

Mr. Allward Learned

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HOUSE OF COMMONS.

STATE OF THE NATION.

MR. GREY, after some introductory matter, spoke to the following effect:—"The conduct of the late Ministers is not alone the subject I mean to enquire into, though I will defy any man to say, that a view of their proceedings—their management of the public revenue—their direction of the war, but particularly their behaviour to the Northern Powers, ought not to be enquired into—that it could not be useful towards regulating the conduct of the present Ministers, to point out the blunders and the criminality of their predecessors. We are now at the end of nine years, during which we have been involved in a most expensive and sanguinary war, with the addition of two hundred and seventy millions to our national debt, and seventeen millions to our annual revenue; about to engage with a new confederacy formed of our old allies, and leagued with our enemy, who with increased resources and extended territory, and more than all with a wiser administration, is preparing to attack us; while we, with diminished resources, and diminished vigor—a scarcity approaching to a famine raging in the country—our relation with foreign powers almost completely subverted, and an administration in whose principles and capacity the public have no confidence, must contemplate the prospect before us with apprehension. Do not all these circumstances, combined with the melancholy situation of the Sister Country, demand an enquiry? A right hon. gentleman, whom I now see in his place, has frequently declared himself ready to enter into a full vindication of the conduct of the war. I hope he will let his explanation be in detail on this occasion, and not confine himself to the hackneyed boast that the war has been triumphant and successful, &c. This leads me to consider what is the evidence of success in war:—the principal object of war is to procure a safe and honorable peace—will any man say that such a peace is now within the reach of Ministers? In order to form some estimate of the conduct of the war, and the late Ministers, let us compare our situation now with what it was at the commencement of the war—let us compare it with that of France—and let us compare the peace which can be now had, with what was attainable when the overtures of Bonaparte were rejected. I call upon the house not to be influenced by a display of persuaded victories, but to consider the general result, and I will ask them if such has been the consequence of victories, what would have followed from defeat? Those brilliant naval victories, so much the theme of just panegyric, have not been productive of solid advantages to the country, for they have not tended to accelerate the return of peace, but rather encouraged the Ministers to prosecute hostilities with augmented fury. We engage in the war to prevent the aggrandizement of France, and how had we succeeded? The power and the dominions of France, have been enlarged beyond the hope of her most sanguine friends. We engaged in the war in order to put down the principles of what is called Jacobinism, and I believe some gentlemen supported it with that view. But that object has completely failed, as indeed have all the objects, avowed or implied, with which it set out. Those failures I conceive principally to have arisen from the imprudent manner in which the war has been conducted—the powerful army committed to the direction of Ministers, which might have been employed with effect on the Continent, was divided and sent on ill-

judged expeditions to the East and West-Indies, where the climate was more fatal than the enemy; and while those forces were employed in remote countries—remote indeed from the proper scene and the original object of the war—France had the opportunity of laying the Continent at her feet. Formerly, had Ministers availed themselves of the opportunity, we might have made peace with France, and obtained from her some valuable colonies; and I have no hesitation in saying, persuaded her to evacuate the greater part of the territories she had then acquired—but the opportunity is gone, and I am led to think the present Ministers would not be disinclined to make peace on the terms of leaving France in possession of a dominion more extended and powerful than the widest dreams of Louis the XIVth could ever have aspired to, and also of surrendering to her the chief of the acquisitions we have made during the war. Such is the state to which misguided councils and incapable war Ministers have reduced us. That all the objects of the war have been lost, I shall prove in detail, should the house go into a committee. From the Texel to the Adriatic not a port is open to us; every coast on which our troops have landed, have witnessed the disgrace of our arms, from the retreat of Dunkirk and the evacuation of Corsica to that wicked expedition to Quiberon, which no human mind can reflect on without horror. On those occurrences I shall not dwell at present. I shall confine myself to more recent operations.—About four years ago the Ministers made a requisition of 100,000 men to defend the country from invasion: they were raised almost in an instant, and there happened to be no occasion for them in England. The Minister then receiving no improvement from experience, devised the Quixotic expedition to Holland, in which a great part of that defensive force was employed; and the manner in which they were conducted, the country will recollect with regret and indignation. An enquiry was applied for on that occasion and refused; but if my motion is acceded to, it shall be among the first to be investigated, and certainly it claims the first attention. A formidable British army, with a large auxiliary force, after several victories, stipulating with a French army much inferior in number, for permission to retreat. Either the original plan, or the manner in which it was executed, deserves the highest censure. I shall not pronounce which ought to be blamed, but certainly it loudly calls for enquiry. Supplementary militia, tho' the right hon. gentleman opposite to me asserted that only 800 men were lost. If he persists in that assertion, I should ask him what is become of the remainder of that body, or why have they not been employed against the enemy? And, I contend, a force so considerable and better appointed, no English Ministry ever had at their disposal. In December, 1799, Bonaparte made his overtures to negotiate with this country, which Ministers so contemptuously rejected; and in justification of their conduct, they told us, that the armies of France were disorganized, and their finances in confusion—that our allies were so faithful it would be base to desert them, that they were flushed with success, and invigorated in resources—nothing being necessary but our cordial co-operation to ensure a complete success, and to determinate the war immediately. Let the late Ministers then come forward and explain why they so dreadfully deceived the public and this house—Why they gave such positive assurances, without even calculating on the chances of war. But I am persuaded that had they judiciously employed the military force under Gen. Abercrombie, they might have postponed, if they had not prevented, the

