

## CONGRESS.

House of Representatives.

Friday, March 14.

In committee of the whole on Mr. Madison's resolutions.

[CONTINUED.]

Mr. Hartley first rose and spoke.

I am exceedingly sorry that this resolution has been pressed upon us at this time—as I hold it would be improper now to adopt it. If we have a war, which is highly probable, the trade will be cut off between these states and Great Britain—and no regulations will be necessary—I am sure that no one will say that this resolution in case of war would be a useful or necessary ingredient for our defence.

The aggressions have been so far totally on the part of Great Britain.

As a nation we may have a right to pass the resolution, but as its consequences are uncertain, and as this may be considered as an act tending to meet Great Britain in hostility, I am not for passing it at present.

The enormities of the British lately upon the high seas, in seizing the vessels and citizens of America amount to piracy and robbery, and are against the law of nations. They would justify an immediate declaration of war. Prudence may however forbid it for the moment.

We should go on with our preparations for war, fall upon effectual measures for our protection—these ought to draw our attention.

There is still a possibility of preserving peace: we should adhere to a neutrality until war is inevitable—let the causes of war arise from Great Britain—let us do no act which will throw an imputation upon us.

If the aggressions on the part of Great Britain should be continued, or satisfaction not be made for the past—we may be necessarily involved in war, and we ought to be thinking of the most effectual means to carry it on.

The French republic expresses herself friendly to the United States—we should not be backward in making returns for any of her good offices towards us, provided our acts do not infringe the principles of neutrality—I believe it to be the desire of this country, to preserve the neutrality, and so far as I can learn even the French republic does not wish us to be involved in war.

We have been insulted and injured by Great Britain in almost every part of the globe generous minds; would be willing to forget former injuries, but the late conduct of that nation will force us to hate her.

I still would wish to avoid a war, but if we are forced into one, and should be unanimous, Great Britain may find us in a better situation than she at present imagines.

To the eastward there is an armed militia of 170,000, and in general throughout the states men will be found to act against a common enemy.

Nay if we are unanimous (from our situation) we have little to fear from European combinations.

This resolution, if past by a small majority, would shew a division in this country. Whereas, in measures at this time, we ought to be as unanimous as possible. There is no necessity for the resolution.

My vote by some may be considered as unpopular; but I shall do my duty, and am well convinced that my immediate constituents will approve of my conduct.

Mr. Smith (S. C.) next rose. He had felt as keenly, he said, the injuries which Great Britain had inflicted on us, as any one on the floor of congress; but had hitherto been silent, as the minds both in and out doors, were sufficiently inflamed, and required rather to be allayed than further irritated. When the committee were last on the subject of these resolutions, the country, he observed, was in a very different situation from what it is now; the commercial relation of the two nations did not call for them; he then and still held the opinion that commercial and political grievances should not be confounded; on that occasion, therefore he had avoided adverting to the political conduct of the British, he considered only their conduct in a commercial point of view, and in this light judged the propositions by no means advisable. As operative on our commercial intercourse with that country in time of peace, they will only be an injury to ourselves, and will

affect materially those states where manufactures have not made any great progress, and who have the more bulky articles for exports. This was his opinion of their tendency, when they were first brought forward, and it had not changed since.

Viewing the subject in a political point of light, the resolutions are by no means sufficiently energetic; both as a peace measure or as a war measure they are equally improper.

When the resolutions were first before the committee, he had entertained hopes that negotiations with Great Britain, or the events of the European war, would have worked some change in the political conduct of that country, which would enable us to preserve a strict neutrality and avert the horrors of war from our peaceful shores. For war is a great evil, the people, from one end of the continent to the other shewed that they prized neutrality, and the unanimous approbation of the pacific measures, adopted by the President shewed that peace was the wish of the representatives of the nation. As long, therefore, as a gleam of hope existed, of our being able by means of negotiation to keep up a good understanding with Great Britain, so long he was opposed to every measure which might tend to interrupt the tranquillity. But he was sorry to find that far from receiving the expected satisfaction, aggressions have been heaped on us with tenfold aggravation. We should then reflect on measures proper to guard us against them;—the resolutions before the committee are not calculated, he conceived, to produce this effect; other much more efficient means can certainly be devised, the legislature should turn their attention to measures of greater energy.

