

THE
SUBSTANCE
OF THE
S P E E C H
OF
ROBERT PEEL, ESQUIRE,
IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS,

On THURSDAY, the 14th of February, 1799,

ON THE
QUESTION for receiving the Report of the Committee on
the RESOLUTIONS respecting an
INCORPORATE UNION WITH IRELAND.

WITH A
Correct COPY of the RESOLUTIONS, as they
were finally amended by the House of Commons.

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Houses of the Oireachtas

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S P E E C H, &c.

MR. PEEL prefaced his Speech, by saying, That a regard for consistency made him anxious to trespass a few minutes on the patience of the House.

Mr. Speaker,

SIR,

In the year 1785, during the discussion of the Irish arrangements, as they were called, I was a petitioner at your bar against
these

those arrangements with Ireland; and I am warranted in saying, that I carried with me the sentiments of a great proportion of the trading interest of England. The object of those propositions was to open a freer intercourse betwixt two independent kingdoms; the one possessing great foreign dominions, and an universal commerce; the other possessing no foreign dominions, and very little trade; and, consequently, enjoying separate interests, as they always must, while they have separate legislatures; because they may become separate, in fact. It was apparent, then, that those arrangements, however well intended, would have been prejudicial to the manufactures of Great Britain. The support I have given the present measure, does not arise from a change of sentiments, but of circumstances. This plan embraces great advantages, both political and commercial, which, by uniting two countries

countries into one country, are calculated to add strength and security to the Empire; and is so essentially necessary at this time, when a daring attempt has been made, both by intrigue, and force, to separate the countries, that inferior considerations ought not to weigh against a plan, which bids fair to frustrate such attempts, and to consolidate both the interest, and affections of the sister kingdoms. By an union we shall become one people; and though the benefits, in a commercial point of view, will be chiefly enjoyed by Ireland; yet, if an opinion may be formed of the sentiments of the trading body of this nation, from their patriotic and respectful silence, a disposition is manifested to reach out a friendly arm to their distressed brethren, to raise them from their present unhappy state to a condition of ease and comfort, similar to

our

our own. This conduct does the British merchants and manufacturers so much honour, that I feel particular pleasure in classing myself amongst that highly valuable and respectable body of men.

THOUGH a friend to the principle of the measure, I think it my duty to draw the attention of the house to the sixth * resolution. It must be the intention of every one to place both countries on an equal footing; and though nothing can be apprehended unfavourable to this country, during the present low circumstances of Ireland, it may have an operation, at a future time, highly prejudicial to our domestic industry. Each country is to provide for its own public debt; and that of Great Britain being infinitely larger than the debt of Ire-

* See the Resolutions at the end.

land,

land, heavy taxes are necessarily imposed on almost every article of consumption, which has so strong a tendency to enhance the price of labour, that goods manufactured under such a pressure, cannot be rendered on equally low terms with the produce of labour in places where similar burdens do not exist. Unless this objection be removed, the measure cannot be expected to have the concurrence of Great Britain. I feel it the more necessary to urge this point, having perceived a want of that liberality in the Irish government, which characterizes our own. The commercial intercourse now subsisting betwixt the two countries, has lost every feature of reciprocity; British manufactures being heavily taxed on their admission into Ireland, whilst the goods of that kingdom meet with every encouragement here. Whatever may be the conduct of Ireland
respecting

respecting the propositions of an union, I trust the firmness of administration will be such, as to refuse all concession to menace and intrigue; and that the aid which may be deemed necessary to extend in future to that nation, will be received as the genuine offspring of affection: I always will oppose the giving much for nothing, when demanded as a matter of right.

HAVING said thus much as a commercial man, I beg the further indulgence of the house as a member of parliament; though it may be deemed presumption in me to speak on a subject which has engaged the first abilities in this house, and after a display of talents on both sides, which never were exceeded. I see, with satisfaction, distinguished members of opposition in their places; because I think that their attendance on great constitutional questions,

questions, induces discussions highly useful and gratifying to the nation. I cannot, however, compliment them on the grounds they have taken in the present debate. The interests of Great Britain are so deeply involved in this question, that I did expect the nature, and extent, of the sacrifices to be made on our part would have been strongly laid down, and formed such a contrast to the imperial advantages so forcibly stated by the friends of administration, as to have enabled the house to come to a matured decision on the subject. Not having been so assisted, my first impressions are unaltered; and there I shall give the measure my continued support. The independence of the Irish legislature having been unequivocally acknowledged by ministers, as it had been by Parliament, and strenuously insisted on by the other side of the house, I am the more surpris'd to find,

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that the measure of union has been debated by the latter on Irish interest only, as if the question were finally to be disposed of here, without being argued elsewhere.

