

PORTSMOUTH ORACLE.

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SPEECH

OF THE
HON. WILLIAM REED,
OF MASSACHUSETTS,
On the Bill for Repealing the
EMBARGO & NON-IMPORTATION ACTS.

MR. CHAIRMAN,

ON no occasion since I have had the honor of a seat in this house, which has been during the period of that awful transition of our country; from the enjoyment of the blessings of peace and prosperity, in a degree unexampled in the history of the world; to those scenes of imbecile, wasteful, disastrous and distressing war, that have within this short period, passed before us, and need not now be repeated; and which, but for the brilliant successes of our little navy, (that precious relic of better days,) would have sunk the mind of every patriot, in the slough of despair—have I been called to act on any proposition of more doubtful expediency, than is embraced by the bill now before us.

It has been no small relief to my mind that the *misaken policy* of converting the resources of the country, in the unrestrained enterprise of our citizens, into the weapons of offensive and defensive war, by restrictions as impolitic as unnatural, would find its grave in the consequences it would inevitably bring down upon its authors; who while they hold the responsible station of "riding on the whirlwind and directing the storm of war" they have raised; must be taught from experience, generally a dear school. Those impressive lessons, which were urged with so much sensibility, by that unfortunate but unheeded class of men, (the merchants,) whose interest anticipated so justly their impolicy and inefficacy. Nor can I withhold entirely, the expression of those feelings of honest triumph; sir, I mean not ostentatious boasting, at the dawn of that day, which is to consign the last relic of a visionary and ruinous policy, to the tomb of "all the Cypriotes." And did it appear to me, sir, (said Mr. Reed) that more than the dawn of this glorious day had arrived, and that it had reached its meridian splendor, I should have felt much less, if at all, the necessity which now compels me reluctantly, to abandon the course I have generally pursued of giving a silent vote on the passage of this bill. But, sir, when I find in the message of the President, recommending this new course of policy, and in the concurrent report which has been presented by the eloquent chairman of the committee of foreign relations—and also in the argument which he has negated to this committee, for the adoption of this bill—no other reason assigned, but the late changes in the circumstances of friendly European powers—changes, which as far as I have been able to ascertain, are in every case unfavorable to the extension of American commerce. Let us briefly examine, sir, what these changes are—Russia and Sweden in the north, and Spain and Portugal in the south of Europe, are the same! Denmark, Holland, all Germany and Italy, have indeed, changed from the paramount influence of France *our ally*; to the same degree of influence on the part of England *our enemy*. How these changes are considered favorable, I am at a loss to discern. France has also changed her attitude, but it alters not her relative situation with this country, unless we connect this expiring system, with the continental system of Bonaparte, now expiring with the allies, which I presume is not intended by the friends of this bill.

Therefore, sir, as I cannot trace the reasons assigned, to any tenable basis, I am constrained to attribute this bill, rather to the financial necessities of the day, than a correction of the theory on the subject of commercial regulations. Indeed, sir, I tremble, lest the only benefit I had ever anticipated, for the immense sacrifices on this experiment, viz. a practical demonstration of the axiom "that interested individuals are the best judges of their own affairs, and that much legislation error distracts and destroys commerce," which requires only the aid of steady laws for its protection is about to be lost by a premature relinquishment of it. Lest however I should be misunderstood in the argument, I shall presently urge against the expediency of repealing these laws at this moment—as having changed my views of their real character—I beg leave here to remark, that the impressions, which at the first resort to them, were made upon my mind, have since been too strongly confirmed by their ruinous consequences on our country

generally, as well as on the State I have the honor to represent, ever to be effaced—and especially so, on most of my fellow citizens dependent on the operations of commerce, whose distresses have long since sickened me, to loathing, of every thing like commercial restrictions.

Yet sir, while I feel this conviction so deeply, I cannot overlook the great number of respectable men, in and out of this House, whose influence has so long predominated in the councils of this nation—that are not yet satisfied with the experiment. I am disinclined to its removal, at the moment when the correction of the public mind is in rapid progression, and when a short time without any new sacrifice, will so far cleanse the body politic, as to leave no further hopes, to the expedients of quackery.

Convinced too, as I am, sir, that a firm adherence to a favorite policy, until satisfied of its true character, is not less an evidence of the integrity in one class than its abandonment by others, also its former friends, I do expect that a short time will number all those who now adhere to it with the majority; whom I expect, on the final passage of this bill, to renounce, with genuine magnanimity, their once plighted faith. The conviction, that is slowly made, is not the less deserving of confidence.

Therefore, as in time of war, with a great naval power, that blockades our whole coast, nothing more will be permitted to pass our enemy, but what suits his own convenience, no essential relief can be given to the suffering citizens of this country. With all my convictions against the policy I would rather endure a little longer, than hazard so much by its repeal at this time.