The legislature should attend to the immediate defence of the sea coast, the organization of troops, and the means of procuring a revenue to nerve the sinews of war. At present our commerce yields almost all the revenue that flows into our public coffers; if that commerce is interrupted by a war we should devise a substitute. And a land tax or stamps must be resorted to, a revenue from some source other than commerce must be secured.

It was his wish to forbear entering into any measures that had an hostile appearance until the country is placed in a state of defence and the means of revenue are so organized as to put us out of danger.

When the subject of the resolutions were first before the house he forbore, he said, making any mention of the detention of our posts, the depredations on our commerce in the European seas and the piracies of the Algerines, because negotiations were then pending of which he hoped a favorable issue, but he owned he was disappointed in his anticipations. With respect however, to the Algerines, though the annoyance we suffer from that quarter is an effect of the unfriendly disposition of the British towards us, yet their conduct in that cannot be construed into direct hostility and we should therefore content ourselves with protecting our commerce against those pirates by a naval armament or purchase a peace.

The resolutions before the committee, considering the critical state of affairs, are not only too inefficient but too tardy in their operation. They cannot be intended to operate on this spring's importation nor indeed upon the importations of the fall, for before this time orders are given, and they cannot be meant to operate so early, because they would have an *ex post facto* tendency. They are then to operate upon the importations this time twelve months. So feeble and remote an operation cannot answer any good purpose. Why proceed in regulating our commerce, he asked, when the commerce is to be saved from annihilation? He was sorry the house did not think proper to go first into the question of embargo. No doubt this was a question of primary importance, but he believed it would not produce that shock to the commercial interest that some gentlemen feared, as the question was not to lay an embargo but to empower the President to adopt such a measure when he thought the exigency of affairs required it.

He took a view of the operation of the resolutions as manufactures are concerned, and endeavored to shew that either we, but especially the southern states, must do without many articles of necessity, we are accustomed to receive from Great Britain, or pay an exorbitantly increased price. He wished to know what rate of increase on the present duties was contemplated,

by the friends of the resolutions, and whether it was intended to increase the duties laid the other day, when on the subject of ways and means, on certain articles still higher. The mover of these propositions, he observed, when he first brought them forward, openly declared, that he did not wish the duties very high at first, but to raise them gradually. He was desirous of knowing whether the gentleman was of the same mind still, or whether he now contemplated prohibitory duties.

Some gentlemen thought they had discovered an inconsistency in the arguments of those opposed to the resolutions; because they maintained, that they might accelerate war and at the same time are not sufficiently energetic. The observations he believed just. The resolutions will have an irritating and therefore hostile tendency and yet they are perfectly impotent in effect in case of hostility. We have reason to contemplate a state of war, we should therefore exert all our means to prepare for such a state, we should fortify our harbours, raise a revenue, organize troops, and put ourselves in complete readiness, yet at the same time we should not hold irritating language; let us hold out that we wish peace as long as peace can be preserved, and when war is unavoidable not meet the event unprepared. He hoped the resolution would be negatived as a measure inefficient in the present critical situation of affairs and only tending to irritate unnecessarily.

Mr. Giles conceived that gentlemen built their opinions on an idea, that if we adopt this resolution it is to prevent other measures from being taken. These resolutions he considered as powerful auxiliaries to any other measure which it might be thought prudent to pursue. He proceeded to point out that the resolutions contemplated must have a useful tendency in the event of a war. If a war takes place a termination to it must be expected; then this system will form the best ground of negotiation. Great Britain in a negotiation for peace would certainly be willing to give an equivalent for any relaxation of the regulations meant to be established by the resolutions. In this single point of view they undoubtedly are a very important engine. The executive are by the constitution empowered to make treaties, but the legislature should put the nation in the best possible state to negotiate them on advantageous terms. If we are to have war, the resolutions can, at any rate, do no harm, and at its termination must produce a great good. If we remain in a state of peace, he believed the first operation of the resolutions would be to increase the revenue: by degrees only the importation would be discouraged and then a spur would be given to our manufactures. He enlarged on this idea and dwelt further upon the peace operation of the resolutions. Here we shall not attempt to follow the gentleman, because it would involve a repetition of ideas expressed in former debates on these resolutions.