THERE are scarcely two opinions in this house, respecting the utility of an union at a proper time, and on fair and equitable terms; though several gentlemen have expressed their marked disapprobation of the measure at this period. Considering the state of Ireland, with a weak government, a disunited people, and with the standard of rebellion erected in many parts of it, this plan is calculated to remove such alarming disorders; and the sooner the remedy is applied the better.

THE manner of bringing forward the resolutions is deemed objectionable. Several gentlemen are of opinion, that they ought
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first to have been submitted to the Irish parliament, before they had experienced a discussion here. If the union involved in it sacrifices to be made exclusively on the part of Ireland, the complaint would have been just: the contrary, however, being the case, and the concessions confined to Great Britain, such a proceeding would have been highly disrespectful and injurious to this country.

THE feelings of pride and national consequence have been awakened in Ireland; they cannot reconcile themselves to the loss of their separate state, and distinct legislature: these are valuable privileges, boasted to have been acquired by their own exertion and patriotism, aided by the liberality of the British parliament. But let me ask, Has not Great Britain likewise valuable privileges, purchased with the
blood

blood of our ancestors? A distinct kingdom, and an independent legislature? A people united, and removed from every danger, either foreign or domestic?—In forming, therefore, an imperial legislature, Ireland loses no rights which are not likewise surrendered by Great Britain: the distinct kingdoms will be mixed into one compact body, and thereby derive additional strength and security: Ireland will gain by the proposed Union, an *imperial* legislature, instead of a *local* legislature.

THE small proportion of Irish members forming a part of the imperial parliament is considered by many as a surrender of their independence. That an opinion so unfounded should be entertained by a stranger to the character and constitution of the British parliament does not excite much astonishment; but that it should meet with the smallest countenance from those

those who have uniformly declared, that a change in the Irish representation must be for the better, is, I own, a little extraordinary. Every member of this house is a representative of Great Britain, and does not consider his duties confined to the place for which he was chosen. Yorkshire and Lancashire are the most extensive and flourishing counties in England, though individually they are very inadequately represented. When, therefore the two countries are incorporated, it will be both the duty, and inclination of every member composing the imperial parliament, to promote the interest of Ireland equally with that of every other part of the united kingdom. Instead, therefore, of Ireland losing two-thirds of her members, she will increase the number from three hundred to six hundred and fifty-eight; and I shall not be contradicted in saying, if an union should take place, it will

will be one of their first duties to administer relief, and ameliorate the condition of the people of Ireland, to communicate to them British comforts, and make them as flourishing and happy, as the people of Great Britain are, from enjoying the benefits of a more liberal system.

THE remarks of the honourable member who spoke first (Mr. Hobhouse) respecting an increase of Absentees, merits particular notice. I am ready to admit, to the fullest extent, the injury which has already resulted to the sister kingdom from this circumstance. In a country, however, governed by equal laws and a free constitution, I see no practicable means of compelling a residence, or removing the existing evil, under the present order of things. The proposed union will have an effect the very reverse of that on which the honourable
Gentleman

Gentleman founds his opposition. Scotland, and the parts of England most remote from London, sustain no injury on account of people of rank and property spending a great proportion of their time and income in the Capital. Manufactures, and other considerable objects of labour, generally flourish most at a distance from the seat of luxury, and the gay pursuits of genteel life. The want of access to the money circulating in England keeps Ireland comparatively poor and unindustrious. When the British markets are, therefore, laid open, property sent from that kingdom will be returned through the medium of industry, by which an equilibrium will be restored.

THE mind, unaccustomed to embrace objects of immense magnitude, will be assisted by a commercial intercourse. Suppose two houses in business, one of which is
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of the first respectability, with an immense capital, and extensive dealings in every part of the globe; the other in a comparatively low situation, with but little property, limited credit, and confined connections, and a proposal is made by the former, to take the latter into partnership on equal terms; such an offer never having been refused, we may easily suppose is eagerly accepted: in this case, each party will lose his distinct firm, and the two houses become one. It is unnecessary to ask here, on which side the advantage lies, though both may be benefited.

THE clamours raised against the Union by interested men in Ireland, may for a time mislead the judgment of many people; the delusion however cannot be of long continuance; and a proposition, the most liberal on the part of **Great Britain**, and on the

the acceptance of which the salvation of Ireland depends, must be received with sentiments of satisfaction, and gratitude, in the end, when reason shall take the place of passion; when policy shall prevail over prejudice; and wisdom shall govern, where enthusiasm misleads.

