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Mr. Webster's Speech
ON THE WAR WITH MEXICO.

Delivered in the U. S. S., March 23, '48.

The Senate having under consideration the bill from the House of Representatives to authorize a loan not to exceed the sum of sixteen millions of dollars, Mr. WEBSTER addressed the Senate on the subject of the Mexican war in a speech of considerable length, of which we find the following account in the Senate's Official Report:

Mr. WEBSTER said:—Mr. President, on Friday a bill passed the Senate for the raising of ten regiments of new troops for the further prosecution of the war against Mexico, and we have been informed that the measure is shortly to be followed, in this branch of the Legislature, by a bill to raise twenty regiments of volunteers for the same service. I was desirous, sir, on Friday, to express my opinion against the object of those bills—against the supposed necessity which leads to their enactment, and against the general policy which they are apparently designed to promote. Circumstances personal to myself, but beyond my control, compelled me to forego on that day the execution of this design. The bill now before the Senate is a measure for raising money to meet the expenses of the Government, and to provide the means as well for other things as for the pay and support of these 30 regiments.

Sir, the scenes through which we have passed & are passing here are various. For a fortnight the world supposes us to have been occupied with the ratification of a treaty of peace, and that within these walls—

"The world shut out"—

notes of peace, hopes of peace, nay, strong assurances of peace, and immediate peace, have been uttered to console us and cheer us. It has been over and over again stated that we have ratified a treaty—of course a treaty of peace; and, as the country has been led to suppose, not of uncertain, and empty, and delusive peace, but real gratifying, and enduring peace; a peace that shall stanch the wounds of war, prevent the further effusion of blood, cut off these enormous expenses, and return our friends, and our brothers, and our children (if they be yet living!) from a land of slaughter, and a land of still more dismal destruction by climate, to our firesides and our arms. Hardly have those halcyon sounds ceased upon our ear until in resumed public session we are summoned to fresh warlike operations; to the creation of a new army of thirty thousand men for the further prosecution of the war—to carry our power, in the language of the President, still more directly in the vital parts of our enemy, and to press home, by the power of the sword, the claims that we insist upon against a fallen, prostrate, I had almost said an ignoble foe. If I may judge of the opinion of the honorable member from Michigan, or other speeches delivered in this chamber, there has not been a time from the commencement of the war when it has been more urgently pressed upon us, not only to maintain, but to increase our military means; not only to continue the war but to press it with more vigor, than at the present time. Pray, what does all this mean? Pray, sir I ask, is it confessed, then, that we are no nearer to peace than we were when we snatched up a bit of paper called, or miscalled, a treaty, and ratified it? Have we yet to fight it out to the utmost; as if no pacification had intervened? I wish to treat the proceedings of this and every department of this Government with the utmost respect God knows that the constitution of this Government, and the exercise of its just powers in the administration of the laws under it, have been the cherished object of all my unimportant life. But if the subject were not too deeply interesting, I should say that our proceedings here might well enough cause a smile. In the ordinary transaction of foreign relations, in this and all other Governments, the course has been to negotiate first and to ratify afterwards. This would seem to be the natural order of conducting intercourse between foreign States. We have chosen to reverse the order. We ratify first and negotiate afterwards. We set up a treaty, such as we find it, and such as we choose to make it, and then we send two ministers plenipotentiary to negotiate thereupon in the capital of the enemy. One should think, sir, that the ordinary course of proceeding was much the wiser; that to negotiate, hold intercourse, come to some arrangement by authorized agents, and then to submit that arrangement to the sovereign authority, to which those agents are responsible, would be always the most desirable method o procedure. It strikes me that the course we have adopted is strange, is grotesque So far as I know, it is unprecedented in the history of diplomatic intercourse. Learned gentleman on the floor of the Senate, interested to defend and indicate this course may, in their extensive readings, have found examples. I know none.

