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SPEECH

OF

MR. ASHMUN, OF MASSACHUSETTS,

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MONDAY, JULY 27, 1846.

In Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union, on the Bill for the erection of additional Fortifications.

Mr. ASHMUN addressed the committee as follows:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I shall vote for all the provisions in this bill. The appropriations for the various fortifications are intended to protect important points, which, in case of war, would be greatly exposed to the attacks of an enemy who may have marine force at its control. I should vote for them in the most profound peace, as salutary measures of timely precaution; but I shall vote for them more readily and cheerfully now, when our country is engaged in a war, of which no man can see or calculate the end.

But I do not rise now so much to discuss the merits of the particular provisions of the bill which is under immediate consideration, as to call the attention of this House and the country to the situation in which, by recent events and disclosures, our nation is placed, with reference to the great question of *peace and war*.

In order that the course of my remarks may be at once more clearly indicated, I send to the Clerk's desk a letter signed by the Secretary of War, and addressed to Jonathan D. Stevenson, and desire to have it read.

(The letter was read by the Clerk, as follows:)

WAR DEPARTMENT, June 26, 1846.

SIR: The President having determined to send a regiment of volunteers around Cape Horn to the Pacific, to be employed in prosecuting hostilities to some province of Mexico, probably in Upper California, has authorized me to say, that if you will organize one on the conditions hereinafter specified, and tender its services, it would be accepted. It is proper it should be done with the consent of the Governor of New York. The President expects, and indeed requires, that great care should be taken to have it composed of suitable persons—I mean of good habits—as far as practicable of various pursuits, and such as would be likely to remain, at the end of the war, either in Oregon, or in any other territory in that region of the globe which may then be a part of the United States. The act of the thirteenth of May last authorizes the acceptance of volunteers for twelve months, or during the war with Mexico. The condition of the acceptance, in this case, must be a tender of service during the war; and it must be explicitly understood, that they may be discharged, without a claim for returning home, wherever they may be serving at the termination of the war, provided it is in the THEN territory of the United States, or may be taken to the nearest or most convenient territory belonging to the United States, and there discharged.

The men must be apprized that their term of service is for

the war; that they are to be discharged as above specified; and that they are to be employed on a distant service. It is, however, very desirable that it should not be publicly known or proclaimed that they are to go to any particular place. On this point great caution is enjoined.

The communication to the officers and men must go so far as to remove all just grounds of complaint, that they have been deceived in the nature and the place of the service.

It is expected that the regiment will be in readiness to embark as early as the first of August next, if practicable. Steps will be immediately taken to provide for transportation.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. L. MARCY, Secretary of War.

Colonel J. D. STEVENSON, New York city.

In the next place, I read for the information of the House, as connected with the subject, the following extracts from the Union newspaper, published in this city, and which is admitted on all hands to be the organ of the Administration—both Executive and Congressional. On June 17th, the organ, in an editorial article, says:

"Congress, it will be remembered, DECLARED WAR UPON MEXICO with an approach to unanimity seldom exhibited on such important occasions. That republic had given nothing but blind and insolent denial to the just and conciliatory demands of the Administration; and, plunging from folly into wickedness, ended her safety and our forbearance in the cold-blooded murder of our citizens. The prompt and cordial vote of Congress, and its appropriations for war, signally recorded its approbation of the sound judgment and patriotism of the Executive. Mexico has already paid dearly for her contumacy and folly, and may yet have to pay much more."

On another day the Executive organ says as follows:

"The Government of this country HAVE MADE WAR openly in the face of the world. They mean to prosecute it with all their vigor. They mean to force Mexico to do us justice at the point of the sword. This then is their design—this is their plan; and it is worthy of a bold, high-minded, and energetic people."

From these papers it will be seen, first, that the Administration now openly proclaims that "Congress has DECLARED WAR upon Mexico,"—that our Government has MADE WAR OPENLY in the face of the world! It is no longer half reluctantly asserted that the war exists by the act of Mexico; but, boldly and unhesitatingly, it is asserted that we have made the war—we have declared the war!

