

REPORT
 OF
THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,

December 1st, 1825

To the President of the United States:

The Secretary of the Navy respectfully presents the following Report:

The Naval Force of the United States, which has been kept in active service during the present year, has been composed of the different squadrons employed in cruising on the stations heretofore assigned them.

The squadron in the Mediterranean has been continued in that service, with the exception of the Delaware 74 gun ship, and the schooner Porpoise, which have been withdrawn, the latter having been represented by the commanding officer to require extensive repairs. The return of the Delaware was decided on under a belief, that the present state of our political and commercial relations in the Mediterranean did not require the employment of a ship of this class in that sea; that all the necessary protection could be given to our commerce by frigates and smaller vessels; that these promised to be more efficient, in the pursuit and capture of such vessels as might be expected to assail it, and were less liable to suffer from the dangers of the Mediterranean navigation. The Constellation frigate and the sloop Ontario were accordingly ordered to join the squadron; the former conveying to England and France the newly appointed Ministers to those countries. Information has been received of the favorable execution of these duties. Our Ministers have been landed at their respective points of destination; and these vessels, it is presumed, have, before this, assumed their stations in the Mediterranean squadron.

It is to be regretted that instances of insubordination have been manifested among the officers of this squadron. Courts martial have been necessarily resorted to, and some of the refractory have been sentenced to temporary, and others to permanent dismissal from the service. It is gratifying, on the other hand, to know, from authority entitled to confidence, that the general conduct of the officers of this squadron has been such as to preserve, among the States and Sovereignities on the Barbary Coast, the favorable opinion of the American character, which had been earned by the gallantry and honorable deportment of their predecessors.

The Naval Force under the command of Commodore Ridgely, and ordered to cruise on the West Indian station, consisted, in the early part of the year, of the sloops Falmouth, Hornet, Erie, and Natchez, and the schooners Grampus and Shark.

Several acts of piracy having been reported to have been committed in the month of February last, the Natenez, which had returned to the United States for repairs, was ordered to rejoin the squadron. After

cruising a few weeks, and there being no reason to apprehend a recurrence of these depredations, again returned to the United States, and has since sailed to Colombia, taking out Mr. Moore, the United States' Minister to that Government, whence she was ordered to proceed to Rio Janeiro, to convey to the United States, Commodore Creighton, whose command had been transferred to Commodore Cassin. This vessel was so required to afford a passage to Mr. Harrison, the late Minister to Colombia, on his return to the United States.

The recent invasion of the maritime frontier of the Mexican States by the forces of Spain, having led to apprehensions that our commerce, in that quarter, might suffer by the encroachments which belligerents are so ready to make on neutral unprotected rights, the Peacock was equipped, and, taking out Commodore Elliott, to relieve Commodore Ridgely, was ordered to repair to the scene of these renewed hostilities. The Erie, which had also returned for repairs, sailed soon after to rejoin this squadron.

It is due to the late Commander, Commodore Ridgely, to say, that, as far as the means had been afforded him, he has kept his little squadron employed with vigilance and activity; and, on a late occasion, this has been gallantly demonstrated at Tampico, in the firm and prompt course, pursued by Master Commandant Norris, in the rescue of the property of one of our countrymen from the grasp of unjust power.

For the last few months, except in the case just referred to, no information has been given to this Department, of any new act of piracy or aggression on the commercial rights of the nation; but there can be no doubt, that a relaxation in the policy lately pursued, would be followed by an immediate repetition of these depredations.

The squadron on the Coast of Brazil and Buenos Ayres has been maintained to its usual extent, and has been varied only by the interchange of relief-ships for those which had performed the ordinary routine of duty. The presence of this squadron, small as it has been, has probably obtained, for the commercial interests of our country, a security which would not have been granted to defenceless merchantmen. Peace having taken place between these two nations, nothing is to be dreaded by our merchant ships from an interference with belligerent privileges. Yet many reasons forbid the diminution of our naval force on these coasts. The annually increasing commercial intercourse between the United States and these countries, calls upon the Government to be prepared to multiply the means of its protection. Many complaints have been made by certain officers of this squadron against each other, of oppression on the one side, and of insubordination and neglect of duty on the other. The parties charging each other have been ordered to repair to the United States. Immediately after their return, a tribunal will be established to investigate these complaints, and to render justice alike to the aggressors and the aggrieved.

