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Congress.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

FRIDAY, February 3.

On raising the Embargo, and authorising letters of Marque and Reprisal—continued.

MR. RANDOLPH said, that he had voted against filling the blank in the resolution with the 4th day of March, because, if possible, he would have wished an earlier day; reserving ever in his own mind the right, when the motion should come before the House, of acting to that day, if an earlier could not be obtained. He hoped—and the prospect which presented itself that morning gave him good cause to hope, that the committee would agree to that member of the resolution which then before them. For some time past had been an inactive, though not an inactive observer of the proceedings of Congress. He did not know whether he ought not to regret the physical incapacity which had prevented him from taking a part in those proceedings.—They had been such as (until) to fill his mind with great apprehension and alarm, because they had hitherto indicated a great want of concert, not to say disunion, where. He would have deemed it one of the most calamitous events that could have befallen the country, if, after the progress which had been made in the consideration of the motion of the gentleman from Virginia (Nicholas) the House could that day, have proceeded further to consider it. And where should he so have deemed it? Because could have indicated not merely a want of concert and of union in the cabinet and council of our country, but he feared it might lead to a state of things, which he would then attempt to anticipate. The plain, open road for every government to pursue was that of common sense and decision—common sense is theory; decision is execution. If, as they had been told, there existed dissatisfaction, murmuring discontent; if not of insurrection, at least leading to insurrection against the laws—wisdom and prudence required either a prompt subdual of spirit, or an immediate yielding to it: one or the other. It was the halting between extremes, an oscillating, hesitating, waffling, tampering, patching-up policy, which brought ruin on every nation, so situated. The history of our own revolution taught this. The conduct of the British ministry to the American colonies, he supposed, would have pressed this principle on the mind of every man. What was that conduct? Marked by a want of irritation and indecision.—Whilst we were irritated on the one hand, we were unrolled by power on the other—and after fits of excitement and illblood, the event is known to all. He therefore congratulated the House and the nation that this system—if system it could be called—was about to be given up—that the hopes, the wishes, the fears—by strong passion of the public—were no longer to be sported with—that the example of Lord North was not so soon to be lost upon us.—Sir, (said he) if my voice will permit me, I will state another subject of congratulation to you and the committee. It is, that during this period of general distraction—I do not think any gentleman will attach any bad sense to the word, but that it will be taken (as I utter it) to mean a difference, a variety of views and opinions; there be hitherto perhaps no ten men to be found in this House who could agree upon any affirmative proposition; amidst this public distraction it is a subject of consolation to me that we have not, as yet, compromised the safety of the state; that during this long and anxious political malady under which we have laboured, and not without some shadow of reason; so extremely peevish and fitful, the Republic has sustained perhaps no radical injury; and that, now, by a happy determination to the surface, the disease is likely to be wholly thrown off.

By some it might be thought that in the late, and perhaps wild range, which he could take upon the subject, he was violating the rules and orders of the House. On this subject he must be permitted to say that there was not a single question; not even that of filling a blank in the resolution under consideration, that did not involve every foreigner; and he might almost say every domestic relation of this Union. It was impossible to discuss a subject of that great and momentous national importance with the dry minuteness of a special pleader; not to travel out of the sphere, or to be tied down to the matter contained in the declaration. And permit me, (said Mr. Randolph) to add that so long as I escape the correction of the chair, I shall myself at liberty to proceed, whatsoever may be the opinions as to order of other gentlemen. There are occasions in which to speak of any man to his face in a certain manner, ought to be reprobated and stamped as the vilest adulation; but there are other occasions in which not so to speak; to restrain feelings of a full and overbearing heart,

subjects perhaps to colder, but for bitterer censure. I shall dismiss this topic, then, by saying, that you, sir, have not so long presided in this assembly, with so much reputation to yourself and benefit to the state, to be new schooled in your duty by the younglings of yesterday. And I say it, because a chairman of this committee would certainly very grossly depart from rule and order were he to rise to vindicate his conduct in this assembly, from any arraignment of it by a member.

