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THE CELEBRATED
S P E E C H
OF A CELEBRATED
COMMONER.



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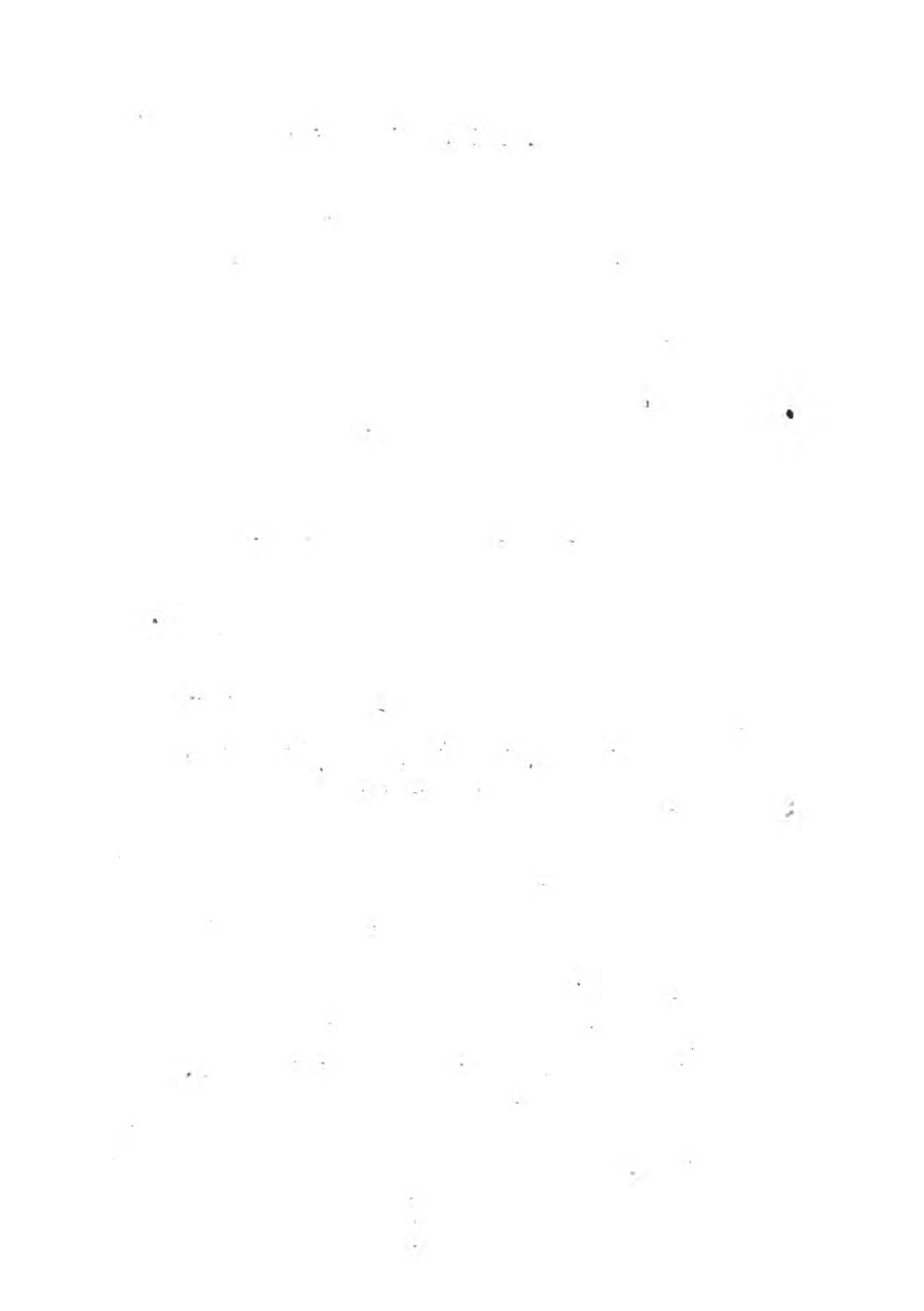
*“ Upon the whole, I will beg leave to tell the House
“ what is really my Opinion. It is, that the Stamp-
“ Act be REPEALED ABSOLUTELY, TOTALLY,
“ and IMMEDIATELY.”*

Mr. P—TT.

