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CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5.

DEBATE on fortifying ports and harbors, concluded.

MR. G. W. CAMPBELL said he was in favor of filling the blank with 150,000, as from all the official information before the House, this appeared to be the best mode of defence which had been devised. He observed that some time since a majority of the House had considered the gun boat system as the best means of defence. He would ask gentlemen who were then in favor of this system, and were now opposed to it, what reasons they had for their change of opinion. If the President and heads of departments were of opinion that such a number of gun boats was necessary, as had been named, he would ask them what reasons they had for thinking a smaller number sufficient; and whether the mere *ipse dixit* of a member of this House ought to stand in competition with the deliberative opinion of the heads of departments? They were peculiarly responsible to the nation, and must be considered as having taken more pains to inform themselves on such a subject than an individual member of the House.

Mr. C. said he considered some of the arguments urged on this occasion unfair. It had been asked what comparison there was between appropriating 20,000 dollars for the protection of our ports and harbors, and 150,000 for building gun boats? The truth was, that for repairing our ports and harbours, there had been appropriated not merely 20,000 dollars, but at least half a million, a considerable part of which remained unexpended, to which the sum of 20,000 dollars was only proposed to be added. Mr. C. said, as he understood the subject, gun boats were intended to supply the deficiency existing in other fortifications. It was the opinion of some of our best informed men that some of our ports could not be defended by batteries, and the system of gun boats was consequently brought in aid of fortifications. But it was asked whether we should build these boats without manning them? Mr. Campbell said he could scarcely view this as a serious argument. Was the enquiry made with regard to batteries? The answer made by gentlemen on that subject is, that in case of danger we will mann them. The same answer might be given in the case of gun boats. The answer was as complete in one case as in the other. The only true enquiry was, whether in case of an attack we have a sufficient number of gun boats? It was true they might rot—and so also might frigates and fortifications. If this mode of arguing was correct, it afforded sufficient grounds for putting down all the armed vessels of the U. States.

MR. PITKIN, in reply to Mr. Fisk, observed, that he had compared the estimates of a frigate and gun boats, from which he inferred that the equipment and annual expence of a frigate of 44 guns, compared to that of gun boats, was as eight to one.

MR. ELLIOT said that if the opinion of the President should be complied with there would be one hundred and twenty nine gun boats built, which in actual service would transcend the expence of the navy of the U. S. and would cost more than a million of dollars. Mr. E. said he considered the reproach cast upon those who were formerly the advocates of gun boats as strong evidence of their inutility. Gun boats had been lately thought much of—what was the result? That gun boats might be considered as a kind of vessel guarding a little deposit of national spirit, if any there was left to put on board; but as soon as they were assailed by the wind or the waves, their maiden purity was gone. They were of no use whenever there was wind or tide; and could only float in a time of profound tranquility.

MR. ALSTON said he possessed little information with regard to the advantages or disadvantages that were likely to flow from building the number of gun boats that was proposed. He merely rose to ask the attention of gentlemen to the grounds taken at the last session. The building of gun boats had been instituted on the recommendation of the President made at the last session. Gentlemen would there find the reasons on which that system had been begun. They were not intended to be sent afloat on the ocean, to commit depredation or attack vessels at sea, but as an aid and support to our fortifications; and to prevent an enemy from annoying our sea ports. It was, he believed, the opinion of the House at the last session, that gun boats constituted the best system that could be devised for this purpose. Mr. A. said he had since seen no reason to change his opinion on this subject. He trusted in God the time would not arrive when these gun boats would be called into operation. But could this in fairness be considered as an argument against them? This system of defence having been adopted, before it was abandoned gentlemen ought to shew their inutility. The language of the President on this subject was stronger than any he could use. He would therefore take the liberty of laying it before the House.

"I cannot therefore but recommend such preparations as circumstances call for. The first object is to place our sea port towns out of the danger of insult. Measures have been already taken for furnishing them with heavy cannon for the service of such land batteries as may make a part of their defence against armed vessels approaching them. In aid of these it is desirable we should have a competent number of gun boats, and the number to be competent must be considerable."

MR. SMILIE said he had voted for the postponement to give gentlemen an opportunity of getting information. He had not heard a single gentleman on either side profess to have any information with regard to the power of gun boats. Was it not then singular, that when this measure was recommended by the proper officer, and every member acknowledged his ignorance, that it should be objected to. It was not their duty to be minutely acquainted on the subject. It was the duty of the executive, and he was of opinion that gun boats would be the most effectual system of defence. Are gentlemen resolved to do nothing until they themselves understand the subject? Mr. S. said for his part, as he was unacquainted with the subject, he would respect the opinions of those who were best acquainted with it. He said he had been informed that our naval officers were of opinion that gun boats were the best system of defence, and it was evident that so far as they had been under the necessity of using them, they had not been disappointed in their expectations.