The squadron on the Pacific coast of South America consists of the frigate *Guerriere*, the sloop *St. Louis*, and the schooner *Dolphin*. No changes have been made in the *force* of this squadron. Commodore Thompson has succeeded Commodore Jones in the command; and the *Guerriere* and *St. Louis* have taken the places of the *Brandywine* and *Vincennes*. Commodore Jones has returned to the United States in the former, and the latter, acting under orders from the late Executive, after touching at the Friendly and Sandwich Islands, will return by way of the Cape of Good Hope.

No information has been presented to the Department inducing a belief that an increase of this force is necessary; though doubtless, good policy forbids that any portion of it be withdrawn. Annexed is a statement, marked A, shewing the disposition of the public vessels now in commission.

The report of the Commissioners of the Navy, which is herewith transmitted, marked B, furnishes a detailed statement of the number of ships of war in ordinary, their present condition, and the amount which will be required to fit them for service. These ships are represented to be in a state of premature and rapid decay, and, when the manner in which they have been disposed of at the stations is considered, this ceases to be a matter of surprise, how much soever it may be of regret. It has been the practice, when ships of war were to be laid up in ordinary, to place them under the general superintendence of the Commandant of the yard, whose avocations have been so multiplied by the Department, that he has but little time to devote to this duty. Thus, they remain exposed to the wasting agencies of the seasons, rain, and sunshine; and to all other causes which favor the decomposition of the materials of which they have been built. This sudden destruction of a fabric, upon the construction of which so much skill has been exercised, so much money expended, and upon the preservation of which so much of the commercial and national security depends, cannot but demand, that immediate and effectual means be adopted to arrest its progress. The impolicy of cutting down the best timber in the country, and converting it into ships, which are to be subjected to this process of rapid destruction, would seem to be too glaring not to have been noticed, and too ruinously wasteful not to have been discontinued as soon as perceived. Within the last few years, the vessels which were in preparation on the stocks have been allowed to remain, under the protection of houses erected over them. In the report marked C, the Commissioners have offered suggestions as to the measures necessary for preventing the progress of an evil, which threatens to render abortive all the efforts of the Nation for the establishment of an effective naval force. The attention of the President is respectfully invited to this branch of the concerns of the Navy, as a matter of minor importance to no one which can be presented for his consideration.

In addition to the measures proposed by the Commissioners for the accomplishment of the objects to which their report refers, it is proper that some remarks be offered on points connected with this subject, and on which their opinions were not required to be expressed. It is believed that the true policy of the Government will be to discontinue, for the present, the building of ships of war, unless for some specific object or immediate emergency; to provide for the thorough repair of the ships in ordinary; for the erection of the necessary sheds for their protection; and for the establishment of a police at each of the naval stations, to superintend and enforce the employment of the means recommended by the Board of Navy Commissioners for their preservation; and such other as the experience of the Navy may have shown applicable to this purpose. To carry the latter objects into execution, an additional appropriation will be required; but their completion must result in an important saving in the naval expenditure, and would give to the nation, instead of the decaying fabrics of which the ships in ordinary now consist, a marine force which could be made to act promptly and efficiently for its defence.

