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SPEECH OF MR. HUDSON,
OF MASSACHUSETTS,
On the Subject of the War with Mexico.
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, May 14, 1846.
(CONCLUDED.)

There is, in my apprehension, one capital defect in all the argument adduced to carry the Texan boundary west to the Rio Grande. There may be, and probably are, a few persons living immediately upon the west bank of the Nueces who have acted with the Texans. They have been cut off from the valley of the Rio Grande by the wilderness and deserts which lie between those two rivers, and may have regarded themselves as belonging to Texas. But this, if it be admitted to the fullest extent, does not prove that Texas has ever extended her laws one hundred and fifty miles further to the Rio Grande, and over people of another race, speaking another language, and owing allegiance to another Government. Texas has no title to it herself except what she obtained by the revolution—that is, by conquest and possession. Did she carry her arms west to the Rio Grande? She has made several attempts, and has always been defeated—in each case her forces have been driven back or captured. Does she hold the country west of the Nueces, except perhaps a very small portion in the immediate vicinity of the river? There is not a particle of evidence that she does. Mexico being the original owner, on every principle of law, would still continue to own all except what actually revolted or was conquered by Texas. And as Texas never conquered the country up to the Rio Grande, and as it is now, or was on the approach of General Taylor's army, inhabited by the subjects of Mexico who owed allegiance to that Government, and who were so faithful to their own country as to burn their dwellings on the approach of the American army, and cross the river to their own countrymen, I contend that there is not a particle of proof that the whole country east of the Rio Grande belonged to Texas, or belongs to the United States.

The President himself has furnished evidence that the Mexicans were in possession in the valley of the Rio Grande; and the most that can possibly be said is, that the territory is in dispute. In all such cases, possession is a good title against an imperfect one. We had, therefore, by no principle of law, a right to dispossess her by arms, pending the controversy, and especially as she was willing to receive a special minister to treat expressly upon this subject of boundary. The advance of our army, therefore, was an act of aggression. We have encroached upon territory where she had the possession, and claimed to have a perfect title. Let a case like this be submitted to any court of justice, and the verdict would be rendered against us.

I will even go further. If our title were the best, or we were in possession up to the banks of the Rio Grande, even then we should be the aggressors, according to General Taylor's own account. In his despatch of the 15th of April, he says that he blocked up the Rio Grande, and stopped all supplies for Matamoros. This was the first act of aggression. For at that time it is not pretended that the Mexicans had made any attack upon our troops. Col. Cross had been missing for a few days, but the worst apprehension was that he might have been murdered by some "banditti known to be in the neighborhood." And what provocation had General Taylor for blockading Matamoros, and cutting off the supplies for the Mexican army? He tells us that he had received a despatch from General Ampudia, summoning him to withdraw his force within twenty-four hours, and to fall back beyond the Nueces. Was this summons an act of hostility? It was not so regarded by General Taylor, for in his note in reply he says the responsibility will rest upon those "who rashly commence hostilities." So, according to his own confession, before the Mexicans had commenced hostilities, he blockaded their town and cut off their supplies. Does not this make us the aggressors? Have we in time of peace a right to blockade the Mexican ports, and so cut off supplies from their army? This is not a threat, but an act of hostility. We were not only the aggressors in invading a country in possession of Mexico, but we were guilty of the first overt act. And I should like to be told, even if the Rio Grande were the true boundary, whether the Mexicans were not justified in crossing the river to cut off General Taylor's supplies, after he had blockaded the port and cut off theirs? The aggression was on our part. We commenced hostilities.

[Mr. Jones, of Georgia. I wish to ask the gentleman from Massachusetts whether he has any authority for saying that the Mexicans crossed the river simply to cut off General Taylor's supplies.]

I will not hizzle with the gentleman from Georgia about terms. I suppose that General Arista had sent his troops across the river to oppose General Taylor, by throwing themselves between him and his supplies. I regard Arista's movement as a hostile one, brought on by the hostile movements of our own troops. Our forces had blockaded Matamoros, and cut off the supplies from the Mexican army; and the Mexicans, in return, attempted to intercept our supplies. Both were acts of hostility. I know no difference between attacking the army itself, and cutting off their provisions and munitions of war. It is as much an act of hostility to cut off an army by famine as by the sword. Or, if gentlemen regard nothing as war but an actual collision of forces, we have no evi-

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dence that the Mexicans made the first attack. General Taylor in his despatch does not pretend it.

