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SPEECH

OF THE

HON. MR. STOW,

A FEDERALIST, WHO OPPOSED AND VOTED AGAINST THE WAR)

IN THE

House of Representatives of the U. States ;

JANUARY 14, 1813,

on the bill in addition to the act entitled "An act to raise an additional military force and for other purposes."

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Let every man read this, and lend it to his neighbor; and let no one make up his mind against his country till he shall have pondered well its contents.

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CONCORD, N. H.

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SPEECH.

MR. SPEAKER,

I AM aware of the delicacy, and novelty of my situation, as well from the indulgence of the house, as from the neutral course, which I mean to pursue. He must have been indeed an inattentive observer of mankind, who proposes to himself such a course, without being exposed to difficulties and dangers from every side. Our country has experienced them too long from the great belligerents of Europe, and an individual will quickly find them here. For even this house is not exempt from its great party belligerents, who issue their commanding decrees, and orders in council; and, in imitation of the hostile Europeans, it is sometimes a sufficient cause of condemnation, to have been spoken with by the adverse side. Yet, notwithstanding all these dangers, I mean to launch my neutral bark on this tempestuous ocean, conscious of the rectitude of my intentions, and humbly hoping for the approbation of my country and my God.

The proper extent of the discussion, growing out of this bill, seemed to be confined to these enquiries:—Can the force contemplated be obtained? If obtained, will it accomplish the proposed? And lastly, will the force be an economical one? If the discussion had been confined to these limits, I would have listened, and not have spoken: but, sir, it has taken a wider range and assumed a more important aspect. It has embraced the present, the past, and the future. The causes of the war, and the mode of conducting it, have been investigated, and overconfident predictions have been made as to its end. The history, and the state of our negotiations have been carefully examined—and the presidential order of succession has been scrutinized, by the light of experience, as well as that of prophecy. We have sometimes been forced into the scenes of private life; and at other times, we have been chained to the car of Napoleon. In short, sir, the discussion has ranged as wide as existence, and not content with that, the speakers “have exhausted worlds, and then imagined new.” I do not pretend to censure this—it may be well for the people to have their political concerns thus splendidly dressed, and passed in review before them.—But still, I will attempt to call the attention of the house from the regions of fiction, of fancy, and of poetry, to the humble, but I trust no less profitable sphere of reality and of prose. Passing by many of those things which have amused by their ingenuity, or surprised

by their novelty, but which do not deserve a serious answer, I will endeavor to state distinctly the grounds taken by the opponents of this bill, or rather the opponents of furnishing the means of prosecuting the war:—Firstly. It is alleged “that the war was originally unjust.” Secondly. “That if the war was originally just, it has become unjust to continue it in consequence of the revocation of the British orders in council.” Thirdly. “That it is inexpedient to prosecute the war, because we have no means of coercing our enemy, or enforcing our claims.” Fourthly. “That we are unable to support the war.” And Fifthly. “That in consideration of all these circumstances, the house ought to withhold the means of further prosecuting the war.”

First then it is alleged that the war was originally unjust. Here let me call on the house to distinguish between *unjust*, and *inexpedient*. Nothing can be more important, than to have clear and distinct ideas about those words which lie at the bottom of a science, or enquiry. This is happily illustrated in mathematics—there every word, by the help of diagrams, is carefully defined; and the consequence is, that there are no disputes among mathematicians, while their labors have done honor to mankind. A thing may be just, and yet inexpedient: the justice of an act relates to the conduct of another, the expediency to our own situation. It may be just for me to sue the man who withholds from me the smallest sum; and yet so inexpedient, as to be even ridiculous. Thus a war may be perfectly just, and at the same time highly inexpedient. This, if I mistake not, was the ground generally taken the last year by the opponents of the war, particularly by the gentleman from Virginia before me, (Mr. Sheffey) who pointed out the distinction which I have endeavored to do, though with more ability and success. I hope the house will bear this distinction in mind; because it is of the greatest importance in the investigation which I intend to make. Before I enter further on the argument, I ask the house to indulge me for a moment, while I explain my views relative to the commencement of the war. I never saw any want of provocation on the part of Great Britain. I never for an instant doubted the justice of the war, while I urged its inexpediency with all my might. I considered man, placed here by a beneficent Providence, on a fertile soil, and in a happy climate, enlightened by science, and protected by the wisest of laws. By our revolution cut adrift, as I may say, from the old world, before the storm which was about to desolate Europe arose—I fondly hoped, that this new world would furnish one fair experiment of what science, liberty, and peace might achieve, free from those corruptions which have eternally attended on war. I hoped to see the country improved, and bound together, by roads and canals, to see it adorned by literary institutions, and by every establishment which reflects honor upon man. Nor do, I yet

believe, that this was an utopian vision, or an idle dream. I still believe it might all have been realized by a different course— But the nation has determined on war, and though it was not my choice, I still maintain that it is not unjust.

