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REDUCTION OF THE ARMY.

[Mr. Williams's speech concluded.]

Next comes the office of Adjutant and Inspector General. This is a pretty decent snug commission, to be held by a clerk in the Department. His duties are entirely those of a clerk, and why is it that he has the rank, pay, and emoluments, of a Brigadier General? I can perceive no reason, unless it be for the purpose of illustrating the military establishment. — But the better way is to graduate and pay men according to the service they render. If they act as clerks, let them be ranked and paid as such. If I am correctly informed, many officers of the army complain of this anomaly in our military establishment. It is said the present incumbent would probably not know how to march a corporal's guard, and yet his rank, pay, and emoluments, advance him quite beyond officers who have seen active, efficient service. Permit me here to say that I have nothing personal against the officer. When I have had occasion to correspond with him, he has answered me promptly. Sometimes I find a little difficulty in reading his communications.

Instead of two Adjutants and four Assistant Adjutant Generals, the whole business in this branch of the army may be transacted by one Adjutant General, and one Assistant. Thus, we may dispense with one Adjutant General, and three Assistants, and thereby save to the nation their pay and emoluments.

Two Inspector Generals and four Assistant Inspectors are also too many for our service. When this subject was considered in the session of 1818-19, I mentioned that the Inspectors, if my information was correct, were young men not qualified to perform their duties; but, if qualified, they had nevertheless failed to perform their duty, and that a regiment in the Northern Division had been reviewed only once by an Inspector, since the introduction of this part of the staff, which was about three years previous to that time. In reply to this, a gentleman from New-York, (Mr. Storrs,) whom I now see in his place, mentioned a fact which no doubt he learned from the Inspector General of the Northern Division who was then in this city. The fact was this, "that the officer in question had himself, the summer preceding, visited every post, examined every musket, and performed every duty which appertained to his office in that division. Now, sir, if the Inspector General performed all these duties in the northern division, why is it that he has two assistants? Take it for granted, that the Inspector General of the southern division can likewise perform all the duties of his office; and why is it that he has also two assistants? Here you have six officers to perform duties to which only two are fully competent. Indeed, sir, I must say, that our military establishment seems to have been built up more from a regard to the men who were to fill offices, than to the service it was expected these men would render.

The bill provides for as many regimental and battalion adjutants as will be necessary, under the proposed plan of reduction. If gentlemen think otherwise, I should be glad they would point out any deficiency.

The Quartermaster's department is next in order, as reported by the Secretary. He proposes to retain in it thirty-seven officers. I admit, said Mr. W. that if there is any one branch of the army more ably and faithfully conducted than all others, it is this; and would be willing to let the rank of the officers remain, but would reduce their number. My friend, the gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. Floyd) submitted a resolution the other day, calling upon the Secretary of War for a statement of the rank, number, and distribution of the army at each post. — This statement has been made accordingly, but has not yet been printed, so as to be laid on our tables. I must, then, rely on the information previously possessed, from which it will be seen, that in 1818, two assistant deputy quartermaster generals were in Gen. Jessup's office at this place. At Detroit there were also two, while the whole duties of the 6th regiment, stationed at Plattsburg, were performed by one quartermaster. At Boston there were two; at New-York two; at West-Point there was a quartermaster, where also a lieutenant of engineers received the pay of quartermaster, whether he performed the duties or not. These facts are mentioned to shew that the number of officers in this department was unnecessarily great in 1818. As their duties have not increased, but rather decreased since that time, the number of these officers may be proportionably lessened. Instead of sixteen assistant deputy quartermaster generals, I would have only eight; and instead of eighteen regimental and battalion quartermasters, I would reduce them to the number of regiments and battalions proposed in the bill. This would be my plan. But if I should not meet the views of my friends, I will concede whatever preference I might have, and will vote for the bill, because retrenchment is with me a paramount object.

