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AMERICAN CONGRESS.

MR. QUINCY'S SPEECH,

ON THE REPORT OF MR. CAMPBELL.

Mr. Quincy. Mr. Chairman, I am not in general, a friend to abstract legislation. Ostentatious declaration of general principles is so often the resort of weakness and of ignorance; it is so frequently the subterfuge of men, who are willing to abuse, or who mean to delude the people, that it is with great reluctance, I yield to such a course my sanction.

If however, a formal announcement of a determination to perform one of the most common and undeniable of national duties, be deemed by a majority of this house, essential to their character, or to the attainment of public confidence, I am willing to admit that the one now offered, is as unexceptionable as any it would be likely to propose.

In this view however, I lay wholly out of sight the report of the committee, by which it is accompanied and introduced. The course advocated in that report, is, in my opinion, loathsome; the spirit it breathes disgraceful; the temper it is likely to inspire, neither calculated to regain the rights we have lost, nor to preserve those which remain to us. It is an established maxim, that, in adopting a resolution offered by a committee in this house, no member is pledged to support the reasoning, or made sponsor for the facts which they have seen fit to insert it. I exercise, therefore a common right, when I subscribe to the resolution, not on the principles of the committee; but on those which obviously result from its terms; and are the plain meaning of its expressions.

I agree to this resolution, because, in my apprehension it offers a solemn pledge to this nation;—a pledge not to be mistaken, and not to be evaded, that the present system of public measures shall be totally abandoned. Adopt it, and there is an end of the policy of deserting our rights under pretence of maintaining them. Adopt it and we no longer yield at the beck of haughty belligerents the right of navigating the ocean, that choice inheritance bequeathed to us by our fathers. Adopt it; and there is a termination of that base and abject submission by which this country has for these eleven months been disgraced and brought to the brink of ruin.

That the natural import and necessary implication of the terms of this resolution are such as I have suggested will be apparent from a very transient consideration. What do its terms necessarily include? they contain an *assertion and a pledge*. The assertion is, that the edicts of Great-Britain and France are contrary to our rights, honor and independence. The pledge is, that we will not submit to them.

Concerning the assertion, contained in this resolution I would say nothing, were it not that I fear that those who have so long been in the habit of looking at the orders and decrees of foreign powers as the measure of the rights of our own citizens; and been accustomed, in direct subserviency to them, of prohibiting commerce altogether, might apprehend that there was some lurking danger in such an assertion. They may be assured there can be nothing more harmless. Neither Great-Britain nor France ever pretended that those edicts, on the principle of imperious necessity, which admits the injustice done, at the very instant of executing the act of oppression. No gentleman need have any difficulty in sewing his courage up to this assertion. Neither of the belligerents will contradict it. Mr. Turreau and Mr. Erskine will both of them counter-sign the declaration to-morrow.

With respect to the pledge contained in this resolution, understood according to its true import, it is a glorious one. It opens new prospects. It promises a change in the disposition of this house. It is a solemn assurance to the nation, that it will no longer submit to these edicts.

It remains for us, therefore, to consider what submission is, and what the pledge not to submit implies.

One man submits to the order, decree, or edict of another, when he does that thing which such order, decree or edict commands; or when he admits to do that thing, which such order, decree or edict prohibits. This then, is submission. It is to do as we are bidden. It is to take the will of another as the measure of our rights. It is to yield to his power; to go where he directs, or to refrain from going where he forbids us.

If this be submission, then the pledge not to submit implies the reverse of all this. It is a solemn declaration, that we will not do that thing, which such order, decree, or edict commands, or that we will do what it prohibits.—This, then, is freedom. This is honor. This is independence. It consists in taking the nature of things and not the will of another, as the measure of our rights. What God and nature have offered us, we will enjoy in despite of the commands, regardless of the menaces of iniquitous power.