In the train of argument which he should pursue, Mr. R. really did not think it at all necessary with his friend from South Carolina, (Mr. D. R. Williams) or the learned gentleman from Connecticut, (Mr. Pitkin) to go into a minute calculation on the subject of the revenue or debt of Great-Britain or of the gross products of duties derived by her from the importation of West India commodities. Such calculations ought not to enter into any determination of that House—for however they might be made to appear on paper, and whatever might have been said on the subject from the days of David Hume, and Dr. Price, to the present hour, the continental enemy of that power had, for at least half a century, been deceived in his reckoning as to her time of bankruptcy. The subject had baffled all the calculations of political economists. And really, sir, (said Mr. R.) it is hardly worth our while, after Bonaparte, like Canute of old, has sat down on the sea shore at Boulogne, vainly waiting for the great tide of British wealth to recede; to take measures, here, bottomed upon calculations of her being unable to carry on the war for want of capacity to raise the supplies. It is a well established fact that the gross revenue of that kingdom was for the year 1807, (exclusive of loans and the revenue derived from Ireland) sixty millions sterling; and that collected at an expence of £ 4 5s. per cent. This is answer enough to us, on the subject of her being unable to carry on the war for want of resources, particularly when we look back to our own revenue, the expence at which it is collected; and more especially when we look at the proposition of our chancellor of the exchequer, the Secretary of the Treasury, to carry on the war (should we engage in one) with loans, exclusively. It is an ample, a redundant answer. Shall we calculate upon the failure, for want of revenue, of a nation whose annual loans bear so small a proportion to her whole receipt (in the year which I have quoted, about a fourth) whilst we ourselves are told that loans must constitute nearly the whole of our revenue. There, then, can be no doubt that this subject, not only, ought not to enter into our views upon the great question of war, but perhaps had better not be stirred at all; that our measures ought to be taken in reference to our own capacity and disposition for exertions, and not grounded on flattering, perhaps delusive, hopes of our adversary's weakness. Another point it might be as well, in passing, to notice; the small proportion which the customs bear to the revenue of that state, and that proportion decreasing, although their aggregate amount be actually increasing; whilst the revenue from internal sources has been rapidly increasing, every year, as well in proportion to the whole receipt as in aggregate amount.

But, sir, (said Mr. Randolph) amidst the various causes which I find for congratulating you and the nation, the recent change in the aspect of our affairs is not the least; that we are at last to settle upon some system; and I listened, I confess, with very great pleasure the other day, to the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. Bacon) and my worthy colleague (Mr. Burwell) although perhaps I may not have exactly agreed with either, certainly not with both of them. I listened to them because they held out to us the prospect of a happy termination of the present state of things; a state of things, which, after the vote of yesterday and to-day, I might almost be tempted to pronounce cannot last beyond the fourth of March. A great deal had been said about the patriotism of the country under the operation of this system. In Mr. Randolph's opinion, never did any people exhibit so striking an instance of patriotism as the people of the United States had done since December, 1807. He believed that their patriotism had in that period been put to a test more severe than during the revolutionary war; because whatsoever of suffering the people then felt they saw that it was inflicted by the immediate hand of the enemy; and it operated only to goad to a still higher pitch their fury against that enemy. But in this case (whether right or wrong was perfectly immaterial) the system had been such as to impress a great portion of the public with the opinion that their sufferings proceeded from the government; and it ought not to be matter of surprise that the popularity of the government should have been diminished. It called for the exercise, by all classes and descriptions of men, of the rarest virtues; patience, forbearance, self denial, long suffering without repining. It presupposed the existence of a state of society in which there was no occasion for government itself. Was it wonderful that