But, sir, the half is not told you, and had it been the embargo only that was affected by this bill, the advantages to arise from the return of our coasting trade unshackled, and the comforts of our citizens, relieved from the pestering group of official pimps and informers, would have compensated for the repeal of that act alone, was it not connected with other very important considerations—and would also have saved me the pain of separation from my political friends on this question: with whom it is my pride and happiness generally to act, and whose candor and charity I solicit on this occasion. Differing from whom, nothing but the responsibility of my station, and the firm conviction of my own judgment, could sustain me in voting against a measure, which is hailed by them; and I should rejoice to have it so prove, as the precursor of that millennium in the political and commercial world we have so long and ardently desired.

Sir, I have before alluded to other considerations that have still greater weight on my mind, than merely the danger of recurring, at a future day, to the embargo policy. I will proceed briefly to state them, and in doing this I shall attempt little more than an examination of the natural effects of our relative situation with the enemy, under the repeal now contemplated.

It is a fact well known, and is shown by the reports from the Secretary of the Treasury, that in times of peace and free trade, our exportations to England fell several millions annually, short of our imports of her manufactures; the balance of which was supplied from the excess of our exports to the continent. It is also true, that since the enactment of the non-importation act against England only, that is, since the proclamation of the President, of the 2d Nov. 1810, exchange has steadily been in favor of this country, from 6 to 20 per cent. This is stated to show what must be the natural and inevitable consequence of opening our ports, for the unrestrained importation of her manufactures, which it will be for her interest to encourage. Is it not obvious, that while under the neutral flag (at this time another term for her own, whitewashed) they will permit the export, under the general blockade, only of such raw materials as may supply their own wants, and nothing for your benefit; and that the consequence must be the draining, to the last dollar, the specie of this country, in payment of the balance for their manufactures; it is unavoidable. I am aware, sir, that I shall be answered, that we have on our table a bill to prevent the exportation of specie. But this does not satisfy me; until the nature of man is changed, it cannot be executed. It is but a remnant of this restrictive policy, and an awkward apology for its abandonment, when, from its former friends, none is necessary.

We have for years been stung with the clamor of British monopoly. May it now be asked, what has England attempted, that our measures for years past have not assisted her to accomplish? We complained that she dreaded us as

rivals, and modestly invited, under an embargo of eighteen months, to husband our resources; and by our state of war, have thrown into her hands, the commerce of the world, and lest this should not satisfy her, we now propose to add thereto the trade of this country, with every facility, in our power to give, for its accomplishment. What more can we do? What inducement can we hold out to her for peace with us? I know of none. Indeed, sir, it seems to me the pledge of interminable war, unless our enemy, in pity to the good people of this country, shall grant us peace, in defiance of their own interest. And when in addition to this, they have tried the benefits of that trade, which in the hands of the citizens of this country, yielded, in freight only, the annual value of more than thirty millions of dollars, I can see in it, only a boon to the enemy to continue the war, until they get our last dollar, and the last timber of our ships shall rot at the wharves.

These reasons are sufficient, sir, to induce me to vote against the bill at this time, and to urge this committee not to adopt a measure fraught with such important consequences, but to wait until we shall hear from our ministers of peace at Gottenburgh, with which we all hope will release our country of its greatest curse—the war; when we may hope to avoid not only these serious evils, but with them too, the disgrace that inevitably attaches to any government pursuing a policy so vacillating as we shall by passing this bill. I must beg the patience of the committee, while I call their attention to the message of the President on the 20th July, 1813. It is as follows:

"There being sufficient ground to infer, that it is the purpose of the enemy to confine with the blockade of ports, Spanish fisheries in central waters, or to British vessels in neutral dominions, whereby they may drain into our country the precise kind and quantity of exports essential to their wants, whilst its principal resources remain unabstracted; keeping in view also the insidious discriminations between the different ports in the United States; and as such a system, if not counteracted, will have the effect of diminishing very materially the pressure of the war on the enemy, and encouraging a perseverance in it, at the same time, it will have the general commerce of the United States under all the pressure the enemy can impose, thus subjecting us much to British monopoly, and amounting to an immediate and effectual prohibition of exports limited to a convenient day in their next session, removable in the mean time, in the event of a cessation of the blockade of our ports."

With your leave, sir, I will finish reading the few authorities I feel constrained to bring to the attention of the house on this occasion. The next is the message of the 9th December last, in which I shall only read the two first and the last paragraph, viz.

"The tendency of our commercial and navigation laws, in their present state, to favor the enemy, and thereby prolong the war, is more and more developed by experience. Supplies of the most essential kinds that our navy, not only to British ports and armies at a distance, but the armies in our neighborhood, and which our own are contending, derive from our ports and outlets a substance obtainable with difficulty, if at all, from other sources. Even the fleets and troops entering our harbors and waters, are by like supplies, recommodated and encouraged in their predatory and intrusive warfare."

