

AN

No. 10

ADDRESS

TO THE

PEOPLE OF IRELAND,

ON THE

PROJECTED UNION.

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1799.

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ADDRESS, &c.

KINSALE, JANUARY 1, 1799.

Fellow-Citizens,

UPON the present momentous crisis of your fate, when a Union of this country with England is about to be proposed, permit an Irishman, ardently attached to your interest and prosperity, to offer you his sentiments on the probable influence such an event (should it take place) may have, on the present and future fortunes of this isle.

The first necessary consequences of a Union must be, the annihilation of your national existence, the transfer of the legislative power from yourselves to another nation, and the reduction of your country to the situation of a province subject to foreign domination. In the following pages, I shall consider the probable result of these consequences.

As I look upon experiment to be the true basis of natural philosophy, so in politics, I look upon the historically recorded manner in which one nation has uniformly conducted itself to another for past ages, to be the only rational foundation for inferring what its future conduct to it may be; and upon this ground, I shall take a rapid and concise view of the mode in which England has exercised its dominion over this country, from its first acquirement 'till the present time; that from a retrospect of the past, my fellow-countrymen may be able to form an idea of their future prospects in a Union with that kingdom.

Henry the Second, taking advantage of the divided and distracted state of this country, acquired an imperfect dominion over it; and as this power, such as it was, had been obtained by the divisions existing amongst the inhabitants, so was it preserved by fomenting and perpetuating them: Irishman was set against Irishman, and the unhappy island was universally desolated by violence, rapine, and murder; which were encouraged and rewarded by our English rulers: and thus their government was founded upon crimes, the most revolting to human nature.

In this wretched and crime-stained situation, did this kingdom continue from Henry the Second's
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time down to Elizabeth's; when, by the vigorous and steady administration of that princess, it was more completely subdued, and its administration conducted upon something like the ordinary principles of policy and justice. From that period the natural advantages of the country began to operate in its favour, and in spite of the narrow policy of its rulers to force it into a state of rising prosperity and happiness, a woollen manufacture arose amongst you: you not only supplied yourselves with this article, but also exported a large quantity to England, and to other countries; your population was increasing, and wealth and prosperity were flowing in upon you apace.

But now, mark the conduct of England upon this occasion; of this England, to whom you are going to transfer the power of legislating for you. In the spirit of that narrow policy, which cannot see the general prosperity of the empire in the prosperity of all its parts; in the true spirit of commercial jealousy that cannot bear a rival in even a sister country, she made an act of Parliament*, laying a duty amounting to a prohibition, on your woollen manufacture, imported into England; and procured from your complaisant Parliament an act, prohibiting its export into foreign countries. Your manufacturers, deprived of employment, sought refuge in France; and

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* Vide 7th William the Third.

in the reigns of William and Anne, emigrated to the number of near twelve thousand, establishing the woollen manufacture in that country. In this instance, England, unfortunately for the empire, received a severe punishment for the illiberality of her policy, by the establishment of her staple manufacture in the country of a rival and an enemy.

But England did not rest satisfied here:—fearing that your Parliaments might feel a returning sense of their own dignity; fearing that they might feel a returning sense of the duty they owed their country, in the promotion of its manufactures, and the advancement of its prosperity—she, by an act of George the First, virtually took from them the power of legislation, and transferred it to herself; thus was your natural manufacture destroyed, and thus were you deprived of your independence by this kingdom, to whom you are about to be required to make a voluntary sacrifice of your country.