From the view I have taken of this whole subject it appears to me that we have been the aggressors. We annexed Texas to this Union; but the Texas we annexed was limited in her territory to the Nueces or that immediate vicinity. Though she had made several attempts to extend her territory by arms to the Rio Grande, she had always been unsuccessful. The whole country east of the Rio Grande to the Nueces, or certainly to the desert, remained in the hands of the Mexicans. They had settlements in the territory, they had military posts there, and custom-houses, which we have always acknowledged as belonging to Mexico by paying duties there to the Mexican Government. Though Texas had laid some claim to the territory, Mexico was in possession, and we had always acknowledged it. And yet the President of the United States, without authority of law, sends our army to dispossess the Mexicans by taking possession of the territory, and planting our standard on the banks of the Rio Grande—the very extreme point to which the most sanguine ever laid claim. Gen. Taylor had, also, by the direction of the Executive, erected a battery opposite Matamoros, with his guns pointing into the town, as if to awe them into submission. This can be regarded in no other light than an act of aggression. So impatient was the Executive to dispossess the Mexicans and take possession of the whole country between the Nueces and the Rio Grande, that, as early as June, 1845, before annexation had been consummated, Mr. Bancroft, the acting Secretary of War, in his instructions to Gen. Taylor, informed him that his "ultimate destination" was the Rio Grande. This is followed up by an order of August 23, 1845, in which we find the following:—"Should Mexico assemble a large body of troops on the Rio Grande, and cross it with a considerable force, such a movement must be regarded as an invasion of the United States, and the commencement of hostilities." In an order of August 30, 1845, the Secretary of War goes further, and says:

"An attempt to cross the river with a large force will be considered by the President as the commencement of hostilities. There may be other acts, on the part of Mexico, which would put an end to the relations of peace between that Republic and the United States. In case of war, either declared or made manifest by hostile acts, your main object will be the protection of Texas; but the pursuit of this object will not necessarily confine your action within the territory of Texas. Mexico having thus commenced hostilities, you may, in your discretion, should you have sufficient force, and be in a condition to do so, cross the Rio Grande, disperse or capture the forces assembling to invade Texas, defeat the junction of troops uniting for that purpose, drive them from their positions on either side of that river, and, if deemed practicable and expedient, take and hold possession of Matamoros and other places in the country. I scarcely need say that enterprises of this kind are only to be ventured on under circumstances presenting a fair prospect of success."

Mr. Chairman, it seems to me that no man can read these orders and review the whole course of the President without perceiving that the Executive was seeking an occasion against Mexico—using every means in his power, and means which, by the constitution, he did not possess, to bring on a war with that Republic. And after these numerous acts of aggression, the President has the effrontery to tell us, in his late message, that "war exists, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, and exists by the acts of Mexico herself."

Sir, I regard this declaration as utterly untrue; and, as it was incorporated into the bill and preamble, I could not vote for it. I believe the preamble to be false, and was satisfied that it was connected with the bill for the purpose of shielding the President. I believe that this recognition of existing war was connected with the supplies for the army for the purpose of committing as many as possible to this base war of conquest, and to this gross encroachment upon the constitution. Regarding the preamble as false, and the war inexpedient, and one got up for the purpose of conquest, I could not, as a faithful representative of the people, give it my support. I believe I should have been false to truth, to justice, and to the best interests of my country, if I had given my sanction to such a measure.

The gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Douglas) has pronounced every one a hypocrite, a traitor, and a coward, who voted against the bill, and who charged the Executive as the aggressor in this case. But, sir, I shall not be deterred from what I consider to be my duty by any such intimidation. I come not here to bow to Executive dictation, or to register the edict of James K. Polk, or any other President. I have no ambitious ends to answer, no patronage to seek, no high political aspirations to gratify, and hence shall not be very solicitous of courting Executive favor, or flattering the morbid sensibility of noisy and restless demagogues. But, altho' that gentleman may brand us as cowards, I will assure him that neither the strength of his voice, nor the violence of his gestic-

ulations, nor the spasmodic emotions of his patriotism will in the slightest degree alarm me. The gentleman may

"Shake his ambrosial locks, and give the nod,"

and some gentlemen may, perhaps, tremble in his presence, but I shall remain un-awed. Yes, he may

"Assume the god,
Affect to nod,
And seem to shake the spheres,"

but he will not shake my convictions of duty, or determination to obey them.