The duty of preparing ships for service, is, by the established regula-

tions, committed to the Commandants of the yards, whose great object seems to be to hurry the equipment, and to incur as little expense as possible. Thus their preparation is imperfect, and the nation has to encounter a considerable expense in foreign ports to obtain the requisite supplies and repairs. The materials for effecting these are sometimes not to be procured, and the ship, being through the whole cruise in a crippled state, performs the service out and home at the risk of her loss, and perhaps that of her crew. Such a system, in peace, is hazardous; and in time of war, dangerous in the extreme. Some cases have been brought to the notice of the Department, in which ships ordered on voyages of two or three years, have been so carelessly equipped, that the whole cruise might be said to be a series of dangers and escapes, and their safe return a matter rather to be wondered at than expected. In every instance in which it can be conveniently done, the officer who is to command should attend to the equipment of his ship for sea. No one is so much interested in the proper discharge of this duty; no one will perform it so well.

It has been usual to discharge seamen at some foreign port, whenever the period of their enlistment expired, or to pay the expenses of their return to the United States. Both these plans are objectionable; the first, because it often leaves the seaman a wanderer on a foreign shore, where he either must suffer from want, or go into the service of other nations; thereby diminishing the number of this useful body of men, or inflicting a heavy burden upon the funds provided for the support of the Navy. To guard against both these inconveniences, the practice is proposed to be adopted, of making the cruises of the ships of war shorter than has been customary, and enlisting the crews for such a term as certainly to allow of their return to the United States before the expiration of the period of enlistment.

The Navy Yards established and now in operation in the United States, are located at the following places: Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Brooklyn, New York, Pensacola, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, and Norfolk. There is scarcely any part of the expenditure for the establishment of a Navy which has contributed so much to exhaust the general fund intended for its support, as that which has been applied to objects connected with the building and maintaining of Navy Yards. It appears from the report made to Congress by the Secretary of the Navy for 1828, that the permanent expenses under this head, including Naval, Ordinary, Hospital, and Civil, amount, annually, to \$268,744. The great expense incurred in the support of these numerous establishments, makes it proper to inquire, whether it may not be materially diminished by a reduction of their number, without affecting injuriously, other important interests of the Navy. The opinion entertained by those most conversant with such subjects, seems to be, that the number now in operation is greater than the public service demands; that the reduction of them would effect an important diminution of expenditure; and that, by concentrating the means and materials for building, repairing, &c. at two or three points most favorable for such purposes, it would tend greatly to promote the general objects of these establishments.

The Commissioners of the Navy Board were directed, on their late visit of inspection into the condition of the Navy Yards, to examine them with a view to this reduction of their number, and to ascertain, as far as practicable, whether there may not be selected, on the numerous bays and harbors of the United States, other sites, embracing greater facilities and advantages than those which have heretofore been employed for those objects.

The report made by the Board, marked C, is herewith transmitted. It affords much interesting information on the points referred to them and connected therewith, and is especially entitled to commendation for the independence of its views on a subject which, from its effects on local interests, is calculated to excite local jealousy and opposition. The document is earnestly recommended to your consideration.

Various representations have been made to the Department, of the advantages offered by the harbors of the small keys in the Gulf of Mexico, called the "Dry Tortugas," as a Naval Rendezvous and Depot of supplies. Should these representations be correct, and the harbor found susceptible of defence, the importance of the position would be equal to that of any other on our Southern coasts. In the month of May last, Commodores Rodgers and Patterson were instructed to visit them, and make such general examination, as would lead to a just estimate of their value and aptitude for the purposes contemplated. This service was performed by Commodore Rodgers—Commodore Patterson having unfortunately been prevented, by disease contracted on the journey, from joining in this examination.

The report made by Commodore Rodgers, marked D, is herewith transmitted. The result of his observations was so favorable as to justify a full and minute survey. Accordingly, Lieutenants Tattnall and Gedney, experienced officers, and well qualified for this service, were ordered to repair to the point designated, and have, for some weeks, been engaged in the performance of this duty. Their return is daily expected; and, when the information obtained by them shall have been received, it will be duly presented to your notice.

