

M. Carlton

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CONGRESS, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, Monday, December 31.

Mr. Otis said he was directed by the Committee of Defence to propose a resolution to the House, on a subject highly interesting to the United States. He supposed that it was known to every gentleman present, that a report had prevailed for many days past, relative to the impressment of a number of American seamen from a vessel of war of the United States, into an armed ship of Great Britain. The committee are sorry to confess, that after making some enquiry into the subject, there is too much reason to believe the report to be founded, though they have no official information on the subject. It is conceived by the committee, therefore, that an act of this sort calls for the attention of every branch of Government; and though they have full confidence that the Executive will institute an immediate enquiry into the business, and take measures to prevent similar abuses taking place in future, they think it necessary that the Legislature of the Union should shew to Great Britain, and to the world, that instances of abuse of this kind excite a lively sensibility, and that they are determined to protect their flag against any country whatever. It is not improbable, said Mr. O. that this circumstance may call for some legislative provision, and that it may be necessary to review and amend the act for the relief and protection of American seamen; for, unless these injuries can be removed and prevented, little success can be expected to attend our infant Navy, which has been considered, both in and out of this House, of the greatest consequence to this country. From these considerations, he was induced to offer the following resolution for the adoption of the House:

“Resolved, that the President of the U. States be requested to lay before this House, such information as he may possess relative to the impressment of seamen belonging to the United States sloop of war Baltimore, into any ship or vessel belonging to the King of Great Britain.”

On the motion of Mr. Harper that this resolution might lie till to-morrow, it was ordered to lie upon the table.

Tuesday, January 1.

Mr. Otis called for the resolution which he yesterday laid upon the table, relative to the impressment of American seamen by a British vessel of war.

Mr. Dent thought, as so little attention had been paid to the subject which had just been disposed of, it might be presumed as little would be paid to any other, and this being the first day of the year, he would move that the house adjourn. Adjourned.

Wednesday, January 2.

Mr. Otis called up the resolution which he laid on the table on Monday, relative to the impressment of American seamen by the British.

It was taken up accordingly; when Mr. Gordon said not having been in the house when this motion was laid upon the table, he was unacquainted with the reasons which had induced the committee of defence to lay it before the house. He wished the gentleman who moved it, would state the object of the resolution, as, without this information, he was not prepared to give his vote for it.

Mr. Otis replied, that though it was not his fault that the gentleman from New Hampshire was not present when the motion was proposed; though he explicitly stated at that time the reasons which induced the committee to bring the subject before the house; and though these reasons have been published with tolerable accuracy in all the papers; yet, for the gratification of his friend, he would repeat them. Mr. O. then repeated what he before stated were the reasons of the committee for proposing this resolution, adding that the committee had no doubt of the fact, as they had the information from our consul at the Havana.

Mr. Gordon assured the gentleman from Massachusetts, and the house, that he had not seen any thing in the papers relative to this motion, nor had he heard of it till the evening of yesterday. He said he could not see the propriety of passing this resolution from what had now fallen from the mover of it, as he saw no connection between it and any legislative act of Congress; he should therefore vote against it. He believed there was no necessity for a resolution of this kind, to shew to the people of the United States that a transaction like the one referred to, meets with the resentment of every branch of government. Every one on hearing an act of this kind will feel for the dignity and honour of his country; and there can be no doubt that the Executive of the United States will take every step necessary to vindicate that honour and dignity.

The business, said he, comes properly within the jurisdiction of the executive, and I am so fully impressed with a conviction that every necessary step will be taken, without our interference, that I wish to leave the matter to that department of the government. Even had he any doubt that proper measures would not be taken, he would wait to see whether they were taken or not, before he would recommend any step to be taken by the legislature. He knew the gentleman from Massachusetts is as far from entertaining any doubt on this subject, as he himself. Then why point out the mode which it will be proper for the executive to pursue? He saw no reason for it; and believing no legislative step necessary, he would vote against the resolution.

Mr. J. Williams thought the resolution did not go far enough; that it ought not to be confined to a single vessel. He believed it proper that the house should express their resentment at an act of this sort, let it be committed by what nation soever. Too many insults of this kind had been suffered, and it is time, said he, for this country to set their face against their commission. National honour may be infringed by one nation as well as another, and if the fact had taken place, as had been represented, this was a most violent outrage, and ought to be strictly enquired into. He should vote for the resolution, but would have been glad to have had it general.

Mr. Otis wished the gentleman from New-Hampshire to recollect that this is no uncommon proceeding.

