

FREE NAVIGATION OF THE ST. LAWRENCE.

MAY 2, 1850.

Mr. BUEL, from the Committee on Foreign Affairs, presented the following views of a portion of the committee; which were ordered to be printed:

[TO ACCOMPANY REPORT 295.]

*The undersigned, members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to whom were referred sundry petitions of citizens of the United States residing in States adjacent to the northern chain of lakes, and the memorial of the legislature of the State of Wisconsin, praying Congress to adopt measures for securing to American commerce the right of freely navigating the St. Lawrence, and also joint resolutions of the legislature of the State of Michigan relative to the same subject, ASSENTING to the resolution reported by the committee, also report their reasons:*

The free navigation of the St. Lawrence, from its connexion with the chain of lakes to the ocean, presents a question somewhat new in the history of the government. In its early agitation, its importance was more prospective than present; and hence, after various unsuccessful attempts to settle it by negotiation with Great Britain, it was allowed to slumber until a more urgent occasion should call for its decision.

The future, which then seemed distant, has suddenly become a present reality, and the wonderful growth of our inland commerce of the lakes has revived the question and given to it fresh interest. The government is now called upon to adopt measures for securing a commercial privilege of great local and national importance. Final action upon the subject will determine whether the export productions of the Northwest and the States adjacent to the lakes may, in part, find their way to the markets of the world through the ocean-outlet of nature, or be disadvantageously forced through the interrupted, contracted, and circuitous channels of art. It will in fact determine whether the millions who dwell and are to dwell in the valley of the lakes shall be permitted to seek intercourse with remote countries by a gentle and easy descent to the ocean, thus appropriating the St. Lawrence as a natural highway to the purposes for which it was designed by Providence, or whether they must divert streams from their native beds, fell forests, fill up valleys, bridge chasms, and even climb or penetrate mountains, in order to maintain such intercourse.

Whoever will look at this question in its length and breadth will not wonder that it now presses itself upon the attention of the country as a great practical question. The laws of nature, the wants of the people, the commercial interests of the country, and even the necessities of the