

Report No. 66.

[To accompany Mr. White's amendment to bill H. R. No. 764.]

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

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HOME DEPARTMENT.

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FEBRUARY 12, 1849.

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Mr. WHITE, from the Committee on Agriculture, made the following

REPORT:

*The Committee on Agriculture to whom was referred the memorial of J. S. Skinner, Roswell Colt, and others, upon the subject of agricultural schools, and a home department or secretary of the interior, report:*

That subsequent to the reference of the above mentioned memorials, the Secretary of the Treasury had presented in his annual report to Congress an able and condensed method of arriving at the only practical results; in the judgment of your committee, of the prayer of the memorialists, and that in the creation of a new department.

The immediate and obvious considerations which urgently commend the creation of a new executive department, to be entitled the Department of the Interior or Home Department, have been so tersely and lucidly set forth in this annual report of the Secretary of the Treasury, that your committee are at a loss to determine where anything could be added to the force of the argument, the necessity of the measure, or its utility to the great producing interests of the country. The mischiefs, losses, and dangers, resulting from the present irrational and ruinous distribution of executive powers and duties, could hardly be over estimated, or extravagantly stated; with public lands under the charge of one department, Indian relations under that of another, patents and inventions presided over by the secretary of foreign affairs; while our ocean mail arrangements are divided between two different departments, neither of them having any proper cognizance of foreign relations, it is impossible that order, system, economy, and ac-

countability should be preserved in the various details of the public service. The evil is radical, and requires a radical remedy—and that remedy is the organization of a new department—a home department, in accordance with the example of all civilized countries, with the express recommendation of Washington. If there was any necessity for it when our country was bounded by the Ohio and the Chattahoochee, and contained four millions of people, there must certainly be far greater need of it now; when our country has expanded to Lake Superior, the Rio Grande, and the Pacific, and our population has swelled to not less than twenty millions. Our public lands alone demand more care, labor, and attention now, than our whole government did fifty years ago. They require, moreover, to be considered in other aspects, than that of revenue, and so should be detached from the control of the department of finance. Our Indian relations also, we could hope to convert into relations of peace rather than war, and it were well, that the appearance should be at least no worse than the reality. The action of the government, and the enforcement and modification of its laws respecting patents and inventions, are matters of the gravest and still growing importance; they need a measure of attention, a capacity of direction, which it were preposterous to expect from the secretary in charge of our foreign affairs. The establishment of a home department becomes, therefore, a matter of the clearest expediency, the most urgent necessity. But there are some further and broader considerations of public policy and utility, which dictate such an establishment, and which your committee would also present; should these be deemed invalid or irrelevant by any, they will at least not weaken the force of the considerations already referred to, while, should they be deemed pertinent, they cannot fail to add something to the urgency of the measures we have rapidly glanced at.

The federal government has now been in existence very nearly sixty years, during which time it has expended through its departments of war and of the navy, some seven hundred millions of dollars, for purposes of military defence or aggression. The average expenditure for these purposes is something like twelve or fourteen millions per annum; while for the last twelve years, it considerably exceeds twenty millions. The whole amount of expenditure by this government during the same sixty years, for the promotion of the arts of peace, for the development and perfection of agriculture, and mechanical science, for the facilitation of internal intercourse and trade, for the support of education, and the diffusion of knowledge, has probably amounted in all to less than one million of dollars per annum, and for some of those most useful, necessary, and indispensable, not one dollar has ever been bestowed by the federal government. The expenditure within, or allotment to the States, wherein the public lands are located, of some small portion of those lands, or their proceeds, does not fairly come within the scope of this comparison, since those lands or proceeds, were wisely thus appropriated by this government, in its capacity of landlord, with a view to an enhancement of the value, and a more speedy disposal of the remainder.

That the ruling motive in this appropriation was entirely selfish, we will neither assert nor deny, but refer to the arguments invariably made in Congress when such applications for lands are made, and also to the fact that such grants have been made almost exclusively to the States containing public lands, which goes far to prove that the primary inducement or justification for these grants was what we have stated. The general fact remains unaffected, that war and preparations for war have been practically regarded as the chief duty and end of this government; while the arts of peace and production, whereby nations are subsisted, civilization advanced, and happiness secured, have been esteemed unworthy the attention, or foreign to the objects, of this government. It seems to us that this should not always continue, but that we should, as a wise people, reorganize the government, so far as to fulfil those duties, also, which are suggested by the nature, aspirations and wants of our race, as physical, moral and intellectual beings; that it should do something towards protecting the people against those internal enemies, ignorance, destitution and vice, as well as against those foreign foes who may invade, or who it is apprehended may assail us. We content ourselves with a bare suggestion on this head; but those who deem it a just one, may readily follow out the argument to its proper conclusion.

The taking of the decennial census of our country demands an amount and kind of preliminary attention which no existing department of the government is either required or enabled to bestow upon it. That no census hitherto taken has been nearly as instructive and valuable as it might and ought to have been, will hardly be questioned. What we need is not merely an enumeration of the people of the United States, but a daguerreotype view of their industrial condition, intellectual attainments, and social progress. We ought to know, on the publication of each successive census, whether our people have improved or retrograded within the last ten years; also, in what respects they have advanced, and in what (if any) they have receded. We should know whether the proportion of independent-freeholders to the whole number has increased or diminished; whether the average production of grain and of esculents to the acre is greater or less than at the last census; what is the proportion of those who earn their living by their own labor, as compared with former periods; how rapidly dwellings are multiplied; how many of them are owned by the occupants; and, approximately, whether, the great mass are better fed, lodged, clothed and taught, employed and recompensed, than they formerly were. It is very well, also, to know how we compare in our possessions, of horses, cattle, sheep, swine, &c., with our fathers; but the first and fullest inquiry should regard human beings—not merely their numbers and ages, but their general condition. The accuracy and value of such a census must, to some extent, depend upon the fitness and fidelity of the takers, but much more on the capacity and maturity of consideration with which the questions have been framed, and the blanks wisely and properly made; and this is a work of which Congress can obviously do but little, and that little

vaguely and loosely; nor is it a work for some subordinate in one or another of the present departments, but one which fairly demands and should justly receive the emphatic and deliberate attention of some functionary of the most undoubted ability to originate and plan as well as to execute and fulfil. Such functionary should be designated and appointed at this session of Congress, since a census must be taken in the course of next year, and there will not be time thoroughly and carefully to prepare for it after the meeting of the next Congress; and to designate him at this time is to double the value of the next census, and render it useful and instructive to an extent hitherto unknown.

Your committee, therefore, entertaining no doubt of the importance and eminent necessity of such a new distinctive department as the Secretary of the Treasury has recommended, ask leave to introduce the accompanying bill.