

**AN ADDRESS TO
THE PEOPLE OF
GREAT BRITAIN**

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An Address to the People of Great Britain by R. Watson

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TO THE

People of Great Britain.

BY R. WATSON,

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AN
ADDRESS
TO THE
People of Great Britain,
&c. &c.

My fellow-countrymen,

THE sentiments which I shall, in this address, take the liberty of stating to you on some interesting points, will, I hope, meet with your candid attention; if not from their worth, from the consideration that they are the sentiments of an independent man. I am neither the friend or enemy of any party in the state; and am so far an impracticable man, that on all public questions of importance I will follow the dictates of my own individual judgement. No favour which I could receive from this or from any administration would induce me to support measures which I disliked; nor will any neglect I may expe-

rience impel me to oppose measures which I approve.

A new system of finance has this year been introduced; and I fairly own it has my approbation as far as it goes. It has given great discontent to many; but it has given none to me. I lament, as every man must do, the necessity of imposing so heavy a burthen on the community; and, with a family of eight children, I shall feel its pressure as much as most men: but I am so far from censuring the minister for having done so much, that I sincerely wish he had done a great deal more. In the present situation of Great Britain, and of Europe, palliatives are of no use, half-measures cannot save us. Instead of calling for a tenth of a man's income, I wish the minister had called for a tenth or for such other portion of every man's whole property as would have enabled him not merely to make a temporary provision for the war, but to have paid off, in a few years, the whole or the greatest part of the national debt.

A million a year has been wisely set apart for the reduction of the debt; and had we continued at peace, its operation would have been beneficially felt in a few years: but, in our present circumstances, and with an expectation of the recurrency of war at short periods, it is not one, two or three millions a year, that can preserve us from bankruptcy. We had better struggle to effect the extinction of the debt in five years than in fifty, though our exertion, during the shorter period, should be proportionably greater.

A nation is but a collection of individuals united into one body for mutual benefit; and a national debt is a debt belonging to every individual, in proportion to the property he possesses; and every individual may be justly called upon for his quota towards the liquidation of it. No man, relatively speaking, will be either richer or poorer by this payment being generally made, for riches and poverty are relative terms: and when all the members of a community are proportionably reduced, the relation between the individuals, as to the *quantum* of each man's property,

remaining unaltered, the individuals themselves will feel no elevation or depression in the scale of society. When all the foundations of a great building sink uniformly, the symmetry of the parts is not injured; the pressure on each member remains as it was; no rupture is made: the building will not be so lofty, but it may stand on a better bottom. It does not require an oracle to inform us (though an oracle has said it) that riches have been the ruin of every country; they banish the simplicity of manners, they corrupt the morals, of a people, and they invite invaders. If we pay the national debt, we may not live quite so luxuriously as we have done; but this change will be no detriment either to our virtue as men, or to our safety as members of society.

I consider the property of men united in society so far to belong to the state, that any portion of it may be justly called for by the legislature, for the promotion of the common good; and it is then most equitably called for, when all individuals, possessing property of any kind, contribute in proportion to their

possessions. This is a principle so obviously just, that it is attended to as much as possible in every scheme of finance; and it would be the universal rule of taxation, in every country, could the property of individuals be exactly ascertained. Much objection is made to the obliging men to discover the amount of their property; but I have never heard a sufficient reason in support of the objection. I can see a reason why merchants, tradesmen, contractors, money-jobbers, who deal in large speculations on credit, and without an adequate capital, should be unwilling to disclose their property; but I do not so clearly see what mischief would arise to the community if they were obliged to do it.

The value of every man's landed property is easily known; the value of his monied property in the funds is known; and his monied property in mortgages and bonds might as easily be known, if an act of parliament was passed, rendering no mortgage or bond legal which was not registered. The greatest difficulty would be in ascertaining the value of stock in trade: but a jury of