And now, my fellow-countrymen, let me pause a moment to turn your eyes on the island you inhabit; behold her situated in a most temperate climate, with a fruitful soil, cultivated by a numerous, a hardy, a brave and industrious population; placed on the ocean, which is ever ready to waft

waft the rich productions of her foil, and of the induftry of her inhabitants to every part of the world, and to bear back its wealth to her numerous harbours, that open their safe and capacious bofoms for its reception. What a proud pre-eminence of wealth and happinefs has God and Nature intended for you; and how large a meafure of perverted human power muft have been exerted to mar thefe bright gifts of Providence! but how fuccefsfully this power has been exerted, let the following picture of your country at the clofe of the year 1781, demonftrate:

At that period, when the reft of Europe had advanced in arts, in fciences, in civilization, in commerce and profperity, far beyond any former æra of its history, you were retrogade in all thefe advantages; excepting your linen manufacture, you had nearly loft all your old manufactures, and no new ones had arifen; your woollen cloth manufactory was entirely gone; your woollen ftuffs, efpecially your tabinets, (which equally fhewed the talents and ingenuity of your people) were languifhing, and almoft ruined; you had fcarcely any agriculture; you did not fupply yourfelves; public and private poverty went hand in hand; your ariftocracy were generally abfentees, increafing the mifery of their country by draining it of its capital; your merchants were poor, few, and pedling;

pedling ; your manufacturers starving ; your peasantry indifcribably wretched, ignorant, bigotted, and almost barbarous. Such, my countrymen, were the effects of the legislative dominion exerted over you by Great-Britain.

The year 1782 has become the most memorable period in your history. An armed body of patriots had arisen, to whose loud, repeated and firm demands, your independence was conceded.—From that moment, the age of your prosperity may be dated : a wise system of corn laws was enacted, and your country became the scene of almost universal cultivation ; new manufactures arose, and wealth, happiness and comfort began to be diffused amongst all ranks of the community. In the seventeen years that have succeeded this æra, you have made a greater progress in population, wealth and cultivation, than has ever been made by any other nation within a similar space of time ; and these advantages are still progressive. These are the fruits of your independence : and will you, my countrymen, exchange this independence, from which you have derived and are deriving so many blessings, for that legislative dependence on Great-Britain, which had already reduced you to so abject a state of misery and national degradation ?

For the purpose of more fully discussing the
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subject of a Union, I shall now for argument suppose, that if such an event shall take place, England will lay aside the narrow policy and commercial jealousy which have hitherto directed her conduct to this country. I will even suppose, that she will exert her utmost power (consistent with her own safety) to advance your prosperity; yet even upon these suppositions, I think I will demonstrate, that from the present situation of Great-Britain, and from the motives (resulting from her situation) which now induce her to propose an Union to you—that such a measure, if carried, must be ultimately your ruin!

Supposing the present war to have a speedy conclusion, England will have incurred a debt of between *four* and *five hundred millions!* At the close of the last war, she found it extremely difficult to raise taxes sufficient to pay the interest of her debt, and the current expences of her Government. How much must these embarrassments be increased, when her public debt is nearly doubled; and if at that period she found it difficult to pay the interest of half its present amount, she must now find it nearly impossible to pay the interest of the whole. In this situation, she turns her eyes on your rising prosperity, and hitherto almost untouched resources; and to share her public burdens, and enable her to keep her faith
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with her creditors, she now proposes a Union to you.

And if it should be said, that these are not her motives for now urging this measure, let me ask, why in the lapse of so many centuries, since her first acquirement of dominion over this kingdom, did she not unite the countries when her power of enforcing a Union was greater, and our means of resisting it were less than they are at present? The answer, in my opinion, is obvious; because she was not so overburthened with taxes as she now is; or even if she was, you had not, until the present time, sufficient wealth to bear any material part of them.

It appears to me, upon this view of a Union, that its immediate and leading effects must be, the removal of the seat of Government to Great Britain, and an immense increase of taxation; and I think I shall prove, that the consequences resulting from these effects, must inevitably be ruinous to this country.

The greatest evil you at present labour under is, the non-residence of your men of great landed property. It has been lately stated in the English Parliament by Mr. Pitt, that a million is annually drawn by them from this country to England; and I think this annual drain has been little less than

than that sum for these last twenty years. The more clearly to point out the ruinous extent of this evil, I shall for a moment suppose, that during that space of time this money had not been drawn from you, to what an immense sum would it now have arisen ! How great a capital would it be, and how powerful a stimulus would it give to your agriculture, your manufactures, and your commerce ; and how severely must you now feel its loss !