In the next place, it is now evident, by the official

letter of Mr. Marcy, the Secretary of War, to J. D. Stevenson, that this war is now to be carried on as a war of conquest, and subsequent colonization, in a distant region of the globe. Look for a moment to the character and contents of this most extraordinary letter. It is addressed—not to an officer of the army whose habits and education fit him for mere military service of the ordinary kind—not to a man who has been distinguished by any public service in the field—but a mere political adventurer, who is only known to the world as a partisan from the neighborhood of the Five Points, and the region where the Empire Club holds sway, and where the doctrine that “to the victors belong the spoils” is acknowledged and practised. It requires that the men should be enlisted “during the war,” and not for twelve months; evidently contemplating that the expedition upon which they are to embark is not expected to be brought to a close within the twelve months provided for in the act. It requires, furthermore, that the men to be enlisted should be of “various pursuits.” They are not to be selected with a view to their qualifications as soldiers merely, but the idea of a colony is distinctly foreshadowed. This letter also requires that they should be men who “would be likely to remain either in Oregon or in any other territory in that region of the globe which may then be a part of the United States.” And the men are to be distinctly warned that they must expect to be discharged in that region, without any claim to be brought home. And finally, to keep the people as much as possible blinded as to the destiny and purpose of this expedition, Mr. Marcy enjoins it upon Stevenson that “it should not be publicly known or proclaimed that they are to go to any particular place. On this point great caution is enjoined!”

This is clearly and plainly developed the aim and purpose of the Administration in carrying on the Mexican war. It is no longer pretended that our purpose is to repel invasion—to strike and defeat the military organizations which Mexico may set on foot to contend for the boundaries of Texas. The mask is off; the veil is lifted; and we see in the clearest characters invasion, conquest, and colonization, emblazoned upon our banners. We are no longer engaged in a defensive war; but we behold an expedition about to sail from New York to a distant region of the globe, which it cannot possibly reach in less time than from four to six months, commanded by a mere political fortune-hunter, of not the highest character, and destined to accomplish the conquest and dismemberment of a sister republic, whose weakness seems to make her a ready prey to men whose pursuits are those of plunder. And is it to be supposed that we are to see this passing before our eyes, and suffer it to pass without remark or remonstrance? In this age of the world—in the nineteenth century—with all the earth besides at peace, shall it be permitted that a republican government, whose institutions can only thrive in peace—whose mission should be, whose glory should be, to scatter the principles and blessings of peace wherever her flag can carry her name—shall it be suffered, I ask, that we should thus invoke upon ourselves the severe judgment of all mankind by lighting up the infernal fires of a war of conquest? Sir, Congress has not power

to make peace. Congress alone has power, by the Constitution, to make war; and the Executive alone has the power of concluding it. But there is a power of public opinion which may be brought to bear upon the conduct of the Executive. And it is for that purpose that I now make these remarks. I call for an expression in this House of the opinions which gentlemen entertain on this subject. I call upon the people, through all their appropriate means of expression—by popular meetings, and the newspaper press—to speak out, and to tell, in unmistakable tones, how deeply they reprobate and condemn this new attempt to dismember the territory of a weak neighboring republic.

This is the condition of our country, in one aspect of our foreign relations. But the war in which we are engaged gives rise to other reflections, and demands attention in many other respects. We have an army now within the territory of Mexico, which is daily swelling by the arrival of forces from the United States; and, so far as we are permitted to know from public demonstrations—for the President does not deign to inform the Representatives of the people what his designs are—a march upon the city of the Montezumas is intended. A strong naval squadron is upon the coast, and we are called upon to believe that our unfortunate and misguided neighbor is about to be speedily crushed beneath our heavy blows. For one, I do not see so clearly through the gloom. The war-cloud that hangs over those regions contains elements which are not so easily controlled. The peace of the world has been broken, and who can prophecy its speedy restoration? The fires of war have been lighted up, and who will insure against a general conflagration?

