

SPEECH OF MR. WINTHROP, OF MASSACHUSETTS,

ON

THE OREGON QUESTION.

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES, MARCH 18, 1844.

The House having resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole on the State of the Union, and having proceeded to the consideration of the Report of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, declaring it to be inexpedient to act at this time on a resolution introduced by Mr. Owen, of Indiana, to request the President of the United States to give due notice of twelve months to the British government for terminating the convention for the joint occupation of the Oregon Territory; and the chairman of the Committee of Foreign Affairs (Mr. C. J. INGERSOLL, of Pennsylvania) having spoken in opposition to the report—

Mr. WINTHROP addressed the committee nearly as follows:

I have no purpose, Mr. Chairman, of attempting a detailed reply to the honorable gentleman who has just taken his seat. I was greatly in hopes that another member of this house, and I will add, another member of the Massachusetts delegation, who has so often instructed and delighted us on these questions of foreign controversy, (Mr. ADAMS) would have taken the floor for this purpose. I would gladly yield it to him, or, indeed, to any one else who is disposed for it, feeling, as I deeply do, the want of greater preparation and longer reflection for doing justice to the occasion. I am unwilling, however, that the speech which has just been delivered should pass off without some notice. I fear, too, that if I yield to the kind suggestion of a friend near me, and ask a postponement of the debate, I may lose an opportunity altogether. Recent proceedings in this house afford me very little encouragement to try such an experiment. On more than one occasion, questions of the highest interest and importance seem to have been brought up unexpectedly, as this has been, for the purpose of allowing some member of the majority of the house to deliver an elaborate exposition of his views, and then to have been shuffled off again by the previous question, or by a motion to lay on the table, before any member of the minority could open his lips in reply. I proceed, therefore, to make the best of the opportunity which is now secured to me.

And, in the first place, let me say a word in regard to the *sectional* character which has been given to this subject. It has been often said that the question about Oregon is a Western question, and a disposition has been manifested to charge hostility to Western interests and Western rights upon all who are not ready to draw the sword, without further delay, in defence of this Territory. I deny this position altogether. It is a National question. It is a question for the whole country. The North have as much interest in it as the West, and as much right to be heard upon it; indeed, there are some views in which it is more a Northern than a Western question. I cannot forget that the American claim to Oregon, so far as

it rests upon discovery, dates back to Massachusetts adventure and Boston enterprise. It was a Boston ship which gave its name to the Columbia river. It was Captain Robert Gray, of Boston, who first discovered that river. It was the Hancock and the Adams of Massachusetts—the proscribed patriots of the Revolution—whose names were inscribed on those remote Capes. And if we turn from the early history of Oregon to its present importance, and to the immediate interests which are involved in its possession, the North will be found no less prominently concerned in the question. The great present value of this Territory has relation to the commerce and navigation of the Pacific ocean. The Whale fishery of this country requires safe stations and harbors on the northwest coast. And by what part of the nation is this fishery carried on? Why, sir, the State of Massachusetts owns nine-tenths of all the whale ships of the United States. The single town of New Bedford, (the residence of my honorable friend Mr. GRINNELL), sends out 92,000, out of a little more than 130,000, tons of the American shipping employed in this business; and three other towns in the same district employ 31,170 tons of the remainder. So far, then, as the whaling interest is to be regarded, the Oregon question is emphatically a Massachusetts question. I feel bound to add, however, that the whole coast of Oregon can hardly furnish one really good harbor. South of the forty-ninth degree of latitude, (a boundary which we have once offered to compromise upon), there is not one which a ship can get safely into, or out of, during three quarters of the year. The harbor of San Francisco, in northern California, would be worth the whole Territory of Oregon to the whaling fleet of the nation.

A mere Western interest! Sir, I doubt whether the West has a particle of real interest in the possession of Oregon. It may have an interest, a momentary, seeming, delusive interest in a war for Oregon. Doubtless, the western States might reap a rich harvest of spoils in the prosecution of such a war. Doubtless, there would be fat contracts of all sorts growing out of such a contest, which would enure to their peculiar advantage. Doubtless, the characteristic spirit of the western people—that spirit of restless adventure, and roving enterprise, and daring conflict, which the honorable gentleman has just eulogized—would find ample room and verge enough for its indulgence even to satiety, in such a campaign. Whether that spirit, indomitable as it is in any ordinary encounter, would not be found stumbling upon the dark mountains, or fainting in the dreary vallies, or quenched beneath the perpetual snows which Nature has opposed to the passage to this disputed territory, remains to be seen. A march to Oregon, I am inclined to believe, would take the courage out of not a few who now believe themselves incapable of fatigue or fear. But suppose the war were over, successfully over, and Oregon ours, what interest, let me ask, what real, substantial, permanent interest would the West have in its possession? Are our western brethren straightened for elbow room, or likely to be for a thousand years? Have they not too much land for their own advantage already? I verily believe that if land were only half as abundant and half as cheap as it is, the prosperity of the west would be doubled. As an eastern representative I would never