Let us apply these correct and undeniable principles to the edicts of Great-Britain and France, and the consequent abandonment of the ocean by the American Government. The decrees of France prohibit us from trading with Great-Britain. The orders of Great-Britain prohibit us from trading with France. And what do we? Why—in direct

subserviency to the edicts of each, we prohibit our citizens from trading with either. We do more; as if unqualified submission was not humiliating enough, we descend to an act of supererogation in servility; we abandon trade altogether; we not only refrain from that particular trade, which their respective edicts proscribe, but lest the ingenuity of our merchants should enable them to evade their operation, to make submission doubly sure, the American government virtually re-enact the edicts of the belligerents and abandon all the trade, which notwithstanding the practical effects of their edicts, remained to us. The same conclusion will result if we consider our embargo in relation to the objects of this belligerent policy. France, by her edicts would compress Great-Britain, by destroying her commerce and cutting off her supplies. All the continent of Europe in the hand of Bonaparte is made subservient to this policy. The embargo laws of the United States in its operation, is an union with this continental coalition against British commerce, at the very moment most auspicious to its success.—Can any thing be more in direct subserviency to the views of the French Emperor? If we consider the orders of Great-Britain the result will be the same. I proceed at present on the supposition of a perfect impartiality in our administration towards both belligerents, so far as relates to the embargo law. Great-Britain had two objects in issuing her orders. First to excite discontent in the people of the continent, by depriving them of their accustomed colonial supplies. Second, to secure to herself that commerce of which she deprived neutrals. Our embargo co-operates with the British views in both respects. By our dereliction of the ocean, the continent is much more deprived of the advantages of commerce, than it would be possible for the British navy to effect, and by removing our competition, all the commerce of the continent, which can be forced, is wholly left to be reaped by Great-Britain. The language of each sovereign, is in direct conformity to these ideas.—Napoleon tells the American minister virtually that we are very good Americans; that although he will not allow the property he has in his hands to escape him, nor desist from burning and capturing our vessels on every occasion, yet that he is thus far satisfied with our co-operation. And what is the language of George the third. When our minister presents to his consideration the embargo laws. Is it *Le Roy s'avisera*? The King will reflect upon them.—No it is the pure language of Royal approbation. *Le Roy le veut*.—The King wills it. Were you colonies he could expect no more. His subjects as inevitably get that commerce which you abandon, as the water will certainly run into the only channel which remains after all the others are obstructed. In whatever point of view you consider these embargo laws in relation to those edicts and decrees, we shall find them co-operating with each belligerent in its policy. In this way, I grant our conduct may be impartial; but what has become of our American rights to navigate the ocean? they are abandoned in strict conformity to the decrees of both belligerents. This resolution declares that we will no longer submit to such degrading humiliation. Little as I relish, I will take it as the harbinger of a new day; the pledge of a new system of measures.

Perhaps, here, in strictness, I ought to close my observations. But the report of the committee, contrary to what I deem the principle of the resolution, unquestionably recommended the continuance of the embargo laws. And such is the state of the nation, and in particular that portion of it, which in part I represent, under their oppression, that I cannot refrain from submitting some considerations on that subject.

When I enter on the subject of the embargo, I am struck with wonder at the very threshold. I know not with what words to express my astonishment. At the time I departed from Massachusetts, if there was an impression, which I thought universal, it was, that at the commencement of this session an end would be put to this measure. The opinion was not so much that it would be terminated, as that it was then at an end. Sir, the prevailing sentiment, according to my apprehension, was stronger than this—even that the pressure was so great that it could not possibly be endured; that it would soon be absolutely insupportable. And this opinion, as I then had reason to believe, was not confined to any one class or description, or party—that even those, who were friends of the existing administration, and unwilling to abandon it, were yet satisfied that a sufficient trial had been given to this measure. With these impressions I arrive in this city. I hear the enchantations of the great enchanter. I feel his spell. I see the legislative machinery begin to move. The scene opens. And I am commanded to forget all my recollections, to disbelieve the evidence of my senses, to contradict what I have seen, and heard, and felt. I hear that all this discontent was mere party clamour; electioneering artifice; that the people of New-England are able and willing to endure this embargo for an indefinite, unlimited period longer; some say for six months; some a year; some two years.

The gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. Macon) told us that he preferred three years embargo to a war. And the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Clopton) said expressly

that he hoped we should never allow our vessels to go upon the ocean again until the orders and decrees of the belligerents were rescinded. In plain English, until France and Great-Britain should, in their condescension, permit. Good Heavens! Mr. Chairman, are men mad? Is this house touched with that insanity which is the never failing precursor of the intention of heaven to destroy? The people of New-England, after eleven months deprivation of the ocean, to be commanded still longer to abandon it, for an undefined period; to hold their unalienable rights, at the tenure of the will of Britain or of Bonaparte? A people commercial in all aspects, in all their relations, in all their hopes, in all their recollections of the past, in all their prospects of the future;—a people whose first love was the ocean, the choice of their childhood, the approbation of many years, the precious inheritance of their fathers, in the midst of their success, in the moment of the most exquisite perception of commercial prosperity, to be commanded to abandon it, not for a time limited; but for a time unlimited; not until they can be prepared to defend themselves there, (for that is not pretended) but until their rivals recede from it; not until their necessities require, but until foreign nations permit! I am lost in astonishment, Mr. Chairman. I have not words to express the matchless absurdity of this attempt. I have no tongue to express the swift and headlong destruction, which a blind perseverance in such a system must bring upon this nation.

But men from New-England, representatives on this floor, equally with myself the constitutional guardians of her interests, differ from me in these opinions. My honorable colleague (Mr. Bacon) took occasion, in secret session, to deny that there did exist all that discontent and distress, which I had attempted, in an humble way to describe. He told us he had travelled in Massachusetts, that the people were not thus dissatisfied, that the embargo had not produced any such tragical effects. Really, sir, my honorable colleague has travelled. All the way from Stockbridge to Hudson; from Berkshire to Boston; from inn to inn; from county court to county court; and doubtless he collected all that important information, which an acute intelligence never fails to retain on such occasions. He found tea, sugar, salt, W. I. rum and molasses dearer; beef, pork, butter and cheese cheaper. Reflection enabled him to arrive at this difficult result, that in this way the evil and the good of the embargo equalize one another. But has my honorable colleague travelled on the seaboard? Has he witnessed the state of our cities? Has he seen our ships rotting at our wharves: our wharves deserted, our stores tenantless, our streets bereft of active business; industry forsaking her beloved haunts; and hope fled away from places where she had from earliest times been accustomed to make and to fulfil her most precious promises? Has he conversed with the merchant, and heard the tale of his embarrassments—his capital arrested in his hands, forbidden by your laws to resort to a market, with property four times sufficient to discharge all his engagements, necessitated to hang on the precarious mercy of monied institutions for that indulgence, which preserves him from stopping payment, the first step towards bankruptcy? Has he conversed with our mechanics? Has he seen him either destitute of employment or obliged to go seek it in labours odious to him, because he was not educated to them? That mechanic, who the day before this embargo passed, the very day that you took this bit, and rolled it like a sweet morsel under your tongue, had more business than he had hands, or time, or thought to employ in it, now soliciting at reduced prices that employment which the rich, owing to the uncertainty in which your laws have involved their capital, cannot afford. I could heighten this picture. I could shew you labouring poor in the alms-house, and willing industry dependent upon charity. But I confine myself to particulars, which have fallen under my own observation, and of which ten thousand suffering individuals on the seaboard of New-England, are living witnesses that here is nothing fictitious.

Mr. Chairman.—Other Gentlemen must take their responsibilities—I shall take mine. THIS EMBARGO MUST BE REPEALED. You cannot enforce it for any important period of time longer. When I speak of your inability to enforce this law, let not gentlemen misunderstand me. I mean not to intimate insurrections or open defiance of them. Although it is impossible to foresee in what acts, that "oppression will finally terminate, which, we are told "makes wise men mad." I speak of inability resulting from very different causes.

The gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. Macon) exclaimed the other day in a strain of patriotic ardour, "What, shall not our laws be executed? Shall their authority be defied? I am for enforcing them at every hazard. I honour that gentleman's zeal; and I mean no deviation from that true respect I entertain for him, when I tell him, that in this instance "his zeal is not according to knowledge."

I ask this house, is there no control to its authority, is there no limit to the power of this national legislature? I hope I shall offend no man, when I intimate that two limits