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SPEECH OF MR. D. R. WILLIAMS

ON THE

Bill for raising an Additional Military Force.

Mr. D. R. WILLIAMS said, there was nothing more natural than a desire to justify the vote we are called upon to give on so important a question as the present; even in ordinary cases, it is both natural and justifiable; much more so, in a case which is of sufficient magnitude, abstractly considered, to excite all our solicitude, now become infinitely more momentous by the course the argument has taken; for the question is not only, Shall the bill pass? but, Shall there be war?

After the maturest deliberation, he had been able to give the subject, he must confess that he was not perfectly satisfied with the details of the bill before the House. He believed it to be fairly liable to the objections urged against it by his worthy friend from N. Carolina, (Mr. Macon.) Sir, the organization of the troops is new; it is true it had been intimated to be an imitation of the organization of the French—but that is not the fact; and viewing it as an experiment, he could not but distrust it or any other that should be attempted at this time. It puts down the old system, which carried us safe and triumphant through one war, and perhaps might better through another, than to take up one that is new, untried, experimental; besides, it certainly does establish a preference in the command of officers of the same grade, in the old and in this new army. He thought the jealousies sufficient already, without adding new causes; but as it is almost impossible every member should obtain his precise wishes in matters of detail, perhaps no one ought sooner to distrust his own judgment than himself—and as the principle of the bill met his approbation, he would vote for it, more especially, as he considered it the first measure of war against G. Britain.

To his mind there appeared to be only three courses left for the nation—Repeal the Non-Importation Law, and take a war with France, make war with Great Britain, or submit to the principle of her Orders in Council. Which alternative, then, shall we accept? He had no agency in bringing the country into its present situation—but it was not therefore less his duty to exert every effort to rescue her from it. The period had arrived when he considered indifference as criminal—but he who was not for the country was against it. He was not disposed to repeal the non-importation law at this time; because he considered, no matter whether he approved of the fact or not, that the faith of the nation was pledged to retain it, and that its repeal would of course be a violation of that faith; nor did he believe that any circumstance could arise, so imperious in his mind, as to induce him by any vote of his to violate a faith, so dear, and heretofore so immaculate.—The repeal of that law, happen when it may, must necessarily depend on circumstances that are not yet known.

To yield to the principle of the orders in council, is a virtual abandonment of the rights of an independent nation. He meant not to drive out this debate by following some gentlemen thro' their tedious details concerning the relative importance of the events of '98. Let us come home to the present time, and inquire what is that principle? Practically considered, it is the exercise of supreme legislation over us, involving not only all the attributes of legitimate sovereignty, but despotism direct. And when honored with seats in this House, while entrusted with the interests, and rights too, of the People of the United States, shall we basely, and without resistance, succumb to British domination? The question then is, ought resistance to be made by physical force?

He could not but rejoice that neither the revocation nor modification of the French edicts, enter into the present discussion. However positive and important the repeal or modification of the Berlin and Milan decrees may be to us, they are, in relation to G. Britain, now merged by her, in considerations of far different character and import. The demands made by that government, through its accredited ministers here, have thrown the repeal of those decrees entirely out of the dispute; because,

contrary to her solemn and reiterated promises, whether they are repealed or not, her orders are to be continued in force. What now is made the basis of their revocation? You are required to act within the territorial limits of France; to put down her municipal regulations; to overthrow her whole system of internal trade and manufacture, whereby a channel may be opened for the introduction of British manufactures into French ports. Is it possible that any man can mistake the secret object of such a requisition? Can it be concealed that it is equivalent to an absolute unqualified rejection of every overture for a repeal on her part? What pretext of justice has she for such a demand? Are French manufactures admitted into her ports? Will she admit them under any circumstances whatever? Does she even permit you who are to procure this advantage for her, to carry your own manufactures to her own dominions? No. If, then, the renunciation of the principle of her orders depends upon our securing to her the introduction of her manufactures into France, what are we to expect? What other resource than positive resistance have we left? We are then brought to a direct decision, either to submit to the principle, or to oppose it by force—Submit! did he say? He shrunk with detestation from the idea! Indeed he felt humbled by the seeming necessity of speaking of it; but the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Sheffey) had made it necessary to expose such a ruinous and disgraceful course. Much as he respected, he did not mean to reflect upon the man, but his arguments he abhorred.

