



CONGRESS.

PHILADELPHIA.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 1792.

In committee of the whole, on the Fishery Bill.

[CONTINUED.]

relina, and prior to the date of his letters, he was furnished with the most indubitable and perfect information, relative to the strength of the enemy, and the support he might depend upon in men and resources; and this information was founded on experiment and actual observation, made on the spot by myself and hundreds of others passing through the whole country, visiting almost every post, and immediately under my command, and communicated by letters as well as personal information from officers of consideration and distinction, sent for that purpose, who are at this day living and well acquainted with the facts; ready to vouch, that the support given, far exceeded any thing that was promised to General Greene, provided that he would return to South-Carolina.

In the same letter it is also asserted, that there were but very few militia in the field, those not to be depended upon, having it in view rather to plunder and accumulate the miseries and distresses of the country, than to give any support to the independence of the United States: and again, that we were contending with more than five times our number, and amongst a people much more in the enemy's interest than our's, & that the state must and will inevitably fall without the immediate assistance of foreign aid—that he has it only in his power to keep up appearances, without the prospect or hope of success. In opposition to this account of the state of affairs, Gen. Sumpter said, that so far from the numbers of the enemy being five times greater, or that the people of the country were more in their interest than ours, or that they were so infamously disposed; he would take upon him to declare that the reverse was the fact; and that the account above stated was not founded in truth. It is a notorious fact, that the greatest collected force of the British at Camden, was not more than a thousand effective men, or twelve hundred going to the extent; and such was the situation of that post that no aid or assistance from any direction could be given, all their other posts, in the interior part of the state, being at that time invested. Against this force we had then collected in the vicinity of Camden more than 3500 effective men, well appointed and most happily disposed for attacking or cutting off Lord Rawdon's retreat to Charleston, which could have been, and ought to have been effected. This, Mr. Chairman, must prove that the number of militia was very respectable, and constituted by far the greatest and most efficient force for that particular service. Shall such abuse then be suffered to remain a stigma on the characters of so great a number of respectable and patriotic citizens? Who put themselves under the command of Marion and Sumpter, and who, under every disadvantage, in a country over run by a powerful foe, unsupported, unprotected by their own government, unknown or unattended to by the general government, thus subject to every inconvenience or discouragement, and only supported by their own zeal and patriotism, and by a sense of love and duty to their country.

I say, Sir, that under all these unfavorable circumstances, the citizens of that country did assemble, and equip themselves, either at their own expence, or by the importance of their services, and continued their unremitting exertions, for more than ten months preceding the date of the letters: they were separated from their families and connections, doomed and obliged to subsist on what could be obtained within the enemy's lines. How then can the accounts given in the letters, just quoted, be reconciled with these facts? Are such men to be traduced and calumniated in a style that would dishonor ruffians? *The very communications of Congress, offering thanks to the Militia, were suppressed, when even those acknowledgements would have been grateful and animating to them.* The extraordinary exertions made by the North-Carolina militia, of which Gen. Sumpter said he was a witness, entitled them to the approbation and thanks of their country, and not to such invectives and aspersions as are lavished in those letters.

Are these to be the rewards of merit and heroism, for risks and losses, for services and sacrifices of property and life, for exposing themselves to every danger, and withholding nothing that could promote the public interest? Is this candor, Mr. Chairman, to traduce such characters? or is it not calumny, involving every epithet of the blackest opprobrium?

Having thus far stated the circumstances, and compared them with the misstatements communicated by Gen. Greene in the letters alluded to, Gen. Sumpter concluded by saying, that if the committee should be of opinion, that the proofs he had now brought forward were facts to be relied on, they must operate as evidence to invalidate other communications from the same source and authority, and verify his first assertion, that those letters do not contain a true statement of the situation of public affairs at the time they were written.

MR. GERRY having moved to strike out the words "bounty allowed" in order to insert "allowance made" by way of accommodation,

Mr. Murray observed, that the question was, whether a bounty should be given for the encouragement of the fishery: the amendment proposed by the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. Gerry) did not alter the principle—it was still "the old cocked hat" on the one hand, and on the other, "the cocked old hat:" the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Fitzsimons) had asserted, that Congress have a right to alter the drawbacks, and allow them in any other mode, by which the citizens may receive back their own money: but this is not a case of that nature; for the bill says, "in case the monies appropriated (for the payment of the duties) shall be inadequate, the deficiency shall be supplied from the treasury;" here the treasury is pledged for the payment of the bounties; and the question is, not on the principle of changing the drawback, but the giving encouragement to a particular branch, at the expence of the community at large.

Mr. Barnwell observed (among other things) that those who are best acquainted with the fisheries, look on the proposed mode of encouragement as the best; and that they ought to be allowed to use the gifts of the public in the most advantageous manner:—that, if he were himself concerned in the cultivation of any particular commodity, for the encouragement of which a sum were granted, he would be much surprised to meet a refusal, in case he should come forward, and propose some more effectual mode of applying that grant:—that even if the bounties should happen to exceed the drawbacks, by 8 or 10 thousand dollars, the number of seamen to be maintained would be well worth that sum;—that whenever the two houses of Congress and the President of the United States are of opinion, that the general welfare will be promoted by raising any sum of money, they have an undoubted right to raise it, provided that the taxes be uniform;—that although it may not at present be an object of great consequence to America to become a maritime power, yet it is of some importance to have constantly at hand a nursery of seamen, to furnish our merchants with the means of transporting their commodities across the sea; that whatever allowance or bounty is granted upon any particular commodity, must ever be paid by the whole, for the advantage of a part, whether it be upon cotton to the southward, upon fish to the eastward, or upon other commodities in the middle States;—that, if the people cannot have so much confidence in their representatives, as to trust them with the power of granting bounties, the government must be a very paltry one indeed. The object of the bill, he said, was only to allow to the fishermen, in the manner that would be most beneficial to them, the same sum, that would otherwise be allowed:—if however, from time and experience, it should appear that this bounty proved an imposition on government, he would not hesitate to revoke it.

