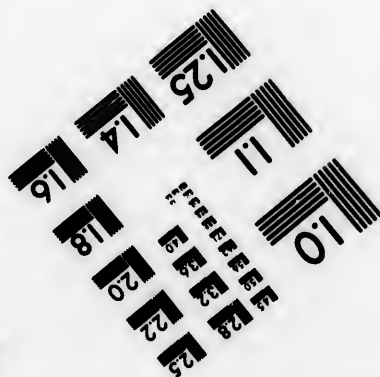
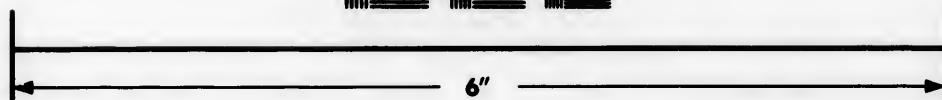


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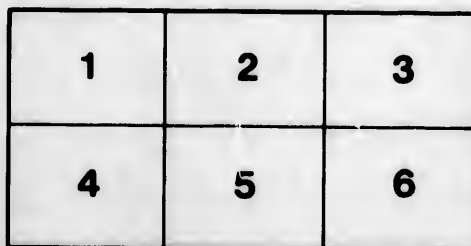
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7.P



SPEECH

OF

MR. REID, OF NORTH CAROLINA,

ON THE

OREGON QUESTION.

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

FEBRUARY 7, 1846.

WASHINGTON:

PRINTED AT THE UNION OFFICE.

1846.

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NOTHING BUT THE COAST OF AMERICA, WESTWARD OF THE STONY MOUNTAIN.

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SPEECH.

On the resolution of notice to Great Britain to abrogate the convention of joint occupancy relative to the Oregon territory.

Mr. REID obtained the floor, and addressed the committee as follows:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The importance of the question under consideration must plead my apology for trespassing on the patience of this House, while I give some of the considerations which will influence the vote I intend to give. Could I cherish the vanity that I could, at any time, have enlightened this body on any topic of legislation before it, such a hope would be utterly vain on this occasion, after the question before the House has undergone so full and able a discussion.

The question under consideration is, whether it is proper, at this time, to give the notice to Great Britain that the conventions of 1818 and 1827, touching what is generally termed the joint occupancy by the two governments of the Oregon territory, should terminate at the expiration of twelve months. I believe that we have a good title to Oregon. We have acquired title to it by settlement and discovery; and if anything was wanted to make it complete, that was supplied by the acquisition of the claims of France and Spain. But I did not rise to discuss the title at this time; that task has already been performed with an ability which has satisfied the country. I must confess that I was astonished to hear the gentleman from Kentucky [Mr. DAVIS] take the ground that the constitution had transferred the power of giving such notice to the President of the United States; and that the executive had endeavored to avoid that responsibility by throwing it on the legislative department of this government. Surely the gentleman did not listen to the able speech of the gentleman from Ohio, [Mr. THURMAN.] What is a treaty? It is the supreme law of the land, and can only be abrogated by an act of Congress, or by another treaty made in conformity to the constitution. And can the gentleman from Kentucky desire that the President shall take into his own hands the prerogative of abrogating a supreme law of the land? If the Executive himself should claim such a power, how would the cry of usurpation ring from one end of the country to the other? He would be charged with an attempt to violate the constitution, and seize upon despotic power. The whole country would condemn such a course, and I fancy that even the gentleman from Kentucky, and his political friends, would raise the cry of usurpation! usurpation! If the gentleman thinks that the notice is a war measure, and equiva-

lent to a declaration of war, as some have insisted, then surely he will not assert that the President has power to give it without the legislative action of this government. The gentleman thought proper to deprecate the idea of connecting this question with the party politics of the day; but he departed from this course by heaping partisan abuse upon the President, and charging on him a design of involving the country in a war without consulting its welfare.

Does the gentleman believe that the interests of the country required the President to make the British government a more liberal offer than he did? if not, then, how could he charge the President with an attempt to plunge the country into an unjust and unnecessary war? For myself, I believe that offer was too liberal; but we have been informed that it was refused, and withdrawn, and our title asserted to the whole of Oregon. Some of the gentleman's political friends say that "the President cannot be kicked into a war;" while the gentleman himself insists that the President is too anxious for war. Whether the gentleman has met this question in the elevated spirit of a statesman, I leave to this House and to the country to judge.

