

and otherwise, among men as will mitigate extremely, if not extinguish, all mutual jealousy and hostility between nations destined, under the blessed influences of Christian civilization, to form but one great family, and will thus deprive politicians of the occasion of turning the wildest frenzy and worst calamities of mankind into a means of sanctifying the abuses of government—will inevitably lead, in this age, to the general establishment of representative institutions. All the tendencies of commerce and industry are to social equality; peace will add to that equality rational liberty under a government of laws; and both will tend to perpetuate, by a natural reaction, the causes that produced them.

Concurring thus fully in the benevolent objects of the memorialists, and believing that there is a visible tendency in the spirit and institutions of the age towards the practical accomplishment of it at some future period, the Committee regret to have to say that they have not the same confidence in the *means* recommended in the petition. They are of opinion that reforms so fundamental, can only be brought about by the gradual progress of civilization, and in consequence of a real change in the condition of society. They must follow events, and conform to them; they cannot, by any contrivance of man, be made to precede and control them. All attempts, in such matters, except by bloody revolutions or conquests, to anticipate the natural course of things, are entirely unavailing.

The scheme of the memorialists is, as we have seen, to refer all international disputes to a Congress of deputies, and to authorize that Congress to digest a code of public law that shall be binding only on such powers as should voluntarily adopt it.

The first objection to this plan lies upon the surface, and is entirely * 163 * fatal. The unanimous consent of nations, in the actual state of the world, to such a proposal, is—as any one will be convinced who reflects a moment upon their political relations, or will but cast his eye over a map of Europe—entirely out of the question; and the refusal of a single great power to acquiesce in it, would alone render it abortive. This is not matter of speculation; it is what has actually occurred in one of the most important departments of international law. The House is aware that Great Britain maintains doctrines in reference to the maritime rights of belligerents, which were formally disavowed and denounced, during the war of our Revolution, by almost all the leading powers of Europe, handed together to resist the enforcement of them in practice. On some of the points involved in the declarations of the Armed Neutrality, our own prize courts have followed, perhaps too implicitly, those of England; but on others—for example, the rule, as it is called, of '56—they have adhered to the law, as explained by that famous league. And yet, against the concurring opinions of all the rest of the civilized world, and in spite of the bloody wars to which the exercise of her pretended rights has led, and may yet lead, Great Britain maintains her principles, irreconcilable as they are with the practice of nations in analogous cases on land, and indeed with all modern ideas of civilized warfare; and even interposes her overruling influence to prevent any of the minor states of Europe from adopting, for their own convenience, provisions inconsistent with those principles, in treaties professedly confined to the parties making them.