

king it. They, at least, ought not to hesitate, either as to the character of the measures called for, or as to the proper time for our action. The consequence of asserting rights thus *clear*, ought not, in my judgment, to be the subject of inquiry or debate. If the whole of Oregon be *clearly* ours, then I submit it to the reason and patriotism of gentlemen, whether it becomes an American Congress, gravely and with solemn fear, to deliberate upon the consequences of its action in respect to a foreign Power. It is humiliating, sir—a stain upon our character—a reproach upon our sovereignty. In this aspect, as, indeed, in any in which the subject under consideration can be viewed, it presents a very different question from a declaration of war; in which light too many gentlemen are disposed to regard it.

I grant, sir, most readily, that if this were a proposition in direct terms to declare war against Great Britain; if it even were a measure that gave any just grounds or provocation for such a declaration on her part—it would be proper, nay, sir, it would be our bounden duty, to inquire into the condition of our country, its resources and defences, and carefully to estimate the strength and power of our adversary.

Notwithstanding the very severe attack made upon Sir John Falstaff last evening, by the gentleman from Ohio, I am half inclined to adopt the sentiment so objectionable to him, "that discretion is the better part of valor." I cannot believe that the great poet, by putting these words into the mouth of the valiant knight of the tap-room, intended to condemn so wise a maxim of human conduct, but merely to show how an arrant, yet ingenious, coward could reason in excuse for his cowardice. I agree, sir, that "discretion is the better part of valor." That it is neither wise nor prudent to rush blindly into a war, unprepared and comparatively defenceless, against an enemy armed at all points, and holding as it were in his hands all the elements of destructive warfare. Such a course, I repeat, in my judgment would be neither wise nor prudent. It would be as much wanting in true courage as it lacked in sound and statesman-like policy. Before I would vote for a declaration of war against a powerful, and in some respects a superior, enemy, I would, by vigorous and enlarged preparations, place my country in a condition to carry on the war, when declared, to a successful and glorious termination.

Sir, I do not believe that war will come of this Oregon difficulty, if prompt and prudent measures are adopted. Certain it is, that the resolution upon your table gives none, not the slightest grounds of offence towards England. In truth, if the position assumed by some gentlemen who oppose this notice be correct, I shall be sustained in the declaration that the resolution now under consideration, as also all the measures that are expected to follow it, are within the ordinary and daily-exercised powers of this Government. No one has gone so far in opposition to the notice as to pretend that, abstractly and *per se*, it gave any just cause or provocation for war. This is contemplated by the very terms of the convention itself. The right of either party to give this notice, and thereby dissolve the convention, forms one of its express and plain stipulations. It cannot be that war is apprehended from acting in strict conformity with the treaty itself. What is it, then, that gives to the

alarmed imaginations of so many gentlemen a war-like aspect to this measure? It is our claim to the *whole* of Oregon; and yet many of these same gentlemen admit our title to that country clear and indisputable. I repeat, Mr. Chairman, that it is not the giving of the notice that makes war a remote or even possible contingency as growing out of this question, but our positive claim to Oregon, and the measures hereafter contemplated in extending over it the jurisdiction of our laws and the sovereignty of our flag. To legislate over territory *clearly* our own, in the extension of our laws, and in the establishment of territorial governments, is certainly no unfrequent or unusual act of legislation. It is, I believe, within our acknowledged jurisdiction and sovereignty; and to be deterred from its exercise, when demanded by the wants of our citizens, because of the unfounded pretensions of a foreign Power, I can regard in no other light than a shameful abandonment of the right itself. Our right to Oregon admitted as *clear*, in my judgment, the subject now under consideration, as well as all the measures expected to follow, become acts of usual and ordinary legislation. But we are told that war will certainly and inevitably follow. Suppose it does, it will follow unjustly and without cause—will it not? And must we halt in the prosecution of our rights? Must we refrain from the exercise of our acknowledged powers because war may ensue? It is a degradation and a reproach—an acknowledgment of weakness that amounts to a virtual surrender of our sovereignty. Sovereignty consults only its own interests and glory. It is the sole arbiter of its own rights. It exists but in its perfect and absolute independence; it suffers no invasion; it can survive no surrender.

If we would abandon our claim to that portion of Oregon lying north of the Columbia river, gentlemen, I am confident, would not then see in this notice to dissolve the convention of 1827, anything alarming or warlike. It assumes that character only because we insist upon our own. England has no right—so say gentlemen opposed to this notice; yet, in the insolence of her power, she interposes her pretensions, and bids us stand, or advance at our peril. Shall we stand at her bidding, and tamely and cowardly surrender our rights? or shall we vindicate them as our fathers did, by all the means God and nature has placed in our hands? This is the question, and the only question, our *clear* right to Oregon admitted. If, instead of looking to the interest of our own people, and determining what is expedient and proper for their good, we are to be swayed and influenced by European cabinets, and European threats, where is our boasted independence? What can England do more than invade our "clear and unquestionable" rights? If she claimed the power of taxation it would be no more; and would gentlemen still counsel supineness and delay? Would they still talk of the dangers and horrors of war? This was not the language of those who laid deep and strong the foundations of the Republic; it is not thus that its integrity can be maintained. What would be our position before the civilized world?—asserting our title to the whole of Oregon as indisputable and clear; yet hesitating, through fear, to take those steps demanded by the wants of our citizens and enforced by every consideration of patriotism and public duty. But I am told that it