those who could not see wisdom in the measures should murmur, when suffering under it?—that men not strictly conscientious should violate its provisions?—that under the severity of its operation the administration should lose somewhat of their former popularity? Mr. R. was not, never had been, and he trusted never would be in the habit of paying compliments to men who have much at their disposal—but he would declare his belief that the popularity of no man whom God ever made could have endured the test which that of the President of the United States had not merely endured, but gone through with victory. There could not have been so strong a proof of the deep seated love and unqualified approbation of that man, as his having been, politically able to support the weight of that experiment. It was a trophy of which he never could be divested, let him die when he would—whatsoever might be the course of his future life. Yes, sir, (said Mr. R.) after the vote of this committee I do consider the embargo as substantially repealed. It is something like a vote of credit—it has not gone through all the forms of a law, but no banker would hesitate to advance money upon it. Gentlemen shake their heads, sir, and heads of such weight too that I despair of shaking them myself—I had supposed that the embargo was all but repealed.—In point of fact I believe that it is already repealed. A member of this House has cited the embargo as a strong proof of the stamina of this infant Hercules, who had been so long able to bear what would have crushed (as he says) any other nation in six months. I believe, sir, that it would have crushed the popularity of any ministry of any other nation than this, in less than six months, supposing that nation to have half the pretensions to freedom that we have. He remembered to have read a great while ago in an extremely beautiful epic poem, that the natives of Chili, when they threw off the Spanish yoke, proposed to choose their captain by this test: a very heavy beam of wood was produced, and he could support it on his shoulders the longest time, was to be selected as their general. One of the chiefs stood under the burthen such an amazing number of hours, that they were like never to come to a conclusion, and (if he remembered rightly) they had to abandon their experiment. Whatsoever proof we had given of our wisdom, we had indubitably borne away the palm of bodily strength, any thing in the observations of a gentleman from New York (Mr. Gardiner) about our being puny and rickety, to the contrary notwithstanding; and Mr. R. hoped we should give perhaps not quite so strong a proof of our wisdom, by throwing the beam off from our shoulders, now that we had ascertained our strength by the experiment.

But it was asked, what substitute would he propose for the embargo. None. He hoped he would not be misapprehended.—Considering the embargo in its operation as mischievous and even ruinous, it would be droll indeed if he should require a substitute for an evil that he proposed to get rid of. Shall a man refuse to be cured of a cancer unless you will provide him with a substitute? But if he were asked what the nation is to do after repealing the embargo? His answer was ready. To be sure, sir, (said he) it is a very old one, and therefore may not take with the fashions of the day—but in matters of policy, old systems which have been sifted and tried by experience, are not, in my judgment, the worst; and the longer tried, perhaps, the better. So far, therefore, from its being an objection with me, that a proposition is old and trite, it is a recommendation; as it is precisely the reverse with respect to new projects, however ingenious, however calculated to catch or dazzle the eye—like the room in which we sit, where I at this moment discern the fissures which, perhaps, are to reduce us to the situation of poor Lenthall. We had as well stuck to our old apartment (I don't mean the library) where we had every convenience and comfort—and saved our money.

The diseases of this state took their rise—I repeat it again and again in the year 1805-6. We were then a flourishing, united and happy people. The government permitted itself, a majority of this House permitted themselves—and I believe they now sorely repent of it, sir, indeed some of them have told me so—to be urged by mercantile clamor and cupidity into collision with powerful European states. From that day we have been going on from bad to worse, until we have arrived at this superlative state, which can no longer be borne, for which a remedy must be found—gentle if you will, alternative if you please—but at any rate a remedy, however desperate. That which I would now propose, is what I had the honor of proposing at the last session of Congress, and I think, of mentioning more than once, on Saturday morning, the 18th of December last:—a remedy, which, without pledging the state, without mortgaging every foot of land in the country for the protection of the mercantile flag, in the most remote seas, would permit our merchants to protect themselves, if they pleased; and if not, stay

