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CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

DEBATE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS.

TUESDAY, JUNE 27.

(Continued.)

The bill for reviving and amending the non intercourse law having been read a third time and the question stated "Shall the bill pass?"

MR. PICKMAN hoped that he should be excused for making a few observations at this stage of the bill, not having before partaken of the debate. He said he felt a strong objection to the bill because it admitted French vessels into our ports and harbors. Gentlemen had asked why a discrimination should be made. He answered that the reasons for this conduct were to his mind very plain. He had considered the outrage on the Chesapeake as a gross violation of our rights and of the law of nations, and he believed no one had felt more indignation at it than he did. But that was now atoned for. I consider (said Mr. P.) that the orders in council are repealed; that G. Britain has stipulated to send an envoy with instructions to negociate for a settlement of all differences. I consider these things as done, because I consider the faith of the British nation as solemnly pledged to do them; for, if it had not been, the U. S. would not have been justified in taking the attitude which we have taken.

It has been said that since the arrangement here has taken place, Britain has modified her orders in council in a most exceptionable manner. I admit that this modification was posterior in point of date to the arrangement here; that is to say that the proclamation of the President of the U. S. was issued on the 19th, and that the orders were modified on the 29th of April; yet in strict propriety the new orders may be said to have issued before the arrangement, because it was before it was known. Viewing the subject in this light I do not believe that the modification of the orders in council did proceed from the arrangement here; and I now declare that if such modification as has been made is to be considered as rescinding the orders according to the stipulation made with Mr. Erskine, I should consider it a mere mockery. I do however consider it in a very different light, and have no doubt that the government of G. Britain will adopt such modification of their orders as they have stipulated to do. These are my ideas, and on this ground I did and do still believe that we ought to have made a discrimination, because I consider one nation to have complied with the conditions of the non-intercourse act, whilst the other has not varied its position.

It will be recollected by the House that when the question was yesterday propounded whether we should exclude the vessels of both belligerents, I voted in favor of it, and I confess that I prefer the exclusion to the admission of both. I know that the admission is more favorable than the exclusion; but, when I consider that the honor of the nation has been endangered by them, I will not prostitute it to either. I do consider it contrary to the honor of my country to admit the armed vessels of either belligerent, when sailing under orders or decrees justifying them in capturing every American vessel sailing on the ocean. And the observation appears to me to be of great weight, that there is a great inconsistency and impropriety in refusing admission to their merchants and admitting the entrance of armed vessels. Considering the peculiar state of our relations with France, I think it proper that we should know how France shall receive the intelligence of our accommodation with England before we change our situation in relation to her.

I have other objections to the bill, the principal of which is the introduction of the word "dependency," or retaining it in the bill which it is intended to re-enact. Gentlemen are not sensible of the very great embarrassments which the most intelligent merchants have had to undergo to avoid the violation of our laws. A vessel sails to a port which at the time of her sailing is not a dependency of France. When she arrives the French emperor has possession; and the port then being a dependency, the vessel incurs the penalty of the law. It is true that under such circumstances the Secretary of the Treasury will remit the penalty. But why subject a vessel to this violation of your laws when it is inconsistent with good policy? It is utterly impossible to carry into effect a regulation prohibiting trade with France. It is known that our vessels going to Barbadoes have brought and will bring back French goods. They do not know whether the articles they carry are of French growth or not, yet at the same time there can be no doubt that a considerable portion of those articles are of French production; and, if so, the property is liable to condemnation. I am not in favor of passing a law which presents such strong temptations to a violation of it. I have a high opinion of our merchants. It is owing to their honor and punctuality that your revenue has been so great as it is; but if once you encourage the practice of smuggling or introduce such strong temptations to it, your revenue will cease to come into the Treasury with such certainty as it has.

