

SPEECH

OF

R. M. T. HUNTER, OF VIRGINIA,

ON

On the resolution of notice to Great Britain to abrogate the convention of joint occupancy relative to the Oregon territory.

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, JANUARY 10, 1843.

Mr. HUNTER rose and addressed the House as follows:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I was one of those who regretted that this debate should have arisen when it did. I regarded it as premature and unfortunate, and I feared that it might add to the difficulties in the way of a wise and dispassionate settlement of the question before us. But, so much has now been said, that a yet fuller development of the opinion of this House is perhaps due to the country, and ourselves. For myself, I have been the more anxious to express my opinions at an early stage of the debate, because I foresaw that I should be separated from many, perhaps from most of my political friends upon the question before us. I am happy to believe, however, that the differences between us are not so wide and deep as to be irreconcilable. This difference relates not so much to the end which we all desire to attain, as to the means by which it is to be pursued. From what I have gathered of the opinions of this House, I believe that all desire the possession of Oregon, not only up to the parallel of 49°, but to that of 54° 40'. Nearly all, so far as I am informed, believe that our title to this country is good, not only to the 49th parallel, but up to that of 54° 40'. I, for one, entertain that opinion. The whole question between us is as to the best and wisest means of attaining an end which we all equally desire. Mr. Chairman, I have expressed the opinion, that, without regard to the distinctions of party or of sections, all of us desire the possession of the whole territory in Oregon, to which we are entitled. There is no man with an American heart in his bosom who could be insensible to the prospect of planting our flag and our settlements upon the shores of the Pacific. There is no such bosom which would not swell with emotions of hope and of pride at the prospect of the influence, commercial, political, and military, which we should derive from a position on the shores of Oregon and California, should we be so fortunate as to be able to obtain the last by just and equitable means. Looking to the map of the globe, and taking the world over with a view to its social and political relations, and to physical characteristics, there is no such position for military strength and commercial supremacy, as

we shall occupy if our settlements should cover the whole breadth of the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean, under our present form of government. In the centre, lies the vast valley of the Mississippi, destined to be not only the hive, but the storehouse of nations, and impregnably secured behind the Alleghanies on the one side, and the Rocky mountains on the other. In time of war, a mighty reserve, ready to debouch on either the Atlantic or the Pacific slope, to overwhelm with irresistible force any foreign invasion, and able in time of peace—teeming, as it will be, with people and resources—to cherish and sustain a vast commerce on either sea. From the Chesapeake northward, our harbors and rivers, communicating with vast inland seas, give us the most commanding commercial position on the vast basin of the Atlantic, which receives the waters and the commerce of most of the large rivers of the world. With Oregon and California, our position on the Pacific would be nearly as commanding. We should hold the advanced posts on the line of commercial interchanges between the civilized portion of the world, and most of that which is semi-civilized or barbarous; and we should probably become the centre of commercial transit between the two seas. The possession of Oregon, and the peaceful acquisition of California, would place this Union in a position of impregnable strength and stable greatness, with one arm on the Atlantic sea and the other on the Pacific shore, ready to strike in either direction with a rapidity and an efficiency not to be rivalled by any nation on the earth.

I know that these speculations on the future are uncertain and often dangerous; but it would seem to be next to impossible that, with this position, and with all these elements of military strength and of political and commercial greatness, we should not be able, not only to command the largest share of the commerce of both seas, but also to protect and advance the march of civilization throughout the entire extent of this continent. With these views of the subject, how could I be insensible to the importance of maintaining our claims to Oregon? But shall we beat promote our purpose by adopting the recommendation of the Committee on Foreign Af-