

SPEECH.

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

Mr. REID obtained the floor, and addressed the committee as follows:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The importance of the question under consideration must plead my apology for trespassing on the patience of this House, while I give some of the considerations which will influence the vote I intend to give. Could I cherish the vanity that I could, at any time, have enlightened this body on any topic of legislation before it, such a hope would be utterly vain on this occasion, after the question before the House has undergone so full and able a discussion.

The question under consideration is, whether it is proper, at this time, to give the notice to Great Britain that the conventions of 1818 and 1827, touching what is generally termed the joint occupancy by the two governments of the Oregon territory, should terminate at the expiration of twelve months. I believe that we have a good title to Oregon. We have acquired title to it by settlement and discovery; and if anything was wanted to make it complete, that was supplied by the acquisition of the claims of France and Spain. But I did not rise to discuss the title at this time; that task has already been performed with an ability which has satisfied the country. I must confess that I was astonished to hear the gentleman from Kentucky [Mr. DAVIS] take the ground that the constitution had transferred the power of giving such notice to the President of the United States; and that the executive had endeavored to avoid that responsibility by throwing it on the legislative department of this government. Surely the gentleman did not listen to the able speech of the gentleman from Ohio, [Mr. THURMAN.] What is a treaty? It is the supreme law of the land, and can only be abrogated by an act of Congress, or by another treaty made in conformity to the constitution. And can the gentleman from Kentucky desire that the President shall take into his own hands the prerogative of abrogating a supreme law of the land? If the Executive himself should claim such a power, how would the cry of usurpation ring from one end of the country to the other? He would be charged with an attempt to violate the constitution, and seize upon despotic power. The whole country would condemn such a course, and I fancy that even the gentleman from Kentucky, and his political friends, would raise the cry of usurpation! usurpation! If the gentleman thinks that the notice is a war measure, and equiva-

lent to a declaration of war, as some have insisted, then surely he will not assert that the President has power to give it without the legislative action of this government. The gentleman thought proper to deprecate the idea of connecting this question with the party politics of the day; but he departed from this course by heaping partisan abuse upon the President, and charging on him a design of involving the country in a war without consulting its welfare.

Does the gentleman believe that the interests of the country required the President to make the British government a more liberal offer than he did? if not, then, how could he charge the President with an attempt to plunge the country into an unjust and unnecessary war? For myself, I believe that offer was too liberal; but we have been informed that it was refused, and withdrawn, and our title asserted to the whole of Oregon. Some of the gentleman's political friends say that "the President cannot be kicked into a war;" while the gentleman himself insists that the President is too anxious for war. Whether the gentleman has met this question in the elevated spirit of a statesman, I leave to this House and to the country to judge.

I know not, sir, whether the giving of this notice will produce war; I am sure that it will not be a just cause of war; but I deny that it is a war measure. It ought not to be so considered here, for it is not so regarded even in Great Britain. The giving the notice is provided for in the convention of 1827; it is peaceable in its character, and does not prevent negotiation; but still so fruitful are the imaginations of some gentlemen that they cannot speak of it in any other light than as a war measure. The friends of this measure have not advocated it as a war measure; it has only been so characterized by those who oppose it.

In giving the notice, the only legitimate inquiry for an American statesman is, whether this question ought to be settled as early as practicable, or delayed for an indefinite period of time. The convictions of my mind are decidedly in favor of the former course. Let us examine this point. For the purpose of postponing the adjustment of the Oregon dispute, it was agreed in the third article of the convention between the United States and Great Britain, signed October 20, 1818, that—

"Any country that may be claimed by either party on the northwest coast of America, westward of the Stony moun-