

SPEECH

MR. CORWIN,  
OF OHIO,

On the proposition to instruct the Committee of Ways and Means to report an appropriation for the continuation of the Cumberland Road.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
February 15, 1840.

Mr. CORWIN, of Ohio, rose and said: Mr. Speaker: I am admonished, by the eager solicitations of gentlemen around me to give way for a motion to adjourn, of that practice of the House, which accords us more of leisure on this day, than is allowed us on any other day of the week. The servants of other good masters are, I believe, indulged in a sort of saturnalia in the afternoon of Saturday, and we have supposed, that our kind masters, the people, might be willing to grant us, their most faithful slaves, a similar respite from toil. It is now past three o'clock in the afternoon, and I should be very willing to pause in the discussion, were I not urged by those menacing cries of "Go on," from various parts of the House. In this state of things, I cannot hope to summon to any thing like attention the unquiet minds of many, or jaded and worn down faculties of a still larger portion of the House. I hope, however, the House will not withhold from me a boon, which I have often seen granted to others, that is, the privilege of speaking without being oppressed by a crowded audience, which is accompanied by this additional advantage, that the orator thus situated can at least listen to and hear himself.

If you, Mr. Speaker, and the members of this House, have given that attention to the speech of the gentleman from Michigan, (Mr. Cray,) made yesterday, which some of us here thought it our duty to bestow, I am sure the novelty of the scene, to say nothing more of it, must have arrested your curiosity, if, indeed, it did not give rise to profound reflection.

I need not remind the House, that it is a rule here (as I suppose it is every where else, where men dispute by any rule at all) that what is said in debate should be relevant and pertinent to the subject under discussion. The question before us, is a proposition to instruct the Committee of Ways and Means to report a bill granting four hundred and fifty thousand dollars to continue the construction of the Cumberland road in the States of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. The objections to the measure are, either that this Government is in no sense bound by compact to make the road, or that it is not a work of any national concern, but merely of local interest, or that the present exhausted state of the Treasury will not warrant the appropriation, admitting the object of it to be fairly within the constitutional province of Congress.

If the gentleman from South Carolina, (Mr. Pickens,) and the gentleman from Maine, (Mr. Parry,) who consider the Cumberland road a work of mere sectional advantage to a very small portion of the people, have attended to the sage disquisitions of the gentleman from Michigan on the art of war, they must now either come to the conclusion, that almost the whole of the gentleman's speech is what old-fashioned people would call a "non sequitur," or else that this road connects itself with not merely the military defences of the Union, but is interwoven, most intimately, with the progress of science, and especially that most difficult of all sciences, the application of strategy to the exigencies of barbarian warfare. It will be seen, that the far-seeing sagacity and long-reaching understanding of the gentleman from Michigan has discovered that, before we can vote with a clear conscience on the instructions proposed, we must be well informed as to the number of Indians who fought at the battle of Tippecanoe in 1811; how the savages were painted, whether red, black, or blue, or whether all were blended on their barbarian faces. Further, according to his views of the subject, before we vote money to make a road, we must know and approve of what General Harrison thought, said, and did, at the battle of Tippecanoe!

Again, upon this process of reasoning, we must inquire where a general should be when a battle begins, especially in the night, and what his position during the fight, and where he should be found when it is over; and particularly how a Kentuckian behaves himself, when he hears an Indian war-whoop in day or night. And, after settling all these puzzling propositions, still we must fully understand how, and by

whom, the battle of the Thames was fought, and in what manner it then and there became our troops, regular and militia, to conduct themselves. Sir, it must be obvious, that if these topics are germane to the subject, then does the Cumberland road encompass all the interests, and all the subjects, that touch the rights, duties, and destinies of the civilized world; and I hope we shall hear no more, from Southern gentlemen, of the narrow, sectional, or unconstitutional character of the proposed measure. That branch of the subject is, I hope, forever quieted, perhaps unintentionally, by the gentleman from Michigan. His military criticism, if it has not answered the purposes intended, has at least done some service to the Cumberland road. And if my poor halting comprehension has not blundered, in pursuing the soaring upward flight of my friend from Michigan, he has in this discussion written a new chapter in the "regum philosophandi," and made not ourselves only, but the whole world his debtors in gratitude, by overturning the old worn out principles of the "inductive system."

Mr. Speaker, there have been many and ponderous volumes written, and various unctuous discourses delivered, on the doctrine of "association." Dugald Stewart, a Scotch gentleman of no mean pretensions in his day, thought much, and wrote much concerning that principle in mental philosophy; and Brown, another of the same school, but of later date, has also written and said much on the same subject. This latter gentleman, I think, calls it "suggestion;" but never, I venture to say, did any metaphysician, pushing his researches furthest, and deepest, into that occult science, dream that would come to pass, which we have discovered and clearly developed—that is, that two subjects so unlike, as an appropriation to a road in 1840, and the proper tactics in Indian war in 1811, were not merely akin, but actually, identically the same.

