

PROCEEDINGS

AT A

MEETING OF THE GENTLEMEN, CLERGY
AND FREEHOLDERS,

OF THE

COUNTY OF DUBLIN,

ON FRIDAY, JANUARY THE 4th, 1799,

TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE MEASURE OF
A LEGISLATIVE

U N I O N,

BETWEEN THIS COUNTRY

AND

GREAT BRITAIN.

ALEXANDER KIRKPATRICK, ESQ.

HIGH SHERIFF, IN THE CHAIR.

IN WHICH IS A CORRECT REPORT

OF

MR. SPENCER'S SPEECH.

Dublin.

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM JONES, No. 26, COLLEGE-GREEN,
OPPOSITE THE COLLEGE,

1799.

Houses of the Oireachtas

MEETING OF THE COUNTY DUBLIN,

ON FRIDAY, JANUARY THE 4th, 1799,

AGAINST AN

U N I O N.

PURSUANT to requisition, a meeting of the gentlemen, clergy, and freeholders of the County Dublin, took place at the Sessions-House, which in number and description, was one of the most respectable we remember ever to have witnessed.—Within about a quarter of two o'clock the chair was taken by the worthy High Sheriff of the county, A. KIRKPATRICK, Esq; and the requisition

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in consequence of which the meeting was convened having been read,

MR. BAKER, (of Corduff) said, that in submitting to the meeting the resolutions which he was about to move, he felt himself alone impelled by the love which he bore for his Sovereign, for his Country, for that Constitution to which he trusted they were all devoted, and for the existing connexion with Great Britain, which he was sure it was the general wish of the assembly, and all loyal Irishmen, to maintain permanent and inviolable. His duty to his Sovereign, his Country, Irish Constitution, and British Connexion, called upon him to resist to the utmost of his power any measure hostile to these objects of his political attachment, and under the firm and most assured conviction, that no possible measure could be
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more injurious to the security of the Irish Crown, or the liberties and happiness of the Irish people, than an incorporating Union of the parliaments of Great Britain and Ireland, he would without further preface move the resolutions which he held in his hand. Here Mr. Baker read the resolutions, which, one excepted, were the same as in advertisement.

Sir J. J. W. JERVAIS, Bart. arose, he said, with the highest pleasure to second resolutions in most respects so consonant to his own feelings. He could not, however, avoid observing, that the measure in which they were occupied, was one so repugnant to every principle of the laws of nature and of nations, that he did not see how far they were justified to themselves and to their country, in even admitting the possibility of its being brought forward in

the Irish parliament. But having presumed that possibility, the disapprobation of the meeting should be expressed in the strongest and most unequivocal manner. An half spirited and ambiguous expression should not be adopted—their resolutions should not be so framed as negatively to refer to propriety of time for bringing forward a measure essentially bad, but the unanimous voice of the County of Dublin should stamp upon the felonious medium of political traffic, that character and mark of its baseness as should at once arrest its currency, and proclaim its detection, and the British minister should be told, that, not only, this was not a time, but that there never could arrive a time in which the people of Ireland could think it seasonable to surrender up their liberties. Sir John then read a
 resolution

resolution expressing the principle which he had advanced.

MR. RAWLINS however, observed, that although the point which the Hon. Baronet had urged was such as must meet the warmest approbation of every man present, yet its adoption must flow from a visible necessity, arising out of a defect in the resolutions previously moved. Such a necessity was not however, evident, and the worthy Baronet would feel on having the resolutions read from the chair, that they contained not the slightest admission, that any period could ever occur in which a question of legislative Union would be proper for parliamentary discussion, and that therefore he would see that the motion which he had just read, notwithstanding the public spirit by which it was dictated, was wholly unnecessary.

MR.