submit a proposition to raise the price of the public lands; such a proposition would be misconstrued and perverted. But if I were a western man, I would ask nothing sooner, I would desire nothing more earnestly of this Government, than to double the price of these lands. It would put money in the pocket of every western farmer, and in the coffers of every western State. Sale for the purpose of settlement would not be checked; speculation only would be restrained. The average income of the nation would be as great as now; the ultimate receipts far greater; and all parties would be benefitted in the end. The west has no interest, the country has no interest, in extending our territorial possessions. This Union of ours must have limits; and it was well said by Mr. Senator Benton, in 1825, that westward "the ridge of the Rocky mountains may be named, without offence, as presenting a convenient, natural, and everlasting boundary. Along the back of this ridge the western limit of this republic should be drawn, and the statue of the fabled God, Terminus, should be raised upon its highest peak, never to be thrown down."

The Oregon question, however, Mr. Chairman, as now presented to us, is not a question of interest, but of right; not a question as to the ultimate reach of our federal union, but as to the existing extent of our territorial title. Upon this point I shall say little. An argument to this house in favor of our title to Oregon would be words thrown away. If any man can convince the British Government that the territory is ours, his labor will be well employed, and the sooner he sets about it the better. But *we* are convinced already. For myself, certainly, I believe that we have a good title to the whole twelve degrees of latitude. I believe it, not merely because it is the part of patriotism to believe one's own country in the right, but because I am unable to resist the conclusions to that effect, to which an examination of the evidence and the authorities have brought me. In saying this, however, I would by no means be understood to concur in the idea which has recently been advanced in some quarters, that our title is of such a character that we are authorized to decline all negotiation on the subject. Why, sir, with what face can we take such a stand, with the history of this question before us and before the world? Nothing to negotiate about! Has not every administration of our Government, since we had a Government to be administered, treated this as an open question? Have we not at one time expressly offered to abandon all pretension to five-twelfths of the Territory, and to allow our boundary line to follow the forty-ninth degree of latitude? Have we not united in a convention of joint occupancy for thirty years, in order to keep it an open question? What pretence have we for planting ourselves on our presumed rights at this late day, and for shutting our ears to all overtures of negotiation, and all assertion or argument of the rights of others? None; none whatever. Such a course would subject us to the just reproach and scorn of the civilized world.

But the question before the committee relates simply to the termination of the convention of joint occupancy. This convention originated in the year 1818, and was limited to the term of ten years. In 1827 it was extended indefinitely, subject, however, to the right of either party

to annul and abrogate the same, on giving twelve months notice to the other party. And now the question is *not* whether this joint occupation of Oregon shall be continued forever. Nobody imagines that the United States and Great Britain are about to hold this Territory in common much longer. Neither country desires it; neither country would consent to it. The simple question is, whether the United States shall take the responsibility of giving the notice *to-day*; whether, after having agreed to this joint occupancy for nearly thirty years, we shall take occasion of this precise moment in the history of the two countries to insist on bringing it to a close? I am opposed, wholly opposed, to such a course. I agree with the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, (a committee, be it remembered, composed of six members of the Van Buren party, and of three only of the friends of Mr. Clay,) that it is entirely inexpedient to act at all on the subject *at this time*; and I sincerely wish that the chairman of that committee (Mr. C. J. INGERSOLL) had saved me the trouble of advocating his own report, and had given us an argument in favor of its adoption, instead of making the anything but reasonable or pacific speech, which he has just concluded.

Sir, I regard the proposition to give the required notice to the British Government at this precise moment, as eminently ill-timed, both in regard to our relations with Great Britain and to our own domestic condition. We are just at the close of an administration. We are on the eve of another election of President. How this election may terminate may be a matter of doubt in some quarters. I have no doubt. But, however it may terminate, it is no more than fair to those who are to be successful, to leave to them the initiation of a policy which they are to be responsible for carrying on and completing. A twelve months notice! Why, to what point of time in our political affairs will the expiration of that notice bring us? To the very first month of a new administration; an administration which will hardly have taken the oaths of office; which will hardly have selected and installed its advisers and agents; and which, (unless you are going to compel the calling of another extra session, only to deride and denounce it afterwards), will have no Congress at the Capitol to act in any way upon its measures! This termination of joint occupation is to be followed by something, I suppose. It must be followed, it is intended to be followed, by some act of separate occupation. If negotiation, in the mean time, shall have failed, as it certainly will fail if this notice be given, something else than negotiation, a strife or a struggle of some sort must ensue. It may, or may not, amount to an immediate war with England. But whatever form it may assume, it will involve responsibility, it will require preparation, it will demand matured and vigorous counsels. And how is a new administration, with its cabinet, perhaps, not yet arranged, and without a Congress to sustain it, to meet such an exigency as it ought to be met?