I shall not trouble the House with any further observations, though I have other insuperable objections to the bill. I should be happy to agree with the majority in favor of the bill; but, viewing it as I do, viewing the admission of French ships into our waters as inconsistent with the course laid down for our conduct by the non-intercourse law, viewing it as inconsistent with the honor and dignity of the nation to admit any armed vessels into our waters whilst the country to which they belong has orders and decrees in force against us, I must vote against the bill.

MR. MACON said he was against admitting the armed vessels of either belligerent into our waters. He would place our foreign relations precisely in the state in which the President had left them, saying neither Yea or Nay on the subject of their armed vessels, leaving it where it had been left by both the parties to the late arrangement. He should have been glad that the same disposition had been manifested towards us by France as by Great Britain; but because there had not he would do nothing towards her to prevent it. Some gentlemen had conceived that an indiscriminate admission would be more advantageous to France than to Great Britain. Mr. M. said he did not agree with gentlemen in this; for Great Britain had Canada and her West India Islands, to which she was in the habit of sending out vessels; whilst France, having no possessions on the American coast, had no occasion for our hospitality.

Mr. M. said he sincerely hoped that we should now act, as we had heretofore done, so as to give to neither of the belligerents cause to charge us with partiality. He was decidedly of opinion that we ought to leave both nations in the same state as they were left by the President's proclamation. He had no doubt that Great Britain would send a minister to negociate.—But what was left as to her for the surrender or repeal of which she had any anxiety? Nothing. As to France she would have no shipping at sea, so long as the war lasted in Europe, unless an event took place which he hoped would not. You give France a right to enter your waters, said he, and take away any inducement she might have had to rescind her decrees. I believe the passage of the bill will extend the difficulties of the nation. I know it is not a very pleasant thing to be opposed to the evident sentiment of a majority of the House; but it is the bounden duty of those who think as I do to vote, as I shall, against the bill.

MR. TAYLOR said it appeared to be desired on all hands that nothing should be done by the House to embarrass the negociation; and he presumed that the majority in the different stages of this bill had been actuated by that wish. If, said Mr. T. I could see the present measure in the light in which its friends appear to view it, I certainly should be in favor of it. But when it is recollected that your legislative acts have been held out to your fellow citizens and to foreign nations, promising a perseverance in our restrictive measures against such nation as shall continue to oppress our commerce by her unlawful edicts, I consider our faith as pledged to the nation that, according to the recession of one belligerent or perseverance of the other, we were to shape our course.

The gentleman from Virginia aimed a side blow at those who, in the discussion of this subject had spoken of the ground which *we* have taken. On the effects supposed to be produced by the non-intercourse I had a right to say *we*. The sense of the House was taken distinctly from a repeal of the embargo, on the first report of the committee of foreign relations. It was then that the principle was decided, and it was that act which was taken hold of across the Atlantic and made the ground of the instructions which came out by Mr. Oakley to the British envoy here, and on which the arrangement did take place. Now, though the gentleman seems unwilling that any part of the House should say *we*, I vindicate the claim which I have to use it. In fact I would claim for the mover of the original proposition to this House for the interdiction of armed vessels, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. Macon) the merit of the late negociation, if it attach any where. But I am not willing to carry on the co-partnership. I will not now say *we*. I, who voted for the motion going to give power to the President of the United States to issue letters of marque and reprisal against that nation which persevered in its edicts after the other had withdrawn them, am not willing on the passage of this bill to say *we*, as by it you admit instead of continuing the exclusion against armed vessels, when, instead of a recession, injuries have rather been added. When gentlemen are asked why they have admitted French vessels, in our present situation in relation to France, after the temper displayed and the votes given at the last session on the subject, their's must be a feeling in which I would not participate, and therefore I will not say "*we*."

(Debate to be Continued.)

DEBATE ON *SELLING THE GUN-BOATS*

Thursday, June 22.

