

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States:

We have come to the end of a long and arduous journey. The great Creator of all things has granted to us the most precious of gifts, a peaceful and prosperous Union. Blessed with genial seasons, the husbandman has his granaries filled with abundance, and the necessities of life, not to speak of its luxuries, abound in every direction. While in some other nations steady and industrious labor can hardly find the means of subsistence, the greatest evil which we have to encounter, is a surplus of production beyond the home demand, which seeks, and with difficulty finds, a partial market in other regions. The health of the country, with partial exceptions, has for the past year been well preserved; and under their free and wise institutions, the United States are rapidly advancing towards the consummation of the high destiny which an overruling Providence seems to have marked out for them. Except from domestic convulsion, and at peace with the world, we are left free to consult to the best means of securing and advancing the happiness of the People. Such are the circumstances under which you now assemble in your respective chambers, and which should lead us to unite in praise and thanksgiving to that Great Being who made us, and who preserves us as a nation.

I congratulate you, fellow-citizens, on the happy change in the aspect of our foreign affairs since my last annual message. Causes of complaint that time existed between the United States and Great Britain, which, attended by irritating circumstances, threatened most seriously the public peace. The difficulty of adjusting amicably the questions at issue between the two countries, was in no small degree augmented by the lapse of time since they had their origin. The opinions entertained by the Executive on several of the leading topics in dispute, were frankly set forth in the Message at the opening of your late session. The appointment of a special minister by Great Britain to the United States, with power to negotiate upon most of the points of difference, indicated a desire on her part amicably to adjust them, and that minister was met by the Executive in the same spirit which had dictated his mission. The Treaty consequent thereon, having been duly ratified by the two Governments, a copy, together with the correspondence which accompanied it, is herewith, in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty, transmitted to you. I trust that whilst you may see in it nothing objectionable, it may be the means of preserving, for an indefinite period, the amicable relations existing between the two Governments. The questions of peace or war between the United States and Great Britain, is a question of the deepest interest not only to themselves, but to the civilized world, since it is scarcely possible that a war could exist between them without endangering the peace of Christendom. The immediate effect of the Treaty upon ourselves will be felt in the security afforded to mercantile enterprise, which, no longer apprehensive of interruption, advances its speculations in the most distant seas; and, freighted with the diversified productions of every land, returns to bless our own. There is nothing in the Treaty which, in the slightest degree, compromises the honor or dignity of either nation. Next to the settlement of the boundary line, which must always be a matter of difficulty between States as between individuals, the question which seemed to threaten the greatest embarrassment, was that connected with the African slave trade. By the 10th article of the Treaty of Ghent it was expressly declared that "whereas the traffic in slaves is irreconcilable with the principles of humanity and justice; and whereas both His Majesty and the United States are desirous of continuing their efforts to promote its entire abolition, it is hereby agreed that both the contracting parties shall use their best endeavors to accomplish so desirable an object." In the enforcement of the laws and treaty stipulations of Great Britain, a practice had threatened to grow up on the part of its cruisers, of subjecting to visitation ships sailing under the American flag, which, while it seriously involved our maritime rights, would subject to vexation a branch of our trade which was daily increasing, and which required the fostering care of the Government. And although Lord Aberdeen, in his correspondence with the American Envoys at London, expressly disclaimed all right to detain an American ship on the high seas, even if found with a cargo of slaves on board, and restricted the British pretension to a mere claim to visit and enquire, yet it could not well be discerned by the Executive of the United States how such visit and enquiry could be made without detention on the voyage, and consequent interruption to the trade. It was regarded as the right of search, presented only in a new form, and expressed in different words; and I therefore felt it to be my duty distinctly to declare, in my annual message to Congress, that no such concession could be made, and that the United States had both the will and the ability to enforce their own laws, and to protect their flag from being used for purposes wholly forbidden by those laws, and obnoxious to the moral censure of the world. Taking the Message as his letter of instructions, our then Minister at Paris felt himself required to assume the same ground in a remonstrance which he felt it to be his duty to present to M. Guizot, and through him to the King of the French, against what he called the Quintuple Treaty; and his conduct, in this respect, met with the approval of this Government. In close conformity with these views, the eighth article of the Treaty was framed, which provides that "each nation shall keep aloft in the African seas a force not less than eighty guns, to act separately and apart, under instructions from their respective Governments, and for the enforcement of their respective laws and obligations." From this it will be seen that the ground assumed in the Message has been fully maintained, at the same time that the stipulations of the Treaty of Ghent are carried into good faith by the two countries, and that all commerce is removed for interference with our commerce for any purpose whatever by a foreign Government. While, therefore, the United States have been standing up for the freedom of the seas, they have not thought proper to make that a pretext for avoiding a fulfillment of their Treaty stipulations, or a ground for giving countenance to a trade reprobated by our laws. A similar arrangement by the other great powers could not fail to sweep from the ocean the slave trade, without the interpolation of any new principle into the maritime code. We may be permitted to hope that the example thus set will be followed by some, if not all of them. We thereby also afford suitable protection to the fair trader in those seas, thus fulfilling at the same time the dictates of a sound policy, and complying with the claims of justice and humanity.