The great landed proprietors who at present reside amongst you, are almost to a man retained by their parliamentary interest, and their places under Government. How enormously then will this evil be increased, when your Parliament shall be annihilated, and your Government transferred to England !

The evil arising from an immense increase of your taxes, grievous as it must be, will be rendered still more destructive by having the greatest part of their produce sent to another country ; for they will then go to discharge the interest of the national debt of England, which is in the hands of capitalists residing in Great-Britain, and must therefore centre in that country.

To what a miserable situation then must you be reduced by a Union, which will deprive you of

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the entire income of your lands, and the greatest part of the amount of your taxes. How will you be able to support this double drain? Thus will every chance of accumulating a capital be destroyed, and with it every rational hope of continuing your present state of progressive prosperity.

Having thus, I think, demonstrated that a Union must be destructive to the kingdom in general, I shall now attempt to shew, that it will be equally ruinous to every description of its inhabitants; and I shall first address myself to the great leading men of the realm.

A Union will deprive them of the great political power they now possess. The increased taxation, which must be a necessary consequence of it, will also take from them a very large part of their income. They will doubtless receive considerable pensions as a purchase for their boroughs, and a recompence for the loss of their political influence; but although these may be some remuneration to them, will they be any to their posterity, to whom they are in some measure bound to hand down that political power which they derived from their ancestors?

To the middling gentry it will be still more ruinous, as the high taxes will deprive them of these

these comforts and conveniences of life which they have hitherto enjoyed; and they will be forced to take refuge in America, or to fill the petty towns of the European continent.

I shall be more particular in detailing the influence of a Union on the mercantile classes of society, as an idea is gone abroad that it will bring English capital amongst them, and increase their commercial prosperity.

As all foreign markets are at present open to them, the only advantage they can gain by a Union is the British markets; and I shall now examine their chance of succeeding in a commercial contest with the merchants of that country.

It has been lately stated by Mr. Pitt, that the British merchants have a capital of one hundred and twenty millions employed in trade; their manufacturers have machinery that our whole capital would not be sufficient to purchase; they have established skill, established credit, and established markets.

What have our merchants and manufacturers to oppose to these great advantages? Scarcely any capital, scarcely any machinery, unskilful artists, no established credit or correspondence.

Supposing the present state and independence of our country to continue, what gives us so fair a chance of rivalling, nay even of out-doing the British merchants? our almost total freedom from taxation, when compared with Great-Britain, and the consequent cheapness of labour, which will enable us to undersell them in foreign markets. Let these advantages be taken from us, (and I think I have proved that a Union will deprive us of them) and what probability will our merchants then have of success in so unequal a contest? What then shall we have to offer the English merchants and manufacturers, that will induce them to bring their skill and their capital amongst us? What recompence will we then have to give them for the sacrifice of their country, their connections, and above all, their prejudices?

I have thus, I think, demonstrated that a Union, so far from increasing the trade of the mercantile classes, that it will inevitably destroy their present commerce, and totally cut off all hope of its future advancement.

It will be equally destructive to the peasantry, as it will increase the necessities of their landlords, and oblige them to raise their rents; and by inducing them to reside in Great-Britain, it will draw from the people of this country these sums which would otherwise center amongst them.

Having

Having thus, I think, proved that a Union will not only be destructive to Ireland in general, but also to every class of its inhabitants; I shall now point out, from the relative circumstances of the two countries, that Ireland must derive almost incalculable advantages from the continuation of its legislative independence.

England at the close of the war, when all her debts shall be funded, will exhibit the astonishing political phenomenon of a country owing a public debt, nearly equal to the purchase of every foot of land within its territory.

Ireland, if the war shall have a speedy termination, will not owe a much greater sum than one year's income,

From these circumstances, two important consequences must inevitably follow.

First, that from the astonishing amount of the English debt, an enormous taxation must take place in that country; and your landed proprietors residing there, will either in direct taxation upon income, or by indirect taxation upon every article of their consumption or expenditure, lose two thirds of their annual fortunes, and from the comparative lightness of the taxes in Ireland, they will be induced to reside in this country; and thus
will

will your independence eradicate the greatest evil you labour under ; an evil which must be so dreadfully increased by a Union.