L O N D O N :

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M DCC LXVI.





A

Celebrated Speech.

IT is necessary to inform the reader, that some time before the meeting of parliament, a report had been artfully propagated, that the ministry had changed their minds with regard to the Stamp-Act, and, instead of repealing, were resolved to enforce it. If it could be proved, that this report did not come originally from the favourites of a certain northern nobleman, yet it was certainly much indebted to them for its progress, which was so great as to affect the stocks.

The king's speech to the parliament on the 14th of January, 1766, gave some colour to the suggestion; but when the gentlemen had spoke who moved for the address, and who seconded it; nothing could be clearer, than that the ministry persisted in their intention to promote the repeal. The friends of the late ministry applauded the king's speech, and approved of the proposed address, which, as usual, only recapitulated the speech:

The opposition took great offence at the tenderness of expression, that the two first gentlemen had made use of concerning America. Mr. Nugent particularly insisted, " That the HONOR and dignity of the kingdom, obliged us to compel the execu-

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tion

tion of the Stamp-Act, except the right was acknowledged, and the repeal solicited as a favour. He computed the expence of the troops now employed in America for their defence, as he called it, to amount to nine-pence in the pound of our land-tax; while the produce of the Stamp-Act would not raise a shilling a head on the inhabitants of America; but that a pepper-corn, in acknowledgement of the right, was of more value, than millions without. He expatiated on the extreme ingratitude of the Colonies; and concluded, with charging the ministry with encouraging petitions to parliament, and instructions to members from the trading and manufacturing towns, against the Act."

Mr. Pitt was the next speaker. Every friend of his country rejoiced to see him again in that house, and more so, in such perfect health. As he always begins very low, and as every body was in agitation at his first rising, his introduction was not heard, 'till he said, "I came to town but to-day; I was a stranger to the tenor of his majesty's speech, and the proposed address, 'till I heard them read in this house. Unconnected and unconsulted, I have not the means of information; I am fearful of offending through mistake, and therefore beg to be indulged with a second reading of the proposed address." The address being read, Mr. Pitt went on:—"He commended the king's speech, approved of the address in answer, as it decided nothing, every gentleman being left at perfect liberty to take such a part concerning America, as he might afterwards see fit. One word only he could not approve of, an EARLY, is a word that does not belong to the notice the ministry have given to parliament of the troubles in America.

In

In a matter of such importance, the communication ought to have been immediate: I speak not with respect to parties; I stand up in this place single and unconnected. As to the late ministry, (turning himself to Mr. G---lle, who sat within one of him) every capital measure they have taken, has been entirely wrong!

“As to the present gentlemen, to those at least whom I have in my eye, (looking at the bench where Mr. Conway sat, with the lords of the Treasury) I have no objection; I have never been made a sacrifice by any of them. Their characters are fair; and I am always glad when men of fair character engage in his majesty's service. Some of them have done me the honor to ask my poor opinion, before they would engage. These will do me the justice to own, I advised them to engage; but notwithstanding—I love to be explicit—I cannot give them my confidence; pardon me, gentlemen, (bowing to the ministry) confidence is a plant of slow growth in an aged bosom: youth is the season of credulity; by comparing events with each other, reasoning from effects to causes, methinks, I plainly discover the traces of an overruling influence.