The medical department requires, I should think, considerable excision. The

Secretary proposed to retain seventy-five doctors. If good, they are more than necessary. — If bad, they are enough to kill a nation. In 1818, he reported to us there were seventy-three posts. I shall show hereafter, that it is not necessary to garrison more than one half, at any rate not more than two-thirds, of the number of posts stated to us. But yet it is proposed to keep seventy-five doctors, a number more than equal to the whole number of posts. This seems to me very strange, because, if I was correctly informed, the surgeon at Albany, in 1818, performed little or no duty; the surgeon at Watertown practised among the people at large, professing at the same time to belong to an arsenal which was not finished, and in which there was no garrison. The surgeon at Boston was stationed there ostensibly for the purpose of inspecting recruits, but as soon as recruits were made, they were sent to the garrison in the harbor, where there were two surgeons. The surgeon at New-York was similarly situated. If a like examination could have been had at that time, of the position of the surgeons in the Southern division, no doubt they would have been found to be engaged with equal profit to themselves, if not to the army. The apothecaries I would entirely discharge. How can they, at N. York or Philadelphia, tell the medicines necessary to be purchased for the troops who may be sick at Charleston or New-Orleans? Would it not be much better to let the surgeon at any particular post purchase such medicines as may be wanted for the sick at that post? Besides, I have been credibly informed by a gentleman from Tennessee, who is not now, but was then, a member, that the apothecaries were very deficient in performing their duties. He mentioned one striking fact as coming within his observation. It was this, that an apothecary stationed at Baltimore had purchased orange peel to send all the way to New-Orleans! Now, sir, every body ought to know that oranges grow in the greatest abundance at N. Orleans; and that, of all articles of medicine, this was the least wanted at that place. It would, then, seem scarcely possible that any apothecary, however unskillful or injudicious he might be, could think of running government to the great expense of transporting it to N. Orleans, where in the first instance it could have been had for nothing. If this be the way in which they discharge their other duties, the sooner we get clear of them the better.

The subject of the Engineer Corps, in connexion with the military Academy, Mr. W. said he would leave to his friend, the gentleman from Tennessee, (Mr. Cannon) who would treat it with much more justice than he should be able to do, by any remarks he might offer.

He had now, he said, taken a cursory review of the staff proposed to be retained. The officers of the line also, in his judgment appeared too numerous. The Secretary says, page 9, "No position connected with the organization of the peace establishment is susceptible of being more rigidly proved, than that the proportion of its officers to the rank and file, ought to be greater than in a war establishment." But what these rigid proofs are, or what should be the exact proportion of officers to the rank and file, he has not vouchsafed to tell us. Most of those with whom I have conversed, have believed that the duties of an army were more multiplied and laborious in war than in peace, and therefore, that a greater number of officers would be required for the former condition. The Secretary, however, says, "It results immediately from a position, the truth of which cannot be fairly doubted, that the leading object of a regular army in time of peace, ought to be, to enable the country to meet, with honor and safety, particularly at the commencement of war, the dangers incident to that state. On no previous occasion have I ever before heard it announced, that we should retain, in peace, officers for a war establishment. It appears to me more rank doctrine than was maintained in Mr. Adams's administration. — What, sir, would have been said, if he had advocated such opinions? or opinions as hostile to the principles of the government as to the principles of that class of politicians to whom the Secretary has heretofore professed to belong. For, sir, it is a principle inherent in the very nature of the government, and which I had believed was almost universally admitted, that a well regulated militia is the only sure and certain defence of this country. But the Secretary, in effect, disclaims this doctrine; he holds out the idea that the militia are not to be relied on, and therefore you must keep on the peace establishment officers to command your armies in a state of war. I protest against this doctrine with my whole strength; I disclaim it, as anti-republican; as useless; as dangerous; as extravagant.