THE RESOLUTIONS,

As they were finally amended and sent by the Commons to the Lords.

I. THAT in order to promote and secure the essential Interests of Great Britain and Ireland, and to consolidate the Strength, Power, and Resources of the British Empire, It will be adviseable to concur in such Measures as may best tend to unite the Two Kingdoms of Great Britain

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and Ireland into One Kingdom, in such Manner, and on such Terms and Conditions, as may be established by Acts of the respective Parliaments of His Majesty's said Kingdoms.

II. That it would be fit to propose, as the First Article, to serve as a Basis of the said Union, That the said Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland shall, upon a Day to be agreed upon, be united into One Kingdom, by the Name of "The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland."

III. That for the same Purpose it would be fit to propose, That the Succession to the Monarchy and the Imperial Crown of the said United Kingdom shall continue limited and settled in the same Manner as the Imperial Crown of the said Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland now stands limited and settled, according to the existing Laws, and to the Terms of the Union between England and Scotland.

IV. That for the same Purpose it would be fit to propose, That the said United Kingdom be represented in One and the same Parliament, to be stiled "The Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland;" and that such a Number of Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and such a Number of Members in the House of Commons, as shall

shall be hereafter agreed upon by Acts of the respective Parliaments as aforesaid, shall sit and vote in the said Parliament on the Part of Ireland, as shall be summoned, chosen, and returned in such Manner as shall be fixed by an Act of Parliament of Ireland previous to the said Union; and that every Member hereafter to sit and vote in the said Parliament of the United Kingdom, shall, until the said Parliament shall otherwise provide, take and subscribe the same Oaths, and make the same Declarations, as are by Law required to be taken, subscribed, and made by the Members of the Parliaments of Great Britain and Ireland.

V. That for the same Purpose it would be fit to propose, That the Churches of that Part of Great Britain, called England; and of that Part of Great Britain, called Scotland, and of Ireland, and the Doctrine, Worship, Discipline, and Government thereof, shall be preserved as now by Law established.

VI. That for the same Purpose it would be fit to propose, That His Majesty's Subjects in Ireland shall at all times hereafter be entitled to the same Privileges, and be on the same Footing, in respect of Trade and Navigation, in all Ports and Places belonging to Great Britain, and in

all

all Cases with respect to which Treaties shall be made by His Majesty, His Heirs or Successors, with any Foreign Power, as His Majesty's Subjects in Great Britain :—That no Duty shall be imposed on the Import or Export between Great Britain and Ireland of any Articles now Duty free ; and that on other Articles there shall be established, for a Time to be limited, such a moderate Rate of equal Duties as shall, previous to the Union, be agreed upon and approved by the respective Parliaments ; subject, after the Expiration of such limited Time, to be diminished equally with respect to both Kingdoms, but in no Case to be encreased :—That all Articles which may at any Time hereafter be imported into Great Britain from Foreign Parts, shall be importable through either Kingdom into the other, subject to the like Duties and Regulations as if the same were imported directly from Foreign Parts :—That where any Articles, the Growth, Produce, or Manufacture of either Kingdom, are subject to any internal Duty in one Kingdom, such countervailing Duties (over and above any Duties on Import to be fixed as aforesaid shall be imposed as shall be necessary to prevent any Inequality in that Respect :—And that all other Matters of Trade and Commerce, other than the foregoing, and than such others as may, before the Union, be specially agreed upon for the due Encouragement of the Agriculture and Manufactures of the respective Kingdoms, shall remain

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to be regulated from Time to Time by the United Parliament.

VII. That for the same Purpose it would be fit to propose, That the Charge arising from the Payment of the Interest or Sinking Fund for the Reduction of the Principal, of the Debt incurred in either Kingdom before the Union, shall continue to be separately defrayed by Great Britain and Ireland respectively:—That, for a Number of Years to be limited, the future Expences of the United Kingdom, in Peace or War, shall be defrayed by Great Britain and Ireland jointly, according to such Proportions as shall be established by the respective Parliaments previous to the Union; and that, after the Expiration of the Time to be so limited, the Mode of jointly defraying such Expences shall be regulated, according to such Rules and Principles as shall be in like Manner agreed upon previous to the Union, for the Purpose of establishing, gradually, an uniform System of Taxation through every Part of the Kingdom.

VIII. That for the same Purpose it would be fit to propose, That all Laws in force at the Time of the Union, and all the Courts of Civil or Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction within the respective Kingdoms, shall remain as now by

Law

Law established within the same; subject only to such Alterations or Regulations from Time to Time as Circumstances may appear, to the Parliament of the United Kingdom, to require.

F I N I S.

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