“There is a clause in the act of settlement, to oblige every minister to sign his name to the advice which he gives his sovereign. Would it were observed!—I have had the honour to serve the crown, and if I could have submitted to influence, I might have still continued to serve; but I would not be responsible for others.—I have no local attachments: it is indifferent to me, whether a man was rock'd in his cradle on this side or that side of the Tweed.—I sought for merit wherever it was to be found.

found.—It is my boast, that I was the first minister who looked for it, and I found it in the mountains of the north. I called it forth, and drew it into your service, an hardy and intrepid race of men! men, who, when left by your jealousy, became a prey to the artifices of your enemies, and had gone nigh to have overturned the state, in the war before the last. These men, in the last war, were brought to combat on your side: they served with fidelity, as they fought with valour, and conquered for you in every part of the world: detested be the national reflections against them!—they are unjust, groundless, illiberal, unmanly. When I ceased to serve his majesty as a minister, it was not the COUNTRY of the man by which I was moved—but THE MAN of that country wanted WISDOM, and held principles incompatible with FREEDOM.

It is a long time, Mr. Speaker, since I have attended in parliament. When the resolution was taken in the house to tax America, I was ill in bed. If I could have endured to have been carried in my bed, so great was the agitation of my mind for the consequences! I would have solicited some kind hand to have laid me down on this floor, to have borne my testimony against it. It is now an act that has passed—I would speak with decency of every act of this house, but I must beg the indulgence of the house to speak of it with freedom.

“ I hope a day may be soon appointed, to consider the state of the nation with respect to America.—I hope, gentlemen will come to this debate with all the temper and impartiality that his majesty recommends, and the importance of the subject—

ject requires. A subject of greater importance than ever engaged the attention of this house! that subject only excepted, when near a century ago, it was the question, whether you yourselves were to be bond, or free. In the mean time, as I cannot depend upon health for any future day, such is the nature of my infirmities, I will beg to say a few words at present, leaving the justice, the equity, the policy, the expediency of the act, to another time. I will only speak to one point, a point which seems not to have been generally understood—I mean to the right. Some gentlemen (alluding to Mr. N—t) seem to have considered it as a point of HONOR. If gentlemen consider it in that light, they leave all measures of right and wrong, to follow a delusion that may lead to destruction. It is my opinion that this kingdom has no right to lay a tax upon the colonies. At the same time, I assert the authority of this kingdom over the colonies, to be sovereign and supreme, in every circumstance of government and legislation whatsoever.—They are the subjects of this kingdom, equally intitled with yourselves to all the natural rights of mankind, and the peculiar privileges of Englishmen. Equally bound by its laws, and equally participating of the constitution of this free country. The Americans are the sons, not the bastards of England. Taxation is no part of the governing or legislative power.—The taxes are a voluntary gift and grant of the commons alone. In legislation the three estates of the realm are alike concerned, but the concurrence of the peers and the crown to a tax, is only necessary to close with the form of a law. The gift and grant is of the commons alone. In ancient days, the crown, the barons, and the clergy possessed the lands. In those days, the barons

rons and the clergy gave and granted to the crown. They gave and granted what was their own. At present, since the discovery of America, and other circumstances permitting, the commons are become the proprietors of the land. The crown has divested itself of its great estates. The church (God bless it) has but a pittance. The property of the lords, compared with that of the commons, is as a drop of water in the ocean : and this house represents those commons, the proprietors of the lands ; and those proprietors virtually represent the rest of the inhabitants. When therefore in this house we give and grant, we give and grant what is our own. But in an American tax, what do we do ? We, your majesty's commons of Great-Britain, give and grant to your majesty, what ? Our own property ?—No. We give and grant to your majesty the property of your majesty's commons of America.—It is an absurdity in terms.—

“ The distinction between legislation and taxation is essentially necessary to liberty. The crown, the peers, are equally legislative powers with the commons. If taxation be a part of simple legislation, the crown, the peers have rights in taxation as well as yourselves : rights which they will claim, which they will exercise, whenever the principle can be supported by POWER.

“ There is an idea in some, that the colonies are virtually represented in this house. I would fain know by whom an American is represented here ? Is he represented by any knight of the shire, in any county in this kingdom ? WOULD TO GOD THAT RESPECTABLE REPRESENTATION WAS AUGMENTED TO A GREATER NUMBER !