It is anti-republican, because it is forbidden by the nature and spirit of our government. It is dangerous, because it cannot be denied that the officers are the persons who originate and carry into effect designs fraught with mischief and ruin to the country in which they live. The disposition of mankind is such, that, if not employed in doing good, they will

be employed in doing evil. Officers in peace, have nothing to do, and in the habit of commanding those about them, begin at length to feel impatient under the restraints of government, and have, in every instance, been the first to meditate the overthrow of liberty. Did Caesar pass the Rubicon when fighting the enemies of Rome, or after they were subdued, and he had nothing else to do but to make a conquest of the liberties of his own country? Let us attend to our own history. At what time were written the letters of Newburgh. Examine the conduct of all armies, and you will find, I think, that officers are most dangerous in peace. It is then they have leisure to meditate, and opportunity to execute, such plans as the more wicked and designing among them may wish to accomplish.

Again, it is of no use to keep officers in service when they can render no service: this is the solism, the contradiction in terms, to which the advocates of the proposed organization must necessarily be driven. They say it is right to retain the officers, but when called upon to point out the service these officers are to perform, they are at a loss for an answer. Some reason, however, is attempted to be given by saying, that altho' the officers may not now be of any immediate use, yet they will hereafter be useful when the country is engaged in war. The Secretary says we shall certainly be involved in war, and that no one, unless he has the "imagination of a poet," can think otherwise. Now, sir, I readily admit that the Secretary has not the imagination of a poet; & further, if a sort of tautology and alliteration; if a kind of synonymous repetition are any defects in style, that he has as slender pretension to prose. But, in whatever character he is to be considered, whether of poetry, prose, politics, or prophecy, he has gone equally wide from the mark. He has not, indeed, told us the nation from whom we are to expect war — only an obscure hint is given, a kind of passing allusion is thrown out that we may have war with Spain. But, the late news from that quarter, though not official, yet entitled to credit, fully explodes this idea. Without this news I would as soon apprehend invasion from the inhabitants of the moon as to suppose Spain would ever attempt to make incursions into our territory. But it may be supposed we are shortly to have war with England. This will turn out like the apprehension of hostilities with Spain. The points in controversy between us and England are so far removed as to render war with that power a very improbable event. I ask whether any man of common sense can seriously apprehend it in any short time? But if it comes it will be confined to the ocean. No one in the possession and exercise of his right mind can suppose Great Britain will ever attempt to wage war effectually against the United States by land. We may be temporarily invaded at different points along our maritime frontier, but, whosoever thought we should keep a regular army to meet that contingency? The militia were always intended to be used, and thought competent for this service. Indeed, the framers of the constitution provided expressly for this particular case when they gave to the general government power to call out the militia to repel invasion. But, the Secretary says, page 4, "the organization of the army ought to be such as to enable the government, at the commencement of hostilities, to obtain a regular force adequate to the emergencies of the country, properly organized and prepared for actual service." If, sir, the militia are not to be called out at the commencement of hostilities, if they are not to be relied on to repel invasion, when, I pray you, are they to render any service? Certainly not after the war shall have progressed for some time, because then, every one admits, government will have provided an adequate force of regular troops. It follows then, according to this plan of the Secretary, that the militia in no instance and at no time are to render any service. If they are to be entirely superseded, let us at once know the fact. Let us not hereafter, as we have done heretofore, appropriate hundreds of thousands of dollars to arm them; to prepare them to repel invasion; to qualify them to sustain that rank in the country which the constitution assigns to them, & which the policy of our institutions requires them to hold.

We speak only of a war in which the United States are invaded and act on the defensive. Because in an aggressive war begun by ourselves, we can select our own time, and cannot, therefore, be taken by surprise. Well then I say, no one ever had the madness to suppose that we should keep a sufficient regular force to meet the first emergency. Can you, sir, can any other man tell me the number of troops necessary for that purpose? The Secretary says that, should a just precaution growing out of our foreign relations render it necessary, we may, on the basis proposed, augment the peace establishment to 13,558 — and pending hostilities, by adding a few more officers, we may have an aggregate of 19,635. Now, sir, what could this army do in a state of war? The whole of them might be required to defend, for example, the town of Boston, as being the only kind of force, in the language of the Secretary,