MR. LEESON spoke in terms of the strongest reprobation against the projected measure of an Union, and contended for the necessity of a very decided mode of expression on the subject. That every circumstance and necessity called for the most spirited and patriotic conduct on the part of Irishmen, and that no time was to be lost, if they wished to save their country. He gave to a certain delegated character the highest credit for his wishes and his efforts to stop the effusion of Irish blood, but he lamented that this *cruel mercy* was to be purchased at the expence of the independence, liberty, and prosperity of Ireland. He adverted in pointed terms to the number of British troops pouring into this country, but also adverted to the yet unextinguished virtue and spirit of the Irish people. He lamented that the British minister had been but too successful
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in dividing the people of this country and *pitting* them against each other, but, in the worst of poisons there was to be found a medicine, and he trusted that the question of a Union was one which would be so scouted and reprobated by the Irish nation, and from a sense of common danger point out the necessity of common unity, that the minister would find he had, instead of prostrating the fabric of Irish freedom, cast among its loosened components, a cement which would make it last for ever. Mr. Leeson then dwelt for some time on the incompetency of parliament to entertain the question of an Union. He vindicated the Catholics from the imputation of leaguings against the liberties of their country in the present measure, and concluded a very animated speech, which was several times interrupted

rupted by testimonies of applause, with moving the resolutions No. 4 and 5.

In the resolutions which these supersede was expressed an high opinion of the wisdom and virtue of parliament, and of their ability to devise measures for restoring and securing tranquillity, and satisfying the people of Ireland of every description.

MR. SPENCER,

Mr. Kirkpatrick, Sir, With the indulgence of this assembly, I shall make a few observations upon a subject, no doubt, of unspeakable magnitude and importance to this country, the merits of which however have never appeared to me to require a very wide field of examination. Sir, the evils attendant on a legislative Union between this country and England, appear to me, to be great, certain, and inevitable; the advantages

advantages which are held forth, to be at best problematical and uncertain. That the necessary consequences of an Union, must be an increase of absentees and of taxes, cannot be questioned; and if ever there was a country which had suffered, both in its property, and in its internal tranquillity, from absentees, it is this country: if ever there was a country, which required all the attention, superintendance, and vigilant observation of a resident gentry, and a resident parliament, it is this country in the present most extraordinary and unexampled situation of affairs. And with respect to the increases of taxes, let this nation be upon its guard; whatever motives the English cabinet may pretend to be actuated by, whatever objects of increased safety to the empire, or improved civilization to Ireland, they may affect to have in view; it is the same principle

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which dictated the American stamp act that hath suggested the Irish Union : taxation not civilization is the object of the English ministry ; and it is upon this principle that the measure has been recommended by all the English writers upon the subject for near a century past. But it is argued by some, that we are incompetent to decide upon the measure of an Union, until we shall be made acquainted with the terms, and the question is triumphantly asked, are you apprised of the conditions of the Union ? To this question, without a moments hesitation, I answer that I neither know, nor desire to know the specific items of the terms, but that I know more than the terms ; for that I know what Ireland has already obtained, and what England has it in her power to grant ; I know that Ireland already possesses a free trade, and I know that in the year 1782,

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she obtained the independence of her legislature, and that it is precisely since she obtained that independence, which an Union must destroy, that she hath flourished beyond all example in the history of nations. Shall we then in the face, and in defiance of this experience, surrender that independence of legislature, the invariable concomitant of which has been national prosperity. For I do take it for granted that we are not to send a number of members to the united parliament, equal to the whole number of the British representation, and that the united parliament is not to sit alternately in either kingdom. Now as to any commercial advantages, which England has it in her power to bestow, with respect to any favourable regulation of the channel trade, or the establishment of a dock-yard at Cork, or I know not whereelse; they may be desirable objects

to obtain, but they are not to be purchased at such a price; and I find that the merchants and bankers of the city of Dublin, who must be the best judges of the commercial part of the subject, have unanimously expressed their most decided reprobation of the measure. For there can be no compensation for the surrender of our legislature, there can be no price for the abdication of our independence; and if there could be terms of compensation, what security have we that they would be adhered to: and here at least I do intirely adopt the sentiment of the author of the government pamphlet; “an argument from experience, says he in political reasoning is superior to any argument in theory.”