NUMBER! Or will you tell him that he is represented by any representative of a borough—a borough, which perhaps no man ever saw—This is what is called, the ROTTEN PART OF THE CONSTITUTION.—It cannot continue the century—If it does not drop, it must be amputated.—The idea of a virtual representation of America in this house, is the most contemptible idea that ever entered into the head of a man—It does not deserve a serious refutation.

“ The commons of America, represented in their several assemblies, have ever been in possession of the exercise of this, their constitutional right, of giving and granting their own money. They would have been slaves if they had not enjoyed it. At the same time, this kingdom, as the supreme governing and legislative power, has always bound the colonies by her laws, by her regulations, and restrictions in trade, in navigation, in manufactures—in every thing, except that of taking their money out of their pockets without their consent.

“ Here I would draw the line,

Quam ultra citraque nequit consistere rectum.”

He concluded with a familiar voice and tone, but so low, that it was not easy to distinguish what he said. A considerable pause ensued after Mr. Pitt had done speaking—Mr. C--n--y then got up. He said, “ he had been waiting to see whether any answer would be given, to what had been advanced by the right honourable gentleman, reserving himself for the reply : but as none had been given, he had only to declare, that his own sentiments

ments were entirely conformable to those of the right honourable gentleman.—That they are so conformable, he said, is a circumstance that affects me with most sensible pleasure, and does me the greatest honour. But two things fell from that gentleman which give me pain; as whatever falls from that gentleman, falls from so great a height as to make a deep impression.—I must endeavour to remove it.—It was objected, that the notice given to parliament of the troubles in America was not early. I can assure the house, the first accounts were too vague and imperfect to be worth the notice of parliament. It is only of late that they have been precise and full. An over-ruling influence has also been hinted at. I see nothing of it—I feel nothing of it—I disclaim it for myself, and (as far as my discernment can reach) for all the rest of his majesty's ministers. Mr. Pitt said, in answer to Mr. C—y, “The excuse is a valid one, if it is a just one. That must appear from the papers now before the house.” In the interim, Mr. G—lle had recovered himself. He avoided meddling with the doctrine of taxation being confined to the house of commons, and being founded on the free gift of the collective body, through the medium of their representatives; neither did he attempt to defend the virtual representation of America; but began with censuring the present ministry very severely, for delaying to give earlier notice to parliament of the disturbances in America. He said, “They began in July, and now we are in the middle of January; lately they were only occurrences, (the word used in the king's speech on the 17th of December) they are now grown to disturbances, to tumults, and riots. I doubt they border on open rebellion; and if the doctrine I have heard this day be confirmed,

affirmed, I fear they will lose that name to take
 that of Revolution. The government over them
 being dissolved, a revolution will take place in A-
 merica. I cannot understand the difference be-
 tween external and internal taxes. They are the
 same in effect, and only differ in name. That
 this kingdom is the sovereign, the supreme legis-
 lative power over America, is granted. It can-
 not be denied; and taxation is a part of that so-
 vereign power. It is one branch of the legisla-
 tion. It is, it has been exercised, over those who
 are not, who were never represented. It is exer-
 cised over the India company, the merchants of
 London, the proprietors of the stocks, and over
 many great manufacturing towns. It was exer-
 cised over the palatinate of Chester, and the
 bishoprick of Durham, before they sent any re-
 presentatives to parliament. I appeal for proof
 to the preambles of the acts which gave them re-
 presentatives: the one in the reign of Henry VIII.
 the other in that of Charles II." Mr. G—lle then
 quoted the *STATUTES EXACTLY*, and desired that
 they might be read; which being done, he re-
 sumed his discourse: "When I proposed to tax
 America, I asked the house, if any gentleman
 would object to the right; I repeatedly asked it,
 and no man would attempt to deny it. Protection
 and obedience are reciprocal. Great Britain pro-
 tects America; America is bound to yield obe-
 dience. If not, tell me where the Americans were
 emancipated? When they want the protection of
 this kingdom, they are always very ready to ask it.
 That protection has always been afforded them in
 the most full and ample manner. The nation has
 run itself into an immense debt to give them their
 protection; and now they are called upon to con-
 tribute a small share towards the public expence,

