

country. It would be utterly impossible for the Hudson Bay Company to resist or check this tide of western emigration if thus encouraged. That company, with all the hunters and trappers it could muster, would present no stronger barrier to this tide of emigration, than would a mud wall to the swelling waters of the broad Potomac.

Shall it be said, that in the meantime the Hudson Bay Company will be exhausting the fur trade, and reaping all the profits to be derived from it? Sir, if we claim Oregon only for the sake of its beaver skins, it occurs to me that we have been shamefully negligent heretofore. For the fur trade is diminishing rapidly, and hitherto Great Britain has derived almost exclusively the benefit from it. But, sir, we desire Oregon for purposes far more important. Meanwhile, as the fur trade diminishes, as the buffalo recedes, and the beaver is hunted out, so will the servants and agents of the Hudson Bay Company gradually retire, and leave us in possession of the territory. Or shall this policy, which I have had the temerity to propose, meet with the objection urged with much plausibility and force by another gentleman from Indiana, [Mr. OWEN,] namely—that our emigration would not extend itself north of the Columbia river, or north of latitude 49°? I admit, sir, that there is a great deal of plausibility and some strength in that objection; for, although it is fanciful and chimerical to suppose (with that gentleman) that the Hudson Bay Company can afford to buy up our citizens like cattle in the market, at the high price of eight hundred dollars per head, yet it is quite probable that, under the existing state of things, our settlers will in a great measure confine themselves to that portion of the territory south of 49°. But, sir, with all due deference to the gentleman from Indiana, [Mr. OWEN,] I do not care if they do. It is, for all purposes of future action and defence, better that they should. They will be more concentrated, and consequently stronger. There is land enough, heaven knows; and for many years to come there will be no crowding. And it is certainly more desirable that our citizens should for the present be as compact and concentrated as possible, than that they should be scattered over the whole territory. But, sir, we are triumphantly asked by the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. COSS] “what shall we gain by delay—what have we ever gained by delay?” Sir, we shall gain time—Time, to us more precious than great riches or many jewels—Time, the tomb-builder and the overturner of thrones—Time, who strikes the old with decrepitude and lends vigor and strength to the young. Sir, there is another “axiomatic” fact which may be gathered from records of history—and it is this: that nations, like individuals, pass through the stages of infancy, manhood, and old age; we see them springing up from small beginnings—mere germs as it were—growing up by degrees, increasing daily and hourly in strength and power, until they reach the very summit of earthly greatness, and “play fantastic tricks before high heaven.” Then, with old age, come dissolution and decay; and as in the human body decrepitude and disease mark the ravages of time, so in the body politic, corruption rears her loathsome form, one shock after another smites the tottering fabric, and each and every symptom declares how sorely and how rapidly she is descending into the tomb of ages.

Thus it is with ourselves and our haughty rival. We are in the vigor of youth, increasing every year

in prosperity and power. Great Britain, though she may not have reached that period when we may look for her speedy topping downfall, yet she has evidently passed her prime. She snacks of age. Many gray hairs are discernible upon her brow, and some symptoms of dotage are manifestly perceptible; and although I will admit that old John Bull is a stout old bully, yet, nevertheless, each wave that dashes from the ocean of Time saps and undermines some portion of his wide dominions, whilst its every heave is lifting aloft this giant republic of the western world. Let me not be misunderstood. I believe, if compelled to measure our strength with Great Britain, we are even now more than a match for her, though I am reminded of a very sensible remark made to me on a certain occasion by one of my constituents, a man of gigantic physical powers, and remarkable for his bravery, as well as for his good nature. He had a neighbor, also a Hercules for strength and prowess, who was constantly disturbing him with petty annoyances. He frequently complained to me of this neighbor's conduct; and I said to him, upon one occasion, “Why do you not lick him; you are able to do it.” “Yes, sir, (he replied,) I know that I can lick him, but it will strain me to do it; and I don't choose to undertake it until I am actually compelled.” Now, sir, there was wisdom in the remark. May we not profit by it? I know that we can lick Great Britain; but believe me it would “strain” us to do it; and we had better postpone it until there is no alternative, and then we will do it.

Thus, sir, we shall gain time by postponing this matter; and every hour, every moment thus gained is of vital importance to us. And in reply to the question, “What have we gained by delay?” I answer, we have gained this at least: we have gained seven or ten thousand hardy emigrants in the disputed territory; we have gained the advantage of having demonstrated our title in the face of the world; and once more, I repeat, we have gained time. Will any man pretend to say that we are not better prepared now to defend our rights in Oregon, than we were under the administrations of Mr. Monroe, or Mr. Adams, or Gen. Jackson? Suppose we had suffered ourselves at that time to have been hurried headlong into a contest about this matter, does any one doubt that we would have jeopardized, if we had not absolutely lost, the whole of the territory? Has this time, then, been lost to us? Have we rested on our oars for nothing? No, sir, we are better prepared now than we were then, and we shall be fully prepared in a few brief years. But gentlemen ask *when*—when will we be prepared to assert our rights? I answer, we are ready *now*, if the worst comes to the worst. We are ready to maintain them by arms even now, if we shall be compelled to do so. But of this there is no danger, if we pursue a wise and prudent policy. And we shall be infinitely better prepared when, at the expiration of a few years, we shall have twenty or thirty thousand rifles in Oregon, and emigrants sufficient to cultivate the soil, and raise corn and beef to maintain any army we may send to protect them. An army which should be sent there now, would have to subsist upon “mule and dog”—[see Fremont's expedition]—poor food for fighting men. I take it, sir; but in a few years we shall have citizens there, the fruits of whose labors will maintain any army sent to protect them. Then we will be ready, sir, and then we will strike.

—But again, it was said by the gentleman from