

THE OREGON QUESTION.

Resolution from the Committee on Foreign Affairs, requiring the President to notify Great Britain of the intention of the United States to terminate the joint occupancy of Oregon, and to abrogate the convention of 1827, being under consideration in Committee of the Whole—

Mr. WOODWARD addressed the committee as follows:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I am not of a temperament to take much pleasure in addressing argument to others, in the absence of all hope of being able to influence their opinions, or control their action; and, perhaps, there never was, and never may be, an occasion, less favorable to such hopes, than the present. I know there is, in this committee, a large and determinate majority opposed to me; and that opposition has not diminished my confidence in the justness of my views, or shaken, in the least, my purpose of adhering to them.

Among the great variety of matters discussed, on the other side of the argument, there is one question, that has not, so far as I have heard the debate, been so fortunate as to be included; and that one happens to be the only question properly before the committee. There may be something of severity in this stricture, but I appeal to the justice and the candor of my opponents to bear me out in the general truth of the declaration. We have heard declamation and discourse, interminable, upon the title to Oregon; the importance of that country to the Union; the reasons why the British ought not to have it; the propriety of promoting settlements there; the duty and necessity of extending laws and protection to the settlers, the right to give the notice, &c., &c., &c. Who, sir, denies we have rights in Oregon, or that they must be defended, whenever, or from whatever quarter assailed? Who desires the country to fall into the hands of the British? Who is opposed to its settlement? Who is not ready to vote for all such laws, as may be essential to the well-being of our people there? Who so stupid, as to question the right to give the notice, or to declare war, even, if it suits you to do so? Sir, I am at a loss to conceive, what motive could have induced gentlemen, putting aside the real question of debate, to spring upon the committee innumerable false issues, and to argue them with a solemn vehemence, positively disgusting to the candid and ingenuous mind. Am I to indulge the suspicion, that their purpose has been to exhibit

the minority in a false light before the country?—to put them in a position they never meant to occupy, and to impute to them sentiments and opinions they never entertained, but do utterly repudiate? This might be considered an uncharitable suspicion—and, of course, I would exempt from it all who might be entitled to escape under the plea of ignorance; but with regard to those who are wise and discreet, what could they say, why sentence should not be pronounced upon them? I shall not undertake to affirm, what has been the object of this most extraordinary discussion; but I have no hesitancy in saying what it has, in fact, done: It has perverted and falsified everything it has touched. It has sent forth no shining light to the country, but enveloped everything in darkness. Its only tendency has been, to produce that very thing, which it is the object of free discussion to destroy—ignorance. Sir, I choose not to refrain from speaking with a degree of freedom on this occasion. Sentiments of profound indignation impel me.

Mr. Chairman, let us see what is the question, this committee ought to have been discussing, and to which my friends in the minority have vainly endeavored to draw your attention.

We have a convention with Great Britain for the joint use and occupancy of the northwest territory. That convention provides, that either party may annul it, by giving twelve months' notice to the other party. And the only question before the committee, upon which there is difference of opinion, is, Shall the notice be given? So, the question is merely one of notice. Nor does it involve the substance of notice, but only the time. All are agreed, that the notice should be given, at some period not very remote. But is it expedient, is it good policy, to give it at the present time? I think it is not. And as it is preposterous to pretend that national honor, or dignity, or essential right, is involved in this matter of time, I maintain that considerations of good policy and expediency ought to direct our councils, and determine our action. And this, sir, is the issue that gentlemen ought to have met, and which the honor of our country, and the welfare of the people, made it their duty to meet, and discuss in an honest and statesmanlike manner. And dismissing every feeling of prejudice from my mind, I now propose to express some views upon this question.