Precisely so; and that argument or rather those arguments from experience did occur in six years after the Scotch Union; when

when notwithstanding the opposition of all the Scotch members of the united parliament, a bill was carried through both houses imposing the malt tax upon Scotland in direct violation of the articles of Union ; and so prolific in grievances was the six years Union to Scotland, that all the representatives of that nation unanimously voted for its dissolution. The story of this scandalous and flagitious breach of national faith on the part of the English legislature, should be inscribed in large characters on the walls of both houses of our parliament, in order for ever to deter this nation from an incorporated Union with England. But it is said, that the extraordinary situation of this country requires some extraordinary remedy, and that some grand and new measure must be adopted : that we have just escaped from an horrid rebellion which raged with unabated fury
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for two months in several parts of this kingdom, is most certain; and it is equally true that the greatest efforts of that rebellion had been made and had failed before Lord Camden quitted this country. That the dispersion of armies, if they may be so called, of twenty thousands and thirty thousands of rebels should produce robberies, and the most audacious breaches of the peace even in the day time, was to be expected and was anticipated; but the remedy for such evils must consist rather in a well ordered, active, and vigilant police than in any legislative measure whatever. Is quiet to be procured for this country, by increasing the number of absentees, and by aggravating the burthens of taxation? Is tranquillity to be restored to Ireland by a measure which will discontent and disgust, if not the whole, at least a great proportion of all the respectable classes

classes of society? but what shews to a demonstration that the safety or tranquillity of Ireland are not the objects of this measure, is, that long before the rebellion or any idea entertained of rebellion in this country, the measure of an Union was the favourite object of the present British cabinet, and that the Duke of Portland a member of the present English administration in his letter to Lord Fitzwilliam when Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, desires him to put off the concessions to the Catholics, if possible, for a time, in order to give ministry an opportunity of obtaining this favourite object. And why have I mentioned this circumstance? in order to make it manifest to the lowest capacity, that the interests of Ireland are not the object of this measure, and in order that the knavery of the English cabinet in this respect may be exposed to the view of this country

country in all its naked and hideous deformity. If the safety and tranquillity of Ireland required an Union, why was not the measure suggested by the Irish legislature in all its anxiety and concern for those desirable objects : whenever any motion was made in either House of the English Parliament with a view of quieting this country, the constant answer of ministers was, that the Irish Parliament must be the best judges of all such matters, that the men of property residing on the spot must be best acquainted with the internal exigences of the country ; and yet it has never been pretended that the Speaker of our House of Commons, who is such a master of the interests and political situation of this country, has gone over to England for the purpose of soliciting an Union, as the only measure which

which can save this country; on the contrary it is well known that he perseveres in earnest and ardent deprecation of the measure, as big with mischiefs and ruin to Ireland; and I say that Mr. Foster deserves the thanks of his country for his conduct on this occasion as well as upon many others. Has this revolution been desired on the part of Ireland? No more than Switzerland desired to be revolutionized by France. But if this were a measure for the advantage of Ireland, why bring it forward at this season? Is it with minds hourly alarmed and agitated by reports of the machinations of treason, and the movements of rebellion, that the public is to appreciate this momentous revolution? If it be a good measure for Ireland, why press it upon us before we have sufficiently recovered our breath

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after the rebellion, to be able to return thanks without faltering? If it were a measure for the advantage of Ireland, why should the English cabinet follow the principle of the United Irishmen, and adopt the policy of rebels in order to carry it in this country? For the author of the government pamphlet contends that, as the United Irishmen took advantage of a time of war, so must the English cabinet, in order to carry this measure. I have forbore to quote the former part of this passage, because I would not outrage the feelings of this assembly by repeating its blasphemies against the saviours of their country—the Volunteers of Ireland. Behold then, according to this writer, that English cabinet, which is continually inveighing against the oppression, the usurpation, and the tyranny of France, behold I say that