This Congress is now rapidly approaching the end of its present session. We are to go home, and leave the conduct of these momentous affairs in the hands of the Executive departments. And in what condition? In what condition do we leave the public treasury? I have made a diligent examination of the various appropriation bills which have passed this House, and find that we have already voted to raise for public purposes OVER FIFTY-ONE MILLIONS FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS! I hold the statement of the various items in my hand, and have submitted them to the chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, who assents to their correctness. To this must be added about five millions more, which have been recommended, and must, in all probability, be granted. We have also authorized the President to issue treasury notes to the amount of ten millions! And yet—I beg that those who hear me will remember what I now say—yet, we have but just begun this business of raising money. If this war continues as it has thus far been conducted, and upon the scale which these expeditions indicate, I have no idea that the Administration has told us the truth, by one-half, as to its cost. Of the fifty-one millions already raised, about twenty-three millions are expressly for the war, and based upon estimates which the Administration has furnished. It is not enough to pay the cost of this war by one-third!—and so time will show. And yet it is at such a moment that we are called upon

by the same Administration to pass a bill to reduce the duties upon foreign importations, on which the Government has always heretofore relied for its revenue. We have a war by which all our foreign relations are disturbed, and at the same moment the authors of it are making war upon all the domestic relations of business and industry of our own country.

The occasion demands an inquiry into the true cause of this extraordinary state of things. What has led to this enormous increase of expenditure of money? Why is it that we are thus plunging into a debt of uncounted millions? Why is it that we are thus gathering armies, invading the heart of the Mexican Republic, and seeking to make partition of her territory by military conquest? What inevitable cause has led to all this?

The people of this country have a right to an answer to this inquiry. Their representatives not only have the right, but it is their duty to demand an answer. The world—all mankind—will sternly insist upon the inquiry, and as sternly judge of the answer.

And, sir, I shall not be deterred from a discussion of the subject here, and at this time, by the miserable cry of those whose duty and profit it is to yield a ready subservience to power, that the present is not the proper time to make this inquiry; that we should wait until the war is over before we should presume to investigate the conduct of the Executive! Sir, it is never too soon, for a people who desire to remain free, to scrutinize the conduct of those who are in power. The time may come when it may be too late—fatally too late. But it can never be too soon. Eternal vigilance, tireless and sleepless, is necessary, to watch and guard against the insidious encroachments of power; and he who drags his conscience with the reflection that men in power are to be presumed to do right, adopts the doctrine of a despotism. And he who sees an Executive usurping to himself unauthorized military power, and fails to proclaim and denounce it, is as false to his duty, as much a traitor to his country, as the man who deserts to the enemy's standard upon the field of battle. Can it be possible that in a government like ours, war may be waged, and the people may not ask, *wherefore?* That armies may be levied—the heart of a neighboring republic be invaded—expeditions of foreign conquest under the lead of questionable characters set on foot—millions of dollars expended—the blood of our gallant soldiers poured out—and that our mouths are to be sealed as to the causes or necessity, which have produced such results? Sir, I acknowledge no such slavish doctrine. Scorn, contempt, and utter loathing, are all they deserve. They belong rightfully to the lips of those who live by the thrift which follows fawning—those of our number who have been the humble applicants for the brigadierships—the paymasterships—and other crumbs which fall from the Executive table, and whose patriotism is valorous and loud-mouthed in proportion to their chance of getting office and emolument. But I hold that we should be false to our trust as representatives, if we fail to hold to a strict accountability those who are temporarily in office, administering the Executive departments of the Government. Those men are not the Govern-

ment; they are not the country. They are, for a brief period, the instruments of conducting the affairs of the Government and the country. The power of the sovereign people is only partially delegated for special purposes. How absurd and preposterous, then, is the clamor, that when we venture to censure these agents of the people, we are arraying ourselves against our country!

