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CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

Tuesday, June 8.

DEBATE ON FORTIFICATIONS.

[Continued from page 1.]

Mr. W. Alston said that the gentleman who first objected to this subject had spoke very narrow compass. The only question was, whether it was necessary to complete the fortifications commenced? If it was necessary to complete them, it would be more laudable to keep a sufficient force appropriated to employ the persons engaged in carrying on the work, rather than to suspend which would not be sufficient. The expense necessary for carrying the works into effect, officers and agents engaged in it would be no more if seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars were appropriated, than if but one hundred and fifty were to be expended. Besides, such was the difficulty of procuring men, that it would be a great inconvenience now to discharge those employed, and (Mr. A.) at this moment was appropriated for this purpose by this House, and timely notice given to the Senate, and they had before them no prudent estimate. Now an estimate is laid before them the Secretary of War, who tells us that in this little time nearly the whole money appropriated has been expended, and but 135,000 remaining, with 150,000 proposed to be substituted for the sum passed by the Senate, cannot last the next session. It therefore appears to me to be more wise in us to appropriate a sum which, if human prudence fly will be sufficient to keep the work in progression, than to small a sum as would not keep the workmen at work. It, however, a majority should be of opinion that it is not expedient to complete the works, there is no necessity to authorise a single cent.

Mr. Nicholas agreed with gentlemen who had preceded him, that true economy called for the largest appropriation. He never was at a loss for reason in the United States which had received its last finishing stroke; and it was necessary at this time that the fortifications of the U. States should be put in the best possible condition—and under the situation in which we stood in respect to foreign powers? Could it be said that we were at peace with all the world? It is certainly not in our power to say so (said Mr. N.) We have yet a treaty to make with Great Britain; we do not know how we stand in respect to France; and no gentleman can say how long the United States will be allowed to remain in peace. It is therefore necessary, the whole world being at variance, to place ourselves in the best formidable state of defence. He (said this fellow) shall not travel over the political pamphlets, but give my decided vote against striking out the sum. One word in relation to a remark made from Mr. Alston, (Mr. Nicholas) in the course of his remarks he was distinguished for his remarkable, as it is the modest gentleman from Virginia." I hope I never shall be so much the coward, as to be private life, so essentially public in holidays; and as it seems that I possess a peculiar gift in this way, I am obliged to make a minister of a part of that honorable gentleman.

Mr. Dana observed that it had been said that there was no probability of an invasion, and that therefore there was no necessity for fortifications. But he might be permitted to observe that it was perfectly incomprehensible to him, on any principle of military prudence, that 100,000 militia could be employed, except in the Union, for every certain he was that militia could not constitutionally be required to march beyond the Frontiers. Was therefore the President of the U. S. had detached 100,000 militia, it was reporting with the feelings, in the circumstances of the country, if there was no possibility of invasion. He said he would invite his gentlemen to consider the question between the practice of the Vice President of the U. S. and their own respect for his opinion. Mr. Dana said he would admit that fortifications would not constitute a security against invasion by a large force, but they would be found proper to guard against sudden and unexpected collisions which might sidered them to be such a security as would prevent insolent persons from disturbing the peace of our states. In the same manner as garrisons in the interior would discourage the savages from attempting to plunder our murder our citizens, so fortifications on the sea board would constitute such a security against maritime marauders. He would rest the security of the peace of the country on this principle, that no enemy might ever be tempted to invade by an expectation to acquire plunder without combat, or victory without effusion of blood. He objected to striking out the sum in the bill. The gentleman had said the U. S. at least 1,500,000 dollars. It was proposed to sell them. He was not disposed to think that the business had been so ingeniously conducted that they would sell forfeits than 10 per cent of their original cost. The proceeds then of the sale of this species of defence taken from any work, it appears to be the sum proposed to be added to another species of defence.

The committee of the whole refused to strike out the sum, Ayes 35. The committee rose and reported the bill.

