

# SPEECH

OF

## MR. DOUGLASS, OF ILLINOIS,

ON

*The resolution giving the twelve months' notice for the termination of the joint occupancy of the Oregon territory.*

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES, JANUARY 27, 1846.

Mr. DOUGLASS, who was entitled to the floor from yesterday, proceeded to remark: Had a foreigner, unacquainted with our proceedings, been present listening to this debate, he would have come to the conclusion that we were gravely discussing the propriety and policy of a declaration of war against Great Britain. Gentlemen opposed to giving the notice, persist in considering it a hostile movement, tantamount to a declaration of war. They go so far as to denominate us as the war party, while they call themselves the friends of peace; and indulge their fancies and fears in giving the most terrible descriptions of the ravages of war, and beautiful pictures of the blessings of peace. Mr. D. was unable to coincide with them in opinion that the convention (usually called the treaty of joint occupancy) was adopted as a substitute for war, and that its annulment would necessarily involve the immediate dissolution of the amicable relations between the two countries. He did not understand such to have been the object, the effect, or the history of that measure. If gentlemen will reflect for a moment, they will recollect that the convention was entered into in 1818, more than three years after the close of the war, when the United States were at peace with the whole world, and there was not a cloud to darken the national horizon. There were no wars, nor fears, nor threats, nor panics of war. Peace had been restored, and an amicable adjustment had been effected between the United States and Great Britain in regard to the rights of each in the Oregon territory under the treaty of Ghent. The first article of that treaty provided that "*all territories, places, and possessions whatsoever, taken by either party from the other during the war, or which may be taken after the signing of this treaty, excepting only the islands hereinafter mentioned, [in the bay of Fundy,] shall be restored without delay.*"

At the commencement of the war, and for some time previous, the valley of the Columbia river had been in the possession of citizens of the United States, under the name of the "Astoria settlement." During the war this settlement was captured and passed into the hands of the English, and was afterwards known as "the settlement of Fort George."

When peace was concluded, our government demanded that the Astoria settlement "should be restored without delay," in compliance with the first article of the treaty of Ghent. To this demand, the British government replied, "that the place had not been captured during the late war, but that the Americans had retired from it under an agreement of the Northwest Company, which had purchased their effects, and had ever since peaceable possession of the coast;" and that "the territory itself was early taken possession of in his Majesty's name, and had since been considered as forming a part of his Majesty's dominions."

Thus the two governments found themselves at issue in regard to their respective rights in Oregon under the treaty of peace. How this difficulty was reconciled and amicably settled, by the parties themselves, will be seen by the following extract from "Greenhow's History of Oregon and California:"

"Mr. Bagot [the British plenipotentiary at Washington] at the same time communicated the circumstances to his government, and they became the subject of discussion between Lord Castlereagh, the British secretary of foreign affairs, and Mr. Rush, the American plenipotentiary at London. Lord Castlereagh proposed that the question respecting the claim to the post on the Columbia, should be referred to commissioners, as many other disputed points had been, agreeably to the treaty of Ghent; to which Mr. Rush objected, for the simple reasons that the spot was in the possession of the Americans before the war; that it fell, by belligerent capture into the hands of the British during the war; and that under a treaty which stipulated the mutual restitution of all places reduced by the arms of either party, the right of the United States to immediate and full repossession could not be impugned."

"The British secretary, upon this, admitted the right of the Americans to be reinstated, and to be the party in possession while treating on the title; though he regretted that the government of the United States should have employed means to obtain restitution which might lead to difficulties."

"Mr. Rush had no apprehensions of that kind; and it was finally agreed that the post should be restored to the Americans, and that the question of title to the territory should be discussed in the negotiation as to limits and other matters which was soon to be commenced. Lord Bathurst, the British secretary for the colonies, accordingly sent to the agents of the Northwest Company at the mouth of the Columbia a despatch, directing them to afford due facilities for the re-occupation of the post at that point by the Americans; and an order to the same effect was also sent from the admiralty to the commander of the British naval forces in the Pacific."