Mr. Chairman, it was—I will not say the policy and design of the Van Buren administration—but certainly the result of their course on going out of office three years ago, to precipitate their successors, while yet without that matured organization which is essential to any effec-

tive action, upon a condition of foreign affairs of the most delicate and dangerous character. Few persons, I imagine, know, and few persons, perhaps, ever will know, how critical were the relations of Great Britain and the United States at the precise instant of General Harrison's accession to the presidency. My honored and venerable colleague (Mr. ADAMS) seemed to understand them, when he charged it openly upon the Van Buren party a session or two ago, *that they had fired the ship when they found they could no longer hold it!* I trust that there is no design, no disposition, no willingness, to bring about the same state of things again. It ought to be the patriotic aim of us all, that whoever the next President may be, he may have a smooth sea and a fair wind to start with; and that he may not be driven upon storms and breakers before his hand has fairly grappled upon the helm, and before his crew have got upon their sea legs!

Sir, if there was any thing too pacific, any thing too compromising, any thing too yielding in the course of President Tyler, or his Secretary of State, in conducting the recent negotiations with Great Britain—all which I utterly deny—no small share of the blame would rest upon the party which threw upon a new administration, in the first hour of its existence, so perilous a responsibility; the party which brought the country to the very brink of war, and there left it, without preparation of any sort, either of money or munitions; with its navy dismantled, its fortifications dilapidated, and its Treasury many millions worse than empty!

But the honorable gentleman from Pennsylvania has made a charge in relation to the treaty of Washington, of a somewhat different character. He has told us that the British ministry have succeeded in depriving this country of a considerable portion of our territory on the northeast, with a perfect knowledge that they had no right to it. He has told us that the Prime Minister of England has declared in Parliament that he had proof, in the handwriting of a late English monarch, that the British claim was without foundation; and he has alluded to what he calls a corresponding acknowledgment of a distinguished member of the House of Lords! Mr. Chairman, this attempt to destroy the confidence of the American Congress and of the American people in the good faith and common honesty of the British Government, at the very moment when we are about to enter upon new and critical negotiations with them, can hardly, in my judgment, be too strongly condemned. The charge is entirely unwarranted. The speeches of Sir Robert Peel and Lord Brougham justify no such impeachment of British integrity. What were the circumstances under which the remarks were made to which the honorable member had reference? It is well known that a charge of bad faith had been brought against our negotiator, Mr. Webster, for having concealed from Lord Ashburton all knowledge of a map which had been discovered by Mr. Sparks in Paris, and which there was the strongest reason for believing to be Dr. Franklin's map. This map had a broad red line upon it in close conformity to the British claim, and was considered as being somewhat of an extinguisher of the American view of the question, so far as the authority of maps was concerned.

Yet it was carefully concealed from the British Government and the British negotiator. For this proceeding Mr. Webster was arraigned both at home and abroad. Lord Palmerston, who, as Secretary of Foreign Affairs for many years, had failed in all attempts to settle the boundary question, and who was, perhaps, a little envious of the reputation which his successor, Lord Aberdeen, had acquired through the negotiations of Lord Ashburton, publicly arraigned Mr. Webster in the House of Commons, and made substantially the same charge against him, which the chairman of the Committee of Foreign Affairs in this house has now made against the ministry of England. And it was in answer to this attack upon Mr. Webster, it was in defence of our Secretary of State—not, perhaps, without some view of vindicating themselves from the imputation of having been overreached in the negotiation—that Sir Robert Peel and Lord Brougham brought forward the fact to which the honorable gentleman has alluded. They stated that the British Government, as well as the American Government, had concealed maps which made against their own claim; that Lord Palmerston himself had been guilty of the same suppression; that, beside other maps of less significance, which had been kept out of sight by the ministry of England, there was one which could be traced back to the possession of George the third, the monarch in whose time the separation of the two countries had taken place, and upon which there was a *red line* in precise conformity with the American claim. But what was their course of remark upon the subject? Did they, as the gentleman would imply, admit that these maps, on either side, would have been considered as conclusive evidence of the intention of the treaty of 1783? No such thing; they ridiculed such an idea. Sir Robert Peel commenced his remarks on this subject by saying:—

“The noble lord has spoken at great length of a map recently discovered. He seems to think that that map, so discovered, affords conclusive evidence of the justice of the British claims. Now, sir, in the first place, let me observe to the noble lord, that contemporary maps may be—where the words of the treaty referred to by them are in themselves doubtful—they may be evidence of the intentions of those who framed them, *but the treaty must be executed according to the words contained in it. Even if the map were sustained by the parties, it could not contravene the words of the treaty.*”

And Lord Brougham followed out the same idea in his speech in the House of Lords, when he said:

“But the map does not tally with the description given. Suppose you had an account, in writing, that the Thames, as is the fact, forms the boundary of the counties of Surrey and Middlesex; and suppose you found a map, or chart, or plan connected with that description, on which a red line through Piccadilly was drawn as the boundary—I should not take it; I should go down to the river; because the red line is only to be regarded if the words do not speak for themselves, or the language is ambiguous. And the same is the case here, more or less.”

