

# THE MINERVA.

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## Congress.

House of Representatives.

Wednesday, Feb. 4.

DEBATE ON

### FORTIFICATIONS AND GUN BOATS.

Mr. Mumford moved that the house refer the consideration of the report of the committee of the whole on the resolutions relative to fortifications and gun boats.

Mr. B.inger called for the order of the day on the bills against the slave trade.

The motion of Mr. Mumford was carried—yeas 56.

When the subject was postponed on Friday, January 23, an amendment to the resolutions was under consideration. The resolution is as follows:

Resolved, That a further sum of money not exceeding 250,000 dollars be appropriated to enable the president of the United States to cause to be built a number of gun boats, not exceeding 50, for the better protection of our ports, towns and rivers; and that a further sum not exceeding 500,000 dollars be appropriated to enable the president of the United States to man, arm and equip the whole, or such number of gun boats, as he may think the public service may require.

The amendment was proposed by Mr. Van Cortlandt, to insert after gun boats, or other armed vessels of the United States.

Mr. Mosely. I should not have supposed, Mr. Speaker, that there could be any objection to the amendment which has been proposed by the gentleman from New-York. I should not have imagined that the most zealous advocates for gun boats, would be unwilling to invest the President with the discretionary power which this amendment proposes.

Are gentlemen apprehensive that so great a proportion of this sum will be appropriated for the equipment of vessels of different description, as to interfere essentially with their favorite system of defence by gun boats? Surely, sir, there can be no danger of this. If we are to judge from recent appearances, or from past experience, there can be no doubt, but that gun boats are destined to constitute at least a considerable time yet to come, the principal naval force of our country—and afford the only protection of consequence which we are to expect for our ports and harbors.

The votes which have already passed in this house clearly evince their determination upon this point.

The president certainly has never manifested any hostility to gun boats. Nor recently, I believe, any disposition to encourage a maritime force of any other description. Indeed it appears from the documents before us that he has on the present occasion instructed the secretary of the navy to state that in his opinion it would be expedient at this time to build sixty additional gun boats. And if our sole reliance is to be placed on gun boats, no one, I presume, will contend that this number can be more than competent for the complete defence of all our ports and harbors.

But however useful gun boats may be in the estimation of some gentlemen in certain cases, and under certain circumstances, it must be conceded that there may be exigencies, in which, if they were ever so numerous, if our shores were lined with them, that a single frigate would be of more efficiency, and might be employed to much greater advantage. Why not then when we have them on hand, when they lie useless and rotting in our harbors, why not authorize the president to make use of our armed vessels, in connection with our gun boats, provided he should judge it expedient?

I know sir, that gentlemen are very partial in their objections against every measure of defence that is proposed, either on sea or land.

It was said when this subject was under discussion a few days since by some gentlemen that they were opposed to a naval force, because it would involve us in an enormous expense, and eventually prove

destructive to the liberties of the people.

It was again contended that as our sea coast was so extensive, and our ports and harbors so numerous, it would be impracticable to fortify and secure the whole of them. That therefore nothing ought to be done. But that the whole of them should be left entirely defenceless and exposed to pillage and destruction, from the most inconsiderable force that might think proper to attack them. The inhabitants it is true were very kindly informed, that in case of invasion, they might flee back to the mountains, or to the interior of the country and find perfect safety.

Sir, I apprehend that this numerous and respectable class of our citizens, who inhabit the wealthy and populous cities and towns upon our sea coasts will duly appreciate sentiments of this sort. They will no doubt feel all the respect and gratitude which they ought, for the liberal and enlightened policy of a government, which guards with such partial solicitude, the welfare and interest of every portion of the community.

But I ought to beg pardon.—These were not precisely the sentiments of a majority of the house. They did not vote to appropriate twenty thousand dollars for the purpose of improving and repairing our fortifications—not the fortifications at any one particular place, but the whole of the fortifications throughout the United States. Twenty thousand dollars! About half the sum that we voted the last winter, to appropriate for the purpose of finishing a single room in the south wing of the capitol, for our own accommodation. Rather more I believe has been expended the present winter in repairing the walls of the room we now occupy.