The value of the Live Oak growing on the public lands, on the Southern coasts of the United States, as a source of supply of the best timber for the purposes of the Navy, has been long properly estimated by the public, and various laws have been enacted by Congress with a view to its preservation. This has been found to be a task of no ordinary difficulty. The great value of this material for the building of vessels of every description, and the high estimation in which it is held, make it an object of pillage to the unprincipled of all nations; and this is not likely to be restrained but by the adoption of measures more coercive in their character than those which have been hitherto employed. It has been the practice to rely on the vigilance of Agents, distributed over different districts on the coasts. These Agents have been required to guard the public interest, and to bring to justice such as should be found trespassing on its rights. Hitherto their efforts have been unsuccessful. In a few instances only have the Agents been able to detect the depredators, or obtain restitution of the property. From the nature of the country in which this timber is found, it must often happen that Agents on the land can afford but a very imperfect protection against these violators of the public rights. The whole coast presents a series of bays and creeks, readily accessible to such boats as can bring off the timber; while the adjacent district may consist of impervious forests, or morasses and swamps, which forbid the approach of a superintending force.

It is respectfully proposed that these agencies be discontinued, and that the protection of the public interest in this timber be confided to a marine force, adapted to the navigation of the bays and inlets on which it is produced.

Other important services might be rendered by the vessels employed on this duty. They might, if required, aid in the enforcement of the Revenue Laws, and, if competent officers were attached to them, afford facilities

for the collection of materials for charts of these hitherto almost unexplored coasts.

Sundry testimonials have been presented to the Department (see copies and extracts marked E) shewing that canvass, made of cotton, had been successfully employed in the merchant service of this and other countries, and partially in the Navy; all favoring the presumption, that this article might be advantageously used in the Navy of the United States. It was determined, therefore, that some experiments should be made, to test the accuracy of these statements. The execution of this duty has, for the present, been committed to the superintendence of Commodore Elliott, and the experiments are now in progress.

Some trials will, also, be made of cordage prepared from this material.

It is, also, proposed to institute a course of experiments on the canvass and cordage made of American water-rotted hemp, which has been represented as possessing durability and strength at least equal to the same qualities of the imported article. The importance of being relieved from a dependence on foreign supply, for materials essential to the very existence of a Navy, justifies a full and decided trial of the products of our own country.

The practice has, for some years past, prevailed in the Department, to make allowances, or extra compensation, to officers who have been required to perform services not strictly within the line of their professional duty.

It is presumed that this practice had its origin in the belief, that the compensation allowed these officers was insufficient for their necessary support, and an inadequate return for their merits and services. Congress has not only yielded to, but indirectly sanctioned, the procedure, by adopting estimates for the appropriations founded on these anticipated allowances; and the officers themselves now view it as a source of emolument, which ought not to be denied to them. This state of things is irregular and unequal in its operation, and not a little embarrassing to the officer having the administration of the Department. If the compensation now allowed by law is too small, it should be increased; but let it be fixed, and not left to be dispensed at the pleasure, or by the favoritism, of any one.

The compensation now made to the officers of the higher grades in the Navy, is probably far below what their distinguished talents and services entitle them to receive; and compared with the amount given to officers of the same, or correspondent rank in the Army, is remarkable for its inequality and insufficiency. Annexed is an Exhibit, marked F, of the relative rank of the two classes of officers, and of the amount of compensation made to each under the existing laws. It is difficult to understand on what principle of justice, or good policy, is founded this difference in the compensation made to officers in the same service, and of the same established rank. Is not the same eminent talent required for the command of a squadron as for the conduct of an army? An equal share of professional skill? Is the Naval officer less exposed to personal danger? Is his responsibility lighter; or are his labors less arduous? Does he contribute less to guard the interest, or sustain the rights and honor of his country?