Mr. Speaker, this discussion, I should think, if not absolutely absurd and utterly ridiculous, which my respect for the gentleman from Michigan, and the American Congress, will not allow me to suppose, has elicited another trait in the American character, which has been the subject of great admiration with intelligent travellers from the old world.—Foreigners have admired the ease with which us Yankees, as they call us, can turn our hands to any business or pursuit, public or private; and this has been brought forward, by our own people, as a proof that man, in this great and free republic, is a being very far superior to the same animal in other parts of the globe less favored than ours. A proof of the most convincing character of this truth, so flattering to our national pride, is exhibited before our eyes, in the gentleman from Michigan, delivering to the world a grave lecture on the campaigns of General Harrison, including a variety of very interesting military events, in the years 1811, 1812, and 1813. In all other countries, and in all former times before now, a gentleman who would either speak or be listened to on the subject of war, involving subtle criticisms on strategy, and careful reviews of marches, sieges, battles, regular and casual, and irregular onslaughts, would be required to show, first, that he studied much, investigated fully, and digested well; the science, and history of his subject. But here, sir, no such painful preparation is required; witness the gentleman from Michigan. He has announced to the House that he is a militia general on the peace establishment!! That he is a lawyer we know, tolerably well read in Tidd's Practice and Espinasse's Nisi Prius.—These studies, so happily adapted to the subject of war, with an appointment in the militia in time of peace, furnish him, at once, with all the knowledge necessary to discourse to us, as from high authority, upon all the mysteries in the "trade of death." Again, Mr. Speaker, it must occur to every one, that we, to whom these questions are submitted, and these military criticisms are addressed, being all colonels at least, and most of us, like the gentleman himself, brigadiers, are, of all conceivable tribunals, best qualified to decide any nice point, connected with military science. I hope the House will not be alarmed by an impression, that I am about to discuss one or the other, of the military questions now before us at length, but I wish to submit a remark or two, by way of preparing us for a proper appreciation of the merits of the discourse we have heard. I trust, as we are all brother officers, that the gentleman from Michigan, and the two hundred and forty colonels, or generals, of this honorable House, will receive what I have to say, as coming from an old brother in arms, and addressed to them in a spirit of candor,

"Such as becomes comrades free,  
Reposing after victory."

Sir, we all know the military studies of the gentleman from Michigan, before he was promoted. I take it to be, beyond a reasonable doubt, that he perused with great care the title page of "Baron Steuben." Nay, I go further; as the gentleman has incidentally assured us he is prone to look into musty and neglected volumes, I venture to assert, without vouching the fact from personal knowledge, that he has prosecuted his researches so far as to be able to know that the rear rank stands right behind the front. This, I think, is fairly inferrible from what I understood him to say of the lines of encampment at Tippecanoe. Thus you see, Mr. Speaker, that the gentleman from Michigan, so far as study can give us knowledge of a subject, comes before us, with claims to great profundity. But this is a subject, which, of all others, requires the aid of actual experience to make us wise.—Now the gentleman from Michigan, being a militia general, as he has told us, his brother officers, in that simple statement has revealed the glorious history of toils, privations, sacrifices, and bloody scenes, through which we know, from experience and observation, a militia officer in time of peace is sure to pass. We all, in fancy, now see the gentleman from Michigan in that most dangerous and glorious event in the life of a militia general on the peace establishment—a parade day! That day for which all the other days of his life seem to have been made. We can see the troops in motion; umbrellas, hoes and axe handles, and other like deadly implements of war overshadowing all the field, when lo! the leader of the host approaches,

"Far off his coming shines;" his plume, white, after the fashion of the great Bourbon, is of ample length, and reads its doleful history in the bereaved necks and bosoms of forty neighboring hen-roosts! Like the great Suwaroff, he seems somewhat careless in forms and points of dress; hence his epaulets may be on his shoulders, back, or sides, but still gleaming, gloriously gleaming in the sun. Mounted he is, too, 'let it not be forgotten. Need I describe to the Colonels and Generals of this honorable House the steed which heroes bestride on such occasions? No, I see the memory of other days is with you. You see before you the gentleman from Michigan mounted on his crop-eared, bushy-tailed mare, the singular obliquities of whose hinder limbs is described by that most expressive phrase, "sickle hams;" her height just fourteen hands, "all told;" yes, sir, there you see his "steed that laughs at the shaking of the spear;" that is, his "war-horse whose neck is clothed with thunder."

