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CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

MONDAY, MARCH 10.

DEBATE

On Mr. GREGG's Resolution.

[CONTINUED.]

MR. MACON, (Speaker). Mr. Chairman—I feel myself bound by the call which has been made by three gentlemen from Pennsylvania, (Messrs. Gregg, Smilie and Findley,) with whom I have long been in the habit of friendship; a friendship on my part sincere, to state the reasons which will govern my conduct on this occasion, whether they may be satisfactory to others or not, they are perfectly so to me. That a difference of opinion subsists between the members with regard to the measures best adapted to the present crisis of our affairs, is evident from the number of resolutions on your table. An attempt has been made to liken this resolution to one agreed to in 1793; but are they alike? I think not. That was general and operated alike on every part of the union, while this, in my opinion, is special, and will only operate on one part of the union; and this partial operation will be severely felt, by that section of the country which I in part represent. Besides this clear difference in the two resolutions, will not all the three gentlemen agree, that there is a great and striking difference in our affairs with G. Britain, in 1793 and now. Her motives may be as unfriendly now as then; but I speak of facts known to all, not of motives; she then held the western posts, she then detained an immense property belonging to the southern people, both in violation of the treaty of peace. She then instigated the Indians to war on the frontiers, and then, as at this time, impressed our sailors and captured our vessels; besides the United States had not then relinquished the principle, that free ships should make free goods; in relinquishing this principle, they in a great measure lost sight of the carrying trade, by peaceable means; but if gentlemen wish to turn to Europe, they will find that in 1793, the treaties of Pavia and Pilnitz were in force. Let the facts which I have stated, be compared with those of the present day, and all must confess, that there is a very considerable difference. I have said this much, to shew that there is no analogy in the facts of the present time, and those of 1793, and that there is no change of opinion in me. If, however, I am mistaken, it is an honest mistake.

This nation, in my opinion, must take her choice of two alternatives; to be happy and contented, without war, and without internal taxes; or to be warlike and glorious, abounding with what is called honor and dignity, or in other words taxes and blood. If it be the first, the people will continue to enjoy, that which they have hitherto enjoyed, more privileges than has fallen to the lot of any nation with whose history we are acquainted; they will, as they have done, live plentifully on their farms, and such as choose, will carry on a fair trade, by exchanging our surpluss productions, for such foreign articles as we may want. If we take the other ground, we shall, I fear, pursue the same career, which has nearly, or quite ruined, all the other nations of the globe. Look at the people of England, legally free, but half their time fighting for the honor and dignity of the crown, and the carrying trade, and see whether they have gained any thing by all their battles, for the nation, except taxes; and these they have in the greatest abundance. Look also at France, before the revolution, and we shall see a people, possessing a fertile country and fine climate, having the honor to fight, and be taxed, as much as they could bear, for the glory & dignity of the *grand monarque*. Let us turn from these two great nations, and view Switzerland during the same period; though not powerful like the others, we shall see the people free, and happy without wars, contented at home, because they had enough to live comfortably on, and not over taxed. The history of these three nations, ought to convince us, that public force and liberty, cannot dwell in the same country.

I mean not to impute improper motives to any one, nor to examine the journal after changes, though I am perfectly willing to have it thumbed over from the day I took a seat in the House to the present, after my name; and if on examination, it shall appear, that I have changed my political principles, or have not uniformly adhered to them, I am willing to bear the name of a political hypocrite. I have formerly been on very great questions, in very small minorities, a minority, not sufficient to command the yeas and nays, on a most important question. I will say no more on this subject; nothing can be more disagreeable than to talk about one's self, and nothing could justify it, but the call which has been made; perhaps, I have already said too much on it, but it was impossible to say less.