The gentleman from Ohio, (Mr. Thurman) who addressed the committee yesterday, read numerous extracts from the Federal papers published during the late war with England. He has produced these extracts with an air of triumph, as if he had demolished his colleague at a blow, because that gentleman had applied to the present war some of the epithets which had been applied to the war of 1812. But, granting all that the gentleman has said, what does it prove? His colleague had denounced the present war and its authors; and he meets it by saying that the war of 1812 was denounced. He does not attempt to show that the present war is just, or that the Executive has not transcended his powers, but contents himself with a low attempt to create a popular prejudice against his colleague. If he felt competent to meet the arguments of his colleague why did he not do it? Why depend upon the cry of Federalism? I do not know the source whence the gentleman obtained his "elegant extracts," but it is suggested by gentlemen around me that he might have obtained them from his Democratic friend now at the head of one of the departments, who formerly so zealous a Federalist that he is said to have remarked that if he thought he had one drop of democratic blood in his veins he would apply the lancet and let it out.

While the gentleman was denouncing the "immortal fourteen," and representing them as enemies of their country, he ought to have recollected that two of them from his own State had proved their courage and patriotism by fighting the battles of their country, and some of the rest of that number have seen more of the tented field, I presume, than that gentleman himself.

As to his attack upon the Federal party, in 1812, I have nothing to say. They need no defence from me. They numbered in their ranks some of the wisest statesmen and firmest patriots of the country. If they erred, I am not responsible for their errors, having never belonged to that party. Though young at that period my feelings were enlisted on the other side in politics.

[Mr. Sims, of South Carolina, made some inquiry about the conduct of the Federalists at that period.]

I should be pleased to hear the gentleman, but my time will not permit. It is rare that we upon this side of the House can obtain the floor; and I have no time to be catechised by the gentlemen on the other side; they will have their turn hereafter. But if the gentleman from South Carolina is troubled about threats of disunion, I will ask him what he thinks of more modern threats of nullification and disunion in another quarter? He may perhaps understand that better.

But we are charged with withholding succor from our gallant little army in the hour of its peril—with being indifferent to its present alarming condition. This charge, sir, is founded upon an entire misrepresentation of the facts in the case.—Does any person believe that any of the troops raised by virtue of our act of war can reach the Rio Grande before the fate of our army will be decided for good or for evil? The collision between our forces and those of Mexico took place on the 24th of April, and the subject was brought before us on the 11th of May, seventeen days after the event. We could not expect that the subject would be disposed of here under two or three days, and the intelligence of our action could not reach Gen. Taylor before the last of May, some thirty-five days after the first collision. It is also manifest that volunteers could not be raised, organized, and sent to the scene of action before the middle of June. Some six or eight weeks must elapse before the troops raised by our act could reach Gen. Taylor's camp. How, then, can it be pretended that our action could have any reference to the immediate condition of our army? From the facts submitted by Gen. Taylor it appears to be certain that the fate of his army must be decided for weal or for woe within a short time. The Commanding General also informs us that he had, in virtue of authority reposed in him, called upon the States of Texas and Louisiana for 5,000 men; and he had authority to call upon several other States. The call for these troops was made on the 26th of April, and would reach the authorities of those States ten or twelve days before the intelligence of the collision reached us. These troops would be sent irrespective of any action by this body, and it is upon them and others, which he was authorized to call for, that Gen. Taylor must depend. It is not true, therefore, that the fate of our army depended upon any action of ours. Our action had reference, not to the immediate fate of our army, but to the future operation of that army. It was a question not of immediate succor to

our troops, but of the conquest of Mexico. This was in fact the question which the majority pressed upon the House; and if our army should have suffered by the defeat of that bill, the responsibility would have rested upon those who, to gain party ends, were pleased to connect the question of supplies with gross falsehoods, and a war of conquest and aggrandizement.

