February 23, 1900

Senate

v. 33 (3)

p. 2128-2133

TERRITORY OF HAWAII.

The Senate, in Committee of the Whole, resumed the consideration of the Senate bill (S. 221) to provide a government for the Territory of Hawaii.

Mr. VEST. Mr. President, no one opposes the annexation of Hawaii more intensely than I do, but that is now a dead issue, and I earnestly ask of every Senator to secure the best possible government, the most equal and fair, for the inhabitants of those islands.

I shall vote for the pending bill, because in its general outlines it is beyond and above constitutional criticism and raises none of the issues which have been urged against Puerto Rico and the Philippines. I think that the thanks of the country are due to the Senators who prepared this bill. There is no provision in it changing the tariff and, even by implication, publishing to the world that Hawaii is not a part of the United States, or, if a part of the United States, that it can be held as a colony, a province, without the people of those islands having the slightest shadow of self-government.

I shall not repeat, Mr. President, my views at length in regard to the extraordinary assumption that any territory under the jurisdiction of the United States should be thereunder be held and governed as a territory. I undertook to show that by the historic argument, if I may so term it, it was impossible that the men who fought the Revolutionary war and made the Constitution of 1789 could ever have contemplated establishing a colonial system in this country. I said then and I say now—and it cannot be successfully contradicted, in my opinion—that the language in the Declaration of Independence and Washington's Farewell Address both are now eliminated; I do not know why, unless they had become so old-fashioned and antiquated as to be considered ancient history and simply academic in the modern world.

Mr. PLATT of Connecticut. Why, Mr. President—

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Does the Senator from Missouri yield to the Senator from Connecticut?

Mr. VEST. Certainly.

Mr. PLATT of Connecticut. I hope the Senator is mistaken in supposing that the Declaration of Independence has been eliminated from our Manual, and I think he is, because on page 389 of the edition of the Manual published in 1899 the Declaration is to be found. I think the Senator must have overlooked it.

Mr. VEST. I do not think I did. I looked very carefully for it in the last edition, as I am not a party to, of the Rules and Orders of the Senate. But it is a matter of no importance. It might have been left out by inadvertence. I do not know how this book is prepared; but I was astonished not to find, or I was unable to find, in the edition that was placed on my desk at the beginning of this session, any copy of the Declaration of Independence or the Farewell Address of Washington. I shall not undertake to say that it was done because the doctrines in those two great papers had become obsolete, or even that it was intentionally done.

Mr. TELLER. It was put in the back of the volume; that is all.

Mr. VEST. Mr. President, it does not matter whether it is published or not. I repeat that the Declaration of Independence is devoted, much the larger part of it, to an arrangement of the King of Great Britain for applying to the colonies in America the oppressive and despotic features of the colonial system as practiced by the nations of Europe.

It is true that in this Declaration of Independence the colonial system is not denounced specifically and co nomine, but all of its salient and essential features of despotism are singled out by Jefferson and denounced.

"He," says Jefferson, referring to the King of Great Britain, George III., "has oppressed the people of the colonies by denying them all participation in the government of the country, and committing all the other wrongs that the monarchs of Europe under the colonial system inflicted upon their subjects.

If the men who fought the Revolutionary war could today take cognizance of the affairs of the living, they would know that they suffered and died, half clothed, half fed, and half armed, for seven long years in order that their descendants might inherit upon other peoples of any color, the wrongs and outrageous which Jefferson denounced in this Declaration.

There was, and it can be seen in the original Declaration of Independence, a government besides those found in the Declaration of Independence as we now have it. In the archives of the Government, the President can find this original Declaration, and it shows upon its face that when Jefferson reported the Declaration it contained the most terrible arrangement of the King of England for inflicting African slavery upon this continent that ever came from the lips or pen of mortal man.

He has, says Jefferson, made war upon an innocent and helpless people in Africa, torn them from their homes, captivated them—using the old Revolutionary war argument—then, when the war was over, brought them to this continent, inflicted them upon an unwilling people, and then attempted to incite servile insurrection in order that fire and sword might be put into the hands of the slaves against their owners and masters.

Thus a colony as a colony had for years protested against the African slave trade, but in vain. The King of England had nullified in every instance the acts of the colonial assembly of Virginia endeavoring to prohibit the importation of slaves into her domain. Jefferson knew this; but when this indictment against the King of England was read before the Senate, the President, who was then considered by the Convention, there was then, as always afterwards, a sensitive feeling in regard to the institution of slavery; and at the instance of John Adams and others this part of the Declaration was stricken out.

There is a curious history, Mr. President, in regard to the institution of slavery. There was the Declaration of Independence. The President, though antebellum, of that institution in the colonies and afterwards in the United States, which has always seemed to me one of the most remarkable features in the formation of the Constitution of 1789. We can now afford to allude to it in this era of fraternal feeling, when our President says that the greatest wrongs whatever wrongs were committed, should be done without decorum and dishonor. The debates of the Convention of 1789 show that when the question of the importation of African slaves into this country came up for discussion, Mr. Madison of Virginia, the leader of the Convention, denounced the African slave trade as inhuman, un-Christian, and unworthy to exist amid the blessings of Christianity. He said, "it was a shame and disgrace that in a Republic African slavery should be instituted with the consent of its people."

Gouverneur Morris, a member of the Convention, alluding to what had been said by Mr. Madison, deprecated the excitement and said that in the same article was a provision to which New England greatly objected, and it was to the effect that the navigation laws could be abrogated by a bare majority of the members of both Houses of Congress. New England was then the great ship-building and ship-sailing port of the United States, no foreign-built ship being admitted to the coastwise or foreign trade in this country. If, said Gouverneur Morris, "the navigation laws, in which New England is greatly interested, and the importation of African slaves can be sent to a committee, where 51 votes, for or against, a committee, shall go, for or against, and the majority of the members of Congress, who I am sure will decide the question before the Convention, General Pinckney, of South Carolina, moved to extend the slave trade to 1808. The motion was seconded by Mr. Gorbam, of Massachusetts, and, each State casting one vote, the motion was carried, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Maryland, and all of the New England States voting for the extension, Pennsylvania and New Jersey voting against it. Mr. President, the African slave trade lasted until 1808 under this agreement. The institution of slavery, forced upon old Virginia, went out in tears and fire and blood, as Mr. Jefferson said that it would. The South paid a terrible price for this agreement in the Convention of 1789. Her best and bravest sons fell on the soil of the South with their blood, and New England, although the price she has paid has not been quite as terrible and disastrous, seems to-day the shipbuilding, which she endeavored to preserve as a monopoly to her people, almost extinct so far as the foreign trade