Mr. EARLY moved to postpone the further consideration of the resolution until this day week.

Mr. LLOYD said he should have no objection to the postponement, if he knew any mode of obtaining the information desired. It appeared that the committee had applied to the Secretary of the Navy, who ought to possess full information on the subject. What was his reply? Waving altogether the expression of his own opinion, he merely confines himself to stating that the President thinks it expedient to build sixty additional gun boats. Whence then were they to get the information that was desired, to enable them to determine whether gun boats are a proper defence for the U. S.? They might apply to the President or the Secretary of the navy, and get information from them that they think them necessary. Mr. Lloyd however said that he was of opinion that they ought to judge on this subject from what had already taken place. For himself he was free to declare that he was opposed to the gun boat system. He had carefully attended to the arguments of gentlemen, and to what did they amount? Have they adduced an argument to shew their utility, or produced an instance to shew where they have been useful? It has been said that their utility is established by the use made of them against Tripoli. But he would ask whether they would have been of any use if the vessels of Tripoli had left the shore? It was admitted that gun boats were not useful on the ocean. It was evident then that they were building a navy for a state of perfect calm. And were gentlemen disposed to expend millions for vessels that would be only useful under such circumstances?

It is said however that they will aid our fortifications. To this however it might be replied, that it would be high time to build them after the erection of the fortifications. Several years have elapsed since the first gun boats have been built, and what have they done? Have they in a single instance proved themselves to be of the least utility? Let us then, until they are proved to be useful, refrain from building any more.

Mr. Lloyd concluded by observing that when he heard arguments weak as these to induce them to adopt this measure, they were sufficiently strong to convince him that it ought not to be adopted.

Mr. EARLY observed that the only information received from the executive on this subject was as to the number of gun boats in their opinion requisite. This was not the point on which at present they wished for information. He added that if they got no further information, he should withhold his vote from giving a single cent for this purpose.

MR. MUMFORD. The gentlemen from N. Carolina on my right, said that if any gentleman can shew us any better mode of defence we shall be glad to hear it, and although I think it incumbent on him to shew us the utility of gun boats, I will not detain the House but a few minutes to recommend what I conceive to be a far better mode of defence, I mean solid and durable fortifications that will last for ages; and block ships similar to the draft now held in my hand, and which any gentleman may examine at his leisure if he chuses. Sir, the experience off Copenhagen is an evidence of their *real utility*; witness the engagement with the British fleet and the Crown battery (somewhat similar to the plan of Montalembert recommended by me in debate of yesterday) and the block ships. That fleet was actually silenced, and nothing saved the proud navy of old England on that memorable day but the game of flag of truce played off so successfully, by the hero of Trafalgar—and when in order I shall move to adopt those block ships in place of gun boats.

MR. ELMER said he should vote against the postponement, as he knew of no information that could be obtained which would be of any service. Gentlemen in favor of this measure seem to confide solely in executive information. If they were thus disposed to appropriate money whenever the executive required it—be it so. He however believed that it was the duty of the House to get all the information they could obtain, and to act on their own judgment, and he should withhold his assent from completing the system begun the last year. Mr. Elmer here suggested as the best mode of defending the port of N. York, to fill up the channel within 15 or 20 feet of high water mark.

MR. CHANDLER said he was in favor of the system of defence by gun boats; but since the gentleman from New York had proposed a new system of defence, he thought it would be best for the present to postpone the subject; and in the mean time to call on the Secretary of War to state what system had been adopted and pursued for defending the port of New York.

MR. TALLMADGE said the question before the House had no connection with the defence of New York—it was a proposition for building gun boats. Having been on the select committee that brought in these resolutions, he thought it proper to state that there had not in that committee been an unanimous opinion in favor of gun boats. He was himself entirely hostile to the measure. He saw no necessity for adding to the number already built, or authorized to be erected. They had 13 gun boats fit for service, and 56 would be soon launched. It would seem to him better to comport with the system of economy, in the first instance to finish and prepare these fifty-six for service. No reason had been assigned for the additional sixty that had been proposed, but the mere opinion of the President. Mr. T. said he did not wish to call in question the high authority attached to the opinion of the President, but he would wish to know whether any naval officer had recommended gun boats as a proper defence for the country. He did believe there were some particular circumstances under which they would be useful, and under this impression he had hitherto voted. But when he saw nothing but gun boats called for, he was placed under the necessity of refusing to grant a single dollar. It appeared as if they were contemplated to be relied on as the exclusive defence of the U. S. and if it were intended to let the frigates rot. He was opposed to the postponement, as he did not see the probability of obtaining any useful information not already before the House.