But it has been said, also, that if we saw fit to oppose the course of the Administration upon this subject, we should have done it *before* the act was passed declaring the existence of this war. Indeed! There seems to be no way of pleasing these difficult gentlemen. It is either too soon, or too late to suit their tastes. There seems to be no convenient season in which to reason with them on the errors of those in power. But to show how thin and transparent this last veil is, a brief statement of the history of the passage of the war-bill will be enough. It was on May 11th, that the President sent us his Mexican war message, containing the only information which he has ever deigned to give to this House on the subject. The supporters of the President in the House, constituting a majority, refused to have the message and accompanying documents read in the House; but immediately adopted a resolution limiting the time of debate upon the subject in Committee of the Whole, to two hours. They then went into committee, and then the message and documents were read; and three-fourths of the time allowed for debate was taken up in reading the documents. Of course they had never been printed, and but a very imperfect idea of them could be gathered from hearing them read at the Clerk's desk. No time remained for discussion, and not a single Whig member had an opportunity to express his opinions. But this is not all. The bill which was presented for our consideration, was one which the Military Committee had previously reported expressly for the purpose of *repelling invasion*, and for that alone. It authorized the raising of volunteers, and granted money for that purpose; and for all the substantial provisions of it, I would cheerfully have voted; and so would, as I think, all the gentlemen on this side of the House. We were willing to grant every supply which was asked or needed, to extricate our gallant little army from the apparent peril into which it had been plunged by the orders of the Executive. But mark the sequel! After all debate was closed by the iron will of the majority, an amendment, in the form of a preamble, was offered by a leading member of the Administration party, [Mr. BOYD, of Kentucky]. That preamble contained the declaration that "*war exists by the act of Mexico*"—a declaration which could not admit to be true, and which I believe to be intended as a cloak to the real intentions of the Administration. I saw then, as I see now that our Government intended to *make war upon Mexico*; but it did not at that moment dare to mare up to the responsibility of a frank and open declaration to that effect. The extracts which I have read from the official organ show that such was their intention. Mr. Ritchie now says, that "*Congress declared war upon Mexico*;" and that "*our Government has made war openly in the face of the world.*" Was I not right, then, in my conviction

that the preamble, which was thus suddenly sprung upon us without notice, and without opportunity for discussion, was intended as a covert declaration of war? And when gentlemen tell us that, now, when we are in a war, we ought not to discuss the propriety of it, and that we should have taken the occasion to do it when the subject was under discussion, and before the measure was adopted, I point to this history of the transaction, as a full and sufficient answer to the shallow and unfounded pretence.

But, sir, the majority determined to force that preamble into the bill. I could not and did not vote for it, when it was thus burdened with a false and mischievous declaration. I was one of the few who voted against the war bill, notwithstanding my great anxiety to vote for the supplies. I will not say that the course of the majority did not make me hesitate—because such a state of things was well calculated to embarrass. But the conclusion to which reflection brought me, left no doubt that it was my duty to vote against the bill, and subsequent events have only tended to strengthen my confidence. I have not, for a single moment, seen occasion to regret that vote, or doubt its propriety; and it is with a feeling of both satisfaction and pride that I allude to the approbation which my constituents have given to it. There is nowhere on the face of the earth a constituency more intelligent, more reflecting, or more patriotic. They attentively observe and carefully judge all public measures and public men; and their judgment upon this measure has been most emphatically pronounced. I know, sir, that many, and, indeed, most of the gentlemen on this side of the House, including two of my colleagues, voted differently. I know the embarrassments under which they were constrained to give that vote, and fully appreciate the honorable motives which prompted it. I fully concur in the remark made by another of my colleagues, [Mr. HUBSON,] that this was a point on which fair minds and honorable and patriotic men might well differ without being liable to any imputation. While I differed from them, I cannot at all sympathize with the censure which has been attempted to be thrown upon them for pursuing a course which a sense of duty marked out for them; and before a hasty condemnation is pronounced in any quarter, I would recommend a more careful examination, and a more impartial consideration, of the difficulties which surrounded us all at the moment when we were called upon to act.