I know not, sir, whether the giving of this notice will produce war; I am sure that it will not be a just cause of war; but I deny that it is a war measure. It ought not to be so considered here, for it is not so regarded even in Great Britain. The giving the notice is provided for in the convention of 1827; it is peaceable in its character, and does not prevent negotiation; but still so fruitful are the imaginations of some gentlemen that they cannot speak of it in any other light than as a war measure. The friends of this measure have not advocated it as a war measure; it has only been so characterized by those who oppose it.

In giving the notice, the only legitimate inquiry for an American statesman is, whether this question ought to be settled as early as practicable, or delayed for an indefinite period of time. The convictions of my mind are decidedly in favor of the former course. Let us examine this point. For the purpose of postponing the adjustment of the Oregon dispute, it was agreed in the third article of the convention between the United States and Great Britain, signed October 20, 1818, that—

"Any country that may be claimed by either party on the northwest coast of America, westward of the Stony moun-

tains, (now called Rocky mountains), shall, together with its harbors, bays, creeks, and the navigation of all rivers within the same, be free and open for the term of ten years from the date of the signature of the present convention, to the vessels, citizens, and subjects of the two powers; it being well understood that this agreement is not to be construed to the prejudice of any claim which either of the two high contracting parties may have to any part of said country, nor shall it be taken to affect the claims of any other power or State to any part of said country, the only object of the high contracting parties, in that respect, being to prevent disputes and differences among themselves."

This convention remained in force till it was renewed by the convention signed at London, August 6, 1827, which provided:

"ART. 1. All the provisions of the third article of the convention concluded between the United States of America and his Majesty the King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, on the 20th day of Oct. 1818, shall be, and they are hereby, further indefinitely extended and continued in force, in the same manner as if all the provisions of the said article were herein specifically recited.

"ART. 2. It shall be competent, however, for either of the contracting parties, in case either should think fit, at any time after the 20th October, 1828, on giving due notice of twelve months to the other contracting party, to annul and abrogate this convention; and it shall, in such case, be accordingly entirely annulled and abrogated, after the expiration of the said term of notice.

"ART. 3. Nothing contained in this convention or in the third article of the convention of the 20th October, 1818, hereby continued in force, shall be construed to impair, or in any manner affect, the claims which either of the contracting parties may have to any part of the country westward of the Stony or Rocky mountains."

From 1818, up to the present time, repeated efforts have been made to settle by negotiation the dispute between the two countries in regard to this territory; but Great Britain has always refused to propose such terms as this country could accept, without a sacrifice of her rights. In this condition the question stands at the present moment; and it might so remain, but for the change of circumstances which will in a short time render it both impracticable and impossible. While the country was only used for hunting, fishing, and fur-trading, there was but little difficulty between the two governments in relation to their conflicting claims, and it was not indispensably necessary to adjust them. But things have changed. Within a few years thousands of our industrious and enterprising citizens have gone with their families to that country to engage in agricultural, mechanical, and other pursuits of civilized life, and they are now cultivating the soil, and earning for themselves permanent homes, and an inheritance for their children. Does any one suppose that we have arrived at such perfection in the science of government as to justify the hope that two distinct races of people, each governed by a different code of laws, and owing allegiance to governments totally differing in their character, can settle and occupy the same territory, and maintain peaceable relations towards each other? Such a hope is illusive. Why then should we indulge further delay, when every moment we live this question becomes more difficult to settle? When a dispute arises between two neighbors as to the boundary of their lands, the dispute may often be easily adjusted at first; but if they once drive their fence-stakes, cut their ditches, and build their houses on the disputed territory, a friendly settlement of the boundary becomes almost impossible. So it will be in regard to Oregon. This territory is now regarded as greatly more valuable than it was in 1818; and if you wait ten years longer, its estimation will no doubt be more than quadrupled. Is it not important, then, that this question should be settled as early as practicable? In view of all this, I ask,

is it not our duty to take such measures as will facilitate the decision of this question? For one, I believe the country is ours to 54° 40', but the extent of our title is not the question now under consideration; and all who believe that we have rights in Oregon, no matter to what extent, so they be greater than the British government has offered to concede, ought to vote for this measure.

