

REPORT

OF

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY.

NAVY DEPARTMENT, *December 5, 1840.*

SIR: In the performance of a duty annually devolving on this department, I respectfully submit the following report:

The squadron in the Mediterranean remains the same as it was at the date of my last report, and consists of the Ohio 74, the Brandywine first class frigate, and the Cyane sloop of war; the whole under the command of Commodore Isaac Hull. This force has been found fully adequate to the protection of our commerce, which has remained unmolested in that quarter.

The squadron on the Pacific station is composed of the frigate Constitution, the sloop of war St. Louis, and the schooner Shark, under Commodore Claxton. Since the date of my last report, the schooner Enterprise, then on her way home, and the sloops of war Lexington and Falmouth, which had been directed to return, have arrived in the United States, and have been replaced by the sloops Yorktown and Dale, now on the eve of sailing for the Pacific. The squadron, when joined by these vessels, will consist of a frigate of the first class, three sloops of war, and a schooner. Commodore Claxton has been directed to despatch the Yorktown on a cruise to the Sandwich and Society islands, New Zealand, the coast of Japan, the Gulf of California, and the Ladrões and Marquesas, for the general protection of our whaling interests and other commercial purposes.

The squadron on the coast of Brazil, under Commodore J. B. Nicolson, at the date of my last report, was composed of the razee Independence, and the sloops of war Fairfield and Marion. The two former have returned to the United States, Commodore Nicolson having been relieved in the command of that station by Commodore Charles G. Ridgely, whose force now consists of the Potomac first class frigate, the sloops of war Decatur and Marion, and the schooner Enterprise. The difficulties between the French Government and that of the Argentine Republic still subsisting, and the blockade continuing to be rigidly enforced, it has been thought expedient to augment this force, and the sloop of war Concord is now on the eve of sailing for that purpose.

The squadron employed in the Gulf of Mexico and the West Indies, under Commodore William B. Shubrick, at the date of my last report consisted of the frigate Macedonian, and the sloops of war Ontario, Erie, Warren, and Levant. The Ontario has been ordered to the north for repairs, and the Erie, being found unfit for service, has been detached from the squadron. The remaining vessels, with the exception of the Warren, were directed to leave the station during the hurricane months, and proceed to the north.

Commodore Shubrick accordingly left Pensacola in July last, with the Macedonian, Levant, and Erie, and arrived at Boston in August. Thence he proceeded to Eastport, and on his return visited the principal ports on the coast as far south as Norfolk, where, in conformity with his instructions:

the department, he delivered the command of the West India squadron to Commodore Jesse Wilkinson, who had been appointed to relieve him, and who has proceeded to his station. The command of Commodore Wilkinson now consists of the Macedonian frigate, and the sloops of war *Levant* and *Warren*; which force is deemed sufficient for the protection of our interests in that quarter, in the present state of things.

The frigate *Columbia* and corvette *John Adams*, employed in a cruise in the Indian and China seas, under Commodore George C. Read, for the protection of the commerce of the United States in that quarter, have returned home. The frigate *Constellation* and sloop of war *Boston* have recently sailed for Rio de Janeiro, where they will replenish their supplies and receive Captain Lawrence Kearney, now in command of the flag-ship on the Brazilian station, who will hoist his pendant on board the *Constellation*, as commander of the East India squadron, and proceed, with that vessel and the *Boston*, to carry out his instructions.

The Exploring Expedition, as stated in my last report, was at Callao, whence Lieutenant Wilkes sailed on the 6th July, 1839. Since that period he has visited the Society islands, Navigator's Group, New Zealand, and various detached islands, with whose inhabitants he held the most amicable intercourse, and with the ports and harbors of which he made himself particularly acquainted. On the 26th December, 1839, he left the port of Sydney, in New Zealand, and proceeded to penetrate the Antarctic sea. On the 19th January following, the *Vincennes* discovered land in latitude $66^{\circ} 2'$ south, longitude $154^{\circ} 27'$ east, and had soundings in thirty fathoms water. The same day the *Peacock* made a similar discovery in latitude $66^{\circ} 31'$, longitude $153^{\circ} 40'$, and obtained soundings at a depth of 320 fathoms. Lieutenant Wilkes coasted along this land, and had sight of it at various times, for a distance of eighteen hundred miles, and has denominated it the Antarctic Continent. It is to be regretted, however, that the vast masses of ice, with which it is every where defended, prevented a nearer approach than fifteen miles, and rendered it impossible to land. It is described as presenting one vast mass of snow and ice, apparently rising almost perpendicularly from the sea, and will probably forever baffle the efforts of man to explore its interior, or convert it to any useful purposes.