I come, then, Mr. Chairman, to consider the causes which have led us into this war. And after a careful examination of the history of the events which are known, I am compelled to say that it has been brought upon us by the men who are temporarily administering the affairs of Government, in disregard of the principles of the Constitution and of their duties to the people of the country. I shall confine my examination to the immediate causes which kindled the flame. I shall omit—as not being essential to the view which I intend to take, and for want of time—the annexation of Texas and its attendant circumstances. That act—good or evil—was done. Our Constitution had been violated to accomplish it, and the deed

of startling, monstrous iniquity, was consummated. It had passed into history, and the judgment of the world was made up upon it. The country was in some measure just recovering from the shock which an act so sudden and so violent had given it, when a new series of measures was set on foot by this Administration, which has brought us into our present condition.

The President of the United States, in his Annual Message at the opening of the present session, took occasion to announce to us the final consummation of the annexation of Texas, with many a high-sounding phrase of glorification. Among other things, he said:

“This accession to our territory has been a bloodless achievement. No arm of force has been raised to produce the result. The sword has had no part in the victory. We have not sought to extend our territorial possessions by conquest, or our republican institutions over a reluctant people.”

And he added that it was “a bloodless achievement, to which the world might be challenged to furnish a parallel!” This was on the first Monday of December, and yet, Mr. Chairman, how does the flourish sound in your ears, when I read to you from the Executive documents the orders which were given to General Taylor to march his army into Texas, and take military possession of it, nearly six months before? On July 30, 1845, Mr. Secretary Marcy writes to General Taylor as follows: “The Rio Grande is claimed to be the boundary between the two countries, and up to this boundary you will extend your protection. * * * It is expected that in selecting the establishment for your troops you will approach as near the boundary line (the Rio Grande) as prudence will permit.” Again: on October 16, Mr. Marcy writes to the General: “You will approach as near the western boundary of Texas (the Rio Grande) as circumstances will permit.” And these letters were addressed to General Taylor as “commanding the army of occupation in Texas.” Here we see an army ordered by the President to take military occupation of Texas—to march as near the Rio Grande as prudence will permit, as early as July; and yet the President, six months afterwards, gravely informs Congress that “the sword has had no part” in the business; “no arm of force has been raised to produce the result!” This movement of the troops, this drawing of the sword in the region of the Rio Grande, was the first of a series of measures which led to this war; and the points which I propose to establish are—

1. That the war was caused by the movement of the army from the Nueces to the Rio Grande, and the military investment of the city of Matamoros.

2. That there was no necessity for any such movement to repel any invasion.

3. That if the object of the movement was to intimidate Mexico into an acquiescence to the demands of Mr. Slidell by hostile demonstrations, it was an unauthorized and unwarrantable act on the part of the Executive.

In the first place, I do not believe that there is a man in the world who thinks that we should have been thus embroiled in war if our army had remained at Corpus Christi. There would have been no bloodshed, no collision. No Mexican soldiers would have crossed the great desert which

stretches between the Nueces and Rio Grande. All was quiet and peaceful. The silence of that vast desert was unbroken by a single martial sound, and would have remained so to this hour, but for the unfortunate orders which were given under date of January 13, 1846, directing General Taylor to plant the stars and stripes upon the banks of the Rio Grande. And after those orders were issued, what other result could have been hoped for than a collision? The Mexican people were already sufficiently irritated by imagined wrongs; and when they found their city thus made the object of hostile demonstrations, cannon planted within point-blank shot of their dwellings, and trained to bear directly upon their firesides, and heard the harsh notes of threats and defiance ringing all around them, it was a consummation which a people more enlightened and less quarrelsome could hardly be expected to brook. War followed, as everybody saw it must. The glory of well-fought battles, all the glory which skill and bravery can earn at the cannon's mouth, has clustered around that gallant little army, which the course of the Executive had thus placed in peril. Theirs, and theirs alone, is all the honor. We all remember with what anxious hearts we waited for the news; and how every American heart bounded with joy when it finally came announcing their brilliant and triumphant escape from imminent peril. But glorious as was the result, and brilliant as was the achievement, the voice of mourning and lamentation is heard with painful distinctness amidst the shouts of victory. The bones of some of the bravest and best of our gallant soldiers lie bleaching upon the banks of the Rio Grande! Who shall bind up the broken hearts, or heal the wounds of those whom the loss of Brown, Ringgold, and a host of others, has afflicted! and who shall say that a whole empire conquered at the price of such blood is not too dearly bought!