Mr. Josiah Parker moved to amend the resolution, by adding after the word “Baltimore,” or any other public armed vessel of the United States. Mr. P. was desirous that the people of the United States should be informed of this transaction; for, as it had been stated to him (and he had his information from an authentic source) the outrage was the most flagrant and violent that could have been offered to the American flag. He had no doubt that the President of the U. States would feel this indignity as severely as any one; but he nevertheless thought it proper to pass this resolution. The Baltimore, he understood, was conveying a number of our vessels to the Havannah, when three of the Squadron were cut off by British force. Captain Phillips, the commander of the Baltimore, enquired the reason for this? Captain Loring, the British Commander, sent an officer on board our ship, who said, “that Capt. L. would take out every man from his ship, who was a British subject, and could not produce his protection?” Capt. P. very properly answered, “that the American flag was a sufficient protection.” This, however, was not deemed sufficient, and this officer took fifty-five men from the Baltimore, and detained them on-board the British ship for some time. Supposing, however, (it is presumed) that he had done wrong, Captain Loring informed Capt. Phillips, “that he might come on board his ship, and take back such of his men as were Americans.” Captain P. replied, “the men were in his power and he might do with them what he pleased.” Captain L. afterwards set two of the vessels at liberty which he had cut off, saying, “I keep the other because the Captain has been insolent,” and returned fifty of the men keeping five.—Mr. P. thought Captain Phillips ought not to have suffered a treatment so flagrant, without firing upon the British ship, and nothing, except, perhaps, his inferiority of force, could plead his apology for not having done so. It is useless, said Mr. P. to guard against the injury and insult of one nation, if we are to receive them with impunity from another. He had no doubt, however, that the President would see the necessity of strongly remonstrating with the British government against this conduct, and of demanding reparation for the injury sustained; nor ought, in his opinion, a small reparation to be accepted.

The resolution was put and carried without a division; and Messrs. Otis and Josiah Parker were appointed a committee to wait upon the President there-with.

The House then, according to the order of the day, resolved itself into a committee of the whole on the bill providing an uniform system of bankruptcy throughout the United States; when, after agreeing to some amendments, one of considerable length and importance proposed by Mr. Sewall, providing, that instead of the Commissioners having power to take such order as they shall deem expedient with the body of a bankrupt, a more lenient provision.

Mr. N. Smith moved the committee to rise, that time might be afforded to have the amendment printed and considered.

Mr. Harper saw no necessity for this. If the committee were to rise, for the purpose of printing

every amendment that was offered, the bill would not be gone through in six years. He did not himself perfectly understand the amendment, but he understood enough of it to vote against it. The provision, as it stands, is copied from the English law; the committee (amongst whom was the mover of the amendment) was furnished with it and he hoped it would be retained.

Mr. N. Smith hoped the gentleman's anxiety to pass this bill would not force gentlemen to vote upon propositions which they do not understand. The gentleman himself confesses he does not understand the amendment; and yet his fondness for the bill as reported, will lead him to vote against it. If he chafes to act thus, Mr. S. hoped other gentlemen might be permitted to act more deliberately.

The question for rising was put and carried 44 to 21, & leave was given to the committee to sit again.

Mr. J. Parker said, he was desired by the committee appointed on the subject of the Navy, to ask leave of the House to have printed for their use, a report from the Secretary of the Navy.—Agreed.

On motion of Mr. Otis, the House went into a committee of the whole on the bill to alter the stamp duties imposed upon foreign bills of exchange and bills of lading, by an act, entitled “An act laying duties on stamped vellum, parchment, and paper,” and farther to amend the same.

This bill proposes that, after a certain time, the duties paid upon foreign bills of exchange and bills of lading shall cease, and that all foreign bills of exchange, whether for a small or large sum, shall then pay a duty of 20 cents; on any note or bill of lading for goods to be exported from one district to another in the United States, not being in the same State, 4 cents; if to any foreign port, 10 cents; any policy of insurance, or instrument in nature thereof, other than those specified in the former act, not exceeding 500 dollars, 25 cents; above that sum, one dollar; and the said duties shall be chargeable upon each and every bill of exchange and bill of lading, without respect to the number contained in a set. And every draft, or order for the payment of money within the United States, shall be chargeable with the same rates of duties, as by the former act are chargeable upon inland bills of exchange, excepting only orders for the payment of money on demand, drawn upon the President and Directors, or Cashier of any Bank.

A debate took place on several propositions which were made to amend various provisions of this bill, which continued till 3 o'clock, when a motion was made to adjourn, and the House adjourned accordingly.

From the AURORA.

To the Citizens of the United States.

WHILST insinuations injurious to my character, were confined to a few public prints, which disgrace our country by the too general abuse of Republican citizens, and virtuous strangers; I considered them as unworthy of notice; confident that none but minds totally devoid of every principle of honour and truth, would credit or propagate them. But as persons high in office, have become the agents of private slander, it becomes my duty to vindicate myself, by a short statement of facts, leaving to my slanderers the full benefit of invention, surmise, and falsehood.

To defend and support the rights of our country as an independent commonwealth, is certainly the first duty of every good citizen. But a state of war is inevitably attended with so many calamities, that an enlightened nation will seek every honourable means to avoid it. With France, the situation of the United States appears to me peculiarly delicate, having received from that nation the most essential services during our arduous struggle against the wanton injuries and oppressions of the British government.

Under these impressions, I embarked for Europe; on my arrival at Hamburg, I met with that distinguished friend to our country, General La Fayette. He procured me the means of pursuing my journey to Paris. Regarding himself equally the citizen of the United States as of France, he views with particular anxiety, the existing difficulties between the two Republics; and has written to Gen. Washington on this important subject.

I arrived in Paris on the 7th of August, when I received the first certain intelligence, that our commissioners had left that city, without having accomplished the object of their mission; and that all negotiation was at an end. The Consul General of the United States, informed me, that an embargo had been recently laid on our shipping in the ports of France; and that many of our seamen were confined as prisoners.