The dispute with Great Britain is most unquestionably for the carrying trade; a trade which is less benefical to the nation, than any other, and a trade, which has produced most of our disputes with foreign nations, and it is the only trade that requires expensive protection. Will any one contend, that this trade is half as important as the coasting trade; this cannot, and will not be contended; for every one knows that the coasting is the best trade. It not only exchanges the products of one part of the nation for those of another, but it also tends, by making us better acquainted with each other, to connect us more intimately, and to make every part harmonize for the public good.—The trade which I consider the next best, for a nation to carry on, is the direct trade for home consumption, by which, the surplus produce of one country, is exchanged for that of another; and in this, as in every branch of trade, this great rule will be adhered to, buy cheap and sell dear if you can. With the coasting and direct trade, agriculture is more nearly connected, than with any other. But a nation may be agricultural without being commercial. The Swiss cantons, and Milan, were of this description, and it may be remarked that Milan is the most populous country in Europe. China is said to be of the same character; but as little is known of that country, I shall not quote it, to establish a fact, which is clearly established by the other two. A country may also be commercial, without being highly agricultural, as was the case with Venice, and some other European powers. But let us pursue that system, which our own experience has proved to be the best for the United States; for since the adoption of the present constitution, and before this day, we have had trying times. It will be remembered, that during the French revolution, we had complaints against France; her government issued orders, of which we justly complained; one of them, I believe, declared all the productions and manufactures of Great Britain, to be contraband of war; this if executed, would have nearly cut of all communication, with a nation, with whom we carried on the greatest trade. What did we then do? We sent ministers to France, with two of whom she refused to have any intercourse, but pretended to be willing to negociate with the other; all the ministers finally returned home, and we took half way measures against her, which are the worst of all measures, and which produced a sort of half war, which, I believe, injured us more than her; for besides the actual expense, which may be estimated at not less than 10,000,000 of dollars, it nearly ruined the agricultural people, by reducing the price of produce; flour it reduced from twelve and fourteen dollars per barrel to six—and tobacco from ten and twelve dollars per hundred to three—and had no doubt the same effect on other articles of exportation. And how were we relieved then from these evils? We again sent ministers, they were received, and made a treaty. Besides what has been before stated of the conduct of Great Britain, it will not be forgotten that she declared all France in state of blockade, and this order would have cut off all commercial intercourse with her, who then wanted much of our produce. To Great Britain also, a minister was sent, and he made a treaty. I am now desirous that the same steps should be pursued, before we adopt decisive measures. We once laid an embargo, of which we tired. This shews the necessity of acting cautiously, and of taking no measures, which we cannot adhere to. All the gentlemen who have supported the resolution, now under consideration, have expressed doubts whether it would produce greater effects on Britain or ourselves; this is surely doubting its policy, and if its policy be doubted by its friends, what ought to be the result of our enquiries, especially when it is believed that its adoption will materially injure one part of the country, and that part entirely agricultural; does the public good about which we have heard so much, require that a measure which its friends seem to think of doubtful policy, ought to be adopted, when none can doubt but it will injure if not sacrifice the real interest of a part of the community. Examine the report of the Secretary of the Treasury, and it will at one glance shew from what quarter the great export is made to Britain; cut off the import, and you will lessen the price of the export, if it shall be exported. But we are told that we are bound to protect commerce, meaning I suppose that this resolution must be adopted; then if we are really bound and there is no discretion, nothing of expediency, there is no occasion for this investigation. But gentlemen well know that on every question discretion may and will be exercised. But have we really done nothing for commerce and navigation? On this subject I can confidently appeal to those most interested. What since the adoption of the present constitution has made this the second commercial nation in the world? (before that we had but little claim to the character of a commercial people.) Has not the protecting duties on the tonnage of foreign vessels, and on goods imported in the [illegible] the effect? They have secured to our vessels the carrying our own productions, which encourages navigation in proportion to their bulk. Let gentlemen enquire the number of cargoes which tobacco and cotton alone furnish the American vessels. Besides this encouragement given to navigation, has not a law been passed to favor the fisheries, and thereby to form sailors for the use of the merchant service? It may be right here to observe that I neither approved nor voted for that law, but no attempt has ever been made to repeal it. This is the encouragement by which, during a time of peace, we have become the second commercial nation in the world, and this too in the short space of time since the adoption of the present constitution—say, if you please, since the 3d of March, 1789. One consequence a little curious is produced by this encouragement, which is this—When Europe is at peace, the protecting duties prevent any competition by foreign vessels to carry our productions, and when at war, so many of our vessels carry for the belligerent nations, that freight is nearly as high with us as it is with them, so that what the agricultural people pay in time of peace to encourage, they lose the benefit of when Europe is at war, and when it is most wanted.

Among the arguments urged to show the effect of this measure on G. Britain, one is that it will ensure us a powerful aid in that country; that the British merchants and manufacturers, whose interest will be seriously affected, will give you all their assistance.—This argument has been completely answered by a gentleman from Georgia, (Mr. Early.) But if gentlemen really calculate to make friends on the other side the water, it seems to me that a different plan would produce more effect. Cut off all intercourse between them and us, and adhere to the plan long enough, and you will find the merchants and manufacturers of England joined by all the inhabitants of the W. Indies, to have the intercourse opened. The assembly of Jamaica have acknowledged that they cannot get supplies in plenty except from the U. States; but this plan would operate as much on beef, pork, fish and flour as on tobacco or cotton. But this would be too strong for them, while they are desirous to adopt a measure which will have the same effect on cotton and tobacco.—What is this but a sacrifice of a part of the agricultural interest of this country to what they believe will be a protection for the carrying trade. I should like it quite as well if the attempt was not to be made solely at the risk of one part of the union. The evil is felt in one part, but the remedy is to be applied in another—Adopt general measures, which will operate equally in every part of the country, and if the shoe is to pinch, let it pinch all alike, and all will then be willing to have it off as soon as possible.

