

could not be maintained to any portion of the Oregon territory upon any principle of public law recognised by nations, yet, in deference to what had been done by my predecessors, and especially in consideration that propositions of compromise had been thrice made, by two preceding administrations, to adjust the question on the parallel of forty-nine degrees, and in two of them yielding to Great Britain the free navigation of the Columbia, and that the pending negotiation had been commenced on the basis of compromise, I deemed it to be my duty not abruptly to break it off."

Mr. Polk adopted this pending negotiation, made it his own, and continued it till he finally offered the line of 49° to Mr. Pakenham as a settlement of the controversy. The British envoy rejected the offer, and then the President threw himself back on our claim to the whole territory.

In Mr. Polk's inaugural address he had stated that our claim was clear and unquestionable up to 54° 40'. But when he entered on the actual duties and responsibilities of his office, he found a negotiation going on based on the principles of *compromise*, and he continued it on the same principles.

For adopting this negotiation, and for continuing it on the principle of compromise, the President has deemed it necessary to make an apology to the American people. His Secretary, speaking for him, said that, though the President differed in his individual opinion, yet, when he considered the question, he "found himself embarrassed, if not committed, by the acts of his predecessors." *Embarrassed* by the acts of Jefferson, Monroe, Adams, Gen. Jackson, Van Buren, and Clay! The word was rather too weak a one. Mr. M. once heard a judge say, upon the bench, that he would have decided the cause before him in a particular manner, "if he had not been *embarrassed* by the *Constitution*." [A laugh.]

Mr. M. presumed Mr. Polk's embarrassment was very much of the same kind with that felt by an heir disposed to set up and pursue a claim beyond the limits of his legal right, when he found himself estopped by the recorded admissions of his ancestor. "Committed" very much as a judge found himself committed when called to decide a question on finding that it had been already decided to his hands by judicial decisions of his predecessors. Very strange it certainly was that the Secretary of State should have felt it to be necessary to apologize for the President, as if he was doing something that was discreditable to him. But, if the President was embarrassed by the acts of his predecessors, was not the nation equally embarrassed now? Must we not be sensible we were treading on dangerous ground, when departing from the position taken by all who had gone before us? Were we not assuming too much when we went so far beyond our best and greatest and wisest men, and for refusing to go this length Senators were to be charged with a want of "nerve?" Standing by the side of the gallant Linn, and sanctioned by the written authority of the no less gallant and experienced Senator from Missouri, (Mr. BENTON,) in saying that our just title was limited by the parallel of 49, were gentlemen to be told that they betrayed a "want of nerve?"—that they were willing to "dismember the Union," and to surrender the soil of the Republic?

The Senator from Indiana, (Mr. HANNEGAN,) had told the Senate that if we surrendered any portion of Oregon short of 54° 40', we might surrender a Western pioneer with his wife and children, all of whom were to be turned over to the grinding tyranny of Great Britain; and then the Senator had assailed their tenderest feelings by a thrilling description of the surprise and dismay of the poor man when he found himself outlawed from his native land. In reply, he would say to the honorable Senator, that his friend,