I will not go into a minute account of all those injuries, and outrages, the bare mention of which, was last year declared sickening to the soul. I will only recal the most prominent to the recollection of gentlemen, who seem almost to have forgotten them.—First then, the revival of the rule of '56, relative to the colonial trade, which produced one universal burst of indignation, and called forth those unanimous resolutions in the Senate, not to endure it. Was that no just cause of war? The numerous blockades, against which all our ministers in England, and every administration, have remonstrated—the repeated insults of our cities by their ships of war—the murder of one of our citizens in our own waters, (I mean Pearce) the shameful trial, and subsequent promotion, of the officer, by which insult was added to injury—in all this, do gentlemen see nothing to render war just? I pass by numerous other injuries, & come to the orders in council which have swept millions of American property from the ocean. But, sir, we have been told, that France was the aggressor—that if we had compelled France to do us justice, Great Britain would have followed in due time the example, and thus war would have been prevented. What has this to do with the case, suppose it either true, or false? What has the justice of the war to do with the order in which we have received the injuries from France or England? Have we not the right to resist the one, who injured us last, as well as the first? Who ever dreamed, that to determine whether it was lawful to repel an injury, he must examine the history of his life, and see if he had not been injured before? Have we lost the moral sense? or have we been so long accustomed to receiving injuries, that we have ceased to know them; that after a patient endurance of fifteen years, and after deliberately resorting to war, we are gravely about to examine the chronology of our wrongs to see if we have the right to resist? I omit the subject of impressment; not but what it was one of the just causes of war, but because I intend to speak of it in another place. After a candid review of the past, can any person then maintain, that America has no just cause of war? Sir, to my mind it appears impossible.

I shall now examine the second proposition, “that if the war was originally just, its further prosecution is unjust.”—On what ground does this rest? It is this, that the orders in council were the cause of the war, and those orders having ceased, the prosecution of the war becomes unjust.—Here again *justice* and *expediency* are confounded. It was never maintained, that the orders in council rendered war more just, than many other outrages, though they went farther to prove its expediency and even necessity. It therefore follows, that their repeal does not affect

the justice of the war; unless accompanied with compensation for the spoiliations committed under them, and atonement made for other wrongs. Neither of these, it is pretended, has been done; except so far as relates to the affair of the Chesapeake, and which I purposely left out of the catalogue of grievances. An injury which was a just cause of war, remains a just cause for its continuance, till atonement is offered, or till it is settled by negociation. But sir, an ample justification of war remains in the impressment of our seamen. The claim on our part is not, as has been alledged, a claim to protect British seamen—it is a claim to protect American citizens. Nay more, as respects the justice of the continuance of the war, it is a claim only, *that they will cease from the practice during the truce, that it may be seen whether it is possible to arrange it by negociation.* Is it unjust to continue the war, till this demand is complied with? or does any American wish to see his country prostrated still lower?

Having thus far explained my ideas relative to the justice of the commencement, and continuance of the war, I will now proceed to answer the third objection, namely: That it is inexpedient to carry it on, because we have no means of coercing our enemy—of compelling him—to what? barely to a just and honorable peace; for that is all that we demand. And have we no means of doing this? Better then to surrender the charter of our independence; confess we are incapable of self-protection, and beg his most gracious majesty to again take us under his paternal care. Such a doctrine, sir, is as unfounded, as it is degrading to the American character. We have ample means of compelling Great-Britain to do us justice; they are to be found in the value of our commerce; in the enterprise of our privateers; in the gallantry of our ships of war, and in the conquest of her provinces. Our custom (considering her in the light of a merchant or mechanic who supplies) is of vital importance to Great-Britain. It is not to be measured by its amount, in pounds, shillings and pence, but by the strength and support she derives from the intercourse. For while I admit, that Great-Britain does not send half her exports to the United States, I do maintain that the custom of this country is of more importance to her, than that of the whole world beside. It is with a nation as with an individual—if he exchange luxuries for luxuries, or superfluities, such as ribbons for ribbons, which he consumes, he adds nothing to his wealth; but if he exchange his luxuries, or his ribbons, for bread, or for such materials as give scope to his industry, he is then benefited and enriched by the interchange. Such is the situation of Great-Britain with regard to America. She, and her dependencies, receive more of provisions, and raw materials, from America, than for all other parts of the world together. Our trade exactly gives effect to her industry, her machinery, and her capital. And it is this, which has, in a great degree, enabled her to make such gigantic efforts in the awful contest in which she is engaged. Our privateers, will they have no effect on Great Britain? Will she learn nothing from the loss of three or four hundred ships? And will she be insensible to the efforts of our little navy? Can they touch no nerve in which Britons feel? Far different are my conclusions, from what I have seen in British papers—they show, that she is tremblingly alive to that subject.