that cabinet meanly and profligately con-
 descending to adopt the policy of the
 United Irishmen, in order to oppress the
 independence of the SISTER KINGDOM.
 If such be the sentiments and such the
 language of the English cabinet, I say,
 that without the formality of a treaty,
 they have become the ally of France,
 for the purpose of spreading revolution
 throughout Europe. It is impossible
 Sir, not to be struck with the singular
 and extraordinary fate of this country,
 which having just suppressed a rebellion,
 and in that rebellion crushed a revolu-
 tion, has now again to contend with ano-
 ther revolution; the Executive Directory
 for carrying on which, however, are
 well known; there were none of them
 on board the Hoche when she was
 taken, neither is there any of them in
 Newgate, or in Kilmainham, awaiting
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his departure for Lisbon, or for America; but perhaps while I have the honour of addressing myself to this assembly, they are fitting in council with our most gracious Sovereign. Who would have believed a few months ago, that the Minister of England would put himself at the head of a revolution in Ireland? Who would have believed that the same minister who says that this is not the time for parliamentary reform in England should say that it was the precise season for a revolution in Ireland? But I trust that this country will prove the elastick force of liberty, whose spring shall be the stronger from the compression which it has sustained during the rebellion. This country shall prove to England and to the Universe that as she can defend her constitution against the open assaults of rebellion, so she will maintain it against the insidious revolutionary

lutionary projects of an English administration. I shall now conclude with observing that in my opinion, the two representatives of this county have by their admirable conduct upon this occasion, acquired fresh claims to the confidence of their constituents, and to that of the nation at large.

MR. SKEYS followed Mr. Spencer, and affirmed that the argument of commercial advantages held out in support of an Union was false and deceptive, and that it would ruin our infant manufactures, which would then lose the protections which they now have.

MR. GUINNESS arose and delivered a very able, eloquent, and animated speech in reprobation of an Union. He inveighed warmly against the duplicity of Mr. Pitt's conduct, who having failed in conquering

quering France, now fought to conquer Ireland. He had prepared a string of pithy resolutions to submit to the meeting this day which he read; they expressed they strongest disapprobation of an Union, and of the incompetency of parliament to agree to it—but he did not attempt to press them on the meeting in preference to those which were already before them.

MR. BAKER having been now voted into the chair, the thanks of the meeting was returned to Alexander Kirkpatrick, Esq; for his readiness in calling the meeting, and his very proper and honourable conduct in the chair, which having been again resumed, the proceedings were ordered to be published in all the London and Irish papers, and the meeting was dissolved. A meeting which has set such
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an example of spirit, patriotism and virtue, that, if generally followed by the other counties, will prove, we trust, the salvation of Ireland.

Houses of the Oireachtas

RESOLUTIONS.

AT a respectable meeting of the gentlemen, clergy, and freeholders of the county of DUBLIN, to take into consideration the momentous question of a legislative Union of the parliaments of Great Britain and Ireland, pursuant to a requisition for that purpose,

ALEX. KIRKPATRICK, Esq; High
Sheriff, in the chair,

Resolved Unanimously,

1st, That the legislative independence of Ireland has been the means of improvement and prosperity to this country—rapid beyond example.

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2^d, That

2d, That we are impressed with every sentiment of loyalty to our King, and the warmest attachment to British connexion.

3d, That we consider the question of an Union as having for its basis the extinction of our separate and independent legislature, to be hostile to the rights, liberties, and interests of Ireland; and as such should be opposed by every constitutional means in our power.

4th, That our thanks are due to our representatives for their early application for our instructions.

5th, That in electing them we did not commit into their hands a power of destroying the constitution, and that we instruct them to declare our sentiments of the incompetency

competency of parliament to bring about a legislative Union with Great Britain.

6th, That impressed with a fervent expectation that our brethren of all religious persuasions in the different counties of Ireland will, by similar resolutions, evince equal zeal in support of the constitution which we have all sworn to maintain. We rely on it that such resolutions will have their constitutional effect.

The High Sheriff having left the chair, and THOMAS BAKER, Esq. being called to it—

Resolved, That the thanks of this meeting be given to our worthy High Sheriff, for his ready compliance with the requisition of the freeholders, and his very proper conduct in the chair.

Resolved,

Resolved, That the Sheriff sign these resolutions, at the request of the freeholders.

Resolved, That the foregoing resolutions be printed in the Irish and London newspapers.

A. KIRKPATRICK, *High Sheriff*,

A requisition, signed by a number of our most respectable citizens, was handed, in court, to Mr. Sheriff Darley, to call an aggregate meeting of the citizens of Dublin, to take into consideration the question of an Union.

F I N I S

