



"Ours are the Plans of fair delightful Peace,
"Unwarp'd by Party Rage to live like Brothers."

Vol. 1.

TUESDAY, MARCH 4, 1800.

No. 20.

CONTINUATION OF THE DEBATE

ON

Mr. Nicholas's Proposition
For repealing certain Parts of the Act for raising an additional Army.

Mr. RANDOLPH opened his maiden speech by a short eulogium; and then proceeded to praise his colleague Mr. Marshall. He said, paying a compliment at the same time to his great talents, had left this subject in a state in which he did not expect to find it, when coming out of his hands, as he had advanced nothing which disproved the propriety of adopting the present measure; and as he had produced no arguments of weight, he should take it for granted that none could be adduced.

Mr. R. opposed the establishment of a standing army in this country, not only as an useless and enormous expence, but upon the ground of the constitution. The spirit of that instrument, and the genius of a free people, are equally hostile to this dangerous institution, which ought to be resorted to (if at all) only in extreme cases of difficulty and danger. Yet let it be remembered that usage is tantamount to every written obligation, and let us beware of engraving this abuse upon our constitution. A people who mean to continue free, must be prepared to meet danger in person, and not rely on the fallacious protection of mercenary armies. He would name a measure which would protect us from every fear of danger. Meet the wishes of the people—bestow a part of the annual millions which are levied upon them, to the purpose of arming and organizing the Militia; for if ever any nation should be so rash as to attempt an invasion of these states, it is upon the Militia that we must rely for the defence of their own rights, and every thing dear to man. The word might be grating to the ears of some gentlemen, but in that case, we must rely upon requisition. No country unpossessed of the pecuniary resources of Britain, can afford (nor can she do it consistently with public happiness) to keep up a mercenary army adequate to her defence. France had been obliged to abandon that system, and to resort to requisitions of Militia.

Mr. R. would not attempt to answer arguments drawn from a supposed analogy between this country and Holland, Switzerland, &c. when no such analogy exists. Nor did he think that the Administrators of our Government had any reason to be obliged to the member from Delaware for suggesting that these troops may be necessary to overawe a hostile faction, who (like the oppressed subjects of the Batavian and Swiss Aristocracies) anxious for any change, from a persuasion that none could be more intolerable, and who might be disposed therefore to join the standard of an invading foe. Insinuations that these troops are to be used, on whatever pretext, against our own people, would not reconcile him to the measure. Mr. R. had hoped that our distance from the great disturbers of human repose, would have secured us from those perpetual alarms, those armings and counter armings, which have raised the national debt of Britain to its present astonishing amount, and which sends her labourers suppers to bed. This is the mischief which poisons that country, of all others perhaps the most blessed, in point of soil, climate and position.

He was friendly to the resolution on another ground. He believed it would remove a considerable cause of irritation; for the military parade which meets the eye in almost every direction, had excited the gall of our citizens; they feel a just indignation at the sight of loungers, who live upon the public, who consume the fruits of their honest industry, under the pretext of protecting them from a foreign yoke. He said the people put no confidence in the protection of a handful of raggamuffins; they know that when danger comes, they must meet it, and they only ask arms at your hands. Gentlemen talked of organizing the militia, he called on them to do so. Instead of reducing the present force, he could wish to see the whole of it, reprobated as it is by the people, abandoned, and the defence of the country placed in the hands of the people themselves, who do not want to have their noses

held to the grindstone to pay protectors. They wish to employ the surplusage of their labours in increasing their property, and in providing for their offspring.

But we are asked, said Mr. R. how we are to maintain our independence. The question is not the preservation of our independence. It is simply whether we will consent to a reduction of an expensive establishment, hostile to our liberties, which cannot be brought to against the enemy, and which, in case of invasion, would make but a paltry part of our defence, and appropriate the saving to objects of real utility. But it is said the consistency of our councils will be called in question, from retracing steps which former legislatures had taken. He would make some sacrifice to preserve the reputation of our councils; but he must not do it at the expence of duty. If our administration had heretofore expended the public money on improper objects, he could not consent to continue such measures, in order to bolster up their consistency.