MR. FISK said he was sorry to detain the House a moment longer. The gentleman from Connecticut had observed that he had fallen into a great mistake when he said the expence of eighteen gun boats was not more than that of one frigate. He had read a letter from the Secretary of the Navy to shew the comparative expence of gun boat No 1. and the frigate Boston; but in this statement he had altogether forgotten to mention the expence of the marines. There was another circumstance which the gentleman had failed to notice, viz.—that gun boat No. 1, had cost between 10 and 11,000 dollars, and required about 40 men to man her, while the boats at present proposed to be built would only require 5,000 dolls. and between a half and two-thirds of that number of men. On attending to these circumstances he would find that his estimate was very moderate, and that he might have said that a frigate would cost as much as twenty instead of eighteen gun boats. Another reason however had been urged by the gent. against gun boats, which was their being contemplated as a substitute for the navy. Mr. Fisk said this was one of the strongest reasons that operated on his mind in their favor. It was unnecessary to man them until they were called into actual service. Not so with regard to the frigates, the seamen on board of which it was necessary should be very skilful, and which were consequently necessary to be constantly manned. Mr. Fisk said he did not feel very anxious on this subject, as he did not perceive any present necessity for encreasing our armaments. But as measures of defence were pressed, he was decidedly in favor of adopting the mode which appeared to him the cheapest and the best. As to the objection which had been made with regard to the number of gun boats proposed, when they considered the numberless rivers in the U. S. they would find there was scarcely one gun boat for each navigable stream. Mr. F. said he likewise preferred gun boats to frigates, inasmuch as they were not calculated to go abroad. He considered them as a valuable auxiliary to land batteries.

MR. PITKEN insisted upon it, that according to the report of the secretary of the navy, eight gun boats in actual service would cost as much as one frigate.

The question was then taken on the motion to postpone, which was disagreed to—Ayes 49—Noes 56.

MR. EPPES moved to postpone the consideration of the resolution until Monday. He said it would take but a short time to gain the information desired by gentlemen. If they could not get detailed information on the subject, the gun boats ought to be resigned to their fate. Mr. E. said he well recollected that some time ago a gentleman from Maryland (Mr. Nicholson) read to the House a number of papers in support of their utility, in consequence of which and other information, the House had voted for them. Mr. Eppes said he was ready to vote for gun boats as the best defence that could be devised. He had never contemplated them, however, as answering the purposes of a navy. They had on the contrary been considered as a proper substitute for expensive fortifications. What would be the advantage of fortifications in the country generally, and particularly at New York? Were they sure that expending even a million of dollars would make that place secure. What had they been told a few days since? That a single vessel would be able to lay the place under contribution. If this opinion was correct, it shewed that some other defence must be resorted to for the defence of our ports and harbors. It was not however, Mr. Eppes said, his intention to go into the discussion. He was so hoarse that he could scarcely utter the few words that had fallen from him.

MR. SMILIE observed that they had got into a curious situation. There appeared to be three parties in the House. All those in favor of a fleet were opposed to gun boats. Some gentlemen were in favor of fortifications exclusively, while others were willing to go to a certain expence in fortifications combined with gun-boats. This was his own wish. For his own part he was ready to say, that if there could be devised no defence of the country except by a fleet, it should not be defended by his vote, and if fortifications required so vast an expence, he should be against fortifying. But he believed by combining gun boats and fortifications, the country could be defended at a moderate expence. Mr. S. said that he believed information in support of the utility of gun boats could be procured. If, however, gentlemen refused asking for this information, and were determined to break down the system of gun boats, let them take the responsibility upon themselves. He believed they would get neither gun boats nor fortifications.

MR. VAN CORTLANDT said he observed that some gentlemen had said that the fortifications at present at N. York were of no use. This however he believed was not the fact. Fort Jay could prevent a vessel from laying before it, and so far the fortifications were of great service. It was true, with a strong wind a vessel might pass. But what then? She could afterwards do but little injury. He granted that gun boats might be of some service to a certain extent, but they ought not to be relied on altogether. Batteries were useful to annoy an enemy, and in addition to them, some coasting vessels would be very serviceable for the purpose of keeping off disorderly and unauthorised persons, such as they had recently seen. He said he should vote for filling the blank with 150,000 dolls. for the purpose of building gun boats, though he did not believe they would prove to be of such use as some gentlemen seemed disposed to imagine. But as gentlemen had declared they would not vote for fortifications without gun-boats, he was willing to vote for both.