And secondly, the same causes will operate in making the prices of provisions and labour so much cheaper in this country, than they will be in England, that the English capitalists and manufacturers will be induced to settle amongst you, and this island will become the emporium of the manufactures and commerce of these kingdoms, and the great depository of their wealth.

I have now, I think, my countrymen, demonstrated to you, that your independence must lead you to power, wealth and happiness ; whilst on the other hand, a Union must inevitably involve you in debt, taxation, misery, and ruin !

I am aware that to all I have advanced, it may be objected that, England might propose an Union to you, in which taxation shall be so modified as not to bear more hardly upon you than it does at present ; to this I answer, it is impossible she should propose such a Union, because it would be inconsistent with her safety ; for if she was to open her markets to you, and give your merchants all the privileges and advantages of her own, and still permit your taxes to be lighter than her's, all
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her manufactures and her wealth would be speedily transferred to Ireland, to her own manifest destruction.

I therefore assert, that Great-Britain cannot, consistently with her own safety, propose a Union to you upon any other terms, than these of sharing her taxation and her burthens to the utmost stretch of your abilities ; which, I again repeat, must inevitably be your destruction, as your prosperity is not sufficiently matured to support them.

Having gone through all the arguments which have occurred to me against a Union, I shall now examine those that are generally advanced in its favour ; and, I think, they may be classed under the following heads :

That it will increase our commerce and prosperity, by opening to us the English market ; and of this argument, the prosperity of Scotland is adduced as a decisive proof.

That it will secure our at present endangered Constitution, and our connection with Great-Britain.

I shall not further discuss the first of these arguments, as I think I have already fully confuted it ;
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but I shall shew you, that the prosperity of Scotland has not proceeded from its Union with England, or even if it had, that the Scottish Union, at the time it took place, is in no manner analogous to a Union of Great-Britain and Ireland at the present period.

The Scotch are a wise, well-informed, ingenious, sober, industrious, and frugal people; qualities, in my opinion, more than adequate to bring them in the hitherto progressive state of Europe to their present prosperity, and causes more natural, more inherent, and more conducive to that end, than the adventitious one of its Union with England.

At the time of the Scotch Union, the debt of England was comparatively small to its present amount. I believe the land and malt taxes were more than sufficient to pay its interest, and the Scotch Parliament made it an article of the Union, that these taxes should fall but lightly on their country; (yet this solemn article was violated in the instance of the malt tax.) The increase of the national debt and of its consequent burthens, were gradual; and the progressive prosperity of the country enabled it to meet and support them.

And what analogy can there be between the Scotch Union, under the circumstances I have described,

scribed, and a Union of Great-Britain and this country at the present time, when her immense debt will oblige her at once to lay numerous and heavy taxes on Ireland, before her prosperity is sufficiently matured to enable her to bear them.

Add to this, that the non-residence of your great landed proprietors, which would be one of your greatest evils in a Union, is almost entirely prevented from taking place in Scotland, by the love the Scottish gentry bear to their country and their hereditary properties, which makes them generally resident on their estates, and causes less real property to be brought to market in Scotland than in any other country of Europe (Switzerland only excepted;) and in this kind of *Amor Patriæ*, our countrymen are, I am sorry to say, proverbially deficient.

Having thus shewn you that the Scottish Union, at the time it took place, has no analogy to a Union of Great Britain and this Country at the present juncture, it necessarily follows, that no inference can be drawn from that fact of what the effects of the proposed Union may be.

Now, as to the second class of these arguments,—that it will secure our endangered constitution, and our connection with Great Britain; and as to

the first of these propositions,—how our constitution can be preserved by that which must inevitably destroy it, is an enigma, that I must confess myself unable to solve.

I have often heard it asserted, that a Union will preserve the connection between this Country and Great Britain; but I do declare, that in my own mind, or from others, I never could find a single argument to support the truth of this assertion.