To his mind, every hope that an accommodation may yet be effected with G. Britain, appears perfectly unfounded. If there is a member of this House, too idle to examine, or having examined the documents on your table, has not confidence in their statements, or does not believe that every effort by negotiation has been made, such a man deserves not to be convinced—to all others, any illustration of mine is unnecessary. Sir, negotiation has been exhausted; there is silence, but conclusive testimony to the fact. Neither within this House, nor without it, to his knowledge, has any man, however violently opposed to the administration, ventured the slightest intimation to the contrary—even the gentleman from Virginia, acute as he is and hard as he labored against the bill, did not suggest a doubt. If, then, negotiation is exhausted, and it is a fact nowhere denied, what alternative have we but to fight or succumb? Gentlemen need not dwell upon the miseries, the consequences of war. I dread the curses of posterity more. But sir, what are the causes of war? Similar injuries with those of which the old Congress complained, and against which they fought. Great-Britain "exercises unbounded sovereignty on the ocean—she names the ports and nations, to which alone we should trade"—The wanton plunder of our property—the unprovoked impressment of our fellow-citizens; the assertion of principles and the practice upon them, absolutely incompatible with our independence.—Shall I go on? No. Gentlemen cannot bear to hear the nauseous catalogue of wrongs repeated, notwithstanding they will not resent them. The same gentleman from Virginia, acknowledges we have had sufficient and justifiable causes of war, ever since the year 1805-6. Indeed! what were they? The interruption of a trade during war, not enjoyed in a time of peace. Was the impressment of seamen then, such a cause of war? If these were justifiable causes of war then, how can he refuse to avenge the wrongs of his country now, increased and extended as they are? To his mind, the interruption of that foreign carrying trade, injurious as it was, bears no comparison with her restrictions on the exportation of our own products. He could not give utterance to the indignation he felt at the imposition of a transit duty on our commerce to any part of the world that Great-Britain might choose to interdict. No—the gentleman may reply, the orders in council do not levy contribution on our trade now—they are modified, so as only to interdict particular places.—If one place, why not every other place?

But indeed, has that proud unbending nation modified her orders, of whom he declared it was impossible to divert from her purpose? Was it discovered she had taken too rank hold upon the peaceable habits of our people? That the

imposition of such a tax, had excited a ferment injurious to herself, the cause of which, no sophistry could conceal? Was the burning of gin at Baltimore calculated to induce a belief that it might renew the same scenes with the destruction of tea at Boston? The outrage, was indeed, too nearly allied to the causes of the revolution, to be borne.—The orders are therefore modified—but the evil still exists, the principle is retained, and is the same, whether exercised by her in imposing a tax on our trade, in restricting our commerce to particular places, or in asserting unbounded sovereignty on the ocean.—What, at this moment, is the practical operation of her orders? She marks out the course and destination of your ships, laden with the productions of your own soil—if you vary in the least from the limits she prescribes, your property is captured and condemned, "for contravening his majesty's orders in council!" Shall we be again asked for the causes of war?