"Abuse having a like tendency take place in our import trade. British fabrics and profits find their way into our port, under the name and from the parts of other countries; and often in British vessels disguised as neutral, by false colors and papers."

"To shew, as much as possible, the duration of the war it is indispensable that the enemy should feel all the pressure that can be given to it; and the restraints having that tendency, will be borne with the greater cheerfulness by all good citizens, as the restraints will affect those most, who are most ready to sacrifice the interest of their country in pursuit of their own."

Sir, I will not detain you nor the committee long by a laborious commentary on these two papers; they are in the hands of every one, and every one can understand them; nor shall I make professions of unbounded confidence in the President—it is not necessary for my present purpose; but if the facts stated in them were true when presented to this congress for their consideration, and nobody ever denied the facts, they are equally true now—and if experience developed their necessity in December, reason teaches every man that the same necessity exists in greater force now than it did then—and if *indispensable* then, to bring the war to a speedy issue, they are more so now.

Sir, although, as a partisan, I feel no personal responsibility of the measures of the administration, I cannot, nay, I would not but be an American, for "with all her faults, I love thee," and I cannot separate myself, as such from the disgrace that attaches to such vacillating conduct. Would to heaven they were not on record, but they are, and my vote must be so too, I'll have no share in an act so humiliating, so degrading to my country.

Translations from French Papers.

PARIS, Feb. 27.—The colours recently taken by the Emperor from the allied armies, were this day, presented to the Empress Queen and Regent in great state, by his excellency the minister of war, who addressed her majesty in the following words:

MADAM—"New orders from the Emperor call me before your majesty, to lay at your feet new trophies taken from the enemy of France."

"At the time when the Saracens were defeated by Charles Martel, in the plains of Tours and Poitiers, the capital was adorned with the spoils of a nation only: now, madam, that no longer dangers than those with which France was then threatened, have brought forth more important results, and which were attended with more difficulty to obtain, your august spouse tenders you the homage of these colours, taken from the three great powers of Europe."

"Since an insatiable blindness has raised against us so many nations, those even which France had placed in a state of independence, and for which she made such great sacrifices, may it not be said that these colours have been conquered from the whole of Europe?"

"When our enemies, listening to no other counsel but revenge in spite of the ordinary rules of war, determined upon penetrating into this Empire, leaving behind them the vast circuit of strong places which encompass them on all sides; when they attempted, by a daring measure, to render themselves masters of the capital without providing the means of effecting their retreat amidst a population exasperated by their conduct; how is it that acquainted as they are with the genius, talents and character of the Emperor, they were not deterred from this gigantic enterprise? In a few days they have learnt the error of their calculations."

"The bold and rapid operations which have just defeated their designs, have impressed the mind of every one, with the glorious recollection of the memorable campaign of Italy in the year 5, and of those that have followed it."

"It is against the best (*élite*) of the troops collected against us, at the battles of Montmirail and Vauchamp and the engagement at Montereau, that the ten colours which I present to your majesty on the part of the Emperor, have been taken."

"These pledges of French valor, are for us the preface of new and still greater successes, should the obstinacy of the enemy prolong the war. This noble hope is in the heart of all Frenchmen. You participate it, Madam; you who, ever confident in the genius of your august consort, in the efforts and love of the nation, have continued to display, in all the circumstances of this war, a steadfastness of soul and virtues worthy of the admiration of Europe & of posterity."

Her Majesty answered: "M. the duke of Feltra, minister of war, I behold with lively emotion these trophies which you present to me by order of the Emperor, my august consort."

"They are in my eye the pledges of the safety of the country. Let all Frenchmen rise in arms at their aspect! Let them flock round their monarch and their father! Their courage, led by his genius, shall have soon completed the deliverance of our territory."

Of these ten colours there is one Austrian, four Prussian, and 5 Russian; they were brought to Paris by Baron de Mortemart, officer of ordnance of his majesty the Emperor.

PREFECTURE OF THE SEINE.

Extracts from the representations made by the Deputies from the cities of Montreuil, Senlis, Nogent and Chateau Thierry to the Municipal Body of Paris, of the progress and proceedings of the Allies in their cities:

The Municipal Council of Senlis say:

"The 4th of Feb. we had the misfortune of being invaded by 2000 Cossacks and three squadrons of Prussian light horse. Vexations of every kind, requisitions on requisitions, the most extravagant demands succeeding each other. Such was their conduct. This first visit of the enemy, which lasted 4 days, did more harm to our city than 10,000 regular troops would have done in 15 days. No more safety for our citizens—no more respect for women.—Nevertheless this first misfortune would have been forgotten, if conquered a second time by an enemy much more numerous, they had not confirmed our miseries. It was then, gentlemen, that we felt most deeply our painful situation—robbery, rapes, horrid treatment, was the order of the day; and which it was impossible to satisfy, became for our enemies a pretext to exercise on our weak and inoffensive inhabitants the most abominable vexations."

