

THE OREGON QUESTION.

The Resolution reported by the Committee on Foreign Affairs directing notice of twelve months to be given to terminate the Convention with Great Britain for the joint occupation of Oregon, being under consideration in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union:

Mr. SMITH addressed the committee as follows: Mr. CHAIRMAN: In rising at this late stage of the debate, on the proposition now before the committee, I have neither the vanity nor the egotism to suppose that I can say much that is new, or that will be interesting to those who may hear me; and could I be *certain* that the resolution introduced by the honorable chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs would pass this House without any amendments, and that it would be followed by the passage of appropriate bills to protect and secure our rights, and those of our settlers in Oregon, and all who are disposed to emigrate thither, I would content myself with simply voting for all such measures, and refrain from troubling the committee with a speech at this time. But as some doubt seems to exist in relation to this matter, I feel it a duty I owe both to myself and to those who gave me a seat in this House, to express my views *boldly and fearlessly* on this great American question. I agree with the venerable gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. ADAMS] and other gentlemen, who say that this is one of the most important questions which ever has, or ever will, come before an American Congress. And, sir, let me tell gentlemen that such is the magnitude of this question, and so strong and deep are the convictions of the people throughout the length and breadth of this country, that the whole of the territory called Oregon (included within the parallels of 42° and 54° 40' north latitude) belongs to the United States; and that the settlement and occupation of that valuable territory are of the utmost importance to the prosperity and harmony of the whole Union, and to the permanency of our republican form of government; that it will, like a mighty avalanche, overwhelm, or *politically bury*, all who obstruct or oppose the measures necessary for the consummation of this great object.

I come, sir, from one of the oldest settled portions of the great valley of the Mississippi—from that beautiful and fertile country *wrested* from the monopolizing grasp of Great Britain on the 4th day of July, 1778, by that bold, daring, and chivalrous soldier, George Rogers Clark, of Virginia, and his intrepid followers. These brave men succeeded

in capturing the British post at the ancient town of Kaskaskia, and compelled the cross of St. George to give place to the stars and stripes of our beloved confederacy. But for the sagacity, enterprise, and patriotism of General Clark and his gallant associates, one of the fairest and richest portions of this Union might still have been a dependency of Great Britain. The people of that region and of the North-western States will ever keep in vivid remembrance that they owe the blessings of the liberty and freedom which they now enjoy to the success of General Clark's expedition. They partake largely of that spirit of adventure which characterized the actors in that noble enterprise. They know well, sir, the perils and hardships incident to the settlement of a new country, and to their defence against the depredations of a savage foe. Many of them, too, while fighting under the command of the immortal Jackson and the gallant Johnson, gained an experience that enabled them to bear witness that the tender mercy of the British and Indian warfare is cruelty refined; but, sir, they would hurl with scorn from the high places of power *any* public servant who would shrink from the maintenance of the *rights and honor* of the nation, or from the defence, to the very last, of every inch of territory which of right belongs to us, even though it were a barren rock or sterile sands. Our right and title to the Oregon territory has for years occupied the attention of our wisest and most enlightened statesmen and jurists. They have spoken, written, and published the result of their investigations upon the subject, and spread them abroad throughout the land. The people have read and maturely reflected upon this question, and they have deliberately decided that the territory is ours, and should be defended, if need be, (in the language of Jackson,) at the "cannon's mouth."

The question of title has been so ably and fully discussed, that I will not go into an elaborate exposition of it. As it is acknowledged by all that Spain first discovered the northwest coast of America, and as we, by the "Florida treaty of February, 1819," came into possession of the Spanish title, I will go back to a period earlier than the discovery of Sir Francis Drake, by virtue of whose discoveries Great Britain lays some claim to this territory. And in doing this, I shall extract from the able reports of Mr. Cushing and Mr. Baylies, and the writings of other distinguished gentlemen who have examined thoroughly the early history and settlement of this territory.