

THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY IN THE MOVEMENT FOR FIFTY-FOUR FORTY OR FIGHT

*with regard to the author
Daniel Wait Howe*

BY
DANIEL WAIT HOWE

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BY DANIEL WAIT HOWE

For a long period prior to 1843 there had been a controversy between Great Britain and the United States over the boundary line dividing the territory known as the Oregon Country, including the land now embraced in the States of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, and parts of Montana and Wyoming. A treaty concluded between the two nations in 1818 provided for a joint occupation of the territory "that may be claimed by either party in the north-west coast of America, west of the Stony (Rocky) mountains", for a term of ten years. By a subsequent treaty, concluded on August 6, 1827, the provisions of the former treaty providing for a joint occupation were indefinitely extended and continued in force, with a further provision that either of the contracting parties should have the right to abrogate the treaty on giving the other twelve months' notice. Further negotiations followed, in the course of which Great Britain claimed as far south as the forty-second parallel of north latitude, while the United States claimed as far north as the line of $54^{\circ} 40'$.

Meanwhile both American and English immigrants, but mostly American, were moving into the territory and making settlements and there was constantly increasing danger of conflicts of jurisdiction inimical to peaceful relations between the two nations. The Americans already settled in the territory and those in other parts of the country, especially in the West and Northwest, who wanted to settle there, were clamoring for the government of the United States to extend the protection of its

laws over the territory. In the year 1843 many public meetings and conventions were held in the United States at which resolutions were adopted favoring prompt action by the national government in reference to Oregon. At all, or nearly all, of these meetings inflammatory resolutions were adopted, assuming the title of the United States to the whole of Oregon up to the line of $54^{\circ} 40'$ to be "unquestionable", denouncing the arrogance and insolence of Great Britain, and recommending the immediate occupation of the whole of the territory by the United States, the building of forts and stockades, and the maintenance of a fleet on the Pacific Coast.

In April, 1843, a call was issued for a convention of the Southern and Western States to be held at Cincinnati, Ohio, in July following, the purpose of which was to induce governmental action in relation to Oregon. The convention was held on July 3, 4, and 5. Colonel Richard M. Johnson, ex-Vice President, presided. There were present some ninety or more delegates from six different States in the Mississippi Valley. Among other resolutions adopted were the following:

Resolved: That the right of the United States to the Oregon territory from 42° to $54^{\circ} 40'$ north latitude is unquestionable, and that it is the imperative duty of the general government forthwith to extend the laws of the United States over said territory.

Resolved: further, that to encourage migration to and secure the permanent settlement of said territory, the Congress of the United States ought to establish a line of forts from the Missouri river to the Pacific ocean, and provide also an efficient naval force for the protection of the territory and its citizens.

The convention also put forth "A Declaration of citizens of the Mississippi Valley", in which it was stated "that, however indignant at the avarice pride and ambition of Great Britain, so frequently, lawlessly, and so lately evinced, as we yet believe that it is for the benefit of all civilized nations that we should fulfill a legitimate destiny; but that she should be checked in her career of

aggression with impunity and dominion without right.
 . . . That so far as regards our rights to the territory in question, we are assured of their perfect integrity, based, as they are, on the discovery and exploration by our own citizens and government, and our purchase and cession from those powers having the pretense of the reality of any right to the same. That beyond these rights, so perfectly established, we would feel compelled to retain the whole territory in accordance with Mr. Monroe's universally approved declaration of 1823, that the American continents were not thenceforth to be considered subjects for any future colonization by any foreign power." The declaration wound up by remonstrating "against the possession of any part of the north-west coast of the Pacific ocean by the power of Great Britain". Copies of the resolutions and declaration were sent to the President, the Governors of the several States, and to each member of Congress. It is obvious that this jumble of "unquestionable title", "manifest destiny", Monroe doctrine and denunciation of the "Blarsted Britishers", was intended for political effect. It was well calculated to appeal to all who sought to better their condition by securing cheap homes, and especially to the bold and adventurous frontiersmen of the West, who were always pushing beyond the outposts of civilization.

President Tyler in his annual message to Congress in December, 1843, declared his opinion, "after the most rigid and, as far as practicable, unbiased examination of the subject", that "the United States have always contended that their rights appertain to the entire region of country lying on the Pacific and embraced between latitude of 42° and 54° 40'."

The controversy got into politics and the national Democratic platform, adopted at Baltimore in 1844, contained a resolution affirming "that our title to the whole of the territory of Oregon is clear and unquestionable;

that no portion of the same ought to be ceded to England or any other power, and the re-occupation of Oregon and the re-annexation of Texas, at the earliest practicable period, are great American measures which this convention recommends to the candid support of the Democracy of the Union."

To unite those favoring the annexation of Texas with those favoring the occupation of Oregon would add to the strength of both, and uniting the two objects in one plank of the Democratic platform was what may be called "shrewd politics". During the presidential campaign of 1844 there were no more inspiring rallying cries than those of "All of Oregon or none", and "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight".

