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CONGRESS.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES.

Wednesday, March 5.

BRITISH AFFAIRS.

DEBATE on the motion of Mr. GREGG

(CONTINUED)

Mr. J. RANDOLPH. I am extremely afraid, sir, that so far as it may depend on my acquaintance with details connected with the subject, I have very little right to address you, for in truth, I have not yet seen the documents from the treasury, which were called for some time ago, to direct the judgment of this house in the decision of the question now before you; and, indeed after what I have this day heard I no longer require that document or any other document—indeed I do not know that I ever should have required it—to vote on the resolution of the gentleman from Pennsylvania. If I had entertained any doubts they would have been removed by the style in which the friends of the resolution have this morning discussed it. I am perfectly aware, that on entering upon this subject, we go into it manacled—hand cuffed, and tongue-tied; gentlemen know that our lips are sealed, on subjects of momentous foreign relations, which are indissolubly linked with the present question, and which would serve to throw a great light on it in every respect relevant to it. I will, however, endeavor to hobble over the subject, as well as my fettered limbs and passed tongue will enable me to do it.

I am not surprised to hear this resolution discussed by its friends as a war measure. They say (it is true) that it is not a war measure; but they defend it on principles which would justify none but war measures, and seemed pleased with the idea that it may prove the forerunner of war. If war is necessary—if we have reached this point, let us have war But while I have life, I will never consent to these incipient war measures, which, in their commencement breathe nothing but peace, though they plunge us at last into war. It has been well observed by the gentleman from Pennsylvania, behind me (Mr. J. Clay) that the situation of this nation in 1793, was in every respect different from that in which it finds itself in 1806. Let me ask, too, if the situation of England is not since materially changed? Gentlemen, who, it would appear from their language, have not got beyond the hornbook of politics, talk of our ability to cope with the British navy, and tell us of the war of our revolution. What was the situation of Great Britain then? She was then contending for the empire of the British channel, barely able to maintain a doubtful equality with her enemies, over whom she never gained the superiority until Rodney's victory of the 12th of April. What is her present situation? The combined fleets of France, Spain and Holland are dissipated, they no longer exist. I am surprised to hear men advocate these wild opinions, to see them goaded on by a spirit of mercantile avarice, straining their feeble strength to excite the nation to war, when they have reached this stage of infatuation, that we are an over match for Great Britain on the ocean.—It is mere waste of time to reason with such persons. They do not deserve any thing like serious refutation. The proper arguments for such statesmen are a strait waistcoat, a dark room, water gruel, and depletion.

It has always appeared to me that there are three points to be considered, and maturely considered before we can be prepared to vote for the resolution of the gentleman from Pennsylvania. *First* Our ability to contend with Great Britain for the question in dispute; *Secondly* The policy of such a contest: and *Thirdly*. In case both these shall be settled affirmatively, the manner in which we, can, with the greatest effect, re-act upon and annoy our adversary.

Now the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. Crowninshield) has settled at a single sweep, to us one of his favorite expressions, not only that we are capable of contending with Great Britain on the ocean, but that we are actually her superior. Whence does the gentleman deduce this inference? Because, truly, at that time when Great Britain was not mistress of the ocean, when a North was her prime minster and a Sandwick the first lord of her admiralty, when she was governed by a counting-house administration, privateers of this country trespassed on her commerce. So, too, did the cruizers of Dunkirk; at that day Suffrein held the mastery of the Indian seas. But what is the case now? Do gentlemen remember the capture of Cornwallis on land because De Grasse maintained the dominion of the ocean? To my mind no position is more clear, than that if we go to war with Great Britain, Charleston and Boston, the Chesapeake and the Hudson will be invested by British squadrons. Will you call on the count de Grasse to relieve them, or shall we apply to admiral Gravina, or admiral Villeneuve to raise the blockade? But you have not only a prospect of gathering glory, and what seems to the gentleman from Massachusetts, much dearer, profit, by privateering, but you will be able to make a conquest of Canada and Nova Scotia. Indeed?—Then, sir, we shall catch a Tarter. I confess, however, I have no desire to see the Senators and Representatives of the Canadian French, or of the tories and refugees of Nova Scotia sitting on this floor or that of the other house—To see them becoming members of the union, and participating equally in our political rights. And on what other principle would the gentleman from Massachusetts be for incorporating those provinces with us? Or on what other principle could it be done under the constitution! If the gentleman has no other bounty to offer us for going to war, than the incorporation of Canada and Nova Scotia with the United States, I am for remaining at peace.