Mr. R. next adverted to the state of the public finances. If, said he, the command of money by indirect methods were attended with no inconvenience; if for the payment of every shilling we borrow, every foot of land in the Union did not stand pledged, then resort to the favorite source might not be so unpleasant; but our people abhor the principle they know how deceitful is the aid which it affords. They dread its consequences; whether they are warranted in these impressions, from a 20 years peace and a 10 years operation of this government, he left gentlemen to determine. What is the consequence? Our debt has been diminished by hundreds of thousands, and increased by millions! The debt which was contracted during our revolutionary war, we know is the price of our independence: We pay it without a murmur. We wish that the revenues raised for that purpose, could have been poured into the lap of the Defenders of the Country, rather than the coffers of speculation.

Should our negotiation fail, it is asked if gentlemen would then be willing to abandon this defence? For himself Mr. R. said, he believed it impossible for this country (much as might be squeezed from the people) to support a mercenary force adequate to its protection against a powerful invading foe. The country must be protected by the people.

A colleague of his had spoken of the probable deficit in our revenue as trifling, and that if it was much larger, it ought not to demand our regard. Was it not surprising to see gentlemen put a smile of contempt on a deficit of five millions, on a revenue of nine, and an annual increase of debt to that amount? Surely gentlemen must dissemble their feelings, when they make so light of it. If our expences were confined to necessary objects, the people would pay them cheerfully; but they will justly murmur at this idle waste of their treasure. When gentlemen attempt to excite alarm on account of foreign danger, he wished to advert to danger of a more serious nature at home, arising from standing armies, which, by cultivating the military spirit only in the soldier, destroy it in the citizen. He cautioned gentlemen against an establishment which had wrought the downfall of every free state where it had been introduced; and which must produce in this country, effects similar to those which it has brought about in others, unless, indeed, it is supposed, that the same moral and physical causes which govern the eastern world, are here suspended in their operation.

Mr. OTIS said, the gentleman just sat down, had, with great modesty, been pleased to say, that his observations had been desultory. Mr. O. would not join issue in this remark; but when he adds that his arguments had been weak, he feared that some of the Defenders of their Country, in whose hearing they were uttered, will think, that a part of them at least, have been extremely strong.

The principal objection, urged against the army proposed to be disbanded, was, that the loans and taxes necessary for supporting it, will be

burdensome to the people. And what right, Mr. O. asked, had the people of this country to expect to escape the conflagration in which the other three quarters of the globe are involved, without some pains and expence to erect barriers against its destructive progress? Are we chosen by Heaven to live in a sequestered corner of the world, exempt from the troubles and distresses of other nations, to grow rich by their spoils, and to fatten on their misfortunes, without any additional burthens? Confident as he was of the justice of our cause, he did not expect the assistance of miracles for our protection. He feared our long enjoyment of peace, had led gentlemen to think that peace belongs to us of right, and that we have only to remind our souls that we have goods laid up for many years, and may eat, drink and be merry. But to gentlemen who reason thus, the voice of experience proclaims in solemn accents, that this very year, for aught we know, our liberties may be required at our hands. The committee are told that the present establishment shews a deficit of five millions. Suppose the calculation just, and the establishment necessary, what are five million of dollars? Or suppose that the price of our safety and independence, should be 20, 40, or even 80 millions, in addition to the present debt. This, indeed, is more than M. Talleyrand observed, it is a greater deal of money; but money is dearer than blood—it is less precious than honour. Who would hesitate between doubling the national debt, and relinquishing the rights of an independent nation? Let the calculating Dutchman, the hardy Swiss, the sophisticated, if gentlemen please, the wretched Egyptian, be asked, what price they would deem the ancient rights and privileges.

reverse the picture, and enquire of the British yeomanry, of the peasants who go supperless to bed, whether they would exchange their burthens, great as they are; their conscious pride and satisfaction, the result at once of a sense of duty and safety, for all the advantages reaped by the nations just enumerated? They would all agree, except such as are abject or corrupt, that liberty cannot be estimated by money.

