

SPEECH

OF

MR. LINN, OF MISSOURI,

IN

REPLY TO MR. McDUFFIE, ON THE OREGON BILL.

DELIVERED IN THE UNITED STATES SENATE, JANUARY 26, 1843.

MR. LINN said the opposition to the measure which he had had the honor of introducing, had confined itself, except on the part of the Senators from South Carolina, to the grant of lands. One of those Senators made that his chief objection; but was averse, in addition, to all present action upon the matter. The other, who spoke yesterday, [Mr. McDUFFIE,] took still wider ground—blamed the bill as to all its incidental parts, as well as its objects, and declared his fixed repugnance, not only to this scheme of settlement, but to all expansion of our population whatever. Certain remarks of the latter eloquent Senator demand a particular reply; and, in answering them, if I can sufficiently, I shall have met whatever else has been further objected to the bill.

It is with a want of consideration, of meditation, and preparation of the measure, that he more directly taxes it. To this objection, the history of the bill, and of its repeated introduction here, is the best answer. The measure was first introduced some twenty-two years ago, in the House of Representatives. It has, therefore, had all the time necessary to reach the legal age of discretion. A bill of like form and objects was urged again upon Congress in 1823, with much ability and research, by a distinguished member, (the late Governor Floyd,) one of whose favorite objects it continued to be up to the close of his honorable congressional career. Though he did not induce the Legislature to embrace his views, yet the measure commanded the attention of President Monroe, and was strongly recommended in his last annual message. His successor, (Mr. Adams,) in like manner, viewed it as a proper part of our national policy, and pressed it upon the attention of Congress. This was followed up by two reports from the accomplished pen of Mr. Baylies in support of the President's recommendation. In 1828, it was once more introduced, in a regular legislative form, by Governor Floyd, and passed the House of Representatives by a large majority, but failed in the Senate by a plurality of two votes. Since then, it has repeatedly, in one form or another, been the subject of executive attention and legislative discussion.

In 1836, Mr. Slacum, a young gentleman admirably fitted for this difficult service, was commissioned by General Jackson to examine the country, and report upon its inducements to occupation, state of the fur trade, commercial advantages, &c. The information which that gentleman personally

collected was placed before Congress in 1838. In the mean time, (October, 1837,) during the extra session, I made a call upon the Executive for whatever it could communicate, in its possession, upon this interesting subject. The answer, besides other matter, brought us, at the regular session, the report of Mr. Slacum of his several journeys and voyages from Mexico to California, to the Sandwich Islands, and to the Territory of Oregon. I then moved the reference of the whole subject to the Committee on Foreign Relations, which was then opposed strenuously by gentlemen who are now in favor of its reference to that committee. Finding this opposition, I moved its reference to the Committee on Military Affairs, which was also strenuously opposed by all who took any part in the debate. It seemed to be the opinion of the Senate, that it should be referred to neither of the committees, but that it appropriately belonged to a select committee; which was accordingly adopted. Being the author of the proposition in regard to the Territory of Oregon, I was selected as the chairman of that committee. On the 6th of June, 1838, the committee submitted a report, accompanied by a bill.

While these proceedings were going on in the Senate, Mr. CUSHING, a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the House of Representatives, presented the question to that body, followed up by a report made by him—a report which, it may be said with truth, exhausted the subject. Neither the Senate nor House bill was reached that session. Then came the Maine boundary excitement, and the political and party agitation of the years 1839 and 1840, in the midst of which there was so little hope of commanding the attention of Congress in a measure in no manner connected with the presidential election, that it was thought unnecessary to press it upon the consideration of the Senate. Notwithstanding this, I was not unmindful of its importance; and in January, 1840,* a resolution was, at my instance, sent to the War Department, as to the expediency of a line of military posts ex-

*About the same period, I introduced another resolution in the Senate, calling for further information from the State Department. In reply to which, Mr. Greenhow's admirable Memoir, Historical, Political, and Geographical, of the Northwest Coast, and drawn up at the request of Mr. Forsyth, was sent in; and 3,000 copies were printed by order of the Senate. Mr. Greenhow's Memoir contains the most careful and correct information that could be obtained up to that period, including even the best British authorities; and it clearly proves, beyond all possibility of doubt or cavil, that the title of the United States to the country is incontrovertible.