What is the question in dispute? The carrying trade. What part of it? The fair, the honest and the useful trade that is engaged in carrying our own productions to foreign markets, and bringing back their productions in exchange. No, sir,—It is that carrying trade which covers enemy's property and carries the coffee, the sugar, and other West India products to the mother country. No, sir, if this great agricultural nation is to be governed by Salem and Boston—New York and Philadelphia, and Baltimore and Norfolk and Charleston, let gentlemen come out and say so; and let a committee of public safety be appointed from those towns to carry on the government. I, for one, will not mortgage my property and my liberty to carry on this trade. The nation said so seven years ago,—I said so then,—and I say so now It is not for the honest carrying trade of America, but for this mushroom, this fungus of war,—for a trade which as soon as the nations of Europe are at peace, will no longer exist, it is for this that the spirit of avaricious traffic would plunge us into war.

I am forcibly struck on this occasion by the recollection of a remark made by one of the ablest [if not the honestest] ministers that England ever produced.—I mean Sir Robert Walpole, who said that the country gentlemen (poor meek souls!) came up every year to be sheared—that they laid mute and patient whilst their fleeces were taking off—but that if he touched a single *brissle* of the commercial interest, the whole sye was in an uproar. It was indeed shearing the hog—"great cry, and little wool."

But we are asked, are we willing to bend the neck to England; to submit to her outrages? No, Sir, I answer, that it will be time enough for us to tell gentlemen what we will do to vindicate the violation of our flag on the ocean when they shall have told us what they have done, in resentment of the violation of the actual territory of the United States by Spain—the true territory of the United States, not your new fangled country over the Mississippi, but the good old United States—part of Georgia, of the old thirteen states—where citizens have been taken, not from our ships, but from our actual territory. When gentlemen have taken the padlocks from our mouths, I shall be ready to tell them what I will do, relative to our dispute with Britain, on the law of nations, on contraband and such stuff.

I have another objection to this course of proceeding. Great Britain, when she sees it, will say the American people have great cause of dissatisfaction with Spain. She will see by the documents furnished by the President, that Spain has *outraged our territory, pirated upon our commerce and imprisoned our citizens*: and she will enquire what we have done? It is true, she will receive no answer, but she must know what we have not done. She will see that we have not repelled these outrages, nor made any addition to our army and navy—nor even classed the militia. No sir—not one of your militia generals in politics has marshalled a single brigade.

Although I have said it would be time enough to answer the question which gentlemen have put to me when they shall have answered mine, yet as I do not like long prorogations I will give them an answer now. I will never consent to go to war for that which I cannot, protect. I deem it no sacrifice of dignity to say to the Leviathan of the deep—we are unable to contend with you in your own element, but if you come within our actual limits we will shed our last drop of blood in in their defence. In such an event I would feel, not reason, and obey an impulse which never has—which never can deceive me.

