

Historical Note.

1845.

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."

Before this despatch reached Mr. Pakenham, Mr. Buchanan had been appointed Mr. Calhoun's successor in the office of Secretary of State. Mr. Pakenham informed Mr. Buchanan of the instructions which he had received, again to press on the Government of the United States the expediency of arbitration. But Mr. Buchanan said on one occasion that he did not despair of effecting a settlement by negotiation, by adopting (to use his own words) the principle of giving and taking; and on another occasion that settlement by arbitration did not meet with the concurrence of the President and his Cabinet, that they all entertained objections to that course of proceeding, and that they preferred negotiation, hoping, as they did hope, that by negotiation a satisfactory result would at last be attained.

On 16th July, Mr. Buchanan delivered to Mr. Pakenham a paper (marked J. B.) containing his proposal for settlement. It began thus:—

"The Undersigned, &c., now proceeds to resume the negotiation on the Oregon question at the point where it was left by his predecessor.

"The British Plenipotentiary, in his note to Mr. Calhoun of the 12th September last, requests that as the American Plenipotentiary declines the proposal offered on the part of Great Britain, he will have the goodness to state what arrangement he is, on the part of the United States, prepared to propose for an equitable adjustment of the question, and more especially, that he will have the goodness to define the nature and extent of the claims which the United States may have to other portions of the territory to which allusion is made in the concluding part of his statement, as it is obvious that no arrangement can be made with respect to a part of the territory in dispute, while a claim is reserved to any portion of the remainder."

"The Secretary of State will now proceed (reversing the order in which these requests have been made), in the first place, to present the title of the United States to the territory north of the valley of the Columbia; and will then propose on the part of the President the terms upon which, in his opinion, this long-pending controversy may be justly and equitably terminated between the parties."

The paper (after a lengthened argument) ended thus:—

"Such being the opinion of the President in regard to the title of the United States, he would not have consented to yield any portion of the Oregon Territory, had he not found himself embarrassed,