In committee of the whole on the bill "concerning the Navy Establishment"—

A motion was made by Mr. PITKEN to insert after the word "*authorised*" the words "*to cause to be sold all the GUN-BOATS belonging to the U. States, except such as he may judge requisite for actual service, and also.*"

MR. PITKIN observed that if the time was not yet come for discharging the gun-boats from the Navy Establishment, the time must come. The House now had before them a statement of the Secretary of the Navy, from which it appeared that one gun on board a gun-boat required to fight it nearly six times as many men and precisely six times as much money as a gun on board a frigate. This was almost the state of the question; and it appeared that even the comparative estimate of original cost was in favor of large vessels; that 19 gun-boats each carrying two guns, would cost more than a frigate of 56 guns. The difference between the expence of fighting a 56 gun frigate and 56 boats each carrying one gun, was half a million in favor of the former. The only argument then in favor of gun-boats was, that the gun-boats might answer a better purpose than frigates. Mr. P. said they might or might not. In some cases frigates must be of much greater service than gun-boats. It was not only on account of the expence of these gun-boats in service, that he objected to them, but on account of the expence of keeping them in ordinary. And it appeared to him, that Congress ought not to continue this expence, unless some very great benefit was to be derived from it. For the purpose of shewing the state in which these boats brobably would be at the end of the year, Mr. P. said he would beg leave to call the attention of the committee to a letter of the Secretary of the Navy in answer to the queries of a committee of the Senate on the subject; and for this purpose he quoted the report which was published in No. 1358 of the National Intelligencer. It appeared by this report, Mr. P. said, that it would require a large annual expenditure to keep these boats in ordinary. He said he did believe and always had said it, that, in case the country should ever be invaded, and gun-boats were wanted to aid and assist our forts and frigates, they could be taken up in the course of a month in sufficient numbers. All bay and water craft could be immediately turned into gun-boats. There could be no necessity therefore to keep these boats against invasion, and they could be of no use in any other case, for it was agreed on all hands that they could not go to sea. In point of economy, therefore, was it not best that they should be sold, and if ever we should be invaded, if ever a hostile force should come upon our coast, that river craft should be taken up on the spur of the occasion and converted into gun-boats? It could not be doubted. Mr. Pitkin said, he therefore hoped, notwithstanding gentlemen had heretofore voted for gun-boats under the belief that in case of invasion they might be of some service, yet as the probable good was far counterbalanced by the certain evil that they would vote to sell them. He did hope that the time was now come, when from fact (not theory) from the report of the Secretary of the Navy it appeared that we have given too much for our whistle, gentlemen would be convinced it was high time to part with the gun-boats.

MR. BURWELL said it was a very easy matter to understand this contest between frigates and gun-boats. The gentleman from Connecticut had always been opposed to the latter, because if the the United States expended a part of their money in gun-boats they would not expend as much on frigates. For one, if the U. States were to have a navy of any kind, Mr. B. said he was decidedly in favor of the gun-boat system, for this plain reason, that the gun-boat system was one which it was in the power of this nation to carry into effect, and the navy system was not. When the object was within the power of the government was it not more consistent with sound discretion to aim at that than at one which was beyond its reach? The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Milnor) told us that nobody ever dreamt of our fitting out frigates to resist or coerce the British government, but to oppose the French, because their marine is small. Now, sir, said Mr. B. if it is decided that, whatever may be the conduct of the British government, we may not meet them on the ocean, where is the necessity of accumulating a species of force which cannot cope with similar force of other nations? I have always been of the same opinion on this subject as the gentleman from Pennsylvania, and therefore have always been against frigates. And here I will observe, that except it is by commercial restriction I give up all idea of contending with the mistress of the ocean.

With respect to the statement of the Secretary of the Navy, I believe there is nothing more obvious than that it is erroneous. He goes upon the ground that we shall always keep on board the boats so many men as are necessary to fight them; and that is the reason why the expence appears so exhorbitant, and why, in the estimate of the Secretary, gun-boats appear to be so much more expensive than they really are. Let me ask if the appropriations for gun-boats have been deficient in any comparison with the frigates? As well as I recollect, the appropriation for one year has never exceeded 800,000 dollars.

