

H. of R.]

Impressment of American Seamen.

[MARCH, 1796.]

lives and usefulness of a valuable body of men. Mr. S. next alluded to what had been said about the proposed agents being of a nondescript character, and believed the British would treat them with as much respect as any other officer of the American Government. No reflection was meant by this view of it to be thrown upon any body: they sat there, he said, as legislators, and when they talked about hurting the feelings of such and such officers, he thought they were mispending their time. The present measures, Mr. S. said, were not only calculated to produce relief for present sufferers, but prevention from future evils, by giving certificates to every citizen seaman: and he hoped this would induce merchants to take apprentices to the sea-faring business; and by that means build up a valuable body of seamen, which will be of greater wealth to the country than the mines of Mexico or Peru. He concluded, by supporting the original resolution, and against the amendment.

Mr. GILBERT explained.

Mr. HILLHOUSE believed the great diversity of opinion on the subject before the House, arose from a wish to determine upon the best possible way of serving the class of men who were the object of their present inquiry. It has been said that America had only five Consuls in England, but surely these five Consuls would be better able to do the business in question than one solitary agent. He thought a Consul General might be appointed, who should have the power to call upon all other Consuls for assistance to carry into effect the business upon which he was commissioned.

Mr. JEREMIAH SMITH proposed to combine the two places of agents and Consuls together, by leaving it optional with the PRESIDENT, which plan he thought best in each particular case.

Mr. MADISON again urged the propriety of adopting the plan of agents, in preference to Consuls, and showed that in adopting this plan, they could not be considered as wanting in respect to the Executive, since they would be doing no more than their duty.

The question being called for, the amendment was lost—being 33 for it, and 52 against it.

The original resolution was then carried, after striking out the words "such part of."

The second clause being read, Mr. GOODHUE and Mr. JEREMIAH SMITH remarked upon the difficulties which would attend the registering of seamen. They were replied to by Mr. LIVINGSTON, who was of opinion it was perfectly practicable. In speaking of the different kinds of American citizens, Mr. L. spoke of those who were natives of other countries, but who had sought an asylum under the American Government, and quoted a great number of ancient and modern authors, and even some English acts of Parliament, to prove that "man has an inherent right to go into whatever country he pleases, and by residing there, and conforming to its laws, become a citizen thereof."

After which, the report was agreed to, and the Committee rose. It then underwent a consideration in the House, and after a number of observa-

tions with respect to the propriety of two or three different amendments, it was agreed to, with an amendment, proposed by Mr. SWANWICK, to strike out the words "West Indies," in order that Halifax and Bermuda might not be excluded.

The report, thus amended, is in the following words:

"Resolved, That provision ought to be made for the support of two or more agents, to be appointed by the President of the United States, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate; the one of which agents shall reside in the Kingdom of Great Britain, and the others at such places as the President shall direct; whose duty it shall be to inquire into the situation of such American citizens as shall have been, or hereafter may be, impressed or detained on board of any foreign vessel; to endeavor, by all legal means, to obtain their release, and to render an account of all foreign impressments of American citizens to the Government of the United States.

"Resolved, That proper offices ought to be provided, where every seaman, being a citizen of the United States (on producing evidence, duly authenticated, of his birth, naturalization, or residence within the United States, and under their protection, on the third day of September, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-three) may have such evidence registered, and may receive a certificate of his citizenship."

Ordered, That a bill or bills be brought in, pursuant to the said resolutions; and that Mr. LIVINGSTON, Mr. BOURNE, Mr. SWANWICK, Mr. S. SMITH, and Mr. W. SMITH, do prepare and bring in the same.

WEDNESDAY, March 2.

A bill for making a partial appropriation for the Military Establishment for the year 1796, was read a first and second time, and committed to a Committee of the Whole to-morrow.

It was moved that the consideration of the Land Office bill, which was the order of the day, should be laid aside, to take up the consideration of the subject of the Naval Equipment; but after some observations for and against the postponement, the sense of the House was taken, when there appeared for it 27, against it 41.

Mr. BOURNE wished a Letter that had been mentioned to have been received from the War Office might be read. It was produced and read accordingly. It contained an account of the materials wanted, the money expended, and what would yet be required to complete the building of the frigates. Referred to the Committee on the Naval Equipment.

Mr. LIVINGSTON said, that it was generally understood that some important Constitutional questions would be discussed when the Treaty lately concluded between this country and Great Britain should come under consideration; it was very desirable, therefore, that every document which might tend to throw light on the subject should be before the House. For this purpose, he would move the following resolution:

"Resolved, That the President of the United States be requested to lay before this House a copy of the in-

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Indian Trading Houses—Northwestern Land Offices.