The same gentleman of Virginia asks, what are the objects of the war? The objects are necessarily involved in the causes of war; and, to his mind, were legitimate, honorable, just and necessary. The liberation of our unfortunate, incarcerated seamen, is one object acknowledged by the gentleman to be proper. The sufferings of this meritorious description of citizens, who are as much entitled to protection as any other (no matter how elevated) cannot be palliated, and ought no longer to be endured. The right (not a restricted permission from G. Britain) to a free and common use of the ocean is another. The renunciation of a principle which exercises foreign jurisdiction over us, another. The re-acknowledgement, not in form, but in fact, of independence—practical sovereignty—another. There can be neither security for our rights nor our property, when the power of taxation can be exercised (it is immaterial under what name or character) without representation; for surely the produce of labor is his, who can take of it whatever he pleases. Deprived of these great and vital objects, who has a mind to calculate the result? And yet, great and vital as they are, they constitute only a part. Will the gentleman reply, they are neither just nor necessary? What gave rise to the revolution? Not a paltry tax on stamps or tea, but the assertion of the right to those taxes. What now is our situation? The principle and practices against which we are called upon to act, are, in magnitude and importance, infinitely transcending those of that day. To avoid war, we have receded, step by step, until we have not one inch of honorable ground left to stand on. Are we not degenerated?—He would be glad to learn from the gentleman, which of the numerous outrages we have suffered from G. Britain is greatest; so numerous are they, it appeared, to his mind, almost impossible to determine which is worst. We are now called upon to assert these objects; if there is no other practicable mode than force, we are bound to make great and cheerful sacrifices to sustain that force. But, suppose unqualified submission is yielded, will that satisfy her? He thought not. A disposition to advance on a receding opponent, marks her character; your own experience teaches; yield them but for a cent, or a moment, and her system is fastened on your neck forever. To war there must be an end; to this there never will be. Her system, sir, is levelled at your most valuable interests: in a pecuniary point of view, it carries poverty and wretchedness every where; in every other, it ought to be spurned with detestation. Indeed, sir, it is fastening a gangrene at the heart of the nation, which will imposthumate in corruption and ruin—its life-strings must rot.

It has been said, our constitution is not calculated to sustain a war. It surely is not calculated for submission; if it be, its brightest glories are gone, and his solicitude for its preservation must vanish with its virtues. He did not believe this was the fact. What is this constitution? It is a system of government which combines a vast variety of interests and character in one great national family. In this family are many peculiar interests; how, then, is it to be kept together? He wished to feel for the people of New-England as he felt for the people of the South—each have their peculiar interests. That of the eastern section of the Union depends upon the right to navigate the o-

cean; that of the southern states, in the possession of a certain species of personal property. If you withdraw the protection of the general government from either, what is there left to cement its attachment to the Union?—Will any man contend that the rights of the one on the ocean are not as dear, or ought not to be maintained, as far as practicable, as inviolate as those of the other on the land? But it has been said, by the same gentleman, the people will not support a war for any object that does not touch their soil.—There seems to be a sort of magic in these words. The British capture American vessels laden with the products of our own soil, destined to France—the people will not resent this, because the soil is not touched. He would be glad to learn from the gentleman what principle is there, that will justify the seizure of our produce on its passage from Charleston to Bordeaux, that will not equally justify the capture of our vessels bound from Boston to New-York? What then becomes of your coasting trade, the most important branch of commerce? It may all be destroyed; and yet, according to the doctrines of the day, the soil is not touched! But the destruction of the coasting trade is not sufficient to satisfy the implacable hatred of the enemy; the bays, and rivers and harbors are infested with pirates; every thing that floated on their broad bosoms is also destroyed—this comes still nearer the land, yet the soil is not touched! Suppose the soil is touched, the hostile standard planted on the castle, and Boston laid in ashes—will the gentleman be contented to drive the enemy to the lines? He dare not follow them—beyond it would be foreign war! Yes, sir, just as much foreign war as we propose to wage—the people will not bear it! This is just "such stuff as dreams are made of."—The soil, sir, is touched—he felt it—every man must feel it in his pocket, if not in his heart, that the soil is touched, is violated. The violation reaches to the fire-side of every man in the nation, and the violators ought to find that the day of retribution is come.

But, it is said, this war will not do, it will not be popular; that the provocations in '98 were greater than they now are, and yet the old republicans opposed the war of that day. It was not his intention to follow the gentleman (Mr. Stanford) through his long details of those times. He was unwilling now to excite feelings long since buried. It appeared to him that this gentleman's opposition was induced by a singular cause indeed. It seems we have adopted a new rule at the present session—one not practised on in '98; and as there was no war then, it will be out of order to resort to it now.

[Mr. Stanford explained, that he had not said there was no war then, but that he had been opposed to the war.]