Mr. O. complained of the deplorable statement which had been exhibited of our finances; shewing, that we are now much better able to bear the expence of a war, than we were at the time of our war for Independence; and that if we pay 8 per cent. for money, it costs the government of England, at least 7. So much, he observed, had been said upon the subject of our finances in the discussion of this subject. The enquiry ought simply to be, Is it prudent and essential to the true interest of the country to maintain the establishment? If so, we must sustain the expence of it; if otherwise, it ought to be relinquished, however adequate our resources may be to its support. Is it, then, expedient, under existing circumstances, to support this army? Mr. O. went into arguments to prove that it was, though he allowed the danger of invasion was considerably diminished; but who could say, that the danger is so entirely passed, as to warrant our remaining in an utterly defenceless state? Another reason why Mr. O. wished this army to be preserved, was, that of all the arts and sciences understood and cultivated in Europe at the present day, the military art has attained to the most considerable degree of perfection; on the contrary, he believed that of all the arts and sciences known in America, the art of war is the least understood. Considering this vast disproportion, then, ought we not to have men to learn the rudiments of discipline, who should serve for the germ of an army, to be ready when called out by requisition, or by any other means? The gentleman from Virginia considers standing armies as opposed to the spirit of the constitution and as dangerous to liberty. This alarm had been rung at least a thousand times a year since the British army landed in this country; and if the objection were well founded, it would go to the destruction of the old regiments, as well as of the new, and we must have immediate recourse to militia for every ordinary object.

That gentleman farther contends, that this country cannot be defended by a standing army, but that a force in time of danger must be raised by requisition. And where, he asked, lay the difference between a standing army and a force raised for a limited time by requisition. The gentleman may distinguish the first by the hard names of Raggamuffins and Mercenaries, if he thinks proper; but why troops raised according to his ideas of requisition, who are to be organized, disciplined and compelled into service, to receive pay, and march wherever they are ordered, are less Raggamuffins and Mercenaries, than troops raised in any other mode, was for that gentleman to explain. Far was it from him to question the importance of the great national resource, the Militia. He allowed them to be the Palladium of the country; but he contended that they are fit only for sudden emergencies. They will fight with bravery whilst they continue in the field. They will resist an invading army, but they will not endure a series of campaigns. And suppose we have not the money, that we cannot obtain it without squeezing it from our needy constituents, the gentleman will not hesitate to squeeze them for the sake of the Militia, tho' not for the regular army. Mr. O. was sorry to hear the gentleman make use of the term squeeze, when applied to taxation. It was the only inelegant word which escaped him, and it was certainly misapplied. This word is properly used, when speaking of the impositions of despots and arbitrary governments; but to talk of squeezing the people in our happy country, and under our mild government, was certainly to speak without accuracy. When the gentleman considered, that at the same time they squeezed their constituents, they also squeezed themselves, the asperity with which he pronounced that expression would doubtless be mollified. He regretted also that the gentleman had discovered the gall of the people moved by the sight of the federal uniform. He himself had witnessed no such effect. He was aware that the jealousies of the people are habitual with respect to standing armies in time of peace; but surely these alarms must yield to good sense, to the consideration that the existence of this army is limited to the duration of our controversies with France.

