

SPEECH
OF
HON. E. D. BAKER, OF ILLINOIS,
ON
THE OREGON QUESTION,

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 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. BAKER addressed the committee as follows:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: In expressing the reasons which induce me to vote for the resolution under discussion, I shall comment upon many of the arguments urged by its opponents, in a spirit of freedom, and, I trust, of fairness.

In the first place, sir, I consider the American title up to 54° 40' virtually conceded in this debate. Most of those who oppose the notice affirm the territory to be ours. The gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. WINTHROP] has said he thought it susceptible of proof in a court of justice. The gentleman from Alabama, [Mr. YANCEY,] considering it ours, is in favor of "masterly inactivity;" not to acquire, but to gain, or to keep, what he admits to be ours. And although there have been some dissentient voices, they have scarcely marred the harmony and fullness of the admission. It is true, sir, that the honorable gentleman from South Carolina [Mr. HOLMES] has denied it, and so did the gentleman from Virginia, [Mr. BAYLY;] but I think, sir, we may safely confide them to the care of Mr. CALHOUN, whose opinions in behalf of the title of his own country should, with them at least, be weighty, if not conclusive.

I am highly gratified, Mr. Chairman, that such is the opinion of this House upon the question of

title. It would be strange if it were otherwise. How does that claim present itself here? Sir, it has been maintained not only by the highest authority, but by every authority known to our Constitution and our laws. It has been asserted for more than thirty years; it has been maintained by our Ambassadors abroad and our Secretaries at home; by successive Administrations, and by every Administration; it has been enforced in the declaration of a general principle, as in the declaration of Mr. Monroe, in 1823, "that the American continents are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European Power;" it has been particularly and specifically relied on by the President of the United States in his Inaugural Address to the people and to the world; it has received his earnest and solemn sanction in the late Annual Message to Congress; it has been the subject of long and repeated negotiation, in every stage of which it has been illustrated and confirmed. Nor, sir, has it been left to presidents or diplomatists: that claim has contributed to change an angry faction into a successful party; and "Oregon and Texas" have immortalized Polk and Dallas.

I know, Mr. Chairman, that there have been some efforts, here and elsewhere, to cast suspicion upon our title to the whole territory, from the fact that we have repeatedly offered to compromise upon the 49th degree of latitude. It is true, that we have made this offer three times; it is also true that it has been three times rejected. And, sir, it is to be remembered, that whenever we have done so, it has been accompanied with a denial of any title in Great Britain, and an express declara-