France is at war with England—suppose her power on the continent of Europe no greater than it is on the ocean. How would she make her enemy feel it? There would be a perfect non conductor between them. So with the United States and England—she scarcely presents to us a vulnerable point. Her commerce is now carried on for the most part in fleets; when in single ships they are stout and well armed—very different from the state of her trade during the American war, when her merchatmen became the prey of paltry privateers. Great Britain has been too long at war with the three most powerful maritime nations of Europe, not to have learnt how to protect trade. She can afford convoy to it all—she has 800 ships in commission, the navies of her enemies are annihilated. Thus this war has presented the new and curious political spectacle of a regular annual increase (and to an immense amount) of her imports and exports and tonnage and revenue, and all the insignia of accumulating wealth, whilst in every former war, without exception, these have suffered a greater or less diminution. And wherefore? Because she has driven France, Spain, and Holland from the ocean. Their marine is no more. I verily believe that ten English ships of the line would not decline a meeting with the combined fleets of those nations. I forewarn the gentleman from Massachusetts and his constituents of Salem that all their golden hopes are vain. I forewarn them of the exposure of their trade beyond the Cape of Good Hope (or now doubling it) to capture and confiscation—of the unprotected sea port towns, exposed to contribution or bombardment. Are we to be legislated into war by a set of men, who in six weeks after its commencement may be compelled to take refuge with us up in the country And for what? A meer fungus—a mushroom production of war in Europe, which will disappear with the first return of peace—an unfair trade. For is there a man so credulous as to believe that we possess a capital not only equal to what may be called our own proper trade, it large enough also to transmit to the respective parent states the vast and wealthy products of the French, Spanish and Dutch colonies?—'Tis beyond the belief of any national being.—But this is not my only objection to entering upon this naval warfare. I am averse to any war with any nation whatever I was opposed to the naval war of the last administration, and I am as ready to oppose a naval war of the present administration, should they meditate such a measure. What shall this great Mammoth of the American forest leave his native element and plunge into the water in a mad contest with the shark? Let him beware that his proboscis is not bitten off in the engagement. Let him stay on shore—and not be excited by the muscles and periwinkles on the strand, or political beras, in a boat, tentured on the perils of the deep. Gentlemen say will you not protect your violated rights? And I say why take to water where you can neither fight nor swim. Look at France—see her vessels steal from port to port on her own coast—I remember that she is the first military power of the earth, and as a naval power second only to England Take away British navy, and France to-morrow the tyrant of the ocean.

This brings me to a second point.—How far is it politic in the U. S. to throw their weight into the scale of France at this moment:—from whatever motive to aid the views of her gigantic ambition—to make her mistress of the sea and land—to jeopardize the liberties of mankind Sir, you may help to crush G. Britain, you may assist in breaking down her naval dominion; but you cannot succeed to it. The iron sceptre of the ocean will pass into his hands who wears the iron crown of the land. You may then expect a new code of maritime law. Where will you look for redress? I can tell the gentleman from Massachusetts, that there is nothing in his rule of three that will save us, even although he should outdo himself and exceed the financial ingenuity which he so memorably displayed on a recent occasion. No, sir—Let the battle of Actium be once fought and the whole line of sea coast will be at the mercy of the conqueror. The Atlantic, deep and wide as it is, will prove just as good a barrier against his ambition if directed against you, as the Mediterranean to the power of the Cæsars. Do I mean (when I say so) to crouch to the invader? No—I will meet him at the water's edge, and fight every inch of ground from thence to the mountains, from the mountains to the Mississippi. But after tamely submitting to an outrage on your domicile, will you bully, and look big, for an insult on your flag 3,000 miles off?

But, sir, I have a yet more cogent reason against going to war, for the honor of the flag in the narrow seas or any other maritime punctilio. It springs from my attachment to the principles of the government under which I live. I declare in the face of day that this government was not instituted for the purpose of offensive war. No. It was framed, to use its own language, *for the common defence* and the general welfare, which are inconsistent with offensive war. I call that offensive war, which goes out of our jurisdiction and limits for the attainment or protection of objects, not within those limits and that jurisdiction As in 1798, I was opposed to this species of warfare, because I believed it would raze the constitution to the very foundation, so in 1806 am I opposed to it, and on the same ground. No sooner do you put the constitution to this use, to a test which it is by no means calculated to endure, than its incompetency to such purposes becomes manifest and apparent to all. I fear if you go into a foreign war for a circuitous unfair carrying trade you will come out without your constitution. Have you not contractors enough yet in this house? Or do you want to be over-run and devoured by commissioners and all the vermin of contract. I fear, sir, that what are called the energy men will rise up again—men who will burn the parchment. We shall be told that our government is too free—or as they would say *weak* and *inefficient*. Much virtue, sir, in terms. That we must give the President power to call forth the resources of the nation—that is to filch the last shilling from our pockets to drain the last drop of blood from our veins.—I am against giving this power to any man be him who he may. The American people must either withhold this power or resign their liberties. There is no other alternative. Nothing but the most imperious necessity will justify such a grant—and is there a powerful enemy at our doors? You may begin with a first consul—from that Chrysalis state he soon becomes an emperor. You have your choice. It depends upon your election whether you will be a free, happy, & united people at home, or the light of your executive majesty shall beam across the Atlantic in one general blaze of the public liberty.