But we are told by gentlemen on this floor that it is treason to oppose the Government in time war. Sir, I have no sympathy with that dastardly sentiment.—What! has it come to this, that a weak or wicked Executive may usurp power and involve the nation in an unjust war, and an unscrupulous majority may press through the House, without debate, a bill sanctioning that iniquitous procedure, and then all mouths must be closed on the subject? Is this the liberty and the only liberty granted to the representatives of a free people? Is it treason to point out the faults of a corrupt Administration? Are we to submit in all things to the will of the President? If so, we have nothing left of liberty but the name. We are already under a despotism. Such doctrines may answer for corrupt sycophants who bow to the Executive for place, but they are unworthy of freemen. I protest against all such corrupt and corrupting sentiments. Treason to speak against the measures of the Administration because we are at war! Sir, I have from my earliest boyhood had profound veneration for the Earl of Chatham, arising from the manly course he pursued in the English Parliament in pleading the cause of America. He spoke freely of the impolicy and the injustice of the mother country towards the colonies. He commenced his patriotic course before the war began, but he did not cease with the breaking out of hostilities. He pleaded for America; he exposed the Administration; he denounced their measures as infamous while the war was in progress.—When opposing the administration he employed language like this: "Sir, I rejoice that America has resisted; three millions of people so dead to all feelings of liberty as voluntarily to submit to be slaves, would be fit instruments to make slaves of all the rest." "The Americans have been wronged, they have been driven to madness by injustice." "If I were an American, as I am an Englishman, while a foreign troop was landed in my country, I never would lay down my arms—NEVER, NEVER, NEVER! I solemnly call upon your lordships, and upon every order of men in the State, to stamp upon this infamous procedure the indelible stigma of public abhorrence."—Such was the language of the friends of liberty on the floor of Parliament, and that body, even under that tyrannic Administration, had not the hardihood to attempt to suppress it. The last act of his life was an effort of the colonies. The opposition in Parliament have always spoken with freedom in peace and in war. This is English liberty. Pitt, and Burke, and all the leaders of the opposition, even at that day, were too enlightened, had too ardent a love of liberty, to subscribe to the degrading and cowardly sentiment which we hear proclaimed upon this floor in the hall of an American Congress.

I have no boasts to make of my devotion to my country. I am a citizen of this country. This is the land of my birth.—My lot is cast in the United States, and my fortune is connected with hers. When she is right, I will sustain her; and if I believe her to be in the wrong, I will not give her up, but will point out the errors, and do all in my power to bring her into the right; so that, if war must come, and our young men must be offered on the altar of our country, we may safely commend them to the God of battle—to that Being who rules in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. I desire the prosperity of my country, and nothing but my devotion to her interest, and to higher principles of moral rectitude induced me to separate from those with whom I have generally acted. I could not consent to involve my country in a war which I believe to be unnecessary and unjust—a war of conquest—brought about by ambitious men to answer personal and party purposes.

Before I conclude my remarks, I must notice another subject closely connected with this, and one out of which our present difficulties have grown. Gentlemen with whom I have acted on this floor will bear me witness that I have not been in the habit of going out of my way to attack the institutions of the South. Though I have always regarded slavery as an evil—a political and moral wrong—having no power over it in the States, I have been disposed to leave it to those who have it in their keeping to manage, according to their own sense of propriety. But, when gentlemen throw this subject in my path—when they bring it up here for action and ask me to give a vote upon it, I will speak and act freely—I will not give it my countenance—it shall not be extended by me. This war is one of the first fruits of the annexation of Texas. And that measure was got up and consummated to extend and perpetuate slavery.—Mr. Calhoun, in the correspondence submitted with the treaty, avowed this to be the primary object of annexation. I opposed it then, and I voted against the war because its object is to extend, not the

"area of freedom," but the area of bondage. And I wish to commend this subject especially to the gentleman from Illinois, whose bosom glows with such ardent patriotism that he is willing to spill rivers of blood in this war with Mexico. That gentleman was born in a State where the blight of slavery was never known, and his residence is now in a free State. All his associations, we may suppose, have been in favor of freedom, and yet he is willing to aid in riveting fetters upon others, now as free as himself. Yes, Mr. Chairman, though he professes an ardent love of liberty, and would have us believe that his bosom was warmed by the very fires of patriotism, he is desirous of spreading the curse of slavery over a large section of country where it is now unknown. He is so devoted to his country and so in love with her institutions, that he is willing to sustain, with blood and treasure, an institution at war with the first principles of a Republican Government—liberty and equality. He denounces Mexico as an uncivilized and barbarous Power, and still he aspires to be a leader in policy designed to extend and perpetuate slavery, and to plant on the soil of Mexico an institution which she, barbarous as she is, and corrupt as the gentleman would represent her to be, would not permit to pollute her soil. This is the position of the gentleman who denounces all as traitors who will not bow to the dictation of the majority on this floor.