He thought, continued Mr. Williams, it was not material to enquire whether the provocation was greater in '98 or now; but whether the present causes of war can no otherwise be removed; and if not, is war therefore necessary and just? But if we must look back into the amount of our losses then; if gentlemen must be met upon their miserable calculations of pounds, shillings and pence, let us examine the statements of the gentleman from North-Carolina; if I mistake him, I shall be glad to be corrected. I understood him to say, the proof was indisputable, that the injuries then were greater than the present, because, in the Louisiana treaty, there was a stipulation for the payment of more than three millions of dollars to American citizens, being the amount of depredation on our commerce by France; and that this sum far exceeded the losses sustained by the Orders in Council. The gentleman is unfortunate in his comparison. Although there are no documents in the possession of the House which shew the number of captures under the orders in council, from the best estimate he could make, and from the opinion of practical men in the House, that amount falls far short of the recent captures which are every hour increasing. Since the decision of Sir Wm. Scott, in the case of the Fox, ninety others (he spoke from memory) had been condemned. The average value of these vessels and cargoes, is considered low at fifty thousand dollars, and in the aggregate, far exceed the losses he has alluded to. When it is remembered that during the operation of the Berlin and Milan decrees, Ame-

rican merchants withheld their shipments to France—for after the case of the Horizon, every one was alarmed—it is very evident that the orders have been as deadly, as in such circumstances they could be. Is other proof required? Look to the insurance offices; they will not insure against captures under the orders in council for less than a war premium.

Why, asked the gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. Sheffey) shall we raise an army now, when we refused to do it in '98? Was it because we were then out, but are now in? The sheer politician, the man who seeks a seat in this House for what he can get; no one can more heartily despise than himself. Such are the wretches, who alone are affected by the circumstance of in and out; but the men who come here to represent and promote the interest of the country—who ask, who seek, who wish for nothing for themselves, cannot be influenced by any such unworthy considerations. Argument upon this point is superfluous. He appealed to the gentleman himself for the fact. He could not but consider the inducements to avoid the war of '98 to be very different from such as present themselves now. What was our situation then? Does it bear the least resemblance to the present? We then enjoyed a prosperous trade with G. Britain, which the gentleman states to be to that of France as 32 to 2. Neutrality was then practicable; we were in fact reaping the golden fruits of neutral trade. While all its rich streams were pouring into our country from every part of the world; we were then growing rich and great; it surely was inexpedient to go to war; we could gain nothing by it—it was madness. Do these circumstances exist now?

But the people were jealous of the army in '98. He wished he could speak of the transactions of those days without alluding to facts calculated to excite unpleasant feelings. This was not his object. Why were they jealous? They saw that the army was palpably useless, or worse. It was impossible to employ it against France—not so against themselves. The alien and sedition laws—the doctrine of the necessity of humbling in dust and ashes a great democratic state, filled them with alarms; they feared their then rulers intended to change the government, and that the army was the instrument to effect that purpose. The volunteers too were opposed—their Pretorian bands—because the power vested in the states, in relation to them, was contravened. The states were robbed of the absolute right to officer them; he said robbed, as that power which is wisely given to the states, as a counterpoise to the physical force of the general government, was unconstitutionally taken from them and given to the President alone.

He understood the gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. Sheffey) to say, we were going to war for a mere phantom; for, if the orders were repealed to-morrow, the trade to France was not worth having. What are the orders worth? said he. Nothing; they were only paper and ink. The deep inroad that horrible system has made on the character and interest of his country, ought not to be so considered. Is it possible, there should be one man left in the nation, who can think the revocation of a principle which not only shuts the continent of Europe against your commerce, but warrants its extension through every species and grade of injury and insult, only paper and ink! It may be easy for the gentleman who estimates national honor as a bubble, to contemplate the Orders in Council with perfect indifference; but for himself, he could not see in them any thing that was not perfectly loathsome. Sir, we have talked so long about trade; about what ought, and what ought not to be regarded, it seemed we had forgotten what it ever had been.—Let us look back a little; perhaps when we are sensible of what we have lost, we may be willing to make the greater efforts to regain it. I am apprized, sir, that the theory of the balance of trade between nations, taken from custom-house books, (we have no other authority) has constantly, and perhaps will continue to deceive the wisest statesmen; but, so far as our reports from the Treasury go to shew the amount of imports and exports, they may be safely relied on. What, sir, was the state of our commerce in 1804? Upon an average of the years 1802, 3, 4, it stood thus: To the British dominions, in Ed-

[Concluded in our fourth page.]