For my part I will never go to war but in self-defence. I have no desire for conquests—no ambition to possess Nova Scotia—I hold the liberties of this people at a higher rate. Much more am I disposed to war, when among the first means for carrying it on, I see gentlemen propose the confiscation of debts due by government to individuals. Does a bona fide creditor know who holds his paper? Dare any honest man ask himself the question? 'Tis hard to say whether such principles are more detestably dishonest than they are weak and foolish.—What, sir, will you go about with proposals for opening a loan in one hand, and a sponge for the national debt in the other. If on a late occasion you could not borrow at a less rate of interest than 8 per cent. when the government avowed that they would pay to the last shilling of the public ability, at what price do you expect to raise money with an avowal of these nefarious opinions. God help you! if these are your ways and means for carrying on war—if your finances are in the hands of such a chancellor of the exchequer. Because a man can take an observation, and keep a log-book and a reckoning, can navigate a cock boat to the West Indies or the East, shall he aspire to navigate the great vessel of State—to stand at the helm of public councils? *Ne sutor ultra crepidam.* What are you going to war for? For the carrying trade. Already you possess seven eigths of it. What is the object in dispute? The fair honest trade that exchanges the product of our soil for foreign article for home consumption? Not at all. You are called upon to sacrifice this necessary branch of your navigation and the great agricultural interest, whose hand maid it is—to jeopardize your best interest, for a circuitous commerce, for the fraudulent protection of belligerent property under your neutral flag—Will you be goaded by the dreaming calculations of insatiate avarice to stake your all for the protection of this trade. I do not speak of the probable effects of war on the price of our produce—Severely as we must feel, we may scuffle through it. I speak of its reaction on the constitution. You may go to war for this excrescence of the carrying trade—and make peace at the expence of the constitution. Your executive will lord it over you, and you must make the best terms with the conqueror that you can. But the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Gregg, tells you that he is for acting in this, as in all things, uninfluenced by the opinion of any minister whatever—foreign, or, I presume, domestic. On this point I am willing to meet the gentleman, am unwilling to be dictated to by any minister at home or abroad. Is he willing to act on the same independent footing? I have before protested, and I again protest against secret irresponsible, over-ruling influence. The first question I asked when I saw the gentleman's resolution was, "is this a measure of the cabinet!" Not of an open declared cabinet, but of an invisible, inscrutable, unconstitutional cabinet—without responsibility, unknown to the constitution. I speak of back stairs influence—of men who bring messages to this house, which although they do not appear on the journals, govern its decisions. Sir, the first question that I asked on the subject of British relations was, what is the opinion of the cabinet? What measures will they recommend to Congress? (Well knowing that whatever measures we might take they must execute them—and therefore that we should have their opinion on the subject) My answer was (and from a cabinet minister too) "*there is no longer any cabinet.*" Subsequent circumstances, sir, have give me a personal knowledge of the fact. It needs no commentary.

But the gentleman has told you that we ought to go to war, if for nothing else, for the fur trade. Now, sir, the people on whose support he seemed to calculate, follow (let me tell him) a better business, and let me add that whilst men are happy at home reaping their own fields, the fruits of their labor and industry, there is little danger of their being induced to go 16 or 1700 miles in pursuit of beavers, racoons or oppossums—much less of going to war for the privilege. They are better employed where they are. This trade, sir, may be important to Britain, to nations who have exhausted every resource of industry at home—bowed down by taxation and wretchedness. Let them, in God's name, if they please, follow the fur trade. They may, for me, catch every beaver in North America. Yes, sir, our people have a better occupation—a safe, profitable, honorable employment. Whilst they should be engaged in distant regions in hunting the beaver, they dread lest those whose natural prey they are should begin to hunt them—should pillage their property, and assassinate their constitution. Instead of these wild schemes pay off your debt, instead of prating about its confiscation. Do not, I beseech you, expose at once your knavery and your folly. You have more lands than you know what to do with—you have lately paid 15 millions for more. Go and work them—and cease to alarm the people, with the cry of wolf, until they become deaf to your voice, or at least laugh at you.

Mr. Chairman, if I felt less regard for what I deem the best interests of this nation than for my own reputation, I should not, on this day, have offered to address you; but would have waited to come out, bedecked with flowers and bouquets of rhetorick, in a set speech. But, sir, I dreaded lest a tone might be given to the mind of the committee—they will pardon me, but I did fear, from all that I