

National Defence.

We are indebted to the attention of the Hon. R. B. CRANSTON, for a Congressional document--the Letter from the Secretary of War on the subject of a system of national defence, &c.

We copy from this document the following, in relation to Narragansett Bay :

Narragansett bay.—The properties of this great roadstead will be here briefly adverted to. More minute information may be obtained by reference to reports of 1820 and 1821.

As a harbor, this is acknowledged by all to be the best on the whole coast of the United States ; and it is the only close man-of-war harbor that is accessible with a northwest wind, the prevailing and most violent wind of the inclement season. Numerous boards and commissions, sometimes composed of naval officers, sometimes of army officers, sometimes of officers of both services, have, at different times, had the subject of this roadstead under consideration ; and all have concurred in recommending, in strong terms, that it be made a place of naval rendezvous and repair, if not a great naval depot ; one or more of these commissions preferring it, for the latter purpose, to all other positions. These recommendations have not been acted on ; but it is next to certain that a war would force their adoption upon the Government.

The defence adopted for Narraganset roads must be formidable on the important points, because they will be exposed to powerful expeditions. Although the possession of this harbor, the destruction of the naval establishment, the capture of the floating defences, and the possession of the island as a place of debarkation and refreshment, should not be considered as constituting of themselves, objects worthy a great expedition, they might very well be the preliminary steps of such expedition; and defences weak in their character might tempt, rather than deter it; for although unable to resist the enterprise, they might be fully competent, after being captured and strengthened by such means as he would have at hand, to protect him from offensive demonstrations on our part.

There are, besides, in the local circumstances, some reasons why the works should be strong. The channel on the eastern side of the island, being permanently closed by a solid bridge, requires no defensive works; but this bridge being the upper end of the island, the channel is open to an enemy all along the eastern shore of the island. Works erected for the defence of the channel on the west side of the island cannot, therefore, prevent, nor even oppose, a landing on the eastern side. The enemy consequently, may take possession, and bend his whole force to the reduction of the forts on the island, which cannot be relieved until a force has been organized, brought from a distance, conveyed by

water to the points attacked, and landed in the face of his batteries and this obviously requiring several days, during which the forts should be capable of holding out.— To do this against an expedition of 15,000 or 20,000 men, demands something more than the strength to resist a single assault.

Unless the main works be competent to withstand a siege of a few days, they will not, therefore, fulfil their trust, and will be worse than useless.

It must here be noticed, that, although the works do not prevent the landing of an enemy on Rhode Island, they will, if capable of resisting his efforts for a few days, make his residence on the island for any length of time impossible, since forces in any number may be brought from the main, and landed under the cover of the fire of the works.

To come now to the particular defences proposed for this roadstead. It must be stated that there are three entrances into Narraganset roads :

1st. The eastern channel, which passes up on the east side of the island of Rhode Island. This, as before stated, being shut by a solid bridge, needs no defence by fortifications, other than a field work or two which may be thrown up at the opening of war.

2d. The central channel, which enters from sea by passing between Rhode Island and Conanicut island. This is by far the best entrance, and leads to the best anchorage ; and this it is proposed to de-

rend by a fort on the east side of the entrance, designed to be the principal work in the system. This work, called Fort Adams, is nearly completed. On the west side of the entrance it is proposed to place another work; and on an island called Rose island, facing the entrance, a third work. It is also proposed to repair the old fort on Goat island, just within the mouth; and also old Fort Green, which is a little higher up, and on the island of Rhode Island.

3d. As to the western passage, three modes present themselves first, by reducing the depth of water by an artificial ledge, so as, while the passage shall be as free as it is now for the coasting trade, it shall be shut as to the vessels of war, including steam-vessels; second, by relying on fortifications alone to close the channel; or, third, by resorting in part to one and in part to the other mode just mentioned. Either is practicable; but, being the least expensive and most certain, the estimates are founded on the first.

The total cost of the Narraganset defences is estimated at \$1,317,482.