The establishment of Schools for the instruction of the junior officers of the Navy, in the various branches of science appertaining to their profession, has so often been recommended to the favorable consideration of Congress, and has so uniformly been passed by, without obtaining their sanction, that it is with reluctance the subject is again introduced to their notice. A firm belief, however, that its tendency would be to qualify them for a better

discharge of the high trust, which may, at some future day, devolve upon them, in their capacities of commanders, forms a sufficient motive for renewing the recommendation, and submitting some views on the subject, which have not been so much insisted on, and which may be entitled to consideration. It has been remarked by a naval officer of much experience and observation, that no inconvenience in the Navy is more sensibly felt than the general ignorance of the officers, of foreign languages. In addition to which, there is often great difficulty in procuring competent and proper persons to act in our ships of war as interpreters and linguists; nor has any allowance ever been made by Congress for the pay and subsistence of such persons. The perplexities and disadvantages under which our officers are placed by these circumstances, may readily be conceived. They are brought in contact, during their cruises, with nations speaking different languages; subject to be drawn into correspondence with the authorities of different places; under the necessity, often, to board vessels of other nations for the purpose of examining their papers and documents; and often without the ability to understand their import and tendency. In time of war, valuable prizes are lost from an inability to translate their papers, and to detect covered property and simulated documents; unnecessary and illegal detentions of vessels are made, and consequent damages obtained from the Government.

The schools which have been employed at New York and Norfolk, in the instruction of midshipmen in the elementary branches of mathematics, have been mere temporary arrangements made by the Department, and have never been fostered or recognised by law. Their introduction into use has not been effected by means very regular or direct, but they have been tolerated by Government, having been found useful, notwithstanding the very limited range of instruction afforded by them. It is respectfully proposed, that, until some better system can be matured, these schools be authorized by law; and that such appropriation be made for their extension and support, as will enable the young officers to acquire a knowledge of such foreign languages as may be important for them to possess in the future pursuit of their profession.

The laws relating to Purser's in the Navy are believed to be defective in some of their provisions. At present they do not provide a limitation to the periods of their continuance in office, nor for the renewal of their official bonds. Many advantages would probably result from their being appointed for stated periods, and made to renew their bonds, as is now required of Navy Agents, Collectors of the Customs, &c.

The mode of compensating them is not such as to lead to a correct discharge of their duties; nor such as is likely to advance the public interests. The profits of these officers arise, principally, from a per centage, which they are authorized to charge on the articles they sell to the crews of ships. A part of these is furnished from the stores of the Government, and the remainder by an advance made to them, to be sold at their risk, and for their own advantage. The temptation to increase their profits by improper demands upon a class of persons little qualified to detect imposition, may sometimes be difficult to be resisted, and ought not to be presented to them. When their dealings are conducted upon principles of the utmost fairness, the income of purser's, in ships of the largest class, amounts to two or three times the compensation of the commander—an extent of remuneration which their services cannot merit, and which is the more odious, when it is known to be drawn from the pockets of men, who, of all others in the employ

of Government, earn their scanty wages with the most unremitting toil, and incessant personal danger.

In lieu of their present emoluments, it is proposed that they receive an annual salary, varied according to the responsibility imposed on them, by having a larger or smaller amount of stock entrusted to their care, and the degree of labor required for its disposition and preservation. Under a system of regulations which would enable the seaman to obtain his little supplies of nautical comforts, at rates fixed, known, and moderate, and without dread of imposition, the Naval service would acquire a popularity with them it has never enjoyed; and the present difficulty of recruiting seamen would be diminished to an extent important as to time and expenditure.

In conformity to an act of the last Session of Congress, in relation to the Africans stranded on the Coast of Florida, a vessel was chartered, and has sailed with them for Liberia, with the exception of two, who were unavoidably detained by sickness. They were placed under the direction of an Agent and an Assistant Surgeon of the Navy, with a liberal supply of hospital and other stores. An effort was made to send to their native country, by the same vessel, two Africans who had been introduced into Alabama, a few years since; but, so strong had their attachment become to this country, that they availed themselves of an opportunity, while preparing for the voyage, to make their escape; since which time they have not been recovered by the Agent of the Government. No cases of importation of this description of persons have come to the knowledge of the Department within the present year.

It may be proper to remark, that drafts have been lately presented by the Agent at Liberia, for the purchase of munitions of war to enable the Colonists to defend themselves against the attacks of the neighboring tribes, with which they were threatened. These claims were rejected, on the ground that no law was known to exist which authorized their payment, or which justified any expenditure beyond a temporary support to the restored captives.

