## HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10.

*Debate on Gun-Boats—Continued.*

MR. SOUTHARD was in hopes this bill would have met with very little opposition, especially when it was considered that it was but a part of a system of defence, of which the other parts would be developed in progression. Various objections had been made to the bill; some gentlemen supposed that gun-boats were altogether insufficient for the purposes of defence, and that the scheme was merely ideal and visionary; and some had attempted to prove that gun-boats had never been used. A gentleman from Massachusetts had yesterday disproved this by circumstantial accounts of two engagements, one on the river St. Lawrence and one in the river Delaware. In the last instance, about twelve gun-boats engaged two British ships of war. Mr. S. would state from good authority that the reason why these vessels were not made a prize, was, that the gun-boats were not supplied with a sufficient quantity of powder and ammunition. This statement and fact would go far to do away the impressions of those gentlemen who suppose that gun-boats were of no efficiency as a defence, or that their utility was ideal. In the progress towards the passage of this bill, every day new difficulties had been discovered, and new objections raised to its passage: some gentlemen told them if they passed this bill, and appropriated a sum of money sufficient for the object proposed by it, that they would not leave money in the treasury adequate to the expence of building land batteries, &c: another objection was, that if they appropriated money for building gun-boats, fortifications and batteries for the sea ports, there would be no money left wherewith to provide arms for the militia. If these remarks were even correct they possessed no weight; because gun-boats, fortifications and land batteries, and arming the militia, were but three several parts of one great system.

After these remarks he would only state his own idea of what ought to be done: he thought they should first provide gun-boats; secondly, erect fortifications and land batteries; thirdly, pass a law providing for arming the militia—for unless men were armed, they could not prevent an enemy from landing, destroying, and laying waste the country. Mr. S. hoped every thing would be done which was requisite for protection. Gentlemen had said that our resources were not sufficient to meet these objects: Mr. S. would observe that there was in the treasury money sufficient to answer all these purposes; if not, the country had resources within itself, fully adequate to every measure of protection and defence. He would not go as some gentlemen had into calculations of dollars and cents; if the nation was embroiled in war, its expence would be incalculable; it was impossible to form even an idea of the enormous expence that would accrue from war: but Mr. S. would draw all the money out of the treasury; he would not leave a cent—he would even drain the blood from his own veins if it were necessary for the defence of the rights so dear to his country. If the nation was involved in war, life, liberty and property, every thing was at stake; and all their energies should be exerted to repel the invader.

A number of gentlemen appeared desirous of building ships of war for the protection of our commerce. Mr. S. was of opinion that whatever might have been proper heretofore, such a measure would be inexpedient hereafter, of what effect would be any naval force which the U. S. could erect? It would form an object of derision for the enemy, and afford a pretext for war. It would increase the expence of the country, and add to the strength of our adversary. Would gentlemen take a view of Denmark and other European powers? See them all swept from the ocean, and their vessels where the navy of the United States would soon be, were any to be erected. As to the ships of war which the United States now had, he should have no objection that those which were fit for service should be distributed as an aid to batteries and other works wherever it might be deemed most proper to make such distribution. He was clearly of opinion, whether war or peace might be the result of our present uncertainty, that preparation for defence ought immediately to be commenced; if preparation would not prevent a war, it would tend to shorten the term of its duration.

Some gentlemen had gone into calculations on principal and interest of expences for six or seven years. Away with such trifling; Let us, said he, act the part of Americans; let us go boldly into defensive operations, and let us not be saddled with a long and tedious war. If war should be our lot, we shall experience a temporary deprivation—not of the necessaries, but of the luxuries of life. For every thousand we expend for opposition to the enemy, we shall save a million in our own resources: our citizens would turn their attention to domestic manufactures; and though no man more than himself deprecated war, he thought advantages might result from it to the nation. He hoped the House would pass the law, and take such further steps as might be necessary to prepare fully for defence; that they would discharge with care the responsibility attached to their situation, and support throughout the justice of their cause and the rights of the people.

Mr. CROWNINSHIELD said he regretted that the present had been represented as a local question, applicable to the South, and it had been stated that the defence of the North was not at all in question. Mr. C. viewed it in a very different light; he considered that the whole sea board of the U. S. that every inhabitant on the coast was deeply interested in the bill now about to pass. Gun-boats would as well assist to protect the passage leading into Boston harbor, as the mouth of the Chesapeake; they were certainly fit to aid in the protection of any of the Northern ports; he was astonished when he heard a doubt expressed upon the subject. He was glad to hear a gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. Dana) say he should vote for the bill; he would rather have his vote than his speech on the subject, as well also the vote of one of his colleagues (Mr. Upham) who followed him in debate and took the same course. Both these gentlemen said they should vote for the bill on the table, and yet they observed they could not approve of this mode of defence; it would thus appear that their votes were vastly more reasonable than their arguments. He trusted that on this bill the House would give an unanimous vote. What was the proposition? To put our ports and harbors in some state of defence.—Was the measure embraced by this bill all the defence proposed? No; but it was all proposed to be decided on at present, because it could be almost immediately accomplished; and who knew when this force might be wanted? He did not say it would be wanted to-day, to-morrow, or the next day. But possibly the return of Spring might bring an occasion for its service to repel an invader, and where the risk was deemed even probable, procrastination in preparing for the worst would be the height of imprudence.