Mr. O. said his strongest objection to the resolution arose from the time chosen for offering it to the house. He wished our Envoys to avail themselves in their negotiation of the offensive opinion of sentiment prevailing among the people, and of all advantages which they carried with them, to maintain the rights and honour of this country. The committee had been told, that the invitation to renew negotiation, must not be imputed to this army, as the act for raising it passed in July, and it could not be known in France in August, when overtures were made to us by the Directory; but it must be recollected, that this law was the last of a series of measures, some of which must have been known to the French government before August. Not that any one supposes that these twelve regiments would be a match for the armies of France, or that they are to be transported to her coast; but, that all these acts taken together, were an evidence of our spirit—a proof that political divisions of sentiment vanish before a common sense of insulted dignity and national honour. Under these advantages our Envoys embarked, and be this measure disguised as it might, it will prove a stumbling block to the negotiation. The Directory, with a prompt sagacity, will discern thro' its weak and wavering policy, from which they will not fail to attempt to draw an advantage. When we who are opposed to the resolution, said Mr. O. express a readiness to modify the present military establishment, so as to diminish the expence, we are told, that any modification will produce the same effect on the negotiation with the proposed reduction. He was of a very different opinion. In the one case, we hold the purse and preserve the establishment; in the other, we shall lose, first the establishment and then the purse. The one would be a total departure from system, the other a mere suspension of means.

Mr. O. concluded by disapproving the intimation suggested by Mr. Gallatin, that the effect of a treaty with France might probably involve the country in hostilities with another nation. He considered an allusion to such a state of things as highly premature and injudicious.

Mr. CLAIBORNE said, the resolution on the table presented to his mind an aspect favourable to the interest of our common country; instead of drawing upon the government "debility and degradation," in his opinion, it would strengthen her resources, and increase the respect of our citizens for the administration. Instead of endangering the security of the nation, it would add to its safety, and promote the happiness of the people.

He had frequently heard the fate of those nations which had lately lost their governments, and, in some cases, the little remnant of liberty they possessed, mourned over within the walls of this house; and the subject was never introduced but his sensibility was greatly excited at the recital of such calamities. But when he heard gentlemen assimilate the late situation of Italy, Holland and Switzerland, to the present state of America, he felt indignant at the reflection on the American character. In those countries the governments were corrupt; human rights were not respected, and the tyranny of the rulers alienated the affections of the people; the intestine divisions which consequently ensued, invited attack, and they fell an easy prey to French ambition. But in America we have a government of our choice, and every man knows, that while the constitution is preserved, his rights are secure: from revolution, therefore, we have nothing to gain, but much to lose.

The wrongs France had done us on the ocean, and elsewhere, were known to all America. Every where the sentiment has been expressed, and so far as relates to resistance to foreign dominion, and a determination to support our government and independence from foreign attacks, but one opinion seemed to prevail. It was from the prevalence of this national sentiment that he felt secure from invasion, as well as from the debility of France, at least so far as relates to the means of conveying war to our shores, which means were unquestionably money and ships. But the gentleman from Delaware seems to draw no security from this weakness, but asks, "What may we not apprehend from a nation who had the boldness to attempt, and the power to effect the invasion of Egypt?" Mr. C. thought his country degraded by such a question. Are the Mamelukes of Egypt, said he, to be compared to the citizens of the U. States? [Mr. Bayard explained, declaring he made use of no such comparison]. Mr. C. said, he believed he had quoted the words of the gentleman correctly, and he had a right to draw therefrom his own conclusions.

Believing as he did that there was no danger of invasion, he could see no useful purpose to which this army could be applied; but, on the contrary, he saw much evil which it would create; among the greatest was the increase of the national expence, and with it the increase of the national burthens. And let not gentlemen flatter themselves that the present weight of government is not felt by the people. In the commercial parts of the Union, the taxes are paid with ease; but in the interior country, they are met with difficulty. And if this army system be persisted in, taxation must every where become great and burthensome. His desire was to exact no more money from the people, than was absolutely necessary. The feelings of a nation may be well compared to those of an individual: A man loaded with debt, and goaded by his creditors, too often loses his firmness of character, and sinks into inactivity and despair; and a nation groaning under debt and taxes, frequently falls into political lethargy, and tamely wears any yoke its rulers may prepare for it. What else has induced the people of England to carry their corrupt government thro' so many wars of ambition; to suffer their treasure to be squandered away in paying foreign hirelings, to in-