Now, Mr. Chairman, it is only after these explicit denials of the idea, that maps, under whatever circumstances they may have been found, are to be taken as conclusive evidence as to the justice of claims resting on the descriptions of a treaty, that Lord Brougham and Sir Robert Peel proceed to disclose the fact of the discovery of the map of George the Third; and that, only in the way of set-off to the map which is supposed to have belonged to Dr. Franklin. They do, indeed, speak somewhat largely and roundly as to the effect which the pro-

duction of this map of George the Third might have had on the settlement of the boundary question, *in case maps were to be taken as conclusive evidence*. But having expressly denied that they were to be so taken—having rejected and ridiculed the idea of the red lines of a map being allowed to control the black letters of a treaty description—their language, however round, admits of no such construction as has been given to it by the honorable gentleman who has just taken his seat.

Sir, there is no evidence whatever, in my judgment, of bad faith on the part of the British government in these speeches of the Prime Minister and Lord Brougham. I do not profess to be deeply versed in the science of political morals or international obligation; but I should say that the principles of common honesty and common sense would lead to this conclusion:—If a government, after having set up a claim of any sort, should find in its own possession conclusive evidence, evidence conclusive upon its own conscience, that the claim was unfounded, it is bound, in all honor and in all justice, to disclose the evidence and abandon the claim. But if the evidence fall short of demonstration—if reasonable and conscientious doubts still rest upon the question—if there be ground enough left for maintaining the claim at all—it would be the height of absurdity in such a government, and a piece of most gratuitous generosity to their opponent, to make such a disclosure. Why, sir, the circumstances of the case we are considering furnish the best possible illustration that the position I have taken is the only sound or safe one. Here were maps in the secret possession of each government at the same moment, which were believed by each respectively to present formidable testimony against its own claim, and the production of either of which, singly, might have seriously affected the final settlement of the disputed boundary. Suppose Mr. Webster had disclosed to Lord Ashburton the map which was then believed to have belonged to Dr. Franklin, and the consequence had been a much larger relinquishment of territory, on our part, than has actually taken place:—Or, suppose Sir Robert Peel had sent over to Mr. Webster the map of George the Third, and had consented, upon the strength of it, to a line less favorable to his own country:—What would the government which obtained the advantage under such circumstances have thought of the diplomacy and statesmanship of its antagonist? And even if both governments had shown their hands, and exhibited their maps simultaneously, what would have been produced but a mutual laugh at each other, and a laugh of all the world at both! And the laugh, certainly, would not have been diminished, if it had afterwards proved that the recently discovered map of Mr. Jay, the only map which we now know certainly to have been in the possession of the negotiators of 1783, was materially different from both the other two. Well, sir, did Mr. Webster say for himself, on this subject, that “he confessed he did not think it a very urgent duty, on his part, to go to Lord Ashburton and tell him that he had found a bit of doubtful evidence in Paris, out of which he might, perhaps, make something to the prejudice of our claims, and from which he could set up higher claims for himself, or obscure the whole matter still further.” And no less well, in my judgment, did Lord Brougham “deny that a negotiator, in carrying on

a controversy, as representing his own country with a foreign country, is bound to disclose to the other party whatever he may know that tells against his own country and for the opposite party; any more than an advocate is bound to tell the court all that he deems to make against his own client and for his adversary." A just nation, like a just man, will never set up a claim which it knows to have no foundation; but both nations and individuals may withhold from an opposite party, (except where they are under question upon oath) any evidence which would weaken a claim which they believe to be well founded, without subjecting themselves to any rightful impeachment of their honor or good faith.

I repeat, Mr. Chairman, that this attempt to destroy the confidence of the American people in the fairness of the British Government, and to produce the impression that they have dishonestly deprived us of a portion of our territory, and are now openly chuckling over the success of an avowed fraud, cannot be too strongly reprobated. The direct tendency of such a course is to create an exasperated popular feeling towards Great Britain, which will forbid the settlement of any future dispute with that power, except by the sword; which will henceforth acknowledge the validity of no *red lines*, but those which shall have been run with *blood*; and which will lead inevitably, and at no distant day, to war for Oregon. I trust that this is not the design of the Chairman of the Committee of Foreign Affairs.

But the honorable gentleman has not been content with charging fraud upon the British Government in relation to the late treaty. He has told us that this treaty was accomplished and consummated against the unanimous sentiment of the people of Maine. Sir, I should like to know where the honorable gentleman has found the evidence of this unanimous sentiment of the people of Maine against the Treaty of Washington. The Commissioners of Maine were on the spot during the whole period of its negotiation. They prepared, it is true, a somewhat elaborate argument against relinquishing any part of their territorial claim. But what did they do afterwards? How did they conclude that argument? They gave their formal and unanimous assent to the arrangement which Mr. Webster and Lord Ashburton had agreed on. *They signed the treaty*. What pretence, then, is there for the assertion, that Maine was dismembered against the unanimous sentiment of her people?