"able to meet the first shocks of hostilities with unyielding firmness." But, before our troops could have marched fifty miles on the sea coast, the enemy might invade New-York, and here again you would want another army of 19,635. But, as no regular troops could be had to meet the enemy, the militia must be called to defend New-York. In this way an enemy could invade your whole maritime frontier, from Passamaquoddy to New-Orleans, and at every point, except one, as in the example of Boston, above supposed, you must rely on the militia for defence. How idle then is it for us to talk about keeping a regular force able to meet the first attacks of an invading enemy. It would require perhaps half a million of troops; and the accumulation of debt, the pressure of taxation consequent upon such a measure, would produce a greater prostration of our energies, would affect more vitally the prosperity and happiness of our fellow-citizens, than any thing else which could be designed.

Our distance from Europe said Mr. W. will always allow us one, two, or perhaps three years previous notice, and we can never be invaded without having sufficient time to prepare for the emergency. — In Europe powerful nations border upon each other; nothing but a river, a road, or an imaginary line, separates them. — Hence it is necessary they should always be ready, because they know not at what moment they may be attacked. But, with us the state of things is very different, and yet gentlemen discuss this question according to principles of policy derived from Europe, and not by such as are adapted to the situation and circumstances of our own country.

As to war with the Indian tribes, it is not necessary to retain a single portion of the regular army for that purpose. — Throughout our whole history the militia have been the force to encounter Indian hostilities. Even in the Seminole war, where you had to fight three or four hundred half-starved, half naked miserable Indians, the regular army did no good. — The militia of Tennessee and Kentucky were called out to meet the enemy wherever he was met. There is, however, no prospect of collision with the Indians, unless it grows out of the expedition ordered up to Council Bluffs, on Missouri river. — But this we can prevent when we please, by withdrawing the troops, who might never to have been sent upon so wild and chimerical a project.

The gentlemen from Virginia and S. Carolina (Mr. Smyth and Mr. Simpkins) have said, that the peace establishment of 1802, amounting to 3,323, was excessively economical; that it was found to be too small, and after wards, in 1818, was augmented to 9,996. In saying this, they must have forgotten what was mentioned by the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. Smith.) He was in Congress at that time, and told us in his speech the other day, that in 1802 some were for reducing the army much lower, while others wished to retain a force considerably greater; that, finally, a middle course was pursued, and 3,323 was determined on as a proper peace establishment. Those gentlemen, then, were mistaken in saying that it was "excessively economical," or that it was subsequently augmented, because it was found to be too small. This increase was a measure preparatory for war, and in support of this assertion I can offer those gentlemen authority they will be very much inclined to respect. It is the report of the Secretary of War, made in 1818. In page 4 he says:

"It is obvious that the establishment of 1808, compared with the then wealth and population of the country, the number and extent of military posts, is larger, in proportion, than the present; but the unsettled state of our relations with France and England; at that time, renders the comparison not entirely just. Passing then that of 1808, let us compare the establishment of 1802 with the present."

Here, sir, is evidence which those gentlemen must believe, that our unsettled relations with France and England, caused the augmentation of the army in 1808. I hope then we shall not again be told that it was increased because it had been reduced too low in 1802; for such is not the fact.

Another position assumed by the gentlemen from South Carolina, is, that 12,656 is not a greater army now than 3,323 was in 1802, because of the increase, since that time, of our population, of the number of posts, and of the line of frontier. Mr. W. said he knew the Secretary had urged these same arguments in 1818, and he had hoped he should not hear them again, because it appeared to him the report then made was composed of materials entirely too frangible to be relied on as authority in this house. But, as the member from South Carolina had brought it forward, he hoped to be pardoned while he briefly noticed each argument, in the order stated.

First, The Secretary says, (and in this he is followed by the member from South Carolina,) that, because our population is double what it was in 1802, an army of 12,656 is not now greater than 3,323 was in 1802. This is just about as conclusive as if any one should undertake to prove that 3 and 3 make 12; for a double population could require only a double army;

and as, in 1802, we had an army of 3,323, so we ought now to have only 6,646. But, instead of this, it is said we must have 12,656, which, to me at least, is a non sequitur in argument.