The present confused and unsettled condition of the fiscal concerns of the Navy Department, makes it proper that the subject be brought to the notice of Congress; since, it is believed, that their interposition alone can lead to an equitable and final adjustment. In the month of March last, when it was discovered that these derangements in the finances existed, reference was made to the Board of Navy Commissioners, for such explanations as they might be enabled to give. Their communication in reply accompanies this report, marked G. From a desire to present such minute and detailed information on this subject, as may be necessary for its proper illustration, the Fourth Auditor of the Treasury was requested by letter, (copy of which is annexed, marked H,) to report on the present condition of the accounts of his office, shewing the probable origin of these embarrassments, and to suggest such measures as he might think necessary to correct the evil. His answer is annexed, marked I.

The vacancy created in the command of the Navy Yard at Washington, by the death of the venerable and highly esteemed Commodore Tingey, in February last, has been supplied by the appointment of Commodore Isaac Hull. In April, this officer commenced the discharge of the duties of the station, and has since, by great industry and judicious arrangement, reduced the chaos of materials accumulated there to good order, and introduced a

system of discipline and economy favorable to the general operations of the establishment.

The laws concerning the Marine Corps, and the act of 1800, establishing regulations for the government of the Navy, are recommended for revision. The papers marked K and L contain the estimates for the Navy and Marine Corps; and those marked M, N, O, are lists of Deaths, Dismissals, and Resignations.

The annual reports on the Navy Pension and Hospital Funds, &c., will be presented at the usual time.

The act of Congress authorizing the establishment of the Board of Navy Commissioners appears to have been designed to provide auxiliaries to the Secretary of the Navy in the discharge of the ministerial duties of the Department. This body was required to be selected from amongst the most experienced of the Naval Commanders, to whom a knowledge of those duties was presumed to be familiar, and by whom they might be expected to be most correctly discharged.

The subjects placed under the superintendence of the Board, by this distribution of the duties of the Department, are numerous, and of almost unlimited variety.

It may be justly questioned, whether the present organization of this body is such as to secure the necessary attention to the diversified subjects placed under its direction, and whether a judicious division of its duties would not facilitate the proper execution of the objects proposed by the institution of this branch of the Department.

Respectful reference is made to a communication from the Navy Board, in answer to inquiries having relation to this subject, herewith transmitted, marked P.

The present Naval Corps of the United States is believed to be more numerous than is required for the wants of the service, and more than can be advantageously employed, with reference to their own advancement in the knowledge and practice of their profession.

“There can be no National Establishment,” says a distinguished Naval character, “like that of the Navy of the United States, which will not, in the course of years, receive into its ranks some who are illy calculated to uphold its character, much less to contribute thereto by their talents and subordination.”

“There may exist, also, some who, when received into the service, were calculated to become its ornaments, but who may, through various concurring causes, have degenerated into a reproach. Happily for this institution, the Government retains in its hands the corrective for any defects in the Corps.”

“It is now twenty-eight years since a judicious pruning was given to the Navy; a period sufficient to admit some useless suckers to repose under the shade of its virtues and its valor. The time would, therefore, seem to have arrived, to correct some of the evils of the service by a Peace Establishment; and which it would go far to effect, by ridding it of the useless and insubordinate portion of its materials. The remainder would be preserved in more correct views of the service, and their management become more easy to the Executive Department.”

If, in pruning these excrescences from the too luxuriant growth of the Navy, some branches should be lopped off, which, in their day, have borne good fruit, let it be remembered that the Navy Pension Fund, with its an-

ple stores, is open for their sustenance and support; and, it may be added, that the Navy Asylum, on the Schuylkill, is now so near its completion as to promise at an early day to afford a permanent and comfortable residence to its disabled founders, and to such as, though not disabled, may have merited, by their bravery, or long and faithful services, the gratitude of their country.

All which is respectfully submitted.

JOHN BRANCH.