I say further, that there was no necessity for the march of the army upon Matamoros. There was no invasion of Texas by any Mexican force. There was no threat of invasion. And I say, also, that the documents which I shall produce, show, that there was no ground for apprehension of invasion. Great misapprehension has prevailed on this point; and much of it is owing to deception. A plain statement of the history of events will show how perfectly idle the pretence is, that the movement of the army was for the purpose of repelling invasion. It will be recollected that the order issued by Secretary Marcy to General Taylor, finally directing this movement, was dated January 13, 1846. Now, I shall show by the documents which the President has sent us, that down to that date the War Department had not received any information tending to show that an invasion was attempted, or even apprehended; nay, even that more than a month after that date, General Taylor cautioned Mr. Marcy against giving any attention to any rumors of invasion. I ask attention to the various extracts which will be read from General Taylor's official despatches to the War Department. They are all dated at Corpus Christi, where he had the best means of obtaining information upon the subject.

August 15, 1845, he writes as follows:

"Nor do I fear that the reported concentration of troops at Matamoros is for any purpose of invasion."

August 20, he writes:

"Caravans of traders arrive occasionally from the Rio Grande, but bring no news of importance. They represent that there are no regular troops on that river, except at Matamoros, and do not seem to be aware of any preparations for a demonstration on this bank of the river."

September 6, he writes:

"I have the honor to report that a confidential agent, despatched some days since to Matamoros, has returned, and reports that no extraordinary preparations are going forward there."

October 11, he says:

"Recent arrivals from the Rio Grande bring no news of a different aspect from what I reported in my last."

January 7, 1846, he writes:

"A recent scout of volunteers from San Antonio struck the river near Presidio, Rio Grande, and the commander reports everything quiet in that quarter."

February 16, he writes:

"Many reports will doubtless reach the department giving exaggerated accounts of Mexican preparations to resist our advance, if not indeed to attempt an invasion of Texas. Such reports have been circulated even at this place, and owe their origin to personal interests connected with the stay of the army here. I trust that they will receive no attention at the War Department."

These various despatches were, from time to time, sent by General Taylor to the department here; and they contained the only authentic information which exists; and yet it is pretended that the army was ordered to march to the Rio Grande to repel invasion! General Taylor writes in every despatch from Corpus Christi, that no such thing is to be apprehended. He entreats the department to pay no attention to any rumor to that effect; and these despatches were before the President when he wrote his message of May 11th, and yet in that message he asserts that "invasion was threatened!" Now, I demand to know whether the President has in his possession any evidence on this point which he has withheld from our eyes, or whether he has thus courageously ventured to contradict the official despatches of the General who was in command upon the spot. No, no; Mexico had no purpose of invasion; or if she had, she never made the slightest public demonstration of any such purpose, until General Taylor was encamped before Matamoros.

Why, then—for what purpose, lawful or unlawful—was our army sent to the Rio Grande? No satisfactory answer has yet been given by any one of those who have so vociferously applauded the Executive in this House. The question has been repeatedly asked; and we are answered, that the President is a great patriot! We demand his authority thus to use our army, and the reply is, "You now know who James K. Polk is!" And thus we are left to our own conjectures on this point. From the examination which I have given these documents, my own conclusion is, that the movement was first determined upon in order to intimidate Mexico, by hostile demonstrations, to comply with the demands of Mr. Slidell, who had been sent out to that Government in the character of Minister Plenipotentiary. It was a military demonstration in aid of diplomacy; and as such, was an unauthorized exercise of power on the part of the Executive. It was an act in the nature of

war—leading directly to war, and our Constitution has given the President no power to do such an act.