MR. INGERSOLL (Mr. W. yielding the floor for explanation) remarked, that he was sorry this matter was gone into, but the gentleman from Massachusetts provoked him to say (he did not mean any thing offensive) that he (Mr. I.) had in his place, from day to day, been informed by a gentleman from Maine, no longer a member of this House, that all that had been brought about by tricks, practised on the Maine Commissioners, such as were attempted to be practised upon Senators at the other end of the Capitol.

MR. WINTHROP continued: And neither do I mean any thing offensive; but I must be permitted to say, that I believe Mr. Webster to be quite as incapable of tricks, as the honorable gentleman himself, and that I demand some better evidence of the fact than the private whis-

pers which the gentleman has retailed. Why has not the person who gave this information made it public before this time, upon his own responsibility? If the Maine Commissioners were tricked into an assent to the treaty, why have they not found it out themselves, and disclosed the circumstances? Sir, I deny the whole allegation. This effort to array an opposition against the Treaty of Washington, in reference to the Maine boundary, is all an afterthought. At the time it was negotiated, it met with a very general, if not an unanimous, assent in both the States which were interested in the question; in Maine no less than in Massachusetts. And even to this day, all attempts which have been made to get up a public sentiment against the treaty, have signally failed. That treaty was ratified by a vote of five-sixths of the Senate; and I have not the slightest belief that some of the Senators who voted against it, (if any of them,) would have dared to take the responsibility of defeating it, if their votes would have produced such a result. There is no way of securing an impunity in regard to any public measure, more easy and obvious, than to vote against it when you are certain that your vote will not prevent its adoption. If the measure turns out to be acceptable to the country, nobody will care who voted against it; while, if it proves to be unpopular in any quarter, you are at full liberty to unite in denouncing it. This is a political *trick*, (to borrow the gentleman's term,) which is often played by aspiring politicians. Whether it will account for any part of the opposition to the Treaty of Washington, others can judge as well as myself. Whether it will or not, however, is of very little importance. The treaty has commended itself so entirely to the approbation of the American people, that the liberty of finding fault with it has proved utterly worthless. *The negotiators are out with all the honors, and there is no chance for tricks to tell.* In the whole records of diplomacy, American or European, there can not be found a negotiation which has been hailed with more undivided satisfaction by those who were interested in its results, than this has been by the people of the United States. Its influence will not soon be lost on the civilized world. It will stand on the pages of history, as a noble example of what may be accomplished by the honest arts of Peace, and will impress with the force of conviction on the nations of the earth, the lesson which they have been so long in learning, that war is not the only resort, or the best resort, for settling international disputes, but that true honor may be maintained, real interest secured, just pride preserved, without the sacrifice of a single life, or the libation of one drop of blood!

The honorable gentleman has alluded to Mr. Calhoun, and has expressed his gratification that he has accepted the appointment of Secretary of State. Has he forgotten that one of the ablest speeches made in the Senate of the United States, in support of the late treaty, was made by this distinguished statesman of South Carolina? Has he forgotten, too, that the crowning glory of that treaty, in Mr. Calhoun's estimation, was that it would establish "a permanent amity and peace" between Great Britain and the United States? "A kind Providence (said Mr. Calhoun) has cast our lot on a portion of the globe sufficiently vast to satisfy the most grasping ambition, and abounding in resources

beyond all others, which only require to be fully developed to make us the greatest and most prosperous people on earth." "*Peace*," said he, "is, indeed, our policy. *Peace* is the first of our wants." Why, sir, if the honorable gentleman will turn to the speech of this political friend and brother democrat of his, he will find it as copious in its eulogies on the blessings of peace, as any of the more recent speeches in the Senate, which he has ridiculed under the title of *sermons*. I honor Mr. Calhoun for such expressions. Let him carry into the negotiations upon the Oregon question, the same spirit which he manifested in relation to the Treaty of Washington, let him 'seek peace and ensue it,' in his management of our foreign affairs, and he will have earned a title to the regard of all good men and true patriots. I rejoice to believe that he will do so. On the subject of Oregon, indeed, he is already committed to a pacific policy. The honorable gentleman is quite mistaken in his idea of Mr. Calhoun's argument against the bill for the armed occupation of Oregon last winter. There was nothing whatever in that argument to give the impression that Mr. Calhoun was in favor of giving this notice now or at any early day. On the contrary, the whole strain and stress of the argument was in favor of abstaining altogether from any action upon the subject. "There is often," said Mr. Calhoun, "in the affairs of Government, more efficiency and wisdom in non-action than in action. All we want, to effect our object in this case, is a wise and masterly inactivity." "Our population," said he, "will soon—far sooner than anticipated—reach the Rocky Mountains, and be ready to pour into the Oregon Territory, when it will come into our possession without resistance or struggle; or, if there should be resistance, it would be feeble and ineffectual. *We would then be as much stronger there, comparatively, than Great Britain, as she is now stronger than we are; and it would then be as idle in her to attempt to assert or maintain her exclusive claim to the territory against us, as it would now be in us to attempt it against her.* Let us be wise, and abide our time, and it will accomplish all that we desire, with far more certainty, and with infinitely less sacrifice, than we can without it."