In the intoxication with which their ephemeral success inspired them, the Russians publicly announced their speedy entrance into Paris, and their intention to carry away all the precious monuments—immortal trophies of our victories; to give Paris up to pillage; to send all our women to people their horrid deferts; to blow up the

Thuileries; and to make, in one word, the feat of the fine arts but one heap of ruins.

Such is the faithful picture of the facts of which we have been the forrowing victims; and we can assure you gentlemen, that notwithstanding the horror which we feel, it is rather short of the truth than exaggerated.

From the National Intelligencer.

It is with great satisfaction we are enabled to state, that the public authorities of the U. States and G. Britain are relaxing in their measures of retaliation. In consequence of the indulgence shown to Gen. W. in the permission granted to him by Sir George Prevost to return for a time to his home, the President immediately extended a like indulgence to some British officers similarly situated. About the period that our executive was thus manifesting his willingness to keep pace with the adversary in acts tending to promote the cause of humanity, Sir George Prevost, without any knowledge of the fact, allowed Col. Jewis and Maj. Madison to leave Quebec, on parole, for the United States: And, in pursuance of the same philanthropic spirit, the President, we understand, has given direction for the discharge, on parole, of all British officers, now in custody as hostages, on a permission for them to proceed to Canada. Thus, the retaliatory system, which, at its commencement, wore a menacing and terrible appearance, is gradually losing its aspect of ferocity; and in a way, too, which promises to leave little or no irritation on either side. The indulgences granted to the hostages, by the public authorities both in Canada and the United States, are voluntary acts of benevolence, and have been sufficiently simultaneous to deprive either government of the exclusive merit of having commenced them.

NEW-LONDON, APRIL 27.

A few days since, two men in a boat from this place, bound into Connecticut River for fish, were taken on board the enemy's ships, and examined as touching *Torpædoes*.

They were informed they had the names of most of those concerned in the *Torpædoes*—and their not being enrolled, they should be dismissed. One of them was put in irons for a short time; otherwise their treatment was as well as they wished, particularly on board the *Sylph* sloop of war.

The officers are much enraged and alarmed by the *Torpædoes*. A few weeks since one exploded under the spritfall yard of *La Hogue*, and threw a volume of water over her foretop.

In our last we mentioned, that Com. Decatur had it in his option to command the *Guerriere* or *President*. Understanding an impression has in consequence gone abroad, that the Secretary of the Navy has in this case given the preference to Com. Decatur, we feel it our duty to state the relative facts. Com. Rodgers, immediately on his arrival from his last cruise, received from the Secretary of the Navy, an offer of the command of the *Guerriere*, which ship it was believed could be made ready for sea, at an earlier period than the *President*. Under which expectation the Commodore accepted of the command of the *Guerriere*; but on his arrival at Philadelphia, finding the *Guerriere* not in that state of forwardness which he had expected, he informed the Secretary that he preferred retaining the command of the *President*. But in the interim the Secretary had preferred the *President* to Com. Decatur. Thus circumstanced, Com. Rodgers courteously offered to Com. Decatur his choice of the ships, and he has chosen the *President*. Com. Rodgers will command the *Guerriere*. The Commodore, we understand, will take their officers and crews with them.

NEWS OF THE ESSEX FRIGATE.

A gentleman, passenger in a Spanish brig, s/s *Providence*, from the Havana, communicates the following:—22d ult. in 20 fathoms water, off the Cape of the Delaware, was boarded by the *Belvidera*, from Matanzas, bound to Providence. The *Belvidera* had recaptured, that day, the ship *New-Zealand*, prize to the U. S. frigate *Essex*; and the gentleman, previous to being put on board the said brig, had conversed with the prize master of the *N. Z.* from whom he obtained the following information, relative to the *Essex*. The *New-Zealand* parted from the *Essex* 10th Jan. last—where, the prize master, would not state; he had on board a cargo of 2300 barrels oil, and despatches from Capt. Porter, which were destroyed, previous to being recaptured. The *Essex* had captured altogether 22 full (ships and brigs,) and had cruising in co. with her 2 ships of 22 guns each, and 2 brigs of 16 guns each. Capt. Porter had furnished 3 small islands on the coast, in the vicinity of a creek, (where he had hauled up his prizes and dismantled them,) which, with the force of the *Essex* and her armaments, he felt himself perfectly safe from any force that might be brought against him in that quarter. The officers and crew of the *Essex* were all in good health. they had plenty of ammunition and provisions, and found men plenty if no want experienced for any thing. The *Essex* had not fallen in with a British cruiser during the time she had been in those seas, and had not been molested by any body; in fact, she had the sole command, and courted in those seas.