In regard to the utility of gun-boats, gentlemen differed, and well & honestly they might, because their use had not in this country been sufficiently confirmed by experience. Mr. C. would, however, quote an instance or two in which they had been eminently useful even in our own country. He had learnt from a very correct source, that in the war between G. Britain and France in 1760, when the American colonies took a part, there was an instance on record, which proved that these gun-boats were employed with success in the river St. Lawrence; that four gun-boats carrying one 18 pound cannon and 20 men each, did attack and capture a brig of 16 guns and 180 men, killing 60 or 70 men in the brig, while the gun-boats lost but a single man, and received little or no other injury. If any gentleman doubted, Mr. C. would give the respectable authority of the Vice President of the U. S. for the fact. Mr. C. had understood he was an officer actually employed by the colonial government in that service. Another instance had been given to him by a naval gentleman of eminence, who was not now in the service of the U. S. but who he believed if called upon would do himself great honor. Mr. C. then read the statement made by that gentleman to this effect: "In 1775, the Roebuck and Liverpool, two British frigates, one of them mounting 44 guns on two decks, lay in the river Delaware, below Philadelphia. A flotilla of American gun-boats attacked them with spirit. The engagement was severe, and victory terminated in favor of the gun-boats. One of the frigates, the Roebuck, was crippled and driven on shore, and would have been taken possession of, if the ammunition in the boats had held out. As it was, after the Roebuck floated off into deeper water, both frigates abandoned their station, and left the gun-boats masters of the river." It was probable that there might be some gentleman of the revolution near him who might have known of the fact; if so, would it have no impression on the House? He presumed it would have a favorable impression, as it deservedly ought. He could cite other instances; he could say that in the neighborhood of Gibraltar, at Algesiras, the Spanish gun-boats had in many cases attacked British frigates and sometimes 74 gun ships, and very much annoyed them; he knew of no instance of their capture, because it often happened that a new wind springing up carried the vessels out of the reach of their fire. It was also believed to be a fact that the British naval commanders in the mouth of the Straits of Gibraltar had always been alarmed in moderate and calm weather, when they saw the gun-boats of Algesiras coming out to attack their ships of war; engagements with them were not uncommon, and the boats frequently had the advantage, and captured merchant vessels under their convoy, and carried them off in spite of all the efforts to save them, which could be made by the men of war.

Gentlemen also differed in regard to the expence of this measure; and had gone into various calculations to prove their positions. Mr. C. had made some too; and gentlemen were not correct when they stated their annual expence at four or five millions of dollars. How many men were necessary to man a gun-boat he could not say, but he thought fifteen were as many as could be usefully employed in a boat carrying but one gun. Estimate the pay of the men at 12 dollars per month, the expence of one man for a year would be 144, say 150 dollars; 100 dollars each for maintenance, would make it 250 dollars for one man: 15 men at 250 dollars each was 3,750 dollars for each boat; and the total annual expence of the whole 257 gun-boats would be somewhat short of a million dollars. He did not assert that the expence would not exceed this; but he did not believe it would much exceed it: and if these boats were employed but half the year it would be but half this expence: and would not this be a cheap defence? He thought it would.

A great deal had been said of the peculiar efficacy of batteries as a defence. Would batteries protect the port of New York? Would even a range of batteries from the Hook to the city of New York, completely protect a passage of a mile and a half wide? If it were but half a mile wide, line of battle ships could pass up to the city notwithstanding batteries on the shore. Did gentlemen know that ships of war could fight almost in contact with one another for a whole day. The battle of Trafalgar and the battle of Abouker, off the coast of Egypt, had proved that. Give a ship of war a favorable wind and tide, at the same time, and fire from a battery as many shot as they pleased, if there was a passage left open for her hull, however narrow it might be, and they could not expect to stop that ship except by accident a mast should be carried away. We must, said he, build gun-boats, bomb ships, and floating batteries, and combine their force together, if we mean to prepare effectual protection for our ports in case of war. But as the question was now on gun-boats only; he should confine himself to that point, and not follow the example of some gentlemen who had occupied the time of the House in discussing subjects irrelevant to the present question.