Mr. Slidell was appointed to the mission some time in November last, under circumstances somewhat singular. We all remember the mystery which was wrapped around his departure. The newspapers spoke of a strange-looking character, in a "slouched hat," going on board a vessel in such a manner as to excite suspicion and gossip. It is not the ordinary course of such distinguished functionaries as Ministers Plenipotentiary and Envoys Extraordinary, to depart from their own country in so stealthy a manner; and I must confess it does now look a little as if he had some doubt of the true character in which he expected to be received. A "Commissioner" might well be supposed to put on a disguise. What Mr. Slidell's instructions were, yet remains a mystery. Whether, in addition to the question of boundary and the indemnities, there was not something about the annexation of California, we are not permitted to know. Time will disclose. But at all events, he did not make much progress in his attempts at diplomatic intercourse with the Mexicans; and while thus in tribulation, he writes, on December 27, to Mr. Buchanan, urging hostile demonstrations upon Mexico, as follows:

"The desire of our Government to secure peace, will be mistaken for timidity; the most extravagant pretensions will be made and insisted upon, until the Mexican people shall be convinced by HOSTILE DEMONSTRATIONS that our differences must be settled promptly, either by negotiation or by the sword."

This is a plain request to our Government to resort to the sword to aid him in his plans. "Hostile demonstrations," he thought, might be highly useful in bringing the obstinate Mexicans to a sense of his diplomatic importance. On January 13th, the hostile demonstration was ordered, and on hearing of it, Mr. S. writes to Mr. Buchanan that it will probably exercise a salutary influence. See despatch of February 17, as follows:

"The advance of General Taylor's force to the left bank of the Rio del Norte, and the strengthening our squadron in the Gulf, are wise measures, which may exercise a salutary influence upon the course of this Government."

The most superficial observer must see by this extract that Mr. Slidell had no idea that Mexico was about to invade our territory, and that his only view of the movement of the army and navy was, that it was intended to influence the course of the Mexican Government in relation to matters connected with his mission. He deemed these measures to be wise, because they would aid the purposes of his mission, and not at all because he anticipated that the United States was in danger of invasion.

If, then, such was the purpose; if it was intended, by thus making hostile and warlike demonstrations upon the frontier of Mexico, and causing our ships of war to gather like a cloud upon her coast, to bully and alarm that Government into an acquiescence with Mr. Slidell's demands, I again say that it was an act of usurped military power. There is no warrant for it in the Constitution; unless, indeed, the whole war power is vested in the Executive, to be exercised at his discretion, and subject to no control or limitation. The President

has power to commence and carry on negotiations, and, with the concurrence of the Senate, to conclude treaties. But he has no power without the concurrence of both Houses of Congress, to arm himself in the panoply of war for the purpose of compelling a foreign Power to submit to the demands of his negotiators.

And it is equally true that he has no authority to settle, by martial and warlike demonstrations, a question of disputed boundary. Whether, therefore, the Nueces or the Rio Grande ought to be adopted as the southwestern limit of Texas, the employment of military force to settle the question was alike unjustifiable. And in considering this point, I do not intend to discuss that much-vexed question of boundary. We have had much learned argument, geographical and historical, spread before us for the solution of this difficulty. But it is enough for my purpose to look at it as an *open question*—admitted on all hands to be one for future adjustment between Mexico and the United States. The resolutions which consented to the annexation of Texas expressly reserved the question of boundary, in these words: "Said State to be formed, subject to the adjustment by this Government of all questions of boundary that may arise with other Governments." I shall therefore pass over those considerations which have so strong a tendency to prove that the true boundary of the State of Texas was the river Nueces. Whichever way the weight of the evidence and the argument on this point may be, so long as it was a question of dispute between the two Governments, I assert that the President had no power to solve it by the sword. The Constitution has given him no authority to mark out lines of our territorial limits with the sword. If such questions cannot be settled by negotiation, then, in the last resort, Congress, and Congress alone, may bring the terrible power of war to bear upon them. But I defy the most unscrupulous supporter of the Executive to put his finger upon any clause in the Constitution which gives to him any such power.