an expence arising from themselves, they renounce your authority, insult your officers, and break out, I might almost say, into open rebellion. The seditious spirit of the colonies owes its birth to the factions in this house. Gentlemen are careless of the consequences of what they say, provided it answers the purposes of opposition. We were told, we trod on tender ground; we were bid to expect disobedience. What was this, but telling the Americans to stand out against the law, to encourage their obstinacy with the expectation of support from hence? Let us only hold out a little, they would say, our friends will soon be in power. Ungrateful people of America! Bounties have been extended to them. When I had the honour to serve the crown, while you yourselves were loaded with an enormous debt, you have given bounties on their lumber, on their iron, their hemp, and many other articles. You have relaxed, in their favour, the act of navigation, that palladium of the British commerce; and yet I have been abused in all the public papers, as an enemy to the trade of America. I have been particularly charged with giving orders and instructions to prevent the Spanish trade, and thereby stopping the channel, by which alone North America used to be supplied with cash for remittances to this country. I defy any man to produce any such orders or instructions. I discouraged no trade but what was illicit, what was prohibited by act of parliament. I desire a West-India merchant, well known in the city, (Mr. Long) a gentleman of character, may be examined. He will tell you, that I offered to do every thing in my power to advance the trade of America. I was above giving an answer to anonymous calumnies;

nies, but in this place, it becomes one to wipe off the aspersion.

Here Mr. Grenville ceased. Several members got up to speak, but Mr. Pitt seeming to rise, the house was so clamorous for Mr. Pitt, Mr. Pitt, that the Speaker was obliged to call to order.

After obtaining a little quiet, he said, " Mr. Pitt was up;" who began with informing the house, " That he did not mean to have gone any further upon the subject that day; that he had only designed to have thrown out a few hints, which, gentlemen, who were so confident of the right of this kingdom to send taxes to America, might consider; might perhaps reflect, in a cooler moment, that the right was at least equivocal. But since the gentleman, who spoke last, had not stopped on that ground, but had gone into the whole; into the justice, the equity, the policy, the expediency of the Stamp-Act, as well as into the right, he would follow him through the whole field, and combat his arguments on every point."

He was going on, when lord Strange got up, and called both the gentlemen, Mr. Pitt, and Mr. Grenville, to order. He said, " they had both departed from the matter before the house, which was the king's speech; and that Mr. Pitt was going to speak twice on the same debate, although the house was not in a committee."

Mr. George Onslow answered, " That they were both in order, as nothing had been said, but what was fairly deducible from the king's speech," and appealed to the Speaker. The Speaker decided in Mr. Onslow's favour.

Mr. Pitt said, " I do not apprehend I am speaking twice : I did expressly reserve a part of my subject, in order to save the time of this house, but I am compell'd to proceed in it. I do not speak twice ; I only finished what I designedly left imperfect. But if the house is of a different opinion, far be it from me to indulge a wish of transgression, against order. I am content, if it be your pleasure, to be silent."—Here he paused—The house resounding with, " Go on, go on ;" he proceeded :