From the report of the Secretary of the Treasury it appeared that there remained in our treasury, exclusive of the sums necessary for current expenditure and the periodical discharge of the public debt, a balance of eight millions of dollars upon which they could operate and which he trusted they would use in part. But this was a measure only preparatory to measures which might follow. If the United States were forced into a war, should they not raise an army, and call out the militia for the invasion of Canada and Nova Scotia? Undoubtedly they would. Would gentlemen say, if they employed an army, that they could limit the expence of its commander to a certain sum? He believed not. So with gun-boats or other measures: even if the estimates were to fall short of their actual expence, it should not prevent them from taking the proper means of defence. All the resources of the nation should be commanded; they were not to censure the administration for approving this or that measure—not to denounce that administration which possessed the full confidence of the people, and would do so as long as it was conducted in the same correct manner and on the principles as had been pursued by the present Executive. The side way strokes which gentlemen aimed at the administration had no effect on Mr. C. they might follow their own course; but he would support the administration in all proper measures which it should recommend to their consideration.

He would add a word in relation to the attack on Tripoli, where gun-boats had been successfully employed. Without gun-boats no impression could have been made on that power. He was told so by the gallant officer, (Commodore Preble) who commanded in the several attacks, and who was now sleeping in the dust. That officer had informed him that without the assistance of gun-boats he could not have completed an assault. It was well known that after Commodore Preble returned to the United States, ten gun-boats were sent from this country to Tripoli, to support the other naval force then before that place. Mr. C. expressed regret that an opportunity had not been afforded them to ascertain their utility in that quarter. Our negociator made a premature peace, and thus prevented the gun-boats dispatched from America, from operating in the new bombardment of Tripoli, which certainly was contemplated by the commander who succeeded Commodore Preble. It was not a sound argument against these boats that one of them had miscarried in crossing the Atlantic on the outward passage, for merchant vessels were often lost at sea, but it was clear that all the remaining boats returned safe to the United States.

Mr. C. would finish his cursory remarks by observing, that he was decidedly in favor of passing the bill. He wished gentlemen generally to agree to it. The boats were a valuable mode of defence, he felt sure they would be found so, and he hoped every member would give support to the measure—trusting to the patriotism of the House that the bill for the further protection of our ports and harbors by land batteries, would also be agreed to when it should be properly brought before them.

Mr. KEY said he conceived he possessed the right to give his sentiments on this subject; & he felt it a duty to assign those reasons which would induce him to vote for the bill under consideration.

He greatly regretted that the House had no general system of defence laid before them, for the protection of the country and more especially of its vulnerable points. Such a plan would have been attended with good consequences; it would have enabled them to progress gradually from one point to another, feeling as they went along, so, that whether the event were peace or war, the honor of the nation might have been preserved. He took up this subject as presented to him by the committee who were appointed, not to devise a defence for our shores, but for our ports and harbors; and in this point of view the bill did not strike him as comprising a general system of defence, but as a particular measure for aiding in the protection of the most prominent parts of our country. He did not like that different parts of a great national subject should come before the House from different committees, because they should properly form a connected series; but as the measure had come under consideration in this form, he would endeavor to shew that the principles of the bill as far as they did go, were correct and proper.

Mr. K. had no doubt but in forming a general system of defence some few frigates would be found necessary; but he strongly feared they could neither construct line of battle ships or frigates before it would be necessary to use them. Some gentlemen had asserted that the nation was at war; he would not combat this position, though it was not tenable. Some gentlemen said we were on the eve of war, with whom he thought. If they were engaged in war, it would not be upon any other part of the frontier than that accessible by water; of course the most vulnerable points of the country were upon the sea shore. He therefore thought that every species of defence competent to the protection of these points should be adopted, and of this description were fortifications and batteries, aided by gun-boats, not that they composed the best possible means of defence, but the best that could be constructed within a given time.

It had been said that gun-boats could not act efficiently alone; but he believed that, as auxiliary to fortifications, they could be applied in such manner and under such circumstances, as to prevent ships of war from acting to effect. It was known that a ship of war in making an attack on any particular point, always placed herself in such a manner as would enable her to act with the greatest effect; she anchored with her broadside to the battery; and under such circumstances gun-boats were competent to make her change her station.

There were, as far as Mr. K. knew, in modern times but two instances, and but one that was remarkable, of the efficacy of gun-boats as a part of a system. One case was the defence of Cadiz, when Nelson with his whole fleet anchored in the bay of Cadiz, and was repulsed principally he believed by the instrumentality, but certainly by the assistance of gun-boats. In case of attack made on our ports, gun-boats being loco-motive, would in such circumstances be advantageous. Another case of the success of gun-boats, occurs in the bay of Gibraltar; they are there secured from attack until, like spiders darting upon flies, they spring out in calm weather, and always capture their prey.