MR. COOK said they had only 950 seamen at present on the peace establishment. They had 13 gun boats already built, and 56 others building. When compleated these would require 1070 men to mann them. But of what use would gun boats be unmanned? He was willing to agree to a short postponement for the purpose of obtaining further information.

MR. THOMAS said he rose to correct a remark of the gentleman from Virginia, that a million of dollars had been expended on the port of New York. The fact was that the general government had only expended about 100,000 dollars.

MR. EPPES said he had observed that from information which he had received, he believed the sums expended on the port of New York, including what had been laid out by the state, amounted to near a million.

MR. THOMAS said he was willing to acquiesce in the postponement till Monday, as so short a delay was not calculated to embarrass the measure. In reply to the gentleman who had said that the fortifications would be of no use unless they were manned, he would observe there was an organized and effective militia in New York, that might be called into service at an hour's notice, and would be competent to repel any force that was likely to be brought against them.

MR. VARNUM said he did not know precisely the amount of money which had been expended on the port of New York, but he believed that more than 120,000 dolls. had been expended before the appropriation of the last year. There had been a regular appropriation ever since the year 1794 for the defence of ports and harbors.

[Mr. Varnum here detailed the several appropriations made for this purpose.]

In addition to these, large appropriations had been made for fortifications. The total of these appropriations amounted to 955,000 dolls. How much had been applied to the port of N. Y. he could not say. He thought the ports and harbors of the U. S. ought to be defended. The idea of retreating to the mountains was abhorrent to his mind. On the contrary, he thought the enemy ought to be met at the water's edge, and fought inch by inch. The true question however was, in what way an enemy might be best repelled? As to New York he believed it was impossible to erect batteries which would prevent vessels from passing by them; but surely they might be so constructed as greatly to annoy them.

Mr. V. said he confessed he was no great admirer of gun boats, though he was willing to allow they might under some circumstances be of considerable use. For the purpose of defending New York, measures had already been pursued to a considerable extent. In addition to the gun-boats which had been built, a large number of cannon had been mounted on travelling carriages. Besides this, there were two regiments of artillery completely organized. Taking the system adopted in all its parts, he did think it was the only safe system that could be adopted for the defence of that harbor, as well as the other harbors of the U. S. He had however no objection to a short postponement for the purpose of getting information.

MR. THOMAS said they had the last session received information from the President of the U. S. that the whole sum expended on the harbor of New York, only amounted to 100,023 dollars.

MR. SMILIE said he rose for the purpose of explanation. If gentlemen imagined he had said he would abandon New York or any other port of the union, they had not correctly heard what he had said. He had observed that he would never consent to defend the country by a fleet. He believed there was no country on earth whose commerce would justify the creation of a navy merely for its protection. He would rather therefore give up the whole trade than protect it by a navy.

The question was then taken on postponing the consideration of the resolution until Monday, which was carried—Ayes 69—When as we have already stated, a motion made by Mr. Early, calling for information relative to gun-boats, was agreed to.

PATENT Fire & Water Proof CEMENT.

Among the various discoveries which have of late been made in the United States, we know of none more deserving of public notice than the following by LEWIS DE NIROTH. Such a desideratum in the architecture of buildings has been long wanting. Many attempts have been made to compose or manufacture a chemical composition similar to that used by the ancient Egyptians; but we have heard of none which approximates nearer to that which is generally called the Egyptian cement and which has put at defiance the ravages of time for several thousand years, than that which the Patentee here describes.

A composition equal in durability to free stone for covering roofs, floors, and plaistering walls of houses—
Rendering Cellars that are marshy and damp water proof.
Chimney pieces.
Fire hearths and cisterns.
Steps to front and back doors of houses.

Cement pavement entire for front and rear of houses, arches, and works under water, statues, images, &c. plaister out side of houses.

The materials of this cement does not much exceed the price of common plaistering.

A Specimen of the composition may be viewed at Mr. Stelle's hotel, Capitol Hill and also at the Union tavern Georgetown.

Feb. 13—3t.

FIVE DOLLARS REWARD.

RANAWAY from the subscriber on the 16th of June last, an apprentice boy, named WILLIAM DENT, a Tailor by trade. He is between 14 and 15 years of age, has light hair, and pale blue eyes; his clothing cannot now be described. Whoever will bring the said boy to me, shall receive the above reward and all reasonable charges.

EDWARD FENNELL, F street
Washington city

N. B. Having heard that the aforesaid boy has been employed by some person at St. Inigoes, (Maryland) I hereby forewarn all persons from harboring him under pain of being dealt with to the utmost rigor of the law. E. F.

Feb. 20—3t