" Gentlemen, Sir, (to the Speaker) I have been charged with giving birth to sedition in America. They have spoken their sentiments with freedom against this unhappy act, and that freedom has become their crime. Sorry I am to hear the liberty of speech in this house imputed as a crime. But the imputation shall not discourage me. It is a liberty I mean to exercise. No gentleman ought to be afraid to exercise it. It is a liberty by which the gentleman who calumniates it might have profited. He ought to have profited. He ought to have desisted from his project. The gentleman tells us, America is obstinate ; America is almost in open rebellion. I rejoice that America has resisted. Three millions of people, so dead to all the feelings of liberty, as voluntarily to submit to be slaves, would have been fit instruments to make slaves of the rest. I come not here arm'd at all points, with law cases and acts of parliament, with the statute book doubled down in dogs-ears, to defend the cause of liberty : if I had, I myself would have cited the two cases of Chester and Durham. I would have cited them to have shewn, that, even under arbitrary reigns, parliaments were ashamed of taxing a people without their consent,
and

and allowed them representatives. Why did the gentleman confine himself to Chester and Durham? He might have taken a higher example in Wales; Wales, that never was taxed by parliament, 'till it was incorporated. I would not debate a particular point of law with the gentleman: I know his abilities. I have been obliged to his diligent researches. But, for the defence of liberty upon a general principle, upon a constitutional principle, it is a ground on which I stand firm; on which I dare meet any man. The gentleman tells us of many who are taxed, and are not represented. The India company, merchants, stock-holders, manufacturers. Surely many of these are represented in other capacities, as owners of land, or as freemen of boroughs. It is a misfortune that more are not actually represented. But they are all inhabitants, and as such are virtually represented. Many have it in their option to be actually represented. They have connexions with those that elect, and they have influence over them. The gentleman mentioned the stock-holders: I hope he does not reckon the debts of the nation as part of the national estate. Since the accession of king William, many ministers, some of great, others of more moderate abilities, have taken the lead of government."

He then went through the list of them, bringing it down 'till he came to himself, giving a short sketch of the characters of each of them. "None of these, he said, thought, or ever dreamed, of robbing the colonies of their constitutional rights. That was reserved to mark the æra of the late administration: not that there were wanting some, when I had the honour to serve his majesty, to propose to me to burn my fingers with an American

frican Stamp-Act. With the enemy at their back, with our bayonets at their breasts, in the day of their distress, perhaps the Americans would have submitted to the imposition; but it would have been taking an ungenerous, and-unjust advantage. The gentleman boasts of his bounties to America! Are those bounties intended finally for the benefit of this kingdom? If they are, where is his peculiar merit to America? If they are not, he has misapplied the national treasures. I am no courtier of America, I stand up for this kingdom. I maintain, that the parliament has a right to bind, to restrain America. Our legislative power over the colonies is sovereign and supreme. When it ceases to be sovereign and supreme, I would advise every gentleman to sell his lands, if he can, and embark for that country. When two countries are connected together, like England and her colonies, without being incorporated, the one must necessarily govern. The greater must rule the less; but so rule it, as not to contradict the fundamental principles that are common to both.

“ If the gentleman does not understand the difference between internal and external taxes, I cannot help it; but there is a plain distinction between taxes levied for the purposes of raising a revenue, and duties imposed for the regulation of trade, for the accommodation of the subject; although in the consequences, some revenue might incidentally arise from the latter.

The gentleman asks, when were the colonies emancipated? But I desire to know, when they were made slaves? But I dwell not upon words. When I had the honour of serving his majesty, I availed myself of the means of information, which I derived from
my

my office : I speak therefore, from knowledge. My materials were good. I was at pains to collect, to digest, to consider them, and I will be bold to affirm, that the profits to Great-Britain from the trade of the colonies, through all its branches, is two millions a year. This is the fund that carried you triumphantly through the last war. The estates that were rented at two thousand pounds a year, threescore years ago, are at three thousand pounds at present. Those estates sold then from fifteen to eighteen years purchase ; the same may be now sold for thirty. You owe this to America. This is the price that America pays you for her protection. And shall a miserable financier come with a boast that he can fetch a pepper-corn into the Exchequer, to the loss of millions to the nation ! I dare not say, how much higher these profits may be augmented. Omitting the immense increase of people, by natural population, in the northern colonies, and the migration from every part of Europe, I am convinced the whole commercial system of America may be altered to advantage. You have prohibited, where you ought to have encouraged ; and you have encouraged, where you ought to have prohibited. Improper restraints have been laid on the continent, in favour of the islands. You have but two nations to trade with in America. Would you had twenty ! Let acts of parliament in consequence of treaties remain, but let not an English minister become a custom-house officer for Spain, or for any foreign power. Much is wrong, much may be amended for the general good of the whole.