Sir, I will now consider her provinces, about which so much has been said. I too will speak of that wonderful country called Canada, which unites in itself all contraries. Which is so cold and sterile, as to be not worth possessing; and so fertile, that if, by any calamity it should become ours, it

would seduce away our population—Which is so *unhappy* under the British government, as not to lure our inhabitants; yet so *happy*, that it is criminal to disturb their felicity—Whose inhabitants, if united with ours, would *destroy* us, because they have none of the *habits of freemen*; and who, well knowing the privileges of their *free government*, will defend them to the last. A country which is of *no importance* to Great-Britain, and whose loss would not make her feel—a country which is so *valuable* to Great-Britain, that she will never give it up. A country so *weak*, that it is *inglorious* to attack it; and a country so *strong*, that we can never take it. But, sir, leaving these, and a thousand other contradictions, the work of fancy or of spleen, I will present to the House, what I believe to be a true view of the subject, drawn from a near residence, and much careful examination. Canada is of great importance both to Great-Britain and the United States. It is important to Great-Britain in the amount and kind of its exports. In the last year preceding war its exports amounted to between seven and nine millions of dollars, an amount almost as great as the exports of the United States preceding the revolutionary war. And had the most discerning statesman made out an order, he could not have selected articles better adapted to the essential wants of Great-Britain. It has been said that Canada is of less value than one of the sugar islands of the West-Indies. Sir, in the present state of the world, Canada is of more importance to Great-Britain, in my opinion, than the whole West-India islands taken together. In danger, as she is, of being shut out from the Baltic, and fighting for her existence, she wants not the luxuries, the sugars and the sweetmeats of the West Indies—she wants the provisions, the timber and the masts of the North.

Canada is also of the greatest importance to the United States, in a commercial, financial and political point of view. I have in a great measure explained its commercial importance already by stating its exports; a large portion of which were the products of the United States. Let an attentive observer cast his eye for one moment on the map of North America; let him bear in mind, that from the 45th degree of latitude the waters of Canada bound for a vast extent one of the most fertile, and which will become one of the most populous parts of the United States; and he will readily perceive, that the river St. Lawrence must soon be the outlet for one third of all the products of American labor. The same circumstances will enable us to lay an impost on one third of our imported articles. Nor will the evil to our revenue end here. Great-Britain will be enabled to smuggle her goods through this channel into all parts of the Union. It will be in vain that you attempt to counteract her by laws; from the great length and contiguity of her possessions, she will forever evade them, unless by your laws you can change the nature of man. But its greatest importance is in a political point of view: for although not as happy in its government as the United States, it is sufficiently so to draw off multitudes of our new settlers, when the intermediate lands of the State of New-York, which separate it from New-England, shall be fully occupied. From this circumstance it will divide the American family, and by the commercial relations, which I have pointed out, it will exert a dangerous influence over a part of our country; for the transition from commercial dependence to political allegiance is too obvious to be insisted on. Having endeavored to shew the importance of Canada to both of the contending nations, I will only add *that it is within our power*.

The fourth objection is, that we cannot support the war—that we have not the ability to carry it on. Before I proceed to answer this objection, permit me, sir, to notice a singular inconsistency of the gentlemen by whom it has been urged. It is this—in one part of their argument, they represent the people as too *happy* to enlist, and in another part, as too *poor* to pay! Both of these propositions, I presume, cannot be true. Not to dwell longer however upon this contradiction, I do maintain, sir, that the nation is fully able to prosecute the war. On what does the ability of a nation depend?

A person who will give himself the trouble of examining things, rather than words, will find, *that it is proportioned to the number of laborers, and the productiveness of their labor.* Wherever from soil, climate, or improvement, the labor of a country will produce more than a supply of the necessities of life, it is evident, that the surplus time may be devoted to idleness, to the production and consumption of luxuries, or to the carrying on of war. To illustrate this further—suppose the labor of a person five days will support him for six, then it is clear, that the labor of five men will support the sixth man, in a state of peace or war. Now, sir, there is no where that the labor of seven millions of people will produce so much, as in this country; consequently, no where have seven millions of people so great an ability to carry on war. The quantity of circulating medium, whether made of paper or of silver dollars, has very little to do with the subject. *If it is made of paper, and to a great extent, it only shows that the people are in their habits economical; and that the faith of contracts is well supported.* The remainder of a man lies in what I have stated; and he must be a weak politician who cannot call it forth.