I am willing to acknowledge that a dollar got by this carrying trade, and made the property of the nation, is just as good as a dollar got any other way, even by the cultivation of the land. But does it follow from thence that you are to make more sacrificos to get the dollar in that way than it is worth? I think not. The adoption of the resolution, besides its unjust and partial operation, will considerably affect the revenue, and no ways and means are proposed to meet any deficiency. On the present question we risk a revenue of ten million of dollars raised on the consumption of foreign articles in the union, to gain—what? (I speak only of revenue)—an additional sum of 850,000 dolls. which additional sum you will lose as soon as you depart from your neutrality. It is asked again and again if we have not a right to the trade about which so much has been said? If the doctrine that free ships should make free goods had obtained, there could be no doubt on the question; but I mean not to examine the right but the effect of the resolution; nor do I mean to deny that the trade is of some use to the nation. Merchants would not so anxiously pursue it, if they made no profit by it; and their profit adds to the national stock, and may affect the price of native aaticles offered for sale. I am also willing to acknowledge that a cargo of flour or any other native production sent to the West Indies, and there fairly exchanged for sugar, and the sugar brought home, that the sugar is as much ours as the produce of our own soil, and this sugar so obtained we have a right to carry to those that may want it. But the question before the committee is not a question of right, but of expediency. Is the protection which will be given to this carrying trade, by the adoption of the resolution, of that sort and of such certainty, as to justify the adoption of a measure, which will operate exclusively hard on one part of the union. The right of deposit at New-Orleans before we purchased the country, was certainly as well established as our right to carry coffee and sugar to France & Spain, or any where else—it was a right acknowledged by treaty; but when the deposit was refused, what did we do, we took pacific measures and succeeded; we heard then much about honor and dignity, and that it was our duty to enforce our right by arms; but notwithstanding all this, we adopted no measure like the present; we then acted for the general welfare: does it follow, because I am opposed to the resolution, that I am unwilling, for our citizens to own vessels—it does not, I am willing they may have as many as they please, and do what they please with them, so that they do not involve the nation in war by them. On this subject the interest of the husbandman in New-Hampshire and Georgia are the same.

The gentleman who introduced the resolution expressed a wish, that no party or geographical feelings, should be brought into the debate. If there was no cause for geographical feelings, why the wish, or why anticipate them,? Let the report of the secretary of the treasury be examined, and it will be seen that there is cause for this feeling; indeed the statement, made from that document by a gentleman from Georgia (Mr. Early) must have convinced all of the partial operation of the resolution. On the first page of the report it appears, that the annual exports to Great Britain and her dependencies are estimated at about 15,690,000 dollars, of which sum tobacco and cotton alone make 8,860,000 dollars—it also appears, that we exported to the dominions of Great Britain in Europe for each of the three years ending on 30th of September, in 1802, the sum of 12,066,521 dollars; and that cotton, tobacco, rice, pitch, tar, and rosin, made of that sum 8,485,762 dollars; in 1803 the sum of 16,459,264, and that the same articles made of that sum, 11,912,493 dollars; in 1804, the sum of 11,767,6?9 dollars, and that the same articles made of that sum, 9,443,807 dollars. These articles are selected, because they are the produce of one section of the Union. The same part of the country produces the following articles in common with other parts of the nation, but the proportion of each is not known, flour, wheat, beef, pork, staves, heading, boards, plank, scantling, timber, flax-seed, skins, wax, hams, bacon, turpentine spirits, lard, and Indian meal, and I may add, pickled fish; some of these articles are carried to the middle and perhaps to the eastern states, and are there exported, or consumed, and if consumed enable them to export more of their own productions.

It has been said, that we have no complaint against any nation, except Great Britain. I wish most sincerely we had not, and that all nations would act as honestly towards us, as we have done and are willing to do towards them; but in examining this subject, we ought not to deceive ourselves; truth, and truth alone should be our aim and guide. Have we no complaints against France and Spain for the conduct of some of their people on the ocean? I mean not to say a word about the conduct of one of them on our south western frontier. What has been the practice at Cuba, to take our vessels, and sell them and their cargoes whether with or without a trial I know not. The owners I believe, have generally lost both vessel and cargo; and how have they treated your seamen? turned them on the first shore they could, and leave them to get home as they could; but it may be said, this is done by picaroons, and without the consent of their governments, and that these governments do not justify those who act in this piratical way. The government at Cuba must have knowledge of these facts; they are committed too near it, and too frequently to remain long unknown; and we cannot have forgot that captains Murray & Chauncey have both very lately been cruising on our own coast to drive these picaroons from it; besides all this, we have heard, that a French fleet lately burnt all the American vessels it met to prevent their giving information of the course it was steering. In this case they treated the crews well, at least I have not heard to the contrary, and promised to pay for the property destroyed. No one will contend that the fleet had a right to destroy this property. These facts are not stated to exculpate Great Britain, but to shew that gentlemen are mistaken, when they say we have no complaints except against England; against her I agree with the gentlemen we have well founded complaints.