After repeated and persevering efforts to approach the coast and effect a landing, Lieutenant Wilkes, his officers and men, having suffered severely from intense cold and the exposures incidental to this hazardous enterprise, returned to Sydney the 11th of March, 1840, where he was joined by the *Peacock* and *Porpoise*, the former of which had been in imminent danger from coming in contact with an island of ice. Lieutenant Wilkes speaks in the highest terms of the conduct of the officers and crews of the expedition. At the last dates (the 6th of April) he was at the Bay of Islands, New Zealand, whence he was shortly to proceed to carry out his instructions.

The steam frigate *Fulton* has been employed during the past season in experimenting with Paixhan guns and shot, under the direction of Captain Perry; and with a view to afford as many officers as possible an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the practice of gunnery, as large a number of supernumeraries have been attached to her as she could accommodate. The reports of Captain Perry present very interesting results, and it is contemplated to continue the experiments for the purpose of demonstrating the relative advantages of the Paixhan guns and those in ordinary use, as well as of affording a useful practice to our naval officers, by attaching them in succession to this vessel.

The surveys on the southern coast of the United States, directed by the act of the 3d March, 1837, have been completed under the superintendence of Lieutenant Glynn; and it is expected that the department will be enabled to lay before Congress, either at or shortly after the commencement of the session, complete charts of all the ports and places which have been surveyed.

The brig Consort, under the command of Lieutenant Powell, is now occupied in surveying the coast from the bay of Appalachicola to the mouth of the Mississippi, as directed by the act making appropriations for the naval service approved July 20th, 1840.

The sloop of war Preble, Commander Breese, has been employed on the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador during the late fishing season, in protecting the rights and interests of American citizens engaged in the fisheries. On the termination of the cruise she returned to Portland, whence she was ordered to Boston for examination previous to being sent on foreign service.

The brig Dolphin, Lieutenant Bell, and the schooner Grampus, Lieutenant Paine, have been employed on the coast of Africa, in the suppression of the slave-trade. They returned at the commencement of the sickly season, and have since sailed in pursuit of the same object. The presence of these vessels on the slave coast, during the season in which this disgraceful traffic is carried on, will, in all probability, in a great degree arrest its progress, so far as it has been prosecuted by the assumption of the American flag, and do much to relieve the nation from the unmerited stigma of participating in a trade equally in violation of the laws of the United States and the policy of their Government. From the reports of Lieutenants Bell and Paine, it appears that the traffic in slaves is now carried on principally under Portuguese colors, through the medium of slave stations, (as they are denominated,) established at different points of the coast, under the protection of the neighboring native chiefs, who furnish the slaves, and receive in return goods manufactured in England expressly for this purpose. Here the slaves are collected until an opportunity offers for the slaver to approach the land under cover of night, and receive them on board. Both officers are of opinion that, so long as these stations are permitted to exist, and this barter carried on, all attempts effectually to arrest the traffic in slaves will end in administering only partial remedies, which will but aggravate the disease. There can be little doubt that the number of slaves transported from Africa is now greater than it was previous to the adoption of measures for its prevention and punishment, which, it would seem, have served no other purpose than to excite the cupidity of unprincipled adventurers, by increasing the value of slaves, and thus presenting temptations which overpower all apprehension of consequences.

During the past year, three small schooners, the Flirt, the Wave, and the Otsego, which had been previously procured and employed by the War Department, under the act making appropriations for suppressing Indian hostilities, approved 3d March, 1839, having been placed under the direction of this department, were employed on the coast of Florida, under Lieutenant McLaughlin. That officer lately returned to the north in the Flirt, bringing with him the men whose terms of service had expired, together with the sick and disabled attached to the expedition. He has since sailed with men sufficient to complete the complement of all his vessels, as well as for boat service. An additional number of marines has also been attached to his command, with a view to operations on land against the Indians, as

well as the protection of the lives and property of the citizens, and the prevention of the introduction of supplies for the use of the enemy.