I never heard a single proof that it will have such an effect; but I know many that evince it will have a direct contrary one.

In the first place, it will increase the discontents unfortunately too generally diffused through this kingdom, by the enormous taxation it will produce. In the second place, there are many patriotic and high-minded Irishmen, who are at present ardently attached to the King and Constitution of Ireland, yet who will but ill brook the sacrifice of their Country's Independence; and thus possibly may the proudest and bravest spirits of the land be thrown into the ranks of the present half-smothered rebellion; and it is unnecessary to point out how formidable it may then become, when no longer led on by Vice or Ambition, but conducted by the talent and virtue of the realm.

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Add to this, that your landed proprietors, who from their residence and their influence might restrain rebellion, will emigrate to Great Britain; and your Government, who by its vigilance may discover and prevent, or by its promptitude and vigour, finally defeat the machinations of the disaffected, will also be removed. Thus will a Union swell the number of the discontented, whilst the means of restraining, discovering, or defeating their conspiracies, will be infinitely lessened.

I have now, to the best of my judgment, examined the argument for and against a Union; I have entirely addressed myself to your reason, and I have with difficulty restrained my own indignation, that I might not address a single word to your passions; but give me leave, my Countrymen, to call your utmost attention to the awful importance of this subject; the more especially awful to you, as if the evils which I have pointed out shall unfortunately be the consequences of it; they will be the more infinitely grievous, as they will be irremediable; for this measure once carried into effect, will be irrevocable, or if at all revocable, only so, by the last dreadful appeal to the God of Justice and of Battles.

As I am sensible that the present political malignancy of party ascribes to all those that oppose
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a Union, the intention of separating the Two Countries, to prevent myself from being included in this misrepresentation, I do declare that I am, and ever have been, an advocate for a political connection between them; from its necessity, as neither of the Islands can separately, oppose a sufficient population to secure it against the attacks of the great Continental Powers; but for all purposes of defence, the union of the executive power of the two kingdoms in the same person, appears to me to be fully sufficient; nor can I see how the union of their legislatures could in the smallest degree, conduce to that effect; but on the contrary, such a union, by sowing divisions amongst us, and by destroying the prosperity of Ireland, will dry up these resources which have enabled us in the present war, to give such strong assistance in men and money to Great Britain; and should our legislative independence continue, the consequent increasing wealth of this kingdom, will promise still more powerful succours on a future occasion.

As a Union has been the cure generally held out for the great evils that at present too unhappily afflict this kingdom, and having, I think, shewn the ruinous tendency of that measure, I think it my duty to point out a remedy for the present unfortunately dittempered state of the realm; and I think I see an effectual one in the public and private

vate virtues of the first classes of Society ; let them but practice these, and their properties, and the laws and constitution of their country, will be safe ; let them but consider, that it is not in vain that the Almighty disposer of all human events gives them information, honours, wealth, and power ; in return, he expects from them that they will enlighten the poorer classes of their fellow-subjects by their wisdom, comfort and support them by their wealth and power, give them in private life bright examples of pure morality, and in public life, of ardent patriotism.

And let that portion of these classes which our constitution calls to the almost God-like power of legislation, exercise it solely for the benefit of the people ; let them indignantly spurn at all those who may attempt to bribe them to sell their own honours and the interest of their country, to the wild attacks of democracy, ambition, or anarchy ; let them oppose the fair and invincible shield of public virtue ; let them, by the wisdom and goodness of their laws, rally every honest and well-thinking Irishman around the natural power of Government, and they may bid defiance to the machinations of the evil-minded and the turbulent, and then shall they reap their rich rewards in their own safety, and the security of their properties, in the noble consciousness of manly
virtue,

virtue, and the glowing gratitude of a happy people.

Nor will their legislative labours be great, as they have before them the finest model of a constitution, that the wisdom of past ages has furnished; let them but act their parts honestly and uprightly in it: let them but bring it's practical perfection as near as possible to it's theoretical beauty, and they may say to it (with a greater probability of success than ever attended any human institution,) *Esto perpetua.*

THE END.