I have no idea, Mr. Chairman, that it will be in our power, under present circumstances, to avail ourselves of this good advice of Mr. Calhoun, or that he will find himself able, in his new capacity, to leave this question to the operation of time. The ill-advised and most unseasonable debates on this subject, which have taken place in both branches of Congress during the last two years, have not only created an impatience, in some quarters of the country, which will brook no further delay; but have so roused the attention of the British Government to our policy, as to forbid the idea that they would acquiesce in any further postponement of the question. A new minister from England has, indeed, arrived, who is well understood to be specially charged with the negotiation of it. And it is now to be decided, so far as this House is concerned, in what spirit that negotiation shall be conducted. Shall it be entered on, by this Government, in that spirit of menace and defiance which has characterized the whole speech of the honorable gentleman from Pennsylvania; or in that spirit of cour-

tesy and magnanimity which becomes a civilized and Christian, as well as a brave and powerful, nation?

Sir, I have already declared my opinion that the required notice for the termination of the joint occupation of Oregon ought not to be given at this moment, in view of our own domestic condition. But a hundred fold more ill advised does such a proceeding strike me, in view of our immediate relations to the British government. In my judgment, it would be an act of rudeness, of indecency, of offence, as unworthy as it would be wanton. What possible pretence of expediency or necessity is there for such a course? Here is an ambassador on the ground, ready at any instant to go into negotiations with us on the subject. But for the deplorable catastrophe which has recently deprived the President of two members of his cabinet, those negotiations would have already been entered on. And is this a moment, when we have seen no disadvantage and no disgrace in this joint occupation during a term of thirty years, when all Presidents and all parties have acquiesced in its continuance throughout that long period—is this a moment for insisting on its being brought to a close? Is this a respectful or a respectable mode of meeting the overtures of the British government for a settlement of the Oregon question? Will it give us an increased hope of effecting such a settlement amicably, honorably, satisfactorily, to tell the British minister, “Sir, we will allow a year for this business. At the end of that time, we shall cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war?” The honorable gentleman has alluded to the code of honor, and to the manner of settling difficulties among gentlemen. There are those present, doubtless, who understand the nice points of that code. What would be thought by them, if, while negotiations of this sort were pending, one of the parties should undertake to limit the time within which there must be a settlement or a fight? Undoubtedly, Mr. Chairman, we have a right to give such a notice to Great Britain; but, in my judgment, the exercise of that right at this moment would not only tend to protract, embarrass, and ultimately defeat the negotiations which are now about to be opened, but would impair the honor of this nation in the estimation of the civilized world. We should be reproached and rebuked for it by the general sense of Europe. And is the American character abroad at so high a mark at this moment, that we can afford to trifle with it? True, sir, many of the censures which have recently been cast on this Republic are unreasonable. Perhaps I might agree with the honorable gentleman from Pennsylvania, that the attacks which have been made upon the character and honesty of his own Commonwealth, and which seem to have so sharpened the edge of his acrimony against England, are a good deal overcharged. At any rate, I feel as strongly as any one the injustice of involving the whole nation in the *repudiation* of two or three of the separate States; and the same discrimination between the acts of individual States and the acts of the United States may, I am aware, be pleaded in explanation of other circumstances which have brought reproach from some quarters upon our national good name. But the fact is not less true, nor less lamentable, that our character as a nation, in one way or another, justly or unjustly, has been not a little lowered,

of late years, in the regard of foreign nations. Now, sir, for whatever we do in relation to this question of Oregon, we can set up no divided responsibility. The Nation, as a Nation, must do whatever is done; and the Nation, as a Nation, must be held answerable. Let us then forbear from pursuing any course, from taking any step, from expressing any purpose, which may give color to a new stain upon our national character. Let us desist from all action and all discussion of this subject until Mr. Pakenham has, at least, opened his budget, and until our own Government, too, is in a condition to pursue with vigor and effect whatever policy we may ultimately be compelled to adopt.

But the honorable gentleman from Pennsylvania finds nothing to regret in the state of opinion abroad as to the American character; he even rejoices at the violent and vituperative tone of the British press in relation to his own State. And why? Because he thinks it may have a tendency to counteract the *idolatrous* disposition which exists in some parts of this country towards Great Britain! Mr. Chairman, I know of nothing more worthy of condemnation in the political history of the present day, than the systematic effort of the self-styled Democratic party of this country to stir up a prejudice against England upon every occasion, and to create an impression that every man who does not fall in with their principles and their policy is in some sort of British interest, or under some kind of British influence. There are some of the leaders of this party, with whom hatred to England would seem to be the only standard of American patriotism, and with whom it seems to be enough, to determine their course upon all questions either of right or of expediency, to know what will be most offensive to the British power. War, war with England, is the ever-burning passion of their soul; and any one who pursues a policy or advocates a measure which may postpone or avert the consummation which they so devoutly desire, becomes the chosen object of their insinuations and reproaches. For myself, sir, I hold in utter contempt all such insinuations. If it be a fit subject for reproach, to entertain the most anxious and ardent desire for the peace of this country, its peace with England, its peace with all the world, I submit myself willingly to the fullest measure of that reproach. War between the United States and Great Britain for Oregon! Sir, there is something in this idea too monstrous to be entertained for a moment. The two greatest nations on the globe, with more territorial possessions than they know what to do with already, and bound together by so many ties of kindred, and language, and commercial interest, going to war for a piece of barren earth! Why, it would put back the cause of civilization a whole century, and would be enough not merely to call down the rebuke of men, but the curse of God. I do not yield to the honorable gentleman in a just concern for the national honor. I am ready to maintain that honor, whenever it is really at stake, against Great Britain as readily as against any other nation. Indeed, if war is to come upon us, I am quite willing that it should be war with a first-rate power—with a foe man worthy of our steel.