Sir, we are in possession, by military power, of New Mexico and California, countries belonging hitherto to the United States of Mexico. We are informed by the President that it is his purpose to retain them; to consider them as territories fit to be attached, & to be attached to these U. S. of America; and the military operations & designs now before the Senate are intended to enforce this claim of the executive of the United States. We are to compel Mexico to agree that that part of her dominions called New Mexico, and that other part called California, shall be ceded to us. We are now in possesion of these territories, it is said, and she is to be compelled to yield the title. This is the precise object of this new army of thirty thousand men. It is the identical object, sir, in my judgment, for which the war was originally commenced, for which it has been hitherto prosecuted, and in furtherance of which this treaty is to be used but as one of the means to bring about the general result; that general result depending, after all, upon our superior power and the necessity of submitting to any terms which we prescribe to fallen, fallen, fallen Mexico!

The members composing the other House—the more popular branch of Congress—have all been elected since. I had almost said the fatal, the remarkable incidents of the 11th of May, 1846; and it has passed a resolution affirming that "the war with Mexico was begun unconstitutionally and unnecessarily by the Executive Government of the U. States." I concur in that sentiment. I hold that to be the most recent, authentic expression of the will and the opinions of the people of the United States. There is another proposition, not so authentically announced hitherto, but in my judgment equally true—equally capable of demonstration; and that is, that this war was begun, has been continued, and is now prosecuted, for the great and leading purpose of the acquisition of new territory, out of which to bring new States with a Mexican population, into this our union of the U. States. If unavowed at first, this purpose did not remain unavowed long. However often it may be said that we did not go to war for conquest—*credat Judeus Appella!*—yet the moment we get possesion of the territory, it is said that we must retain it and make it our own. Now, I think the original object has not been changed. Sir, I think it still exists in the eyes of those who originally contemplated it—who began the war for it; that it is as attractive to them, & from which they have no more desire to avert their eyes now than they had then or have had at any time since we have compelled a treaty of cession. We know in our consciences that it is compelled!—We use it as an instrument and an agency in conjunction with other instrumentalities & agencies of a more formidable or destructive character, to enforce the acquiescence of Mexico in the acquisition by us of new territory to form new States—new States to be added to this union. Every intelligent man knows that there is a strong desire in the heart of the Mexican citizen to retain the territories belonging to that republic. We know that the Mexican people part with their territory—if part they must—with regret, with pangs of sorrow. That we know. We know the cession is altogether forced; and therefore, because we know that it must be forced—because we know that whatever the Government, which is our creature, may do or agree to we know that the Mexican people will never accede to the terms of this treaty but through an impulse of absolute necessity, and the impression made upon them by the absolute irresistible force. Therefore we propose to overwhelm them with another army. We propose to raise immediately ten regiments of regular troops and twenty regiments of volunteers, and to pour them in and upon the Mexican people.

Now, sir, I should be happy to concur, notwithstanding all this tocsin, and all this cry of all the Sempronious es in the land that their voice is still for war—I should be happy to agree, and substantially I do agree, with the honorable member from South Carolina, that, after all, the war with Mexico is substantially over, that there can be no more fighting. My opinion in the present state of things is that the people of this country will not sustain this war. They will not go to the expense. They will not find any gratification in putting the bayonet to the throat of the Mexican people. For my part, I hope the ten regiment bill will never become law. Three weeks ago I should have entertained that hope with the utmost confidence. Events since have struck me with pain and shaken my conviction. Still I hope it will not pass. And here, I dare say, I shall be called a "Mexican Whig." A man who can stand up here and say that he hopes that what the Administration projects for the further prosecution of the war against Mexico will not be carried into effect, is "an enemy to the country;" or, what gentleman would consider the same thing, an enemy of the President of the United States and his administration and his party. He is a "Mexican!" Sir, I think very badly of the Mexican character, high and low, out and out; but names do not terrify me. Besides, if I am a sufferer in this respect, if to be made the subject of reproach by these stipendiary presses, these hired abusers of the motives of public men, I have the honor on this occasion to be in very respectable company. In the vituperative, the accusative, the denunciatory sense of that term, I do not know a greater Mexican in this body than the honorable member from Michigan at the head of the Military Committee.

Mr. CASS. I should like the honorable gentleman to explain what sort of Mexican I am.

Mr. WEBSTER. That is exactly the thing I now propose to do.