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structions given to the Minister of the United States who negotiated the Treaty with Great Britain, communicated by his Message on the first instant, together with the correspondence and other documents relative to the said Treaty."

Ordered to lie on the table.

INDIAN TRADING HOUSES.

Mr. PARKER moved that the unfinished business might be postponed, to take up the consideration of the report of the select committee to whom was referred the amendments of the Senate to the bill for establishing trading houses with the Indian tribes. The House agreeing to this question, the report and amendments were read, when

Mr. PARKER, one of the committee, gave the reasons which induced them to recommend to the House to disagree to the amendments of the Senate. He said they went to alter the principle of the bill. The bill took precautions to prevent Government from suffering loss, but one of the proposed amendments puts it in the power of the PRESIDENT to alter the price of merchandise, as he may think proper. The bill fixed the sum of six thousand dollars for the payment of six agents, which was thought both by the late and present Secretary at War to be sufficient; but the Senate has struck out the clause, and left it to the PRESIDENT to appoint as many agents and to pay them what sum he pleases. The bill has directed that offenders against the act shall be tried and punished in the vicinity where they live; but the Senate propose that offenders shall be taken and tried anywhere. It may be said that offences against this act would be of the same nature as a debt; but, he said, to be so tried, would take away the great privilege of the Habeas Corpus act; that it was one of the grievances complained of when this country was under British Government, that they were removed into that country to be tried. The principle of these amendments, he said, amounted to this, that the PRESIDENT should sell goods at what price he pleased, give what salary he chose to agents, and try offenders against the act where he thought proper.

Mr. SEDGWICK hoped the amendments would be considered separately.

The first amendment being read, respecting the appointment of agents—

Mr. HILLHOUSE hoped the House would agree to the amendment. He saw no inconvenience in leaving it to the PRESIDENT to appoint agents and fix their salaries, as they might be employed in other business, which, at present, persons are specially employed to transact, under a former act.

Mr. PARKER said, this act was meant to introduce a friendly intercourse with the Indians, and ought to have no connexion with any other business.

Some observations took place between Mr. J. SMITH, Mr. PARKER, Mr. SEDGWICK, and another member, on the propriety of the wording of one of the clauses of the bill, which was at length allowed to be right.

Mr. GILES said the question was, whether one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, the sum pro-

posed to carry into effect the bill in question should be given up to the sole direction of the PRESIDENT, or whether that House would direct how it was to be disposed of. It was the first time, he said, that a proposition had been made that the PRESIDENT should be allowed to give salaries *ad libitum*. The bill provided that six thousand dollars should be paid for salaries, but it would be very improper that the whole sum for carrying the act into effect should be put in the power of the Executive. He said he had never any sanguine expectations from this bill, but had no objection to the experiment being tried.

Mr. JEREMIAH SMITH believed it was right to limit the power of carrying into effect this bill, but thought six thousand dollars too small a sum to be allowed for agency. He said it was contemplated to have six trading houses, and it would be necessary that each should have a clerk, who would expect five hundred dollars, so that there would remain only three thousand dollars for the six agents. He supposed an alteration would therefore be necessary in the sum. As a conference would most likely take place between the two Houses, he thought it best to disagree to the amendment, in order that the clause might be differently modified.

Mr. HILLHOUSE again spoke in favor of the PRESIDENT's appointing the agents, in order that he might employ them in other business, and by that means save an expense to the public.

Mr. MILLEDGE was of opinion that the agents, appointed under this act, should be confined to the business of it alone.

Mr. DEARBORN said it would require a very different person to be employed in a trading house from those employed in distributing articles to the Indians, the act for authorizing which he believed expired this session. He thought the sum would be fixed for salaries; but he thought six thousand dollars far too little, and he believed it should be twelve thousand.

The motion being put, on agreeing to the report of the committee to reject the first amendment, it was carried. The other amendments were severally put, and, after a few remarks, four of them were agreed to, and four rejected; and the Clerk was directed to acquaint the Senate therewith.

LAND OFFICES N. W. OF THE OHIO.

The House resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole, on the bill for establishing Land Offices for the sale of the North Western Territory. The amendment proposed for selling the land by auction being under consideration—

Mr. BALDWIN said he was in favor of the amendment. He was not disposed to encourage, in his own mind, too great suspicions of the integrity of individuals; but it is not to be forgotten, said he, in making the provisions of this land law, that it is to be carried into operation in times singularly exposing it to a mercenary and unfaithful execution. We must temper our laws to what we see to be the state of the country. Philosophers and politicians, in some ages, have made such success-