It would have furnished additional cause for congratulation, if the Treaty could have embraced all subjects calculated to lead to a better understanding between the two Governments. The territory of the United States, commonly called the Oregon territory, lying on the Pacific coast, north of the 42d degree of latitude, to a portion of which Great Britain lays claim, begins to attract the attention of our fellow-citizens, and the tale of population which has reclaimed what was so lately an unbroken wilderness, in more and more numerous regions, is preparing to flow over those vast districts which stretch from the Rocky mountains to the Pacific ocean. In advance of the requirements of individual rights to these lands, essential to the well-being of the Government, to settle their respective claims. It became manifest at an early hour of the late negotiations, that any attempt for the time being satisfactorily to determine those rights, would lead to a protracted discussion, which might embrace in its failure other more pressing matters, and the Executive did not regard it as proper to waive all the advantages of an honorable adjustment of other difficulties of great magnitude and importance, because this, not so immediately pressing, stood in the way. Although the difficulty referred to may not for several years to come involve the peace of the two countries, yet I shall not delay to urge on Great Britain the importance of its early settlement. Nor will other matters of commercial importance to the two countries be overlooked; and I have good reason to believe that it will comport with the policy of England, as it does with that of the United States, to seize upon this moment, when most of the causes of irritation have passed away, to cement the peace and unity of the two countries by wisely removing all grounds of probable future collision.

With the other powers of Europe our relations continue on the most amicable footing. Treaties now existing with them should be rigidly observed, and every opportunity, compatible with the interests of the United States, should be seized upon to enlarge the basis of commercial intercourse. Peace with all the world is the true foundation of our policy, which can only be rendered permanent by the practice of equal and impartial justice to all. Our great desire should be general only into that rivalry which looks to the enlargement of the field for the exercise of the mechanical arts, and the spread of commerce—that great civilization—to every land and sea. Carefully abstaining from interference in all questions exclusively referring themselves to the political interests of Europe, we may be permitted to hope an equal exemption from the interference of European Governments, in what relates to the States of the American Continent.

On the 23rd of April last, the commissioners on the part of the United States, under the convention with the Mexican Republic, of the 11th of April, 1839, made to the proper department a final report in relation to the proceedings of the commission. From this it appears that the total amount awarded to the claimants by the commissioners and the umpire appointed under that convention, was two millions twenty-six thousand and seventy-nine dollars and sixty-eight cents. The arbitrator having considered that his functions were required by the convention to terminate at the same time with those of the commissioners, returned to the board, undecided for want of time, claims which had been allowed by the American Commissioners, to the amount of nine hundred and twenty-eight thousand six hundred and twenty dollars and eighty-eight cents. Other claims, in which the amount sought to be recovered was three millions three hundred and thirty-six thousand eight hundred and thirty-seven dollars and five cents, were submitted to the board too late for its consideration. The Minister of the United States at Mexico, has been duly authorized to make demand for the payment of the awards according to the terms of the convention, and the provisions of the act of Congress of the 12th of June, 1840. He has also been instructed to communicate to that government the expectations of the Government of the United States in relation to those claims which were not disposed of according to the provisions of the convention, and all others of citizens of the United States against the Mexican Government.

He has also been furnished with other instructions, to be followed by him in case the Government of Mexico should not find itself in a condition to make present payment of the amount of the awards, in specie or its equivalent. I am happy to be able to say that information, which is esteemed favorable, both to a just satisfaction of the awards, and a reasonable provision for other claims, has been recently received from Mr. Thompson, the Minister of the United States, who has promptly and efficiently executed the instructions of the Government, in regard to this important subject.

The citizens of the United States who accompanied the late Texan expedition to Santa Fe, and who were wrongfully taken and held as prisoners of war in Mexico, have all been liberated. A correspondence has taken place between the Department of State and the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs, upon the complaint of Mexico that citizens of the United States were permitted to give aid to the inhabitants of Texas in the war existing between her and that Republic. Copies of this correspondence are herewith communicated to Congress, together with copies of letters on the same subject, addressed to the Diplomatic corps at Mexico, by the American Minister and the Mexican Secretary of State.