The gentleman first up, from Pennsylvania, has observed, that the contraband trade was generally carried on by foreigners. (Mr. Gregg explained, and said he had observed that he believed this to be the case in many instances.)

MR. MACON. I thank the gentleman for the explanation, as I have no wish to mistate what has been observed, but the difference in the statement will not affect the question, that foreigners may be concerned both in illicit and contraband trade. I have no doubt but there are some facts known to all that will shew, that others besides foreigners have been concerned in business not the most honorable. The petition of Nicklin and Griffith now before the House, contains the proof, that an American, with an American register, covered a vessel for a foreigner, who armed vessels to fight their way into the St. Domingo trade. I have heard it was not a foreigner but an American, who fitted out the Leander for Miranda, and who by this act run the risk of committing the peace of the country. I understood that it was an American. In stating these facts I mean no reflection on the merchants; they, like every other class in the community, have among them good, bad and indifferent. The same gentleman said he was not willing to protect the wild carrying trade. I know not what this wild trade is, unless it be that which will involve the nation in war; it is not the contraband, because that no one will protect.

It has also been said, that if we adopt the resolutson, and cannot get what we want from G. Britain, we will manufacture for ourselves. This sounds well on this floor, but I very much doubt the practibility of making this nation manufacture for itself, while we have land enough for every industrious citizen, to become a land holder, and a cultivator of the soil. Connecticut and Massachusetts have tried the experiment, and both without success, and both on articles in which it was most likely to succeed; if these states, with their population could not succeed, what chance of success is there in other states? The practicability ought to be satisfactorily shewn before we enter on the plan. It may, as has been said, prevent our wives from wearing silk gowns, & ourselves from wearing broad cloth; whether it will produce this effect is quite uncertain; fashion is as great a tyrant as any we have to contend with; it will, I fear, be difficult to destroy its influence, by legislating. The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Smilie) and myself, plain as we are, are both obliged in some degree to yield to it, we can no more contend with it, then we can fly to Europe.

The gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr Crowninshield) has told us, that the balance of trade between this country and G. Britain is 10 or 12 millions annually against us, and endeavours to support the assertion by the report of the secretary of the Treasury. It is true that the report states a balance against us of 11,710,000 dollars, and this the secretary attempts to account for; no doubt he has done it as well as it can be done from custom house books. But surely every one must be convinced, that you cannot rely on them for the balance of trade; this balance is always a secret, and depends much on the economy and industry of those concerned in trade. Is it possible that this balance can really be against us, and that it has been against us ever since the establishment of the present constitution, and that our commercial intercourse should be constantly increasing with that nation, it seems to me to be impossible. If the balance was really so much against us, our merchants would long since have declined the trade. There is a trade carried on with the British dominions in the East Indies from the U. S. which appears by the report to be more against us than that just mentioned, and I am sure that the gentleman from Massachusetts will not say that the balance of that is against us. The annual exports to which are one hundred and thirty thousand dollars, and the annual imports 3,530,000 dollars. Here is a greater balance appearing against us, than that stated by him, because the whole exports to the first has been stated to be 15,690,000, and the whole imports are 27,400,000 dollars. The India trade I have always understood was very profitable, perhaps as much so as any carried on from the U. S. But the same report informs us, that on the whole trade of the nation there appears to be a balance against us, of 6,855,000 dollars. Can there be any thing more astonishing than this, and is it not evident that no reliance can be placed on the custom house books for the balance of trade? Look at the people happy and prosperous, beyond example, all classes doing well; the old part of the country rapidly improving; the new settling with unheard of success; the villages growing into towns, and the towns becoming cities, and all this with the last mentioned balance against us. Philosophers and statesmen may talk about the balance of trade, but if they confine themselves to the information to be derived from custom house books, they might as well read Robinson Crusoe.

The same gentleman said, if war should come, we could take more from G. Britain than she could from us, that we had done so in the revolutionary war. Without enquiring into past captures, let us examine the situation of both, at both periods. We are certainly much stronger now than we were at any time during the war; we have more men & more tonnage and more property on the ocean, and could if the same naval force could be had to operate on the British navy now as then, nearly destroy her commerce. But this cannot be had. At that time the navies of France, Spain and Holland were all united against her, and the navies of the two first for some time disputed possession of the channel with hers. The navies of these are now gone. But besides, the armed neutrality acted upon her like a powerful screw; under the pressure of all these she nearly sunk toward the latter end of the war. Playfair's political atlas