He believed there is as yet no deficiency in the revenue of the United States. If a deficiency should take place, he should be ready to make it up. If our importations and consequently our impost revenue, should decrease, our ability to pay taxes in another shape, will increase in the same proportion.

He next began to animadvert upon observations which fell some days since, from Mr. Lee, who, he said, had asserted generally, that there appeared within the walls of Congress, a disposition in some, to violate the rights of a certain kind of property. He wished the gentleman to be more explicit as to the persons he alluded to, and the expressions that warranted the belief he had expressed. Mr. Giles was interrupted, and declared to be out of order.

Mr. Dexter then rose. The less love or hatred we bear to foreign nations, the less fear of them will actuate our councils. We should legislate only for our own country. He made this observation, he said, to introduce his principal objection to the resolutions, viz. That they discriminate between foreign countries, because we hate the one, and love the other, and tax our citizens to gratify those passions. This was his principal objection to the propositions; an objection that no alteration of circumstances could do away, an objection which rests on the immutable interest of this country, to be detached from foreign politics as much as possible.

It is true that though these resolutions were adopted, we should be able to adopt any other energetic measure; but he object-

ed to wasting time on this, when more serious concerns call for our attention. If we were attacked by an assassin, should we, he asked, spend our time in fixing our sword knot or feather, should we not rather think only of defending ourselves. Should we now spend time in discussing commercial theories?

The gentleman last up said these resolutions would be important at the termination of a war, then surely there is time enough to consider the ground we wish our commerce to stand on at the end of a war which is not yet declared. If we are engaged in a war, our commerce will not require to be regulated, and the passing these resolutions, will be an obstacle to peace rather than tend to secure to us advantages for their relaxation. Another consideration had weight on his mind: Why should we discriminate? Because one nation is hostile and the other friendly. Strong as our partiality may be, where is the European nation that confers acts of kindness on us at the present time? He saw none that merited a return of good offices.

If we are involved in a war with Great Britain we shall not remain at peace with Spain, as it is the drift of the resolutions to encourage the commerce of foreign nations and Spain among others, at the expense of that of Great Britain; then at the close of the war the weight which a relaxation of those regulations may have, as Great Britain is concerned, will have a contrary and proportional effect as Spain is interested; for every diminution of the restraint on the British commerce will be a diminution of the encouragement granted by law to the Spanish.

Nature intended that we should be out of the reach of the politics of Europe, our interest is loud against the connection; if the resolutions are passed, a basis will be laid for a permanent system of commerce with them, a link he never wished to see established. If we meddle with European politics, we may catch the contagion which so unfortunately desolates one fine country, but which is perhaps there a necessary, or at least unavoidable evil. He feared the effect of dissensions among us; a reign of anarchy would lead to despotism. This he dreaded more than the effects of external aggressions. He wished all thoughts were at present turned to self-defence, to devising and organizing the means.

It was said that the resolutions had not a tendency to provoke war. If it is the intention of the nation against which they are meant to operate to make war, it is immaterial in this respect, whether they do or do not pass. But to spend time on them is trifling at this critical juncture. They may have an injurious tendency, he believed. We had been told that the manufacturers and merchants of Great Britain would not suffer the government to go to war with us. By passing the resolutions the friends of which say are to operate against those very classes of people we shall destroy that check and render a war with us a popular measure. We have much shipping in the ports of our actual tho' not yet declared enemies, will any irritating measures tend to the security of that property? Will they not diminish the chance of their being released? By passing the resolutions we should shew our temper without retaliating, and we should unjustly oppress the mercantile interest. It is sufficient to shew that the resolutions are inefficient to prove that they ought not to pass. If there is no reason why they should pass that is reason sufficient against them.

He believed if the resolutions had not been brought forward before this day, no member would have thought this a time fit to introduce them, then why now insist upon a decision on them? They are robbed of the object on which they were intended to operate. They cannot be seriously intended to repel aggressions, they are only a shew of resentment without operation. This is not the time for such feeble measures; our commerce, our very existence as an independent nation is threatened. The present war is a war of political principles; we must secure ourselves against attack, and avoid all connection, as much as possible with European politics. Let the ocean be a gulf of partition between us and the eastern hemisphere, at least till the present convulsions are at an end.

(To be continued.)

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