Mr. Speaker, we have glowing descriptions in history of Alexander the Great and his war-horse Bucephalus, at the head of the invincible Macedonian phalanx, but, sir, such are the improvements of modern times that every one must see that our militia general, with his crop-eared mare, with bushy-tail and sickle-ham, would literally frighten off a battle-field an hundred Alexanders. But, sir, to the history of the parade day. The general thus mounted and equipped is in the field, and ready for action.—On the eve of some desperate enterprise such as giving order to shoulder arms, it may be, there occurs a crisis, one of the accidents of war which no sagacity could foresee or prevent. A cloud rises and passes over the sun! Here an occasion occurs for the display of that greatest of all traits in the character of a commander, that tact which enables him to seize upon and turn to a good account events unlooked for as they arise. Now for the caution wherewith the Roman Fabius foiled the skill and courage of Hannibal. A retreat is ordered, and troops and general, in a twinkling, are found safely bivouacked in a neighboring grove. But even here the general still has room for the exhibition of heroic deeds. Hot from the field, and chafed with the untoward events of the day, your general unsheathes his trenchant blade, eighteen inches in length, as you well remember, and with an energy and remorseless fury he slices the watermelons that lie in heaps around him, and shares them with his surviving friends. Other of the sinews of war are not wanting here. Whiskey Mr. Speaker, that great leveller of modern times, is here also, and the shells of the watermelons are filled to the brim.—Here again, Mr. Speaker, is shown how the extremes of barbarism and civilization meet. As the Scandinavian heroes of old, after the fatigues of war, drank wine from the skulls of their slaughtered enemies, in Odin's Hall, so now our militia general and his forces from the skulls of melons thus vanquished, in copious draughts of whiskey assuage the

before fire of their souls, after the bloody scenes of a parade day. But, alas, for this short-lived race of ours, all things will have an end, and so even is it with the glorious achievements of our general. Time is on the wing, and will not stay his flight; the sun, as if frightened at the mighty events of the day, rides down the sky, and at the close of the day when "the hamlet is still," the curtain of night drops upon the scene.

"And glory, like the phoenix in its fires,  
Exhales its odors, blazes, and expires."

Such, sir, has been the experience in war of the gentleman from Michigan. We know this from the simple announcement that he is and has been a brigadier of militia in time of peace; and now, having a full understanding of the qualifications of our learned general, both from study and practice, I hope the House will see that it should give its profound reflection to his discourses on the art of war. And this it will be more inclined to, when we take into view that the gentleman has, in his review of General Harrison's campaigns modestly imputed to the latter great mistakes, gross blunders, imbecility, and even worse than this, as I shall show hereafter. The force, too, of the lecture of our learned and experienced friend from Michigan is certainly greatly enhanced, when we consider another admitted fact, which is, that the general whose imbecility and errors he has discovered had not, like the gentleman from Michigan, the great advantage of serving in watermelon-campaigns, but only fought fierce Indians in the dark forests of the West, under such stupid fellows as Anthony Wayne, and was afterwards appointed to the command of large armies by the advice of such an inexperienced boy as Gov. Shelby, the hero of King's Mountain.

And now, Mr. Speaker, as I have the temerity to entertain doubts, and with great deference to differ in my opinions on this military question with the gentleman from Michigan, I desire to state a few historical facts, concerning General Harrison, whom the general from Michigan has pronounced incapable, imbecile, and, as I shall notice hereafter, something worse even than these. General Harrison was commissioned by General Washington an officer of the regular army of the United States in the year 1791. He served as aid to General Anthony Wayne, in the campaign against the Indians, which resulted in the battle of the Rapids of the Maumee, in the fall of 1794. Thus, in his youth, he was selected by General Wayne, as one of his military family. And what did this youthful officer do in that memorable battle of the Rapids? Here, Mr. Speaker, let me summon a witness merely to show how military men may differ. The witness I call to controvert the opinion of the gentleman from Michigan is General Anthony Wayne. In his letter to the Secretary of War, giving an account of the battle of the Rapids, he says:

"My faithful and gallant Lieutenant Harrison rendered most essential services, by communicating my orders in every direction, and by his conduct and bravery exciting the troops to press for victory."

Sir, this evidence was given by General Wayne, in the year 1794, some time I imagine, before the gentleman from Michigan was born, and long before he became a militia General, and long, very long, before he ever perused the title page of Baron Steuben. Mr. Speaker, let me remind the House, in passing, that this battle and victory over the Indian forces of the Northwest, in which, according to the testimony of General Wayne, "Lieutenant Harrison rendered the most essential services by his conduct and bravery," gave peace to an exposed line of frontier, extending from Pittsburg to the southern borders of Tennessee. It was, in truth, the close of the war of the Revolution, for the Indians who took part with Great Britain in our revolutionary struggle never laid down their arms until after they were vanquished by Wayne in 1794.