Does the gentleman complain he has been misrepresented in the public prints ? It is a common misfortune. In the Spanish affair in the last war, I was abused in all the news-papers, for having

ing advised his majesty to violate the laws of nations with regard to Spain. The abuse was industriously circulated even in hand-bills. If administration did not propagate the abuse, ADMINISTRATION NEVER CONTRADICTED IT. I will not say what advice I did give to the king. My advice is in writing, signed by myself, in the possession of the crown. But I will say, what advice I did not give to the king: I did not advise him to violate any of the laws of nations.

“As to the report of the gentleman’s preventing in some way the trade for bullion with the Spaniards, it was spoken of so confidently, that I own I am one of those who did believe it to be true.

“The gentleman must not wonder he was not contradicted, when as the minister, he asserted a right of parliament to tax America. I know not how it is, but there is a modesty in this house which does not chuse to contradict a minister. I wish gentlemen would get the better of this modesty. If they do not, perhaps, the collective body may begin to abate of its respect for the representative. Lord Bacon had told me, that a great question would not fail of being agitated at one time or another. I was willing to agitate that at the proper season, the German war: my German war, they called it. Every sessions I called out, has any body any objections to the German war? No body would object to it, one gentleman only excepted, since removed to the upper house, by succession to an ancient barony,” (meaning lord le Despencer, formerly sir Francis Dashwood;) he told me, “he did not like my German war.” I honoured the man for it, and was sorry when he was turned out of his post.

A great

" A great deal has been said without doors, of the power, of the strength of America. It is a topic that ought to be cautiously meddled with. In a good cause, on a sound bottom, the force of this country can crush America to atoms. I know the valour of your troops. I know the skill of your officers. There is not a company of foot that has served in America, out of which you may not pick a man of sufficient knowledge and experience, to make a governor of a colony there. But on this ground, on the Stamp-Act, when so many here will think it a crying injustice, I am one who will lift up my hands against it.

" In such a cause, your success would be hazardous. — America, if she fell, would fall like the strong man. She would embrace the pillars of the state, and pull down the constitution along with her. Is this your boasted peace? Not to sheath the sword in its scabbard, but to sheath it in the bowels of your countrymen? Will you quarrel with yourselves, now the whole house of Bourbon is united against you? While France disturbs your fisheries in Newfoundland, embarrasses your slave trade to Africa, and with-holds from your subjects in Canada, their property stipulated by treaty; while the ransom for Manillas is denied by Spain, and its gallant conqueror basely traduced into a mean plunderer, a gentleman, (colonel Draper) whose noble and generous spirit would do honour to the proudest grandee of the country. The Americans have not acted in all things with prudence and temper. They have been wronged. They have been driven to madness by injustice. Will you punish them for the madness you have occasioned? Rather let prudence and temper
come

come first from this side. I will undertake for America, that she will follow the example. There are two lines in a ballad of Prior's, of a man's behaviour to his wife, so applicable to you and your colonies, that I cannot help repeating them :

" Be to her faults a little blind :

" Be to her virtues very kind.

" Upon the whole, I will beg leave to tell the house what is really my opinion. It is, that the Stamp-Act be REPEALED ABSOLUTELY, TOTALLY, and IMMEDIATELY. That the reason for the repeal be assigned, because it was founded on an erroneous principle. At the same time, let the sovereign authority of this country over the colonies be asserted in as strong terms as can be devised, and be made to extend to every point of legislation whatsoever. That we may bind their TRADE, confine their MANUFACTURES, and exercise every POWER whatsoever, except that of taking their money out of their pockets without their consent!"



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