

# S P E E C H

OF

## HON. GEORGE FRIES, OF OHIO,

ON

### THE OREGON QUESTION.

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1846.

The Resolution from the Committee on Foreign Affairs, requiring the President to notify Great Britain of the intention of the United States to terminate the joint occupancy of Oregon, and to abrogate the convention of 1827, being under consideration in Committee of the Whole—

Mr. FRIES addressed the committee as follows:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Were I about to act a professional part on that field where many believe the controversy now going on between Great Britain and this Government, in reference to the territory of Oregon, will terminate, there, midst saws and amputating knives, scalpels, tenaculums, and bullet forceps, I should undoubtedly be able to act a part more creditable to myself than I shall be able to perform on this field of public discussion. Unaccustomed as I am to participate in public discussion duty to myself, but more particularly to my constituents, impels me to an unreserved expression of my individual views touching the question now under consideration, and to avow what I believe to be the will and wishes of those I have the honor to represent on this floor.

Sir, I approach this question with a most profound sense of its importance. Habituated as I have been, for the last fourteen years, to the responsibilities of a station, the duties of which gave me the control of the lives of thousands of my fellow-citizens; yet, at no time during the performance of the arduous duties of the station referred to, was every fibre of my heart so thoroughly imbued with a most profound sense of the importance of a single act as at present. When I reflect, that upon my single vote may depend the fate of governments and of empires, and the lives of millions of human beings, I cannot but feel, and deeply feel, that my position, in common with every member

of this House, is clothed with the most awful responsibilities.

The resolution now under consideration cannot be looked upon as a war measure, because it is only abrogating the joint convention in the manner and form prescribed by the treaty of 1818, and as renewed in 1827, concerning the Oregon territory. Yet I am fully sensible of the fact, that the Government of Great Britain, should she be disposed to engage in war with the United States, will not pause long ere she distorts the peaceful intentions of this Government in giving this notice, into a cause of war. A Government which could find a cause of war in the refusal of a people to be drugged with poison, would not be slow in manufacturing a cause of war, even out of so proper and peaceful a measure as the giving of this notice. Inasmuch as this resolution is the only action which this House proposes to take at this time, which can by possibility be distorted into a belligerent measure, I deem it a matter of deep importance to the House and to the nation, that we give it the most serious consideration. In carrying out this view of our duty, the validity of our title to the Oregon territory should be carefully examined and fairly determined. If, upon such examination, our title shall prove "clear and indisputable," I cannot see, nor have I heard any good and valid reason, why we should hesitate or falter in declaring the truth to the nation and the world, or in performing a function which properly belongs to this House. If, on the other hand, our title is disputable—is not clear, I, for one, should deem it my duty not to interfere with the provisions of the treaty, but leave the whole matter where it would then properly belong—in the hands of the President, to be disposed of by negotiation. But, sir, being fully convinced that our title to the whole