reduction of the Emperor. Had that force which too late appeared before Genoa, been landed time enough to join the Austrian army, the fate of the battle of Marengo might have been very different. When Ministers found they were rather late to attack France they ventured on Spain, and hence we come to the disgraceful expedition to Ferrol, and the still more disgraceful attack on Cadiz; and certainly any Ministers that could be capable of planning an attack upon a garrison, suffering, as Cadiz then was, under the severe inflictions of Providence, if they had any knowledge of it, would deserve the execration of all mankind. Such has been the military career of the late Ministers—such the unfortunate and unsuccessful manner in which they have managed the war—with all the means they desire, or the country could grant, a force of not less than 168,000 rank and file, exclusive of the troops of the East-India Company and those on the Irish establishment.—When the military glory of England was carried to the highest pitch of fame, during the reign of Queen Anne, or when the battle of Minden was obtained, Great-Britain possessed not half that number. Last year Ministers reckoned confidently on the dissolution of the French army, but ability, activity, vigor, and enterprise will collect an army, will create resources, when little minds would sink into dejection and despondency, and the great genius of Bonaparte has proved it. Will the admirers of the late administration compare them with that extraordinary statesman and warrior?—they had abundance of money, a formidable army, a nation tranquil and obedient to the laws—he had quite the contrary in every respect, and yet he has subdued them in the field and in the cabinet—he has given security to the French nation, and tranquillity to the French people. Why did Ministers suffer that season for action to pass by when they represented the French army as weak and disorganized; or why if they did not believe them so, should they deceive this house? This particularly calls for enquiry. I shall not pursue this subject farther, but hasten to matters more pressing. I beg the house to contrast the conduct of the late Ministers, when in high and lofty strains they refused to treat with M. Chauvelin, and dismissed him with contempt, with their recent solicitations to M. Otto to remain here. Here was a change! When Ministers had it in their power to confine France within her ancient limits they refused peace. Wise men reflecting on the impolicy of their former conduct, would be forward to seize any opportunity that might afterwards occur of repairing it. Such opportunities did offer to Ministers, even after they had full means of ascertaining that it was impossible to dictate a government to an armed nation. Still trusting to an alliance which had no firm bond of union, because it had no common interest in view, they continued to persevere in the war, in contempt of experience, and in defiance of sound political wisdom. I shall not, however, urge these topics as a ground for enquiry, because I am aware of a plea in bar, the house has sanctioned these proceedings; but the house, when it voted the address of approbation on the rejection of Bonaparte's overtures, at least many members declared they gave their vote from a confidence in Ministers. The fatal consequences of that vote should convince those gentlemen of the propriety of examining that affair fully. The motion I propose to submit will give them an opportunity for ample investigation, as the whole of that case has not been yet developed. The house at that time received the most solemn pledges from the Minister, that the allies were indissolubly connected. I call upon the right hon. gentleman opposite to me to

account for that assertion. Had he then no reason to suspect the attachment of the Emperor Paul. Had he no grounds to apprehend the Northern Confederacy? Had he nothing to plead but a want of foresight—such, I contend, as would disqualify any Minister from ever assuming the character of a statesman? There were ample grounds to form a judgment of the designs of the Russian monarch, from the departure of his army from Italy, and from what followed the failures in Holland. There were steps taken long since by the Northern Powers, to maintain the right now in dispute, particularly by Sweden. The Capt. of the convoy which was captured by us, was sentenced to death for surrendering, and was only respited at the place of execution. With such evidence before them of the designs of Russia, and the other Northern Powers, why should they reject the overtures of Bonaparte? Does this alone demand enquiry? I approved the conduct of Ministers last summer in refusing Bonaparte a Naval Armistice, but I do not approve of their policy when he afterwards proposed a separate negotiation, not to accept of it. They had no obligations of good faith to their allies then to restrain them: The Convention, after the battle of Marengo, and that of Hohenlinden, completely set aside any pretext of that nature. The next object for our enquiry which presents itself is, the Northern Confederacy, with the causes which have produced it. With respect to the right of neutral bottoms making neutral property, it strikes me as very obvious that this country would profit by allowing this right more than any other nation in Europe, because it is clear that the country which has most trade, must have the greatest interest in protecting it. At this moment, I understand, we carry on a commerce with France in neutral bottoms, and perhaps it will be particularly for our advantage to preserve this communication undisturbed, for if, as is more than probable, the French government should contrive to shut out our shipping from all the European ports, we might be enabled to carry on our trade with the continent through the medium of France herself. So much for the policy of the right, so far as it regards us; then as to the prudence of asserting it at this particular time, I am decidedly against it. If we should even succeed in forcing the Northern Powers to give up this right to us now, we could not secure it; it will at all times be a mere question of power. Therefore I would prefer the policy dictated by the treaty of 1780, to that pursued by Ministers at present. We are told, indeed, if we abandon this right now, we may as well order our ships to be burnt:—A more extravagant absurdity never fell from the lips of man; that privilege was granted to Holland in 1674, yet during the last century our navy has flourished beyond example. It was also allowed to France, and confirmed to them by the treaty of 1786. Therefore no such dangerous consequences as are apprehended can arise from the admission of the right of neutral nations to trade with the enemy, to the fullest extent; certainly not by any means, so much as by the assertion of that right at present. The notes of Lord Grenville and Lord Carysfort attempt to maintain that the treaty of the Empress of Russia recognized this right: a treaty which, in fact, had nothing to do with it. That was an act of violence independent of all right, and without even a reference to the law of nations. The very circumstance would entitle the House to go into an enquiry. If it is incumbent on us to assert this right, why not proceed against Prussia? The affair of the seizure of Cuxhaven, and the trick of making the timid citizens of Hamburg purchase the ship, and restore her to his Prussian Majesty to appease his wrath, was beneath the magna-