The President of the United States, in his annual message at the opening of the present session of Congress, says:

"The extraordinary and wholly inadmissible demands of the British government, and the rejection of the proposition made in deference alone to what had been done by my predecessors, and the implied obligation which their acts seemed to impose, afford satisfactory evidence that no compromise which the United States ought to accept can be effected. With this conviction, the proposition of compromise, which had been made and rejected, was, by my direction, subsequently withdrawn, and our title to the whole Oregon territory asserted, and, as is believed, maintained by irrefragable facts and arguments.

"The civilized world will see in these proceedings a spirit of liberal concession on the part of the United States; and this government will be relieved from all responsibility which may follow the failure to settle the controversy.

"All attempts at compromise having failed, it becomes the duty of Congress to consider what measures it may be proper to adopt for the security and protection of our citizens now inhabiting, or who may hereafter inhabit Oregon, and for the maintenance of our just title to that territory. In adopting measures for this purpose, care should be taken that nothing be done to violate the stipulations of the convention of 1827, which is still in force. The faith of treaties in their letter and spirit, has ever been, and I trust, will ever be, scrupulously observed by the United States. Under that convention, a year's notice is required to be given by either party to the other, before the joint occupancy shall terminate, and before either can rightfully assert or exercise exclusive jurisdiction over any portion of the territory. This notice, I would, in my judgment, be proper to give; and I recommend that provision be made by law for giving it accordingly, and terminating, in this manner, the convention of the sixth of August, 1827."

Now, sir, in the face of these facts, can we shrink from giving the notice? Some gentlemen take it for granted that this measure will cut off all negotiation but they are mistaken. It only carries out what public opinion has declared, and what the true policy of the country requires. If further negotiation shall be necessary or proper, then this notice in no wise prevents it; if further negotiation is unnecessary or improper, it is our imperative duty to give this notice. Passing this measure, then, will not prevent our government from doing anything that ought to be done, while it will untie our hands and leave us free to pursue such measures as the interests of the country demand. In doing these things we must observe our national faith, and violate no treaty stipulation. At the last session of Congress a bill to organize a Territorial government in Oregon passed this House by a vote of 140 to 59. This bill contained a section providing for the giving of the notice, in the following words:

"SEC. 43. And be it further enacted, That the President of the United States be, and he is hereby, required to cause due notice to be given to the British government of the desire and intention of the government of the United States to annul and abrogate the convention with Great Britain relative to territory on the northwest coast of America, concluded August 6, 1827, agreeably to the provisions of the 2d article of that convention: Provided, that nothing in the act contained shall be so construed or carried into effect by any of the officers or citizens of the United States, as to interfere in any way with any right which any of the subjects of Great Britain may have in the territory herein mentioned, as provided for in the convention aforesaid, until the expiration of twelve months after notice shall be given, as above provided, by the President of the United States."

Sir, I voted for this bill then, as did a very large majority of the members of the House, but it did

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not pass the Senate. Was it considered a war measure then? No, sir; and why should it be considered so now? Without a knowledge of the views of my constituents, I voted for the bill then, and they sustained me; but in giving the same vote now, I not only believe that I am doing right, but feel sure that I am obeying the will of those who sent me here. I repudiate the idea that this is a war measure. It is merely proof of our anxiety to settle the question, and of our determination to maintain our rights in that territory, and repel those who trespass on them. But while I repeat that this is no war measure, I would not be understood as saying that this country will not take such further steps as may be necessary to secure our rights in Oregon. The territory is ours, and we must not part with it. Sir, the time has ceased with us when we can act in that spirit of forbearance to Great Britain which characterized the conduct of the patriarch Abraham, when he said to Lot, "If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." That might have been possible once when very little value was attached to territory. But not so now with us. We need all the territory we have, and ought not under any circumstances to part with any portion that we possess. But highly as we prize territory, we do not propose to take any that does not belong to us.

