

"Waiving all other reasons for declining it, it is sufficient to state, that he continues to entertain the hope that the question may be settled by the negotiation now pending between the two countries; and that he is of opinion it would be unadvisable to entertain a proposal to resort to any other mode, so long as there is hope of arriving at a satisfactory settlement by negotiation; and especially to one which might rather retard than expedite its final adjustment."

Historical Note.

1845.

On the 3rd of April, Lord Aberdeen addressed to Mr. Pakenham the following despatch, the tone and contents of which shew the seriousness of the position in which the controversy then was, and the determination of Her Majesty's Government to maintain their claims:—

"Sir,

"April 3, 1845.

"The inaugural speech of President Polk has impressed a very serious character on our actual relations with the United States; and the manner in which he has referred to the Oregon question, so different from the language of his predecessor, leaves little reason to hope for any favourable result of the existing negotiation.

"I presume that you will have acted upon my instruction of the 3rd of March, and have repeated to the new Secretary of State the proposal of an arbitration, which you were directed to make to his predecessor. If this should be declined by Mr. Polk's Government in the same manner and for the same reason as assigned by Mr. Tyler, namely, the hope that the matter might yet be favourably terminated by negotiation, such a mode of refusal would at least display a friendly spirit, and would not close the door against all further attempts to arrive at such a conclusion. On the other hand, if the proposal should be simply rejected, and the rejection should not be accompanied by any specific proposition on the part of the Government of the United States, we must consider the negotiation as entirely at an end. Indeed, we could scarcely, under such circumstances, take any further step with a due regard to our honour and consistency.

"In the event of arbitration being rejected, and the failure of every endeavour to effect a partition of the territory on a principle of mutual concession, you were directed in my despatch of the 18th of November, to propose the further extension for a fixed term of years of the existing Convention. This, it is true, would have been an imperfect and unsatisfactory arrangement; but it might have been tolerated in the hope that the prevalence of friendly feelings, and the admitted interest of both parties, would in due time have led to a permanent settlement of an amicable description. The recent declarations of Mr. Polk forbid any such hope; and there is too much reason to believe that the extension of the Convention for a fixed period would be employed in active preparation for future hostility.

"You will, therefore, consider this portion of my instructions, to which I have now referred, as cancelled.

"Judging from the language of Mr. Polk, I presume we must expect that the American Government will renounce the Treaty without delay. In this case, unless the question be speedily settled, a local collision will be liable to take place, which may involve the countries in serious difficulty, and not improbably lead to war itself.

"At all events whatever may be the course of the United States' Government, the time is come when we must be prepared for every contingency. Our naval force in the Pacific is amply sufficient to maintain our supremacy in that sea; and Sir George Seymour has been instructed to repair without delay to the coasts of the Oregon Territory.

"You will hold a temperate, but firm, language to the members of the Government and to all those with whom you may converse. We are still ready to adhere to the principle of an equitable compromise; but we are perfectly determined to concede nothing to force or menace, and are fully prepared to maintain our rights. This is the spirit in which Her Majesty's Government have declared themselves in Parliament, and to this they will adhere.

"I thought it so important that our intentions should be clearly known and understood in the United States without delay, that I detained the last American mail, in order that a correct report of the proceedings in Parliament on the Oregon question might reach Washington as early as possible.

"Nothing can be more encouraging and satisfactory than the spirit which has been exhibited on this occasion, both in Parliament and in the country generally; and it is evident that Her Majesty's Government will be warmly supported in whatever measures may be considered really just and necessary.

"I am, &c.

(Signed) "ABERDEEN."

K