And now, Mr. Chairman, let me inquire how it happened that Congress was not consulted by the President before these military demonstrations were made? This is a matter which demands the most serious and grave consideration. There has been a secrecy and mystery apparently attempted to be thrown around the proceedings of the Executive in relation to the Mexican affairs, from the time of Mr. Slidell's disguised departure, down to the late despatch of Mr. Marcy to Mr. Stevenson, in which caution is enjoined against letting the public know the aim and purposes of his expedition. Congress has been in daily session since the first Monday of December last, but no intimation was given to it that the military expedition to the Rio Grande was desired or intended. The order for that movement was given on the 13th of January, but Congress were kept in the dark about it until May 11th, two days after the great battles, when the curtain was so suddenly lifted upon a scene of bloodshed, and the blaze of actual war! Vague rumors had indeed got abroad, but all official information was withheld. An attempt early made in this House to obtain information was opposed by the friends of the Administration.

Having heard from a confidential, but reliable source, that such orders had been issued, I, on February 3d, offered the following resolution of inquiry:

"Resolved, That the President of the United States be requested to communicate to the House of Representatives any information in his possession, not heretofore communicated, which affects the relations existing between the United States and the Republic of Mexico, and particularly whether the army or navy of the United States, or any part of either, has been ordered to move towards that republic, and what occurrences have come to the knowledge of the President to require such a movement, provided the information can, in his opinion, be communicated without detriment to the public interests."

This resolution was objected to by the chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs, [Mr. HARALSON,] and by the gentleman from Kentucky, [Mr. BOYD,] the latter of whom may be considered as the leader of the Administration forces upon this war question; and it was defeated. This silence remained unbroken, until the imminent peril into which General Taylor's army had been thrust by the Administration compelled it to ask for men and money on the 11th of May. Why was this? The Constitution has placed the guardianship of the great issues of war and peace in the hands of the people's representatives in the two Houses of Congress. It is the duty of the President to give them all possible information to enable them to discharge these responsibilities with due fidelity. But here is a case in which the President has assumed the war power himself, while Congress was in session, without communicating the fact to either House! I maintain that, in any view which can be taken of these military and naval expeditions, it was the duty of the President to have sought and obtained the consent of Congress before they were set on foot. Did he think our national honor had been wounded in the person of Mr. Slidell? he should call on Congress to vindicate it. Did he think that hostile demonstrations were needed to compel Mexico to pay the indemnities, or yield us the boundary of the Rio Grande? he was false to his high responsibility if

he failed to invoke the aid and power of Congress to make them. But that he should undertake to make them himself, upon his own responsibility, and without even informing Congress, is an act which deserves most marked condemnation.

Such is the manner in which our country has become involved in war; and such is the character of the wars manifested by the expeditions recently set on foot,—a war brought upon us by the unwarrantable course of the Executive, and to be carried on as a WAR OF CONQUEST. What a train of reflections arise upon this review! I can, in the time to which I am limited, advert to but one of the many which throng upon the mind.

What is to be the end of all this? Our victorious armies are to plant the stars and stripes upon the halls of Montezuma and the shores of California. And what is to follow? Are we to retain Mexico? or to carve out of it as our share of plunder the province of California? I have no doubt that the acquisition of some port, like that of San Francisco, upon the Pacific, would be beneficial to our country in a commercial point of view; but we all know that a peaceful arrangement could have accomplished such a purpose. A very small part of the many millions of dollars which this war will cost us would have speedily obtained it. But the mind revolts instinctively, and with horror, at the idea of attempting it by military conquest. The enlightened spirit of the age—the sentiment of all Christendom—will condemn it. It belongs to a barbarous age and a barbarous people. And although temporary success may crown the adventure, it will not, it cannot, come to good. And if such schemes are to be quietly suffered—if the public voice does not rebuke them—I see a portentous omen of the early and premature decay into which our institutions are fast falling.

It is to arouse the attention of the people of the country that I have now spoken. The power of prevention is in their hands, and I invoke them to exert it!