Sir, I am aware some gentlemen, who do not appreciate the importance of Oregon, represent it as a distant strip of land of but little value; and they ask, are we going to fight for that? I tell such gentlemen that Oregon is of vast importance to this country, and that its loss would be deeply felt and sorely regretted to the latest moment of the existence of this great republic? Because Oregon is at a great distance from this Capitol, shall we treat her as the Roman empire once treated the island of Britain—clip her off, and tell her to take care of herself? Britain was once a part of the Roman empire; but that government thought her of so little value that they cast her off, and told the people if they could defend themselves against their enemies, good and well, let them do it; the Roman eagle would no longer take them under its wings. On this strip of country, thus severed—which is infinitely smaller than Oregon—is planted that mighty government, whose invincibility has this day been so eloquently described! It is the nation inhabiting this territory which now struggles for the conquest of the world, and carries terror with her name to the most distant parts of the earth! This teaches us the increasing importance of territory, and is a warning to us to guard against the loss of any part of our country, or of any portion of our people. It is quite natural for us to suppose, that, under any circumstances, Oregon is destined to be a part of our confederacy, but it may perhaps turn out otherwise. I here express the hope, and cherish the belief, that she will never be a British colony; that that country will be a republic, inhabited by freemen, I believe almost certain; but whether she is destined to remain a part of this confederacy, or to become a separate and distinct republic, depends upon the policy pursued towards her by this government. If we now refuse her protection, may she not hereafter scorn our proffer of reunion and refuse to be received by us as a State? The case of Texas was different. Texas was a distinct and independent nation, and we were under no obligations to protect her people or territory till she became a

part of this Union. But we are under very different obligations to the people of Oregon, because we own the territory, and it is settled by our own citizens. If we leave her in the moment of her struggles to shift for herself by withdrawing our protection, will she hereafter, when she has established her right to the soil, come and ask to be again incorporated into this Union? I believe not. I must here remark that I would be the last man on this floor, or in this country, to claim a single inch of territory which I did not believe to be ours; but, on the other hand, I say with equal determination that I will never consent to the surrender of an inch that is our own—I care not where it lies, or what may be its value—to gratify the ambition of Great Britain or any other government upon the earth. We boast of being a great and glorious republic; but what constitutes a great government? It is the justice of its laws—the preservation of its rights—and the protection of its citizens. I care not how wealthy or powerful a nation may be; as soon as she ceases to preserve her rights and to protect her citizens she ceases to be great and is destined to fall. If we ever surrender any portion of our territory to Great Britain, gentlemen may rest assured that it will be but the beginning of surrenders; she will never be satisfied with demanding. Peace is our policy. We do not seek a war with Great Britain; but if she declares war against us for defending our right to Oregon, we shall stand justified in the eyes of the world, and every American heart, and every American arm will be found on the side of their country. Sir, the country is in favor of notice, and for maintaining our right to the territory. Even in North Carolina Oregon is stronger than any political party; and, as an evidence of this, I will refer to the fact that my whig colleague from *Lumber river* [Mr. Dockery] publicly proclaimed during the canvass, that, before he would surrender any part of Oregon, he would march barefoot over prickly pears to fight for it. I repeat that the "Old North State" is for Oregon.

Mr. Dockery rose, and asked his colleague to give him leave to explain. His colleague [Mr. Reid] knew more of the geography of his State than to speak of him as his colleague from *Lumber River district*. The remark to which the gentleman alluded was, that he was ready to contend for all to which we had a valid title. I said that there were in Oregon British rights and American rights; and that, when the line was run, I would defend our soil to the utmost extremity; and what he had said about marching over prickly pears was said in that connexion. He had said that, when our rights were determined, then he would be ready to fight for them, though he had to march barefoot over prickly pears.

Mr. Reid. Where does my colleague think our rights extend to?

Mr. Dockery. Just where the gentleman's favorite President settled it in his negotiations. A laugh.

Mr. Reid. Then the gentleman is with the President, and the President says, "our title to the whole of Oregon has been asserted, and, as is believed, maintained by irrefragable facts and arguments." The gentleman's location arose from this connexion: him and myself were members of the legislature at the same time; he had a favorite project for the improvement of *Lumber river*; and from his zeal in favor of the measure, he became associated in my mind with the name of the river, so that I thought

Lumber river certainly must run through his district. [A laugh.]