Mr. Gardenier moved the House for striking out the sum for the purpose of inserting a smaller. If the House should refuse to accommodate him he said he felt no hesitation in offering the sum he had proposed in the bill. The idea of securing this country from foreign invasion of attack by fortifications he considered as appeared to him to be so perfectly absurd, that he was astonished, while he was in the house, seriously engaged in forming out one species of mania, that they should introduce another. When the sum from Mr. Nicholas (said Mr. B.) tells the House that one person in a year expended in the town the city of New-York, does he mean it to be understood that the people pay this money, or do they pay the merchants, import articles to this amount which are consumed in other parts of the state, and which of course the duty really falls? Every man of the smallest information knows that these duties, which are collected in the city, are dispersed in every part of the United States. This subjected fortifications on new ground. We all agree that we should fortify our seaport towns from the attacks of foreign nations; but no man supposes that we can establish fortifications which will effectually repel the invasion of a large force. If we were to collect all our revenue for twenty years back, and expend it, the sum would be inadequate to the purpose. The strongest fortification ever erected, is the fortress of New-York, would they prevent an army from landing in New-Jersey or Connecticut? Would they prevent the sale of New-York? From whatever cause we are in no danger now, and whatever may be said in this House, the embargo has caused a conviction in the British government of the advantage of a mutual trade between the two countries. They are convinced that it is a blessing to us, and that we want nothing else from them. But, if this House, when danger was relaxed, and when there could not be a pretext, not upon to appropriate more than 350,000 dollars at the last session for fortifications, and now proposes to appropriate more than 150,000 dollars to that object, I am astonished.

The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Ross) asks us, whether it would be more prudent to lay a tax to fortify the seaports? Certainly not. But if a farmer were to attempt to fence his farm without money, he would be a little fool, he would not get more rails and fences than he would lose in expending extravagant sums of money on an object which can never be finished.

The gentleman from New-York (Mr. Gardenier) says that the writers to destroy geographical distinctions and to unite the people to every part of the country, are, that so far as a solicitude to have such a system for the protection of every part of the country, it has been for the Eastern country exclusively. Every one at all conversant with the subject knows that very little has been done elsewhere. I admit that New-York should be fortified, but that question is whether we shall at this particular time devote the whole resources of the country to that object; whether it will be an innovation hence to New-York or any other town. It is not fortified by the next mess. ing of Congress, when we are in a state of peace and there is no necessity of its continuance? I wish not by large appropriations to induce the Southern or Western states to think, prematurely, for if we do, we shall have still more money to appropriate. We know very well that the appropriations of former years for this purpose have scarcely ever been expended; and I am sure that it cannot be in opposition to the 185,000 dollars remaining unexpended, the Secretary of War will be able to dispose of 750,000 more. I consider the great bulk of expense for this object to have been already encountered, and that almost all the materials are already prepared. The remaining sum, if it be expended, must be comparatively inconsiderable, viz. for the employment of men to make use of the materials, and for the works of this kind continue the greater part of the expense. The sum with which I proposed to fill the blank will give the House opportunity, till the next session, 300,000 dollars, as much as can be judiciously expended, as much as we can spare, as much as prudence will permit, and no more. I hope the House will not consent to appropriate the Treasury by appropriations more than it can answer proper purpose.

Mr. Goldsborough said that he had not doubts but the House would reject. He expressed himself happy at the demonstration already given of a disposition to put a period to the fortifications system. It was a object in which New-York was much interested and in which Maryland, engaged in forming out one species of mania, that they should introduce another. When the sum from New-York (said Mr. B.) tells the House that one person in a year expended in the town the city of New-York, does he mean it to be understood that the people pay this money, or do they pay the merchants, import articles to this amount which are consumed in other parts of the state, and which of course the duty really falls? Every man of the smallest information knows that these duties, which are collected in the city, are dispersed in every part of the United States. This subjected fortifications on new ground. We all agree that we should fortify our seaport towns from the attacks of foreign nations; but no man supposes that we can establish fortifications which will effectually repel the invasion of a large force. If we were to collect all our revenue for twenty years back, and expend it, the sum would be inadequate to the purpose. The strongest fortification ever erected, is the fortress of New-York, would they prevent an army from landing in New-Jersey or Connecticut? Would they prevent the sale of New-York? From whatever cause we are in no danger now, and whatever may be said in this House, the embargo has caused a conviction in the British government of the advantage of a mutual trade between the two countries. They are convinced that it is a blessing to us, and that we want nothing else from them. But, if this House, when danger was relaxed, and when there could not be a pretext, not upon to appropriate more than 350,000 dollars at the last session for fortifications, and now proposes to appropriate more than 150,000 dollars to that object, I am astonished.

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Mr. Goldsborough said that he would not detain the House long on this sub