We now come to see something of the man the General, whose military history our able and experienced General from Michigan has reviewed. We know that debates like this have sometimes been had in the British Parliament. There, I believe, the discussion was usually conducted by those in the House who have seen and not merely heard of service. We all know that Col. Napier has, in several volumes, reviewed the campaigns of Wellington, and criticised the movements and merits of Beresford, and Soult, and Massena, and many others, quite, yes, I say, quite as well known in military history as any of us, not even excepting our General from Michigan. We respect the opinions of Napier, because we know he not only thought of war, but that he fought too

We respect and admire that combination of military skill, with profound statesmanlike views, which we find in "Caesar's Commentaries," because we know the "mighty Julius" was a soldier, trained in the field, and inured to the accidents and dangers of war. But, sir, we Generals of Congress require no such painful discipline to give value to our opinions. We men of the 19th century know all things intuitively. We understand perfectly the military art by nature. Yes, sir, the notions of the gentleman from Michigan agree exactly with a sage by the name of "Dogberry," who insisted that "reading and writing come by nature." Mr. Speaker, we have heard and read much of "the advance of knowledge, the improvement of the species, and the great march of mind," but never till now have we understood the extent of meaning in these pregnant phrases. For instance, the gentleman from Michigan asserts that General Harrison has none of the qualities of a General, because, at the battle of Tippecanoe, he was found at one time at a distance from his tent, urging his men on to battle. He exposed his person too much, it seems. He should have staid at his tent, and waited for the officers to come to him for orders. Well, sir, see now to what conclusion this leads us. Napoleon seized a standard at Lodi, and rushed in front of his columns across a narrow bridge which was swept by a whole park of German artillery. Hence, Napoleon was no officer; he did not know how to command an army. He, like Harrison, exposed his person too much. Oh, Mr. Speaker what a pity for poor Napoleon that he had not studied Steuben, and slaughtered water melons with us natural born Generals of this great age of the world!—Sir, it might have altered the map of Europe; nay, changed the destinies of the world!

Again: Alexander the Great spurred his horse foremost into the river, and led his Macedonians across the Granicus, to rout the Persians, who stood full opposed on the other side of the stream. True, this youth conquered the world, and made himself master of what had constituted the Median, Persian, Assyrian, and Chaldean empires. Still, according to the judgment of us warriors by nature, the mighty Macedonian would have consulted good sense by coming over here, if, indeed, there were any here hereabouts in those days, and studying, like my friend from Michigan, first Tidd's Practice, and Espinasse's Nisi Prius, and a little snatch of Steuben, Alexander the Great might have made a man of himself in the art of war, had he even been a member of our Congress, and heard us colonels discuss the subject of an afternoon or two. Indeed, Alexander, or Satan, I doubt not, would have improved greatly in strategy by observing, during this session, the tactics of the Administration party on the New Jersey election question. Mr. Speaker, this objection to a general, because he will fight, is not original with my friend from Michigan. I remember a great authority, in point, agreeing with the gentleman in this. In the times of the Henrys, 4th and 5th, of England, there lived one Captain Jack Falstaff. If Shakspeare may be trusted, his opinions of the art military were exactly those of the gentleman from Michigan. He uniformly declared, as his deliberate judgment on the subject, that "discretion was the better part of valor;" and this is an authority for the gentleman. But who shall decide? Thus the authority stands—Alexander, the mighty Greek, and Napoleon Bonaparte, and Harrison, on one side, and Captain John Falstaff and the General from Michigan on the other! Sir, I must leave a question thus sustained by authorities, both ways to posterity. Perhaps the lights of another age may enable the world to decide it. I confess my inability to say on which side the weight of authority lies.

I hope I may obtain the pardon of the American Congress for diverting in this discussion to another matter, gravely put forward by the gentleman from Michigan. Without the slightest feelings of disrespect to that gentleman, I must be allowed to say that his opinions (hastily, I am sure,) obtruded on the House on this military question, can only be considered as subjects of merriment.

But I come to notice, since I am compelled to it, one observation of the gentleman, which I feel quite certain on reflection, he will regret himself. In a sort of parenthesis in his speech, he said that a rumor prevailed at the time (alluding to the battle of Tippecanoe) that Col. Joseph H. Davies, of Kentucky, who commanded a squadron of cavalry there, was, by some trick of General Harrison, mounted, during the battle, on a white horse belonging to the General, and that, being thus conspicuous