Mr. Gerry. The State of Massachusetts asks nothing more, than equal justice. We do not come forward, to request favors from the United States: we only wish, that the same system, which is applied to other parts of the union, may be applied to us. But in examining this question, we wish that gentlemen would not make distinctions, which will not admit of a difference.

The proposed allowance has been called a bounty on occupation, and is said to be very different from that encouragement, which is the incidental result of a general commercial system:—but in reality it is no bounty:—a bounty is a grant, made without any consideration whatever, as an equivalent; and I have no idea of a bounty, which admits of receiving from the person, on whom it is conferred, the amount of what is granted. We have imposed a duty on salt, and thereby draw a certain sum of money from the fishermen:—the draw back is, in all instances, the amount of the money received:—this is all we ask; and we ask it for a set of men, who are as well entitled to the regard of government, as any other class of citizens.

It has been supposed, that the allowance, made to the fishermen, will amount to a greater sum,

than the drawback on the exportation of the fish: but I think it has been clearly shewn, that this will not be the case:—on the contrary, it is presumable, that the drawback on the fish would on the whole exceed the sum, which is proposed to be allowed to the fishermen; sometimes it might be more, sometimes less.

The calculation is made on general principles; and it is impossible to calculate to a single cent: the quantity of salt, to be expended on the fish, cannot be minutely ascertained: but this was not heretofore considered as a sufficient reason, why Congress should refuse to allow the drawback; they allowed it, though in a different shape.—It is now proposed to make a further commutation: gentlemen call this a bounty on occupation:—but is there any proposition made for paying to the fishermen, or other persons concerned in the fishery, any sums, which we have not previously received from them?—if this were the case, it would indeed be a bounty:—but if we beforehand receive from them, as much as the allowance amounts to, there is no bounty granted at all.

If however it really was a bounty on occupation, it would after all be only an indulgence similar to what has been granted to the landed and agricultural interest:—we have laid on hemp a duty of 54 cents per hundred weight; and on beer, ale, and porter, five cents per gallon:—now I ask gentlemen, whether the professed design of those duties was to raise a revenue, or to prevent the importation of those articles? they were laid for no other purpose, than to prevent foreigners from importing them, and thereby to encourage our own manufactures; and was not that encouragement a bounty to the persons concerned in producing such articles in this country? If the duties had not been laid, the importer could sell much cheaper, than he now can; and the landed interest would be under a necessity of selling cheaper in proportion. If those prohibitory duties operate as a bounty in favor of raising hemp, and of brewing beer, ale and porter, I ask, whether, if a bounty were proposed on every quintal of fish, it might not, with the same propriety, be granted? If we have not a right to grant a bounty in the one case, we have as little right to grant it in the other.

A calculation has been offered, to shew that the proposed allowance will exceed the amount of the present drawbacks, by 10,000 dollars a year: but that calculation has been proved to be erroneous: suppose however that this was the fact, what comparison is there between such a tax on the citizens of the United States, and the tax borne by the citizens of Massachusetts, for the defence of the western frontier? A commercial war is waged against the American fisheries, by foreign nations, who lay heavy duties on the American fish, and apply the produce of those duties in bounties to their own fishermen: and their fisheries being less extensive than ours, the duty, thus imposed on our fish, and bestowed in bounties to their vessels, operate in a two-fold proportion to the discouragement of our fishermen, and the encouragement of theirs.

I wish to know on what principle gentlemen can expect, that the citizens of Massachusetts should contribute 200,000 Dollars, or perhaps a greater sum, for the protection of the western frontier against the Indians, when no contribution is made to support the commerce of Massachusetts, which, without this support, will be as effectually ruined, as if their vessels were captured by an enemy. The principle is carried farther with respect to the protection of the frontier: we have voted large sums as presents to the savages, to keep them friends to the frontier settlers: there is however no clause in the constitution, that will authorize a measure of this kind: it is true, indeed, we have a power to regulate trade and commerce with the Indian tribes; but does that give us a power to render the United States tributary to the savages? and if we make them such grants every year, do we not in fact become tributary to them?

The gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Giles) says, that although this plan of encouraging the fisheries, may be wise policy in Britain, as being on all sides surrounded by the sea, yet the United States will not equally find their account in pursuing the same plan. The state of Virginia is, in point of exposure from the sea, very differently circumstanced from the state of Massachusetts: we have a vast extent of country, 450 miles of sea coast, exposed: the citizens of all the towns along the coast are obliged to pursue marine occupations; and I hope the gentlemen does not wish that the country should be depopulated, and the inhabitants driven off to settle the western territory.

The state of Virginia is very happily circumstanced with respect to a marine war: should such an event take place, that state is pretty secure from depredations: but when we consider how much the inhabitants of Massachusetts are exposed in a case of that kind, we ought to look forward, and make some provision for their defence:—they have as good a right to expect, that