Mr. Speaker, I will now consider the last, and by far the most important objection of all; and one, without which, I certainly would not have spoken. It is, that in consideration of all the circumstances in which we are placed, it is the duty of this House to withhold the means of further prosecuting the war. It will not be denied, I trust, that this is a fair statement of the scope and object of most of the reasonings, which have been employed; and that, without this construction, they would be irreconcilable with common sense. This doctrine, in my opinion, goes, not only to the overthrow of our constitution, but to the destruction of liberty itself. The principle of our government is, not only that the majority shall rule, but that they shall rule in the *manner* prescribed by the constitution. So that if it could be proved, that a majority of the people were in favor of certain measures, it would not be sufficient, till they had pronounced that decision thro' the *constitutional* organs. In short, it must have been a principal object with the framers of our constitution to suspend, at least for a limited time, the effects of popular opinion. The constitution has committed the legislative power to three co-equal branches; and to the same hands has it intrusted the power of declaring war; while it has expressly confided the treaty-making power (and which alone can make peace) to two only of these branches. The claim now set up, goes to invest that branch, which has no authority in the matter, not only with the treaty making power, but also with a complete control over the two branches. Thus *one* branch of the government forcing the nation to *desist* from doing what *three*, including itself, had thought best to *perform*. Let us test the correctness of this principle by applying it to another co-equal branch of the government. Let us suppose the President has made a treaty of peace, which is disapproved by the Senate—and suppose upon this he should say, the war ought not further to be prosecuted, and refuse to employ the public force, would you not impeach him? Most unquestionably you would. I expressly admit, that cases may be imagined, where such a course would be proper—where it would be not only the duty of this house to withhold supplies, but where it would be the duty of an individual to resist the laws; but such are extreme cases, not provided for by any organization of government. What, sir, has been the practice of the British House of Commons? Have they ever refused supplies, because a war was unpopular, since the revolution? Did not the same parliament, which resolved, that they would consider any man as an enemy of his country, who should advise his majesty to the further prosecution of offensive war in America, still vote the means for carrying on the war? A similar case occurred when Mr. Fox came last into power—he disapproved of the commencement, and conduct of the war, and yet he called for and received the necessary supplies. Let us examine our own history: In the case of the British treaty, the House, by a call for papers, at-

tempted to superintend the treaty-making power, before it would make the necessary appropriations. The encroachment was instantly resisted by the great man, who then presided over the government; and his decision was approved by the nation. Is not the duty of furnishing the necessary supplies stronger, now we are engaged in war? And that too, declared by all the branches of the government! Sir, these temporary sacrifices of our own wishes to the constitutional decisions of our government, are the price we pay for liberty, and all that is dear to us. Once withheld, anarchy and tyranny ensue! I am one who ardently longs for peace. I see in it, not only the present prosperity of the *Union*, but a long train of republican virtues; and I would spring to arms at the first fair occasion. But much as I desire it, I would not purchase it by submission to the enemy of my country, or by the smallest violation of the constitution.

Much, sir, has been said of French and British influence. There is no such thing in this House, or in any nation—quite so by British influence is meant, what has been denoted by an assistance of her excellent *poets*, from her language and not writers, who have done honor to mankind. Who is there, that feels in her own breast, this French or British influence? And where is the man, who dares to ascribe to his respectable fellow citizen, feelings which in himself he would abhor? No, sir, the evil is of another kind; it is party! it is the magic of names, by which men of equal intelligence, who have the same ties to society, and the same interest in the welfare of their country, are torn asunder. We take our sides like boys for a game; and, in the ardor of competition too often forget our country! In the great contest which is now going on in the world we are all of one side—Our country is the stake, and the last republic on which the sun shines; Here man, enlightened and free, is placed as it were, in a second garden; the fruit of life is union, and near it grows the fruit of disunion and death. The attempt to divide us must have been originated in Pandemonium by the great enemy of mankind; and his first effort must have been, to instigate us to call each other by opprobrious names. Should he at last succeed in producing our downfall, and the expulsion of republicanism from America, “Earth” would once more “tremble from her entrails as again in pangs, and nature give a second groan.” But, sir, I will not indulge the melancholy idea: I will not anticipate a time when this splendid hall shall crumble into fragments, and this fair republic, reared by the immortal Washingtons, Franklins and Clintons of our country, shall itself become a more deplorable, a more melancholy ruin! I will hope that there is a redeeming spirit in the land, and that a guardian Providence will still watch over the destinies of our infant country.

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