Mr. CASS. I shall be glad to hear the explanation.

Mr. WEBSTER In his remarks on this bill in the Senate, the other day, the honorable gentleman told us that his object was to frighten Mexico—it would touch his humanity to hurt her.

Mr. CASS. Does the honorable gentleman mean to say that I made such a remark?

Mr. WEBSTER. I mean to say that the gentleman said it twice.

Mr. CASS. I beg the gentleman's pardon. I said no such thing. Will the gentleman allow me to state what I did say? I remarked that we had two objects to accomplish in raising the regiments; one was, the vigorous prosecution of the war; and, secondly, to produce a moral effect upon Mexico by convincing her of our determination, and thereby hold out an inducement to her to make peace.

Mr. WEBSTER. The gentleman said that his principal object was to "frighten" Mexico, and that that would be more humane than to harm Mexico.

Mr. CASS, (in his seat) True!

Mr. WEBSTER. It is true? Very well. I thought as much. Now, the remarkable characteristic of his speech which makes it so much a Mexican speech is, that the gentleman spoke it in the hearing of Mexico, as well as in the hearing of the Senate. We have been accused, sir, of being 'Mexican Whigs' because what we say here is heard by Mexico, and Mexico derives countenance and support from what is said here. But the honorable member comes forth and tells Mexico that his object is to frighten her! His words have passed along the wires, they are on the Gulf, they are floating away to Vera Cruz; and, when they get there they will satisfy the Mexicans that after all—after all "ye good Mexicans, our principal object is to frighten you!" And, to the end that they may not be frightened too much, he gives them notice that the object is to frighten them! Mr. President, when Snug, the joiner, was to represent the lion, and roar on the stage, he was quite apprehensive that he might too much frighten "the duchess and the ladies;" and therefore, by the advice of his comrade, one Nicholas Bottom, he wisely concluded to that in the heat and fury of his effort he would show one-half his face and say: "Ladies, fair ladies, I would wish you, or I would request you, or I would entreat you not to fear, not to tremble: my life for yours, if you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life! No, I am no such thing; I am a man as other men are; I'm Snug, the joiner!"

But, sir, in any view of this case—in any view of the proper policy of this Government, according to any man's apprehension and judgment—where is the necessity of this augmentation of regiments of the military force of the country? I hold in my hand a note, I suppose substantially correct, of the present military forces of the United States. I will not vouch for its entire accuracy, but I believe it is substantially according to fact There are now twenty-five regiments of regular troops, of various arms, which, if full, would give us a force of 28,960 rank and file, including officers, thirty thousand and odd men. These, with the exception of six or seven hundred men, are now all without the limits of the United States, in field service in Mexico, or on the route to Mexico. These regiments are not full. Casualities and the climate have sadly reduce their numbers. If the recruiting service would now yield ten thousand men, it would not more than fill up those regiments, so as to give the field officers their full command. I understand, sir, that the report from Gen. Scott—Gen. Scott? A man that has performed the most brilliant campaign in military annals; a man that has warred against the enemy, warred against the climate, warred against a thousand unpropitious circumstances, and carried the flag of his country to the capital of the enemy, honourably, proudly, humanely, to his own permanent honor and the great credit of his country. Gen. Scott! And where is he? At Puebla! At Puebla, undergoing an inquiry before his inferiors in office, and other persons not in office, while the high powers that he exercised, and exercised with so much distinction, are turned over to another, I do not mean to say an unworthy gentleman; but his inferior in military rank and station.