Mr. Speaker, I have no disposition to treat this subject with levity. I view it as a very serious one.—But sir, when we compare the sum appropriated with the object to which it is to be applied, it does really appear (I will not from respect to the house say) contemptible; but I will say what no one I presume will deny, that it is as small a sum as the most rigid principles of economy could justify a magnanimous legislature in granting, provided they thought proper to grant any thing. But I perceive I am extending my remarks further than I intended when I rose. My intention was to confine them to the amendment proposed by the gentleman from N. York, which is simply to authorize the president, provided he should judge it expedient, to man and equip some other of our armed vessels in addition to, or in common with the gun boats to be employed.

The amendment proposed appears to me so reasonable and so unobjectionable, that I cannot but persuade myself the house will think proper to adopt it.

Mr. D. R. Williams professed his surprise at the course pursued by the gentleman from Connecticut. I am, said he, very sorry that he has shown no more regard to the propriety of the case, and the decorum of this house, than to speak on the measures and conduct of a gentleman who is absent, to attempt to reply to arguments advanced on a former day, by the honorable gentleman from Maryland (Mr. R. Nelson) when he is absent and unable to vindicate himself. I am the more surprised at this course as the observations of the gentleman from Connecticut have no relevancy to the subject before the house. The question is, whether we will vest the president with power to arm and send to sea at his discretion, all the public vessels of the U. States. The gentleman has wandered from the subject in order to express his disapprobation of a vote of the house on a former day. I think he said that 20,000 dollars are appropriated for the purpose of fortifications. If the gentleman will look at the files on the table, he will find that more now stands appropriated for fortifications than the last year. We last year appropriated 120,000 dollars, of which only 40,000 were laid out, and a balance of above 100,000 dollars remains. There is also, in the general estimate an item of 75,000 dollars appropriated to this purpose. These sums added together, make nearly 200,000 dollars.

Is not this enough? I see the gentleman shakes his head, meaning that it is not enough. I should be glad to know what sum is enough; I should like to know what would satisfy gentlemen.

As to the amendment to authorize the president to arm all our public vessels; I am decidedly hostile to it. Gentlemen ask us if we have not confidence in the president. They will never smuggle such a resolution through the house under the pretence of confidence. Why wipe away by this side blow the whole navy peace establishment? If it is to be done, let the subject be met fairly and directly.

Mr. Mosely. Mr. Speaker, I never before understood that it could be considered indecorous, or improper, to reply to arguments which had been stated upon the floor of this house, in the absence of the gentleman who had advanced them. Had my opinion corresponded with that of the gentleman from South-Carolina upon this subject I might perhaps have spared the remarks which have given him so much uneasiness had I indeed noticed or recollected the absence of the honorable gentleman from Maryland, which if necessary I could assure the gentleman from South-Carolina I did not until mentioned by him. But, sir, as I entertain a different opinion upon the point of order and decorum from the gentleman from South-Carolina, I should conceive myself justified in making the same remarks in the absence of the gentleman from Maryland, as I should suppose myself authorized in making, were he present. Nor would the presence of that gentleman, however formidable the opposition I might in that case expect, deter me from submitting such observations as I should consider pertinent to the subject, and compatible with the rules of decorum in debate.

Whether my remarks were relevant to the subject under consideration the house must decide.

Mr. Elliot believed that the sentiments of the gentleman from Connecticut were neither indecorous to the house nor to any member absent; but he believed that the system advocated on a former day by the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. R. Nelson) to abandon the sea coast on approach of danger and flee to the mountains, can never be reprobated in terms indecorous, unless they are outrageously personal. It is not the man but the system that is condemned.