Second, It was reported to us in 1818, that we then had 73 posts, but in 1802 there were only 27. On the supposition that it was necessary to garrison each post, it would follow, not that you could employ the present establishment of 12,656, but only about 8,000, a little more than the aggregate proposed to be retained in the bill. But I deny that the posts necessary to be garrisoned amount to 73. The Secretary himself told us, in answer to certain enquiries respecting the Yellow Stone expedition, that Indian hostilities had essentially terminated in the south west, and therefore the troops had been ordered on service up the Missouri. If the troops could be spared, I think the posts might also be spared. A gentleman who resides in the north west told me the whole of that line of posts might be demolished. He said, the people did not want them. Admitting, however, that it is necessary to keep some posts both in the north west and south west, it still follows that you cannot shew a greater number than about 50, and consequently that you cannot, on the data assumed by the Secretary, find any use for an army larger than that proposed in the bill.

Third, The Secretary says, the line of frontier is greater than it was in 1802, in the proportion of 73 to 27. He has given both the line of frontier and the number of posts for the year 1818; but for 1802 only the number of posts. To enable us to determine fairly, he should have given the frontier at both periods. But, from the materials furnished, scanty as they are, we shall be led to conclude that the frontier has not increased in the proportion stated. Chesapeake Bay, for example, had the same indentations and sinuosities of the coast. There were also the same meanders of rivers at both periods. It is said, we have acquired Louisiana since that time. But every one knows the geographical and military frontiers are not always commensurate with each other, or extended precisely in the same degree. The Secretary calculated the acquisition of Florida would not extend our frontier more than about 120 miles from point to point, while all agree that our geographical limits would be considerably increased. Indeed, the possession of Louisiana may be said, in several respects, to contract the military frontier. — When Spain held it, the Indians were under her control, and were liable to be excited against us at any moment; but now there is no danger from that source. At any rate then the necessity for military defence has not increased in the manner stated by the Secretary, and repeated by the member from South Carolina.

The increase of public property, Mr. W. admitted, involved the necessity, correspondingly increased, for a greater number of men to take care of that property. How, or in what proportion, public property has increased, we have not been told. But, taking for the basis of calculation the number of guns and the number of men, reported to us as being at New York in 1818, (and certainly there is not a more important post,) we find that, on the whole sea coast, there could not be employed more than about 1100. But there were stationed at that time, on the whole coast, 2,408 men, which is more than double the requisite number. The navy is intended to defend our shores. As it increases, I should suppose the army might be diminished. It is now three times as large as it was in 1802, and therefore three times as competent for our defence. But yet gentlemen demand for the sea coast an army much larger than when we had little or no naval strength. They seem to think the army ought to be increased in a direct ratio with the increase of the navy. On the contrary, I think it may be lessened as the navy is increased.

In 1802, when there was danger of Indian war in that quarter, there were between 5 and 600 men only on the whole north western frontier; but in 1818, after the danger had quite subsided, we had between 15 and 1600. It is the first time I have known the rule of inverse proportion applied to the defence of the country; that is, when the danger had become less, it is now thought expedient to have a greater force. In short, sir, if we view the whole subject with reference to the danger which may threaten us, (and this is certainly the correct criterion,) we can find no use at this time for an army as large as it was in 1802. The great, perhaps the only, object of an army, in time of peace, is to preserve the public works, to keep the guns from rust, and the fortifications from decay. I hold in my hand, sir, a list of the fortifications, and the number of men necessary to be stationed in each. From it it appears that about 4,500 are amply sufficient for the whole frontier, both maritime and inland. I have seen another statement, shewing that about 3,150 would answer. If these statements are incorrect, I would thank gentlemen to point out the inaccuracy. But, taking either, we find there is not the least reason for keeping the present establishment of 12,656.

Why then shall it not be reduced to