

SPEECH OF MR. HOUSTON, OF TEXAS,

ON THE

OREGON QUESTION.

DELIVERED IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES, APRIL, 1846.

Mr. HOUSTON said:

Mr. PRESIDENT: I am not insensible to the peculiarity of the position in which I now find myself placed. To any one, and more especially to one unaccustomed to participate in its debates, the occasion of addressing a body so influential and intelligent as the Senate of the United States, must necessarily be attended with much embarrassment. I am, however, now about to be called on to act, as a member of this body, on a subject of high importance, and it therefore becomes my duty, as one of the representatives of a State which has recently become an integral part of the great confederacy of this Union, to present my reasons, so far as I may be enabled, for the vote which I shall give on this occasion.

The proposition to abrogate a treaty which has existed for years with England is in accordance with the undeniable right of this government. I believe both those in favor of the resolution, and opposed to it, have acquiesced in that right. The Executive has thought proper, in his annual message to the Congress of the Union, to recommend the abrogation of the treaty by giving the twelve months' notice, necessary under its provisions. The question, then, arises—Is it politic, and is it wise, to exercise this right? To the exigencies of the country require its exercise? I think it discreet and necessary that such a course should be adopted and carried out, for the reason that I can perceive no rational ground for hope, that by delaying the measure, its necessity will be obviated, or the rights of the country vindicated. Nor can I perceive the possibility of any detriment to the interests of the country by giving the notice as recommended by the Executive.

Consequences may grow out of it which, at this time, we do not anticipate; but that it is a war measure, or one likely to produce war, I cannot believe. Honorable and distinguished senators think differently on this subject.

If we were disposed to admit the opinions of gentlemen who have spoken on this question, war, with all its calamities, is inevitable, if this measure be adopted. But this does not seem to me to be the question. Is it wise policy in this government to pursue this course? Is it necessary for the preservation of our rights that the notice should be given? It seems to me to be the question properly presented; but not whether war is likely to result.

Were we to be restrained from action in a crisis like the present by any considerations as to the possibility of war, or the reverse, the public interest would be liable to suffer deeply. If we never dare adventure action, we can achieve nothing. It is

true I am not in favor of precipitate action, but for a calm, deliberate, and firm course of procedure.

No less than twenty-eight years have rolled round without producing a satisfactory result. Negotiations, though often attempted, have failed in effecting a settlement of the controversy. Repeated overtures to England, direct and favorable as the United States supposed, from a strong desire to preserve peace between the two countries, have been made, yet they have not been met in a corresponding spirit on the part of that government.

They have been declined or rejected, again and again. The last proposition made by our Executive, it appears, was, according to the representations of the English premier, decided upon by the minister resident here as inadmissible, and not transmitted to his government. This, to my mind, is conclusive evidence that his government would not have considered it more favorably than he did himself. No minister to a foreign court would assume so important a decision, unless well aware that it was in harmony and keeping with the policy and opinions of those who had delegated a trust to him. Nor have we any intimation from the government of England that it would have been otherwise considered by the ministry. I think it is idle to anticipate an agreeable termination to our negotiations with England upon the subject of Oregon, unless it is brought about by giving this notice.

England may desire to gain time, and she may have a desire to amuse the United States as long as possible. It may be that England at this time is not prepared for war, and therefore does not wish to bring things to an issue with us upon this subject; for if she contemplated any such basis for negotiation as that offered by this government, and rejected by her envoy, she has had, and yet has, an opportunity to renew it. Does delay on her part arise from the fact that the resolutions now under consideration have been introduced into the Congress of the United States in accordance with the recommendations of the Executive in his annual message? Can it arise from the fact, that England considers herself insulted, because the Executive assumed our right to the whole of Oregon in that state paper? Can she allege this as a satisfactory reason to this government for not stepping forward and making such an offer, if she really had it in contemplation? To be sure, honorable senators have suggested that the measure recommended by the Executive would be regarded by England as held in *terrorem* over her, and that she cannot, consistently with her national honor and dignity, accede to any proposition, nor make one, until after Congress has adjourned.

Such opinions are advocated in and out of Con-