He may occupy that position, but I confess that I do not covet it. I agree with the late Whig candidate for the Presidency, Mr. Clay, "that all wars are to be regarded as great calamities, to be avoided if possible; and that honorable peace is the wisest and truest policy for this country. I agree with him, also, that in a war for conquest, and especially in a war to extend and perpetuate slavery, we should stand disgraced in the eyes of the civilized world." In such a war, I fear that victory itself would prove a defeat, and that a triumph over enemies in foreign countries, would eventuate in the destruction of our free institutions at home. War under any circumstance is a great calamity. But when it is waged without an adequate cause—when it is carried on to gratify an inordinate ambition, or an unwholesome spirit of conquest, it is more than a calamity—it is a crime of the deepest dye. And the Administration which shall use the power reposed in it for good, for such wicked purposes, merits and justly merits public execration. Let those in power look well to it that this execration does not fall upon their heads. They may think it a light thing, but let them remember that bloodshed for unrighteous purposes will cry from the ground to Him "who bringeth the princes to nothing, and who taketh up the isles as a very little thing."

GEN. TAYLOR IN THE LAST WAR.

The New York Telegraph rescues from oblivion the following incident, in which Gen. Taylor was engaged during the last war:

"On the 3d of September, 1812, soon after the beating of the retreat at Fort Harrison, in the then territory of Indiana, of which post Captain Taylor was in command, four guns were heard to fire at a short distance, in a direction which left no doubt that two young men who had gone out a few hundred yards to make hay, had been attacked. A portion of the Prophet's party was supposed to be in the neighborhood. Captain Taylor having not more than fifteen or sixteen men fit for service, probably waited till morning when he sent out a small party with a Corporal to learn the facts, cautioning them against an ambuscade, as he recently did Captain Thornton.

The bodies of the young men were found dreadfully mutilated, cold and stiff, and were brought in and buried.

A communication of a threatening character was then sent in with a white flag from the Prophet's party, which satisfied Capt. Taylor that he was to be attacked; he accordingly made his preparations. He personally examined the men's arms to ascertain their condition, distributed sixteen rounds per man, and though just recovered from a severe attack of fever, saw for himself every disposition made that the emergency required. A non-commissioned officer was ordered to walk around the interior of the fort during the night, to give the alarm, if the sentinel should not; and though it was well understood the post could not very well be defended by its small and enfeebled garrison, Capt. Taylor resolved not to surrender it while he lived.

At about 11 o'clock at night the Capt. was called from his quarters by his orderly and informed that the Indians had succeeded in firing the lower block house.—This building contained in the lower section, the property of the army contractor and was used also as an alarm post, in which a corporal and ten men were stationed. The firing commenced at the same time, and was actively kept up on both sides. Captain Taylor immediately ordered the fire buckets to be made ready, water drawn from the well, and the fire extinguished, as at this moment it had not extended very far.

In the captain's despatch to Gen. Harrison, he says, from debility, apprehension or other causes, his men did not obey his

orders with alacrity, and very soon they reached the store-room and commenced to a quantity of whiskey, the flames extended to the roof, and the men gave all for lost. The heavy fire of the Indians and musketry; the yelling of hundreds of savages, and above all, the screams, wailings of nine or ten women and children in the fort, were enough to have fused the bravest soldiers; it was, indeed, also, that if the block-house were destroyed, the barracks, next to it, would have made part of the fortification, would have been destroyed. So completely had the Indians in the fort become disheartened, that of fifteen or sixteen who were able to get out of the best and stoutest soldiers, only two of the picked and ran away. This moment which tested the superior qualities of Capt. Taylor's mind. Any man may get on smoothly, when he meets difficulties to meet, but it is only the great who know how to overcome them, and to rise above the pressure of such circumstances.

The Commander took his measures promptly. He ordered a party of men to mount the barrack roof, throw up part of it on fire next to the block-house, and then keep the gable thoroughly open. He pointed out to his men, that the things would thus be saved. While the block-house was burning down, a heavy breast-work was erected, protecting the entrance over the ruins, which, but about twenty feet wide. This arrangement being made, the destruction of the block-house was of no consequence in the final defence if attacked.

These skillful directions gave the officers new life, they went to work with desperate energy, and by day-light, a heavy fire, continuing for eight hours, the fort was in fact safer than before. When morning came, Capt. Taylor turned the enemy's shots with a spirit and effect, that they drew off, never made their appearance again, and he was there. The whole of the morning were present at this siege, had no certain success. But their courage and their charges were unavailing. Captain Taylor gallantly maintained his position against a large and superior force.

It seems as if all victories were won with odds against him. The communication which the gallant officer made to Gen. Harrison on the occasion was written in the most unassuming and modest manner, and is a tribute worthy of being read. Capt. Taylor, on the recommendation of his General, was promoted to a majority, and his whole subsequent career has shown himself a prudent, modest, intelligent, brave man.

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Fayetteville, January, 1846—1847.

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