———"Oh, the blood more stirs
To rouse the lion than to start the hare."

If the young queen of England were the veritable Victoria whom the ancient poets have sometimes described as descending from the right hand of Jupiter to crown the banner of predestined Triumph, I would still not shrink from the attempt to vindicate the rights of my country on every proper occasion. To her forces, however, as well as to ours, may come the "*cita mors*," as well as the "*Victoria leta*." We have nothing to fear from a protracted war with any nation, though our want of preparation might give us the worst of it in the first encounter. We are all and always ready for war, when there is no other alternative for maintaining our country's honor. We are all and always ready for any war into which a Christian man, in a civilized land, and in this age of the world, can have the face to enter. But I thank God that there are very few such cases. War and honor are fast getting to have less and less to do with each other. The highest honor of any country is to preserve *peace*, even under provocations which might justify war. The deepest disgrace to any country is to plunge into war under circumstances which leave the honorable alternative of peace. I heartily hope and trust, sir, that in deference to the sense of the civilized world, in deference to that spirit of Christianity which is now spreading its benign and healing influences over both hemispheres with such signal rapidity, we shall explore the whole field of diplomacy, and exhaust every art of negotiation, before we give loose to that passion for conflict which the honorable gentleman from Pennsylvania seems to regard as so grand and glorious an element of the American character.

But Great Britain is so grasping, so aggressive, so insidious and insolent, so overreaching and overbearing! Does not her banner flout us at every turn? Does not her drumbeat disturb our dreams by night, and almost drown our voices by day? Is she not hemming us in on every side; compassing us about in a daily diminishing circle; and are not our outer walls already tottering at the sound of her trumpets? Nay, have not her blandishments succeeded where, as yet, her arms have failed? Has she not scaled our very ramparts and penetrated to our very citadel in a shower of corrupting *gold*? What but BRITISH GOLD carried the last presidential election against the people? What but BRITISH GOLD is about to carry the next? What were the twelve hundred and seventy-five thousand voters which deposed Mr. Van Buren from the chief magistracy in 1840, and who are now rallying again, with renewed energy, to the old watchwords, against his restoration, but so many *British Whigs*? Is there a Whig, in all the land, who dares deny, that when he voted for General Harrison, he had a British heart in his bosom, and a British sovereign in his pocket? Mr. Chairman, let me call to the remembrance of the committee a story which was introduced by the celebrated George Canning into one of his speeches in the House of Commons, and which has thus the highest sanction as not beneath the dignity of parliamentary debate. It is the story of a painter, who had made himself somewhat eminent in the professional sphere in which he moved, but who had directed his art altogether to one favorite subject. This subject was a *red lion*, which he had learned to depict in great perfection. One of his earliest patrons was the keeper of a public house, who wished something

appropriate painted on his sign board. The painter, of course, executed his red lion. A gentleman in the vicinity, who had a new mansion-house which he wished to have ornamented, was the next employer of the artist, and, in order to afford him full scope for his genius, gave him his own choice of a subject for the principal panel in his dining-room. The artist took time to deliberate, and then said, with the utmost gravity, "don't you think that a handsome red lion would have a fine effect in this situation?" The gentleman, as you may imagine, did not feel quite satisfied with the selection, but resolved to let the painter follow his own fancy in this instance, trusting to have a design of more elegance and distinction in his drawing-room or library, to which he next conducted him. "Here, said he, I must have something striking; the space is small, and the device must be proportionably delicate." The painter paused; appeared to dive down to the very bottom of his invention, and thence to ascend again to its highest heaven for an idea, and then said, "what do you think of a *small red lion*?"

