground, not always in our power.

To the late extraordinary changes, America will concede much, but secure from conquest, and increasing in strength, she will make no disgraceful concession; and though Great Britain may rise in her demands, she must not presume too far. At this moment her influence is at its greatest elevation, it may decline, but cannot be augmented, and what America will not relinquish now, she never will concede. On this reflection I build my desire for immediate peace, being persuaded if the war last another year, America will reject terms that she would now gladly accept. To point out the basis of a peace, is beyond my intention, I confine myself to the impolicy of the war, and the fatal consequences that may arise out of it, by uniting the naval genius and resources of America in a league against us.

This is a consequence that may flow from the war, and that cannot be prevented by any success on the part of Great Britain. Before the Americans declared war, they knew what must be the immediate effect of contending with a great naval power. They could not, did not hope to see their infant navy triumph in repeated, single well contested actions; they only hoped it would not sink without some creditable exertion, and were pre-

pared to witness its temporary annihilation. If in this, success has been beyond their hopes, we have the less reason to expect unqualified submission, and though the Americans are prepared to see their navy swept from the ocean by superior force, they well know their naval capacity, habits, and resources must hourly increase, and be finally established. When she declared war, America was prepared to see her sea-ports threatened and invaded, therefore the successful enterprises against them, of which we vaunt, some of which are trivial, neither surprise, nor alarm, they have been looked for, and estimated as the price of war. The occupation of Washington has indeed surprised America, as much as its destruction has injured England in foreign estimation. It was certainly a bold and well planned measure, but the Americans will be less alarmed at the victory than exasperated at its abuse. In proof of the indignant feeling produced in France by it, I will offer one extract from a French paper, which remarks, if England “believe that such conduct will “frighten her enemies, and conquer them by terror, she deceives herself. Injustice and barbarity revolt still more than they affright. They “communicate to the soul an unknown energy, “they raise the spirit of even the most pacific, “and produce bold and desperate determinations “which secure the safety and independence of “nations.”

When I heard of the destruction of Washington, I recalled the expression of your wish for "some signal instance of British vengeance on America," but at the same time I cherished a hope, the destruction of its fine public buildings was not the sort of vengeance you had invoked, or could delight in. I will only add a particular observation of the nature of the war with America, and a close attention to the character of its inhabitants lead me to the conclusions I have drawn. Such as they are I submit them to your consideration, and subscribe myself

your obedient humble Servant,

ULYSSES.

13th October, 1814.

P. S. The publication of this Letter has been unfortunately, and unaccountably delayed, since it was ready for the press. The late events, near Baltimore, at Plattsburgh, and at Lake Champlain, prove the accuracy of the opinions contained in the Letter, and fully warrant all the conclusions drawn from them. My next perhaps will be more minute if it should be on the same subject.

ULYSSES.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

- Page 4, 6th line, for *wrecked*, read "wreaked."
 5, 22nd line, for *her man*, read "human "
 7, 28th line, for *extention*, read "extension."
 8, 2nd line, for *adapting*, read "adopting."
 ib. last line, for *of a necessity*, read "of necessity."
 11, 2nd line, for *indentity*, read "identity."
 12, 8th line, for *offencies*, read "offences."
 ib. 19th line, for *immence*, read "immense."
 14, 10th line, for *scarsely*, read "scarcely."
 ib. 28th line, for *shure*, read "sure."
 15. 10th line, for *from*, read "for."
 ib. 17th line, for *course*, read "coarse."
 ib. 19th line, for *course*, read "coarse."

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