at home, at their option. This was my opinion as far back as 1805-6, and I think it will be found, although not in detail, in a report made during that session of Congress, which proposed raising a military force for the purpose of commanding, within the United States, obedience to the laws, not from ourselves, but a foreign power. And here suffer me to say, that I really think we are coming back again, slowly—for large bodies (even such as move in ellipsis) move slowly—after having been long in aphelion, we are returning back to the day light of those good old republican principles, of which (as I think, and as I would endeavor to shew, if it could answer any good purpose) we have too long lost sight. And after being for years, one of the procribed and denounced, I am not without a saving hope, that I shall die in the good old political church, at last—certain I am, sir, that I shall die in the faith, whether I die in the church, or not. I am induced to this belief, principally, from perceiving that scarcely a sentiment is contained—I beg pardon of the committee for this egotism—I believe if it be warranted in any human being, I might fairly challenge a right to it now; scarcely a sentiment is expressed in either of those speeches of which I was the author (unfortunately as it would seem) that I have not heard during the present session of Congress, from lips the most orthodox in this House. They amounted to this:—“Before you begin this contest, count the cost; calculate your means of annoyance as well as of resistance: your enemy (if she becomes such) is all powerful at sea: if she strikes, you will feel; bring matters to extremity and you will have to recede; not from your claims, but in point of fact, from the ocean.” All this, and more, I have heard urged, not only by the chairman of the committee of the whole House, but repeatedly by other gentlemen, nearly as orthodox as himself, on various questions; the navy bill in particular, and I hope to hear sentiments of the same sort when the other bill (army bill) is taken up, which was put down in order to act on the present subject. The embargo, and the course pursued by the administration generally, have during this session, been defended and eulogised on positions admitted on all hands to be indisputably true, but which it was criminal in me to advance three years ago. “Then, it was little short of treason to magnify (as it was said) the resources of our rival and depreciate those of our own country; now, it is madness not to perceive our inability to cope with her on the ocean,” the theatre of our wrongs, where redress, to be effectual, must be obtained. Was it not wiser to make a just estimate of our strength, or even to under-rate it a little, before plunging into a conflict; then afterwards have to abate from our sanguine, overcharged expectations? We suffer ourselves to be driven, step by step, by mercantile clamor into a situation which has raised (whether rightfully or not) more clamor, from the same parties too, than all the foreign injuries about which they beset the government. I now, therefore, propose, that they be restored to that situation which, according to their own shewing, is so enviable a one, and against the evils of which, I hope, they will never again have the hardihood to complain to this House, or apply for means of redress. It will, therefore, at once be perceived, that I am not friendly to that part of the resolution, from which my worthy colleague on my left [Mr. Burwell] anticipated so much benefit; and for the plainest of all reasons; because I do not conceive a threat to be the best means of patching up a reconciliation, [and as such, a hope has been expressed from that quarter, I may be at liberty to name it] between two parties who look at each other already, perhaps, with too jealous an eye; and for another reason—because I do not choose to put out a distant threat, to the execution of which, either the capacity or disposition of the country may be doubted. Sir, we have dealt in the military sort of traffic long enough, and I have no disposition to be any longer laughed at. We began with the non importation law. That was undoubtedly a threat; for a power was given to suspend it, in case our terms were complied with.—Next came the embargo: that too was to be suspended in case—and so forth. Now we are called upon to hang, by a single hair, over the head of the belligerents, the sword of Damocles, to be cut some time in June next; and really, to my apprehension, we might as well make a declaration of war, to take effect in the next century, as in next June. I speak as to the power of this House, as well as to the policy of the thing.

(To be continued.)

WHEREAS my wife Dinah hath again maliciously left my house and board, I am hereby constrained to forwarn all persons from harbouring her, or dealing with her, or giving her credit on my account, for I will not be answerable for any of her contracts.

SAMUEL FORSTER.

Rowan, Feb. 16th 1809. 74-10p.