Well now, sir, the course of a certain class of politicians in this country seems to me to have a most marvellous analogy to that of the painter in this story. This cry of British Whigs, this clamor about British gold, this never-ending *alarum* about British aggression and British encroachment, this introduction of the red lion on every occasion, seems to be the one great reliance of the political artists of a certain school. There is always a lion in the path of the self-styled Democratic party of the United States; a British lion, red with the blood of cruelty and oppression, which it is their peculiar mission to slay, but which the Whigs are leagued together to defend. Whatever principle, whatever project, may be under discussion in this House, or before the people, the *red lion* is sure to be on the ground. Red lion here, red lion there, red lion everywhere! Why, sir, even on the question of refunding to General Jackson the fine which was imposed on him for setting at defiance the civil authorities of the land, and imprisoning the judge who dared to confront him with a writ of habeas corpus, it was thought "*that a small red lion might have a fine effect in that situation.*" And a very small one it certainly was. It was suggested that the judge was an *Englishman* by birth. He was known to have come over to America in early youth. His residence here could be traced back to the fifteenth or sixteenth year of his age; but there was reason to apprehend, though even that was not altogether certain, that he was born in England; and, *therefore*, all those who were unwilling to annul his judicial decree, and to admit that he was rightfully insulted and imprisoned, were little better than so many *British Whigs*. Was not that, sir, a very little red lion indeed? This Oregon question, however, presents a larger panel, and here, of course, a flaming lion is shown up in its full dimensions. The Texas question affords a larger field still, with far more room for the fancy to expatiate in; and although the canvass is but just unrolled, the teeming invention of these unrivalled artists has already done its work, with something of

that celerity which Milton has so glowingly attributed to Creative Power:—

——“ Now half appeared
The tawny lion, pawing to get free
 His hinder parts, then springs, as broke from bonds,
 And rampant shakes his brinded mane !”

Mr. Chairman, is it possible that the honorable gentleman from Pennsylvania, and his political friends, can be mad enough to believe that the people of this country can be wrought upon by such conceits? Let me assure them that they do injustice to the intelligence of the people. “ ’Tis the eye of childhood that fears a painted devil.” The manly sense of this nation will scorn such appeals to fear and folly. Conscious of their own integrity, and resolved on the vindication of their own rights, the people will neither be frightened from their propriety, nor diverted from their purpose, by such devices. They proved this in 1840; they will make assurance doubly sure in 1844.

A word or two about Texas, and I have done. The honorable gentleman from Pennsylvania, among other most inconclusive reasons for the adoption of the resolution which has been condemned as inexpedient by the committee over which he presides, has told us, that “ he holds it to be incompetent for the mere treaty-making power to part with any portion of the territory of the United States, or to settle a boundary question, without the consent and co-operation of the House of Representatives.” And he has appealed to the Massachusetts delegation, and called upon myself in particular, “ as one who has loudly expressed an apprehension of the stealthy annexation of Texas to this Union by a clandestine treaty,” to unite with him on *this analogous question of Oregon*, and insist on the right of representative action on the subject. Sir, I shall enter into no argument as to the extent of the treaty-making power of this Government, in regard to the particular measures which the gentleman has specified in his proposition. Even if I assented to the full import of that proposition, which I certainly do not, it would form no ground for that union with him on the pending question, to which he invites me. Even if it were the admitted prerogative of this House to give advice or prescribe action to the Executive on the subjects he has named, it would be no reason for our giving *bad* advice, or prescribing injudicious or unwarrantable action. But “ the analogous questions” of Oregon and Texas! Sir, I deny that there is any analogy whatever between those questions. The Texas question is not in any sense a question of parting with territory or settling a boundary line. It is not even a question of annexing territory. It is a question of amalgamating a foreign sovereignty with our own sovereignty; of annexing a foreign State to our own State. It is such a question as would be presented by a proposition to re-annex the United States to Great Britain, or to amalgamate Great Britain with the United States. This, the gentleman must remember, was the distinction taken by Mr. Van Buren and Mr. Forsyth in 1837. They maintained, that “ the question of the annexation of a foreign independent State to the United States had never before been presented to this Government.” They maintained, that the circumstance of

Louisiana and Florida being colonial possessions of France and Spain, rendered the purchase of those Territories materially different from the proposed annexation of Texas. "Whether the Constitution of the United States, they added, contemplated the annexation of such a State, and, if so, in what manner that object is to be effected, are questions, in the opinion of the President, which it would be inexpedient, under present circumstances, to agitate."

And now, Mr. Chairman, I go much farther than the honorable gentleman from Pennsylvania, on this subject. I not only deny the competency of the treaty-making power of this Government to negotiate any such amalgamation as this, *without* the co-operation of the House of Representatives; but I deny that our co-operation can confer or supply that competency. Certainly, certainly, the Constitution did *not* contemplate the annexation of such a State. *Provoco ad populum!* The People, in their own right, are alone competent to pronounce the doom, which is to bind up the fortunes of this Republic in the same bundle of life or death with those of any foreign power; and I hope and believe that they will disown and renounce any Executive or any Legislative act, which shall infringe upon this—their own supreme prerogative. I trust that they will not be deluded by any false alarm, by any *red lion* representation, that Texas is about to be made a colonial possession of Great Britain. The British Government have no such purpose. Our own Government know this. And if Texas be foisted into this Union upon any such pretence, it will be an act as fraudulent in its inception, as it will, under any circumstances, be pernicious in its result.