But Gen. Scott reports, as I understand, that in February there were twenty thousand regular troops under his command, and *en route*. Add the thirty regiments of volunteers—and if full they would make thirty-four thousand men; officers included over thirty-five thousand—and there would be a force of regulars and volunteers amounting to not less than fifty-five or sixty thousand men, including the recruits on the way. If my information be exact, & the honorable member from Michigan can correct me if it be not—I presume that it is correct—in February Gen. Scott had under him in Mexico thirty thousand troops, regulars and volunteers. Now, all these troops are regularly officered. There is no deficiency of officers in the line or in the staff—they are all full. Whatever deficiency there is consist of men. Now, sir there is a plausible reason for saying that it is difficult to recruit at home for the supply of deficiencies in the volunteer regiments. It will be said that volunteers choose to enlist under officers of their own selection; that they do not incline to enlist here as individual volunteers, where the regiment is abroad under officers of whom they know nothing. There may be something in that; but pray to what does that conclusion lead? Does it not lead to this, that all these volunteer corps must moulder away, so far as the privates are concerned, and come to nothing? Meantime the places of the commissioned officers are continually filled, the regiments being full of officers, although the privates, by casualty or disease, are reduced to be less in number than the officers themselves. —But, however that may be, in regard to the recruiting for the regular service, you can fill up the regiments by pay and bounty, according to existing laws, or new laws, if new laws be necessary. There is no reason upon earth why we should now create five hundred new officers, for the purpose of getting ten thousand new men There are officers to command them. All that is wanted is men; and there is a place for the men, and I suppose that no gentleman can stand up here or elsewhere and say, that the recruiting service can go on faster than it will be necessary to go, in order to fill up these deficiencies in the regiments ab oad.

But now what do we want with a greater force than we already have in Mexico? Without asking what need there is for the supply of deficiencies in the existing regiments, what do we want beyond the thirty thousand regulars and volunteers now in field service? What is the purpose?—There is no army to fight. I suppose the enemy has not five hundred men together under arms in any part of Mexico. Except in one instance, perhaps, there is not half that number. Mexico is prostrate—there is no Government to resist us It is notorious that the Government of Mexico is on our side. It is our instrument, by which we hope to establish such a peace and accomplish such a treaty as we wish. As far as I can understand the matter, the Government of Mexico owes its life and breath and being, at this moment, to the support of our arm; and to the hope—I will not say how inspired—that somehow or another, and at no distant period, there may be pecuniary means arising from our three millions, or our twelve millions, or some other of our millions. What do we propose to do, then, with those thirty regiments that we design to pour into Mexico? Are we going to cut the throats of the Mexicans? Are we going to plunge the sword deeper and deeper into the vital part of Mexico? What do we propose to do? Sir, I see no object, and yet we are pressed and urged to adopt this proposition in its full length—ten regiments of regulars and twenty regiments of volunteers! We are told, and the public is told, and the public believes, that we are on the verge of a safe and honorable peace. Every man looks out in the morning for tidings of confirmed peace or confirmed hopes of peace. He gathers it from the Administration, and every organ of the Administration, from Dan to Beersheba, and yet the warlike operations—the incurring of additional expenses—the imposition of new charges upon the Treasury, are pressed here as if peace was not in all our thoughts, at least not in any of our expectations!

Now, sir, I propose to hold some plain talk to day; and I say that, according to my best judgment and apprehension of matters, the main object of these bills is patronage—office—the gratification of friends.—This very measure for ten additional regiments creates four or five hundred officers, colonels and subalterns, and not them only, for whom I have some respect, but then there comes paymasters, contractors, persons engaged in the transport service, commissaries—even down to sutlers, *et id genus omne*—people who handle the public money without facing the foe; one and all, the true descendants, if not the true representatives, of corporal Nym, who said,

"For I shall sutler be

Unto the camp, and profits will accrue."

Sir, I hope, without disrespect to those applicants and aspirants, and those patriots, and some of them patriots, ready to fight, and those other patriots not willing to fight, but willing to be paid—I hope, without disrespect to any of them, according to their rank and station and merits, that they may all be disappointed. I hope, sir, as the weather grows genial and the season advances, they will, on the whole, find it their interest to place themselves, one of these mild mornings, in the cars, and take their destination to their respective places of honorable private occupation and civil employment. They have my good wishes, that, bidding adieu to the Avenue and the Capitol, and the perlieus of the President's House, they may reach their homes in good health themselves and find their families all very happy to receive them.