There is another circumstance in relation to these vessels which cannot at this time be remedied, and which it is unfortunate was not attended to when they were built. The gun-boats are too large. As a species of armed vessels, never to go to sea on a cruize, they have not been constructed in such a manner as best to answer the purpose they have in view. I have conversed with the officers of the navy on the subject, and they stated to me that the gun-boats of Europe are small, and put in motion by means of oars, sometimes perhaps using a single sail. A gun-boat of that kind might be built for 2,000 dollars and answer every purpose to which the largest boat now in service is competent. Let me ask the gentleman from Connecticut whether (if, according to the doctrine of the gentleman from Pennsylvania, your navy is intended exclusively to fight France and fit for no other purpose) consistency would not require that we should at least suspend for a moment the sale of these vessels? However unpopular this species of vessel may be, let me ask whether, if sold, they would bring the price which the timber of which they are constructed cost the U. S.? Is it necessary to mark with reprobation this system which has received the approbation of all Europe? Why throw away all the capital already expended on it? The gentleman says that they are of no service inactive; and that if we want them for service we should soon be able to purchase bay craft for the purpose. Let us keep them by us till they rot. If they are found to be unfit for the service of the country, build no more of them. If you sell them now they must be sold much beneath their cost or value.

Besides, sir, I am one of those who have frequently voted for gun-boats, not because they were the rage at all, but because I believed them adequate to the object in view. And, let me tell the gentleman, however useless he may deem them in the Northern ports, they will be of service on the Southern shore, where the water is not so rough. The gentleman tells us these boats never can be of service unless we are invaded. If that argument be good against them, let me ask him why has he pressed upon us the encreased expenditure for fortifications? Why is he averse to dismissing the frigates and presses a continuance of our present attitude? Because, I presume, he fears something of this kind. I should presume that his reasoning in favor of an encreased expenditure for fortifications would apply as well to gun-boats. I am willing to acknowledge that the expenditure is now greater than a time of perfect safety would authorise; and if we wait till that time arrives, I shall have no objection to reduce the expenditure. If a reform now takes place, however, it is upon the ground that some change has taken place to justify it; & I hope we shall give the President a like authority in relation to the frigates as to the gun-boats. I am decidedly in favor of begining with them. What do you want with frigates? We are told they cannot oppose England—and do you want them to oppose the mere *brutum fulmen* which the French force on the seas has been so often called? Whilst we are calling the public attention to the enormity of our expenditures and inviting a reduction of them, let it begin with a species of defence (the frigates) not less expensive and much more useless than any other. If the motion now before us prevail, I shall certainly move to insert a clause for selling all the frigates, as a matter of course.

MR. LIVERMORE supported Mr. Pitkin's motion. God forbid, said he, that I should be the means of depriving our Southern brethren of the means of defence! The motion only goes to sell such of the gun-boats as may not be deemed expedient for the public service. I have no objection that our Southern brethren should retain so many as are necessary for their defence, but I disclaim owing our defence to such means. I am perfectly willing that Virginia and North-Carolina, or the Western states of Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio should have them. I go upon the ground that all the gentlemen from those states entertain the same opinion as the gentleman last up, viz. that they are good means of defence. The idea of selling the unnecessary gun-boats I believe to be correct, as they decay in a little, time and the expence of building them is very great. They require repairs when in service, and much more when laid up and exposed to the sun and weather. As to the use of gun-boats, I do not know but they are beneficial in Southern waters; but in rough waters they are useless. I do not expect, even were there a certainty of a war, that any benefit could be derived from these gun-boats.—France cannot come here to invade us, and if we make any resistance to her it must be at sea by means of our navy. It does not follow, however gentlemen may apprehend benefits to result from the increase of our naval establishment, that such an increase would be made in consequence of the sale of the gun boats. I believe that