I believe every argument that could be urged on a former day, when the subject of fortifications was before the house, is applicable to this subject. It is the same subject of an efficient national defence in another form. We are asked whether we are willing to vest this discretionary power in the President. I would not if we could prevent it, if any thing better could be obtained. But so long as the present economical system prevails, the system falsely so called, I am willing to vest this power in the executive, because it is the only measure that it is probable can be obtained.—The legislature will do nothing on the subject of national defence because it is not economical. They will do nothing till the actual approach of danger. I believe that these vessels will be wanted in the recess, that the danger will arrive, and I am therefore willing to place this discretionary power in the hands of the President.

I hope the system of the gentleman from Maryland will always, when the subject of national defence is agitated in this house, meet the most pointed reprobation. It is worse than the old maxim in Hudibras.

—He who fights and runs away, May live to fight another day.

This system does not propose to fight at all, it proposes an instantaneous flight on the approach of danger.

Mr. Lloyd had not intended to say any thing on the question, but as allusions had been made to his colleague who was absent he thought it his duty to offer a few observations. I will not undertake to say what is decorum, or what is consistent with the rules of proceeding in this house, but I always thought it indecorous to take up a resolution in the absence of the chairman of the committee who reported it. Is it not proper to forbear answering the arguments

of one who is absent, and who cannot therefore vindicate himself?

But did my colleague say what has been attributed to him by the gentleman from Vermont? (Mr. Elliot.) No, sir. I understood him to say, that, in his opinion, it would be better to give up the sea coast and retire for a season, than build useless fortifications at an enormous expence, but he would not do even this without a contest.

My colleague is not in the habit of running away from danger. He was one of the first to engage in the revolutionary war in the defence of his country, and his services and his gallantry in the field are well known. I think the observations made are ungenerous. I appeal to men of honor whether it is just or generous thus to attack the character of a man in his absence.

As I am up I will say a few words on the resolution. I was against the appropriation of 20,000 dollars to fortifications, because I thought they would do no good. I am also opposed to the gun-boat system. We have now 60 gun boats, which is enough for an experiment of their utility. I am against building any more till we know that what we have are worth something.

Mr. Elliot. I am very happy to learn that the gentleman from Maryland and myself think and are about to act alike on the subject of gun boats. As efficient and substantial means of defence, I am most decidedly opposed to them. I beg the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. Lloyd) to be assured that nothing was further from my intention than to treat with indecorum the character of his honorable colleague. I respect him highly as a soldier, as a member of this house, and as a patriot.

Mr. Mumford. I highly respect the character of the gentleman from Maryland who is absent; but if he goes away to do his business, we must do ours. As the session is approaching to a close, I thought it my duty to call up this subject, for if it is not soon taken up and acted upon, nothing can be done this session.

Mr. Lloyd. The public good will be equally promoted if the resolutions should be adopted a fortnight hence. As my colleague, the chairman of the select committee who reported them, is obliged to be absent a few days on account of his business, I move, in order that he may be present when a discussion and final decision take place, a postponement till Monday fortnight.

Mr. Thomas was against a postponement. I conceive there is no indecorum in calling up the subject. I intended to have done it myself if my colleague had not done it. It would be a dereliction of our duty to postpone it on account of the absence of the chairman of the select committee. Not four weeks are left of the session. Those resolutions must go thro' all the forms of a bill in the house and in the senate before the business is finished. There is no time to be lost.

Mr. Gregg was in favor of a postponement. He thought it indecorous to take up a resolution when the chairman of the committee who reported it, is absent. Some gentlemen seem to think we shall soon have a war. One says we shall have a war before the next session. [Here Mr. Elliot declared that he had said no such thing.] The proper authority has given us no information to support such an opinion. The president in his message has told us that with one nation our negotiations are in a favorable train. The other is not, we hear, preparing for war. I can see no more prospect of war than some years ago. There was a cry of war some years ago. Armies were raised, and fortifications were erected; but they were never wanted, and the fortifications are now decaying.

Mr. Lyon. I am in favor of the postponement, but not on account of the new lessons of decorum we have heard to-day. They are new to me. It is ten years since I have been a member of this house, and never heard of them before.

I am in favor of postponement because I believe there is danger of war, and I believe that danger will be more apparent at the end of a fortnight than it is now. I am of opinion that we shall and must have