But, sir, *paulo majora canamus!* This war was waged for the purpose of creating new States, near the southern portion of the United States, out of Mexican territory, and with such population as might be found resident therein. I have opposed that project. I am against the creation of new States. I am against the acquisition of territory to form new States. And this, sir, is not a matter of sentimentality, which I am to parade before mass meetings or before my constituents at home. It is with me no matter of declamation, regret, or expressed repugnance. It is matter of firm, unchangeable purpose, to yield to no force of circumstances that have occured or that I may consider likely to occur, and therefore I say, sir, that if I am asked to-day whether for the sake of peace, I will take a treaty that brings two new States into this Union on his southern boundary, I say no, distinctly no! and I wish every man in the United States to understand that to be my judgment and my purpose. I have said on the southern boundary, because there the present proposition takes its locality. I would say the western, the northern, the eastern, or any other boundary. I would resist to-day, and to the end, here and every where, any proposition to add any foreign territory, on the south or west, north or east, to the States of this Union, as they are now constituted and held together by the constitution. I do not want the colonies of England on the north; I as little desire the Mexican population on the South. I resist and reject all, and all with equal resolution; and therefore, I say, that if the question is put to me to-day, whether I will take peace in the present state of the country—distressed as it is—in the exigency of this war, odious as it is—in circumstances so afflictive to the community, and so disturbing to the business of those whom I represent, as those which now surround us—I say still that if the question be put to me whether I will have peace, with new States, I say no—no—no! Why? Because, sir, there is no necessity of being driven into the dilemma, in my judgment. Other gentlemen may think differently. I own no man's conscience but mine own. I mean to make a clean breast for myself, and I protest, that I, see no reason whatever to believe that we cannot obtain as safe a peace, as honorable a peace, and as prompt a peace, without territory as with it. The things are separable. There is no necessary connexion between them. Mexico does not wish us to take her territory that she may receive our money. Far from it. She yields her assent—if she yield at all—reluctantly, and we all know it. If she yield, it is the result of force; and there is not a man here that does not know it.—Let me say, sir, that if this Trist paper be finally rejected in Mexico, it is most likely to be because those who, under our protection, prepared it, cannot persuade the Mexican Congress or the Mexican people to agree to this cession of territory.—The thing most likely to break up what is now expected to take place, is the repugnance of the Mexican people to part with Mexican territory. They would prefer to keep their territory, and that we should keep our money; or we resolve that we should keep our money and allow them to keep their territory. We shall see. I pretend to no powers of prediction. I do not know what may happen. The times are full of strange events. But I think it probable that if the treaty which has gone to Mexico shall fail to be ratified, it will be because of the aversion of the Mexican Congress or the Mexican people to cede the territories, or any portion of them, belonging to their republic.

I have said, sir, that I would rathe: have no peace for the present than to have a peace that brings territories, for new States; and the reason is that I believe we can get a peace just as soon without territory as with it—a peace more safe, more enduring—vastly more honorable to us, the great republic of the western world. I hear gentlemen say that we must have some territory, that the people demand it. I deny it; at least, I say I see no proof of it whatever. I do not doubt that there are individuals, here and there, of an enterprising character disposed to emigration, who know nothing about New Mexico, but that it is far off, and nothing of California, but that it is still further off, who are tired of the dull pursuits of agriculture and civil life. I dare say that there are hundreds and thousands of such persons who might wish for territory in which to seek their fortunes. Whatever is new is attractive to such minds; they feel the spirit of a borderer, and that is, I take it, to be pretty tolerably content with his condition till somebody passes beyond him; and then his disposition to take up his "traps" and pass beyond him who has passed himself, and sit down further off, is an irresistible passion. At least so says that great and sagacious observer of human manners, Chateaubriand, when he travelled in this country in 1797. But I say, sir, that I do not find any where nor that there exists any where, any considerable respectable number of persons who think that we want more territory, and such territory. There were twenty-four of us last year who voted against the prosecution of the war for acquisition of territory, on the ground that we did not want it—Southern men and Northern men. I believe there were Southern gentleman who concurred in that vote, and who found themselves, even against what might be supposed to be the local feeling and partiality, able to sustain themselves upon the ground of the wisdom of the general policy of not seeking for territory, and, by the acquisition of territory, to bring into our politics certain embarrassing and embroiling questions. I do not learn that they suffered by the advocacy of such sentiments; I rather believe that they triumphed in them, and I believe that through the great portion of the South, if we can trust what has been said here—through the Southwest, to a very great extent, the same sentiment is general—that there is no prevalent opinion in favor of new territory, and such territory, or of an augmentation of your population, and such population. I need not say that it is, if not the undivided, the preponderating sentiment of all the North. But we think we must take territory; for the sake of peace we must take territory. This is the will of the President! If we do not take it we may fare worse! Mr. Polk will take no less! That is fixed upon! He is immoveable! He has put down his foot!—He had put it down, sir, on "fifty-four forty," but it did not stay. I speak of the President of the United States as I speak of all Presidents, without disrespect; but I know no reason why his opinions, his will, his purpose declared to be fixed, should control us any more than our purpose formed upon equally conscientious motives, and, I may add, formed under as high responsibilities as those which should control him. We think he is firm and will not move. I should be sorry, sir, very sorry, indeed, that we should entertain more respect for the firmness of an individual at the head of the Government, than we can entertain for our own firmness. He will stand out, it is said, against us. Do we fear to stand out against him? For one, I do not. It appears to me to be a slavish doctrine. For one, I am willing to meet the issue, and to go to the people over all this broad land. If we will take peace without new States, and the Administration will have no peace without new States, I am willing to stand upon that and trust the people. I do that because, in the first place I have no distrust of the people. I am not unwilling to put that to their sovereign decision and arbitration.