These gun-boats took their origin in an early part of this century, when Gibraltar was surprised by the enemy. Gun-boats were then introduced into the Gut of Gibraltar; and from the time that Britain captured Gibraltar, to the present day, such had been the effect of these boats, that the British were obliged always to send supplies and provisions to Gibraltar under convoy. He had mentioned this circumstance to shew that gun-boats had acted offensively as well as defensively.

If gentlemen, however, considered them as alone a sufficient defence for this country, they were most miserably mistaken; they were merely eligible as a mean of defence in aid of fortifications. Mr. K. agreed with the gentleman who had yesterday said that these boats would be no protection against ships of war, with wind and tide in their favor, in Chesapeake bay; but as offensive weapons they might be placed at points where they might lie in readiness till a proper time should arrive, in which they could act with advantage. A number of frigates had been for some time lying in the Chesapeake; Mr. K. did religiously believe, if the nation had been in a state of war (and a contrary situation alone had prevented the experiment from being made) that twelve gun-boats stationed at Norfolk, could have driven them away from their anchorage. And why did he believe so? Because they could have chosen their time when the weather was calm, and large ships could not be worked. It was in this way that gun-boats could greatly injure ships of war; and if not destroy them, could injure them so much as to render them unmanageable. He did not conceive that gun-boats should be considered as incapable of rendering essential services, because they had not hitherto driven the British squadron out of the Chesapeake; for the measures taken by the Executive had not warranted such a step. We are not at war, said he; when by the shameless impressment of our seamen and other injuries, and when consummating her folly and wickedness by the attack on the Chesapeake, the English nation gave cause for war, we did not go to war. In his judgment, and he was reluctant to withhold praise where it was due, a much wiser course was taken; he meant the call upon that government for reparation before a resort was had to war. Had they gone to war on the spur of the occasion, they would have commited to the mercy of the British navy twenty millions of American property afloat on the ocean; it would have fallen a sacrifice to the superior naval force of our opponents. If honorable reparation be made, the course which had been pursued would have been wise: at all events, whether reparation were made or not, time had been given to our citizens to save a great portion of their property. A measure of immediate war would have brought bankruptcy on our cities, and ruin on our citizens: It was well for this reason to put the event off as long as possible; the longer it was put off, the better we should be prepared for it when it did arrive. There was no necessity for immediate precipitation; and measures had been wisely taken; and they now daily expected a minister from England for the purpose of offering the cup of peace: whether it would be such as the nation could drink of, he could not say. No measure had yet been taken by this government usually taken by nations in a state of war. He hoped the country would never again be caught in a state so perfectly defenceless, and at the mercy of the enemy, nor be caught napping at its post. Even contemplating a present peace, he considered every protective measure to be imperiously demanded by the situation of the country: the building of ships of war or frigates could not be accomplished in the necessary time in case of immediate war; but he thought they would be driven by necessity to this means of defence whenever the exigency of the times required a strenuous defence.

An honorable gentleman had yesterday observed as one reason against this measure, that it would, if carried into operation to the proposed extent, prevent the adoption of another measure, on which the gentleman placed much reliance—arming the militia. Mr. K. was greatly in favor of this principle, and voted for it; he also wished it to be carried into effect as early as possible; he thought it would be wise and prudent to arm the militia; but when the question now presented itself, should our funds be exhausted by a general arming of our militia, neglecting to afford that protection so necessary to our ports and harbors, he should be strongly opposed to it, because the whole body of the militia would not be called into service at one time, and because by arming them now at the public expence, they would draw those sums of money from the treasury, which could under present circumstances be much more advantageously employed.

When he reflected on our expectation of an immediate rupture with a foreign power, on the situation of our most vulnerable points, and the danger to which they were now exposed—all conspired to influence him in his belief that the measure under consideration ought to be adopted. One other reason: gentlemen ardent for the protection and safety of the country, who expressed the greatest dislike to this mode of defence, had not pointed out any other, had offered no more eligible mode as a substitute. Because this did not meet entire approbation, were they to have no defence? If he could hear gentlemen of talents demonstrating how the same money could be expended with the same effect, in the same time and to the same object, he should listen with pleasure. He had, however, assigned his reasons for the vote he should give: during the discussion which had taken place on the bill, he had listened with great attention to arguments on both sides of the question; and looking with a single eye to the expediency of the measure, without considering from what quarter it emanated, he did think the bill ought to pass.

*(DEBATE TO BE CONTINUED.)*