The two steam frigates commenced under the second section of the act approved 3d March, 1839, (one at New York, the other at Philadelphia,) have been so far completed that the former will be ready for launching in a few days, and the latter in the ensuing spring, as soon as the Delaware is free from ice. The engines and boilers are also in a course of speedy completion, and, when finished, will be placed on board, and the vessels prepared for service without delay.

The apprentice system continues in operation, and thus far its results are highly satisfactory. The conduct of the young lads is generally exemplary; and such is their rapid progress in the art of seamanship, that, by the time they are of age for sea service, our commanders generally prefer them to older seamen. I take this occasion to recommend that this system be fostered to the utmost extent of which it is susceptible, being fully of opinion that it presents one great means of partially, at least, remedying that increasing scarcity of competent petty officers and able seamen, which greatly embarrasses the operations of the navy, delays the sailing of our public vessels, and places the defence of the honor and interests of the United States under the protection of crews, a great portion of which are foreigners.

This scarcity of seamen for the uses of the navy is, I apprehend, owing to the high wages they receive in the merchant service, and the comparatively short periods of their engagements in commercial voyages; to the absence of an apprentice system in the mercantile marine; and the discharge of seamen, when their terms have expired, on foreign stations, where the seductions of climate and the allurements of pleasure attach them to the soil, and whence many of them never return, or return so enervated as to be comparatively unfit for active service. The inquiries I have instituted result in the fact, that many of our seamen are now scattered among the islands of the Pacific and on the coast of South America; and, though directions have been given to reclaim them whenever it may be found practicable, there can be little doubt that a large number are thus irretrievably lost to their country. I have also sufficient reason to believe that the modification of the navy ration, which was proposed to Congress, but which has not been definitively acted on, would, if adopted, contribute materially to attach our seamen more permanently to the service; and I take this occasion earnestly to request that the early attention of Congress may be invited to this subject generally, as one of vital importance to the well-being of the navy.

The accompanying reports and letter from the Commissioner of Pensions (marked N, No. 1 to No. 7) exhibit the number of pensioners, the amount of their pensions, and the means now remaining at my disposal to meet those which will become due the 1st of January and 1st of July, 1841. From these documents it will appear, that, under the operation of the navy pension laws, (and most especially that of the 3d of March, 1837,) the navy pension fund, which, at the period of its passage, amounted to upwards of a million of dollars, the annual interest of which was sufficient to meet all demands, now consists of one hundred thousand dollars in Cincinnati five per cent. stock, greatly depreciated; fourteen thousand dollars of stock of the Bank of Washington, in the same situation; thirty-three thousand three hundred and thirty-nine dollars five per cent. stock of the city of Washing-

ton; and eleven thousand four hundred dollars of stock of the Union Bank of Georgetown: the latter totally unsaleable at this time.

By the same statement, it appears that the sum of one hundred and fifty-one thousand three hundred and fifty-two dollars and thirty-nine cents will be required, in the course of the year 1841, to meet demands arising out of the present pension list; and that, consequently, either an appropriation of that sum during the present session must be made, or the pensioners will remain unpaid, and the faith of the nation, which was pledged to make good any deficiency in this fund, remain unredeemed.

The estimates which accompany this report have been prepared with a due regard to economy on one hand, and the protection of the honor and interests of the United States on the other. The number of vessels now in commission is fully equal to those employed in preceding years; and it is believed that, during the past year, neither the persons nor property of our citizens have any where suffered outrage or wrong, for want of due attention in affording the means of protection and redress.

It will be perceived that the Board of Navy Commissioners have again presented an estimate for additional clerks, who I am satisfied are indispensable to the prompt performance of the duties of that office, which are daily increasing, and which there is no reason to believe will suffer any diminution in future.

A schedule of the documents accompanying this report is enclosed.

Respectfully submitted:

J. K. PAULDING.

To the PRESIDENT of the *United States*.