Sir, I hold this question to be vital, permanent, elementary, in the future prosperity of this country and the maintenance of the constitution, and I am willing to trust that question to the people. I prefer that it should be submitted to them, because if what I regard as a great constitutional principle, or a principle essentially important to the maintenance of the constitution, be broken down, let it be the act of themselves. It shall never be my act. I therefore do not distrust the people. I am willing to take their sentiment on this issue, from the Gulf to the British Provinces, and from the ocean to the Missouri. I am willing to ask them, will you continue this war for territory—for territory to be purchased after all for an enormous price, a thousand times the value of all that is purchased—or will you take peace, contenting yourselves with the honor that the country has reaped by the military achievements of its armies? Will you take peace without territory and preserve the integrity of the constitution and the Union? I am willing to go on that, for one.

I am willing, sir, to take this issue: peace without new States, keeping our money to ourselves, or war till these new States shall be acquired. That's the question; it is a question for the people themselves. If they support me and those who think with me in the view I take of the matter, very well. If they will have territory, if they will add new States, to this Union, why let them do so, and they will be the artificers of their own fortunes, for good or evil.

But, sir, we tremble before Executive power. The truth cannot be concealed—we tremble before Executive power! Mr. Polk will take nothing else than this, and, if we do not take this, "the king's anger may kindle," and he may impose still heavier burdens. Now, who and what is Mr. Polk? I speak of him in no manner of disrespect. I mean only to ask who and what is the President of the United States for the current moment? He is in the last year of the term of his administration—formally, officially, it can only be drawn out till the fourth of March. Why, really and substantially, we know that two short months will or may produce events that render the duration of the official term of very little importance. We are on the eve of a Presidential election. That machinery resorted to to collect public opinion, or party opinion, is to be put in operation two months hence. We shall see its result. It may be that the present incumbent of the presidential office will be again presented to his party friends and admirers for their suffrages for the next Presidential term. I do not say how probable or improbable that may be—perhaps it is not entirely probable. Suppose that not to be the result, what then?—Why, then, Mr. Polk becomes as absolutely insignificant as any respectable man amongst the public men of the United States—honorable in his private life—valuable in his private character. Respectable—never eminent in public life, he will, from the moment that a new star arises, have just as little influence as you, sir, or I; and, so far as respects myself, God knows that will be very little. Sir, political partisans, and aspirants, and office seekers are not sun-flowers; they do not

"Turn on their god when he sets
The same look which they turned when he rose!"

Now, sir, if the respectable gentleman who is now at the head of the Government should be agreed upon, there will be those who will commend his consistency and be bound to maintain it and the integrity of the party; his friends will require that this should be done. If otherwise, who is there in the whole length and breadth of the land who will care for the

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