MR. LOCKEY. The gentleman mistakes the nature of my patriotism. He thinks that a man's patriotism must be confined to his own district. Now, I am willing to improve North Carolina in any part of it; and just so I feel in regard to the United States.

MR. KING resumed. I am happy to hear of the gentleman's patriotism, and I shall be still more so, if, when it comes to the vote, he shall show that his patriotism, which has already reached Lumber river, is found sufficiently expanded to extend to Oregon! I hope that we shall look on this as a great national question. My feelings are with the South—my destiny is with hers; but I will suffer no local or sectional views to influence my course on this important measure. It was with extreme reluctance that I heard the remark made by a member on this floor, that whatever might be the fate of this question, he should have the consolation to know that he had not followed in the lead of the gentleman from Massachusetts. [Mr. Adams.] I regret that it should be thought necessary to invoke existing prejudices against an individual to operate against a great national measure.

But, sir, in reply to that remark, I might, with equal propriety, say that we who support the notice will have the consolation to know that we are not following in the lead of Great Britain. But such a declaration would not be an argument for or against the notice. It has been said that the member from Ohio [Mr. Gimbretts] is for the notice, and that he is actuated by motives unworthy of a statesman. But even this shall not deter me from giving my vote for a measure which I believe to be right. I might as well be told, because one of the chosen twelve was a traitor and betrayed the Savior, that therefore I must reject Christianity. I follow in the lead of no man. I go for my country. We are told that we must not act lest a war ensue. Has it come to this that our government can carry out no important measure connected with her domestic or foreign policy without the cry of war being raised and held up as a terror over us? War and ruin panics have alternately prevailed ever since the commencement of our government, and if we wait for them to cease before we act we shall never do anything. If we attempt to procure indemnity for spoliation on the property of our citizens by a foreign country, the war cry is raised!—if we attempt to annex Texas, war in all its horrors is depicted as the consequence!—and when we attempt to assert our claim to Oregon, we are told an unjust and sanguinary war will be inevitable! The horrors of war have been described in so vivid and forcible a manner that one might almost imagine that they saw the British steamers darting from point to point along our coast—that they heard the thundering of British cannon, and beheld our cities with their temples of justice and their temples of religion wrapt in flames! But in the midst of this gloomy picture, the reflection rises in my mind, that whatever may have been the devastating effects of past wars, it is nevertheless certain a portion of mankind are so constituted that they grieve much about wars that never happen; and such, I hope, is the character of the lamentations of the gentlemen we have heard on this occasion. I am for peace, I love peace; I appreciate its effects upon commerce; and, above all, I admire its happy influences in a moral and political point of view. But while I say

this, I must be permitted to remark, that I would scorn the idea of a peace that had to be purchased at the sacrifice of the interests and the honor of my country. The territory claimed by Great Britain on this continent, is greater in extent than our own with Oregon included; and ought we to surrender to that government any portion of our soil? No, sir, we have none to spare. It has been with deep regret that I have heard remarks on this floor more disparaging to our claim to Oregon than anything that I have ever seen in the correspondence of the British minister himself. It has always been unfortunate for this country that in all of her controversies with foreign governments, sentiments have been uttered here which were calculated to mislead other countries in relation to the state of public opinion in the United States, and thereby to render the subject of dispute the more difficult to adjust. Such, I fear, will be the case in the present controversy. Sir, it is time we had learned to stand on our own feet. Great Britain is, year after year, by the force of her diplomacy, and the power of her sword, bringing our nation after nation to bow to power and dominion, until her possessions dot your map over a considerable portion of the globe. With our love of liberty, we could not withhold our sympathy from those whose misfortune it has been, from time to time, to fall within her grasp; but we have stood by and beheld all these things in silence, adhering to the policy not to interfere in foreign disputes in which our own safety does not require us to take part. But when she comes upon our own shores, and seeks to possess herself of a part of our territory, every consideration of interest and of patriotism requires that we should resist her arrogant demands in the spirit of freemen who know their rights, and dare maintain them. If the preservation of our rights did not require it, such a course would then be absolutely necessary even to command the respect of Great Britain herself. In all the pictures that have been drawn of the horrid results of war, gentlemen have taken it for granted that we are to bear all the loss and make all the sacrifices, and that Great Britain has nothing to lose. But such is not the fact. Disastrous as such a conflict might prove to us, she has more to fear from it than ourselves. She cannot but foresee that the prosecution of a war against the United States would lead to a dismemberment of nearly all of her colonial possessions, and, perhaps, ultimately to an entire dissolution of her form of government. She has her domestic feuds and her immense debt; she has a commerce to suffer as well as ourselves; and the loss of our trade will injure her more than the loss of her trade can injure us. The defenceless condition of the United States has been frequently alluded to; and the gentleman from Alabama [Mr. Yancy] said that there were perhaps no United States soldiers in his own State at this time. I learned almost my first lesson on this Oregon question from that noble State. At the last session of Congress she sent to this House a resolution, passed by her legislature, in the following words:

Resolved, That the true policy of the United States requires that the joint occupancy of Oregon by the United States and England should cease; and resolved, that the title of the United States to the territory of Oregon is clear and indisputable.

This was the language of that gallant State one year ago. But, sir, Alabama has soldiers—citizen soldiers—the best in the world. Let a British soldier set his foot on Alabama's consecrated soil, and

then we shall see where the soldiers are. Sir, "it takes time to discipline the slaves of despotism; but every man is a soldier when he combats tyranny." Our policy forbids the keeping of large standing armies in time of peace, but we depend on our citizen soldiery, who are the safest reliance. Sound the alarm that the invaders are at hand, and the question will not be whom can you urge to meet them, but whom can you hold back from the conflict? Tell me not of the want of soldiers to defend our country. Our citizen soldiers fight, not for pay, but for the rights of their country; and when they have achieved the victory their patriotism deserves, they lay aside their armor—they put off their martial character and retire to the bosom of their families, and tell their deeds to inspire the rising generation with the same patriotic ardor. These, Mr. Chairman, are our soldiers, and they will be found equal to any emergency. Let not Great Britain calculate on dissensions among ourselves, for when the first blow shall be struck, whether it be in the North or the South, all local distinctions will be forgotten. We shall alone remember that we are citizens of the same republic; and the South will be ready to fly to the rescue of the North, and the North will be ready to defend the institutions and the rights of the South. But it has been said that our navy is so large as that of Great Britain. It is true that she has a large navy, and out-numbers us in ships; but it is equally true that our situation is infinitely better than it was at the commencement of the last war. Our resources are greater, the facilities for commanding them vastly increased. The efficiency of the British navy has been greatly exaggerated. She has laid out millions in building fleets which the improvements in modern warfare have rendered next to useless. These improvements are constantly going on, and

have already reached a point which renders a large portion of the vast navy of Great Britain on which she has lavished such immense sums utterly unavailable in a war with the United States. If we need fleets we can build them; and it is better for us that we have not exhausted our resources in the construction of a large navy, which would now be unfit for service. During the last war our gallant little navy won for herself enduring fame; and I undertake to say that when the emergency shall again arise, she will fully maintain that high character to which her noble deeds so justly entitle her. In conclusion, permit me to remark, that while I respect the opinions, and do not arraign the motives of those who differ from me on this question, no act of mine shall ever sanction the surrender of any portion of our territory, without a just equivalent. Entertaining the opinions I do, if I were to act otherwise, I should feel that I had not faithfully performed the high and responsible duty which I owe to my constituents, and to my country. Let us pass the notice, and follow it up by giving bounties of land to such of our citizens as may go there to brave the hardships and privations of a frontier life. Let us extend the laws and protection of the United States over that territory. Do these things, and my word for it, these brave pioneers will do much towards protecting themselves. We shall then prove to the world that we regard the great principle that the protection of our laws shall extend to every citizen of this republic, and that we are determined that our rights shall be respected all over the earth. It is natural that there should exist among a free people, some differences of opinion as to the best mode of accomplishing any end; but on this great question, let us present to England, to Europe, and to the world an undivided front, and this will ensure us peace, if peace is attainable.

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