After the election of Polk the advocates of the occupation of the whole of Oregon up to 54° 40' at once began to insist that the new administration should redeem its party campaign pledges. In his inaugural address President Polk expressly approved the position of the Democratic National Convention on the Oregon question. He could scarcely have done otherwise, as the position of the Democratic Party on that question had undoubtedly contributed largely to his election.

The President devoted a considerable portion of his annual message of December 2, 1845, to the Oregon question, reviewing the actions of his own and of the preceding administrations upon the subject. In his message he referred to "the extraordinary and wholly inadmissible demands of the British government", and expressed the opinion that "no compromise which the United States ought to accept can be effected", and that the title of the United States to the whole of Oregon territory "could be maintained by irrefragible facts and arguments", and he advised that Congress consider "what measures it may be proper to adopt for the security and protection of our citizens, now inhabiting, or who may hereafter inhabit,

Oregon, as for the maintenance of our just title to the territory". For this purpose he recommended that "the protection of our laws and our jurisdiction, civil and criminal, ought to be immediately extended over our citizens in Oregon". He also recommended the establishment of stockades and forts and an adequate force of mounted riflemen for the protection of immigrants while on their way to the territory. Continuing, he said that "at the end of the year's notice, should Congress think it proper to make provisions for giving that notice, we shall have reached the period when the national rights in Oregon must either be abandoned or fully maintained. That they cannot be abandoned without a sacrifice of both national honor and interest, is too clear to admit of doubt".

Resolutions looking to the immediate carrying out of the policy announced by the Democratic Baltimore Convention and approved by Polk were introduced in the House by Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, then Chairman of the House Committee on Territories, and by C. J. Ingersol, Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Relations, and in the Senate by Senator Edward A. Hannegan of Indiana.

Prolonged and exciting debates on the Oregon question followed in both houses of Congress which disclosed a very belligerent spirit against Great Britain, especially in the West and Northwest. The general tone of the Democratic press throughout the country was equally belligerent. In the Senate the chief advocates of the administration's Oregon policy were William Allen of Ohio, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Lewis Cass of Michigan, Edward A. Hannegan of Indiana, and David Atchison of Missouri. Conspicuous among the supporters of this policy in the House was Stephen A. Douglas. The most eloquent, and at the same time the most bitter, of all the Fifty-Four Forties was Senator Hannegan. Although born in Ohio, he was of

Irish descent and was animated by a hatred of Great Britain which he made no attempt to conceal. While the excitement in Congress over the Oregon question was at its height, in response to an invitation to attend a meeting of the friends of Vice President Dallas in Philadelphia on January 8, 1846, he sent a letter in which he proposed as a toast, "Oregon — Every foot or not an inch; 54 degrees and forty minutes or *delenda est Britiania*", to which the committee replied "The honorable Edward A. Hannegan, the true hearted American Statesman, who truly represented the people on the Oregon question; 'the whole of it or none; Oregon or war'".

Senator Allen of Ohio delivered a long tirade in which he recounted the manifold aggressions and expatiated on the internal weakness of the British Empire, which, he argued, portended its speedy dissolution, and upon the great advantages which the United States would have in case of war between the two nations, and wound up with this extraordinary peroration: "In these things sir, it is, that the strength of our, and the weakness of the British government consists. Ours resting upon the hearts — hers, upon the backs — of the people. What then, have we to do, to secure Oregon? Extend over it our laws. What else have we to do for its defense? Tell the people the truth. Tell them it is their soil. Tell them this, prove it to them — as we have before told them; and before proven it. Tell them that arrogant England — their hereditary enemy, the enemy of all free governments, is seeking to snatch it from them, to fence us out from the Pacific ocean, to belt us about yet more closely with her kingly despotism. Tell them these things and ask them if they will surrender this large part of their country, surrender it to that government which, in two wars employed savages to hack to pieces, in cold blood, the women and children of America, surrender it to that government which hates ours, because it is free — which

envies our people for their happiness, in proportion to the misery of its own. Tell them these things, and ask them if they are ready to surrender this vast territory from the mere dread of invasion by a rabble of armed paupers, threatened to be sent by a bankrupt government, whose whole power of government, whose whole power of the sword and dungeon is required to stifle the cries of famine at home, or to protect its own life against the uplifted hands of starving millions. Tell them these things, ask them if they are ready to make this surrender. Ask the American people this, and they will give you an answer which shall make the British Empire tremble throughout its whole frame and foundation”.

Senator Hannegan of Indiana and Senator Cass of Michigan spoke in much the same strain. Hannegan’s speech on January 24, 1846, was a model of its kind, commonly designated as “spread eagle eloquence”. “Where is your warrant”, he asked, “for ceding away five degrees and a half of Oregon? Where is your warrant for withdrawing the aegis of your constitution and laws from any, even the meanest of your citizens, who may have fixed his habitation on the most remote and sterile points in all your dominions? Is the Senator from South Carolina prepared and willing to transfer any, even though it be the poor pioneer, whose sinewy form first parts the tangled forests to let in upon the eternal solitudes the light of day; from whose rude hut the first smoke of the pale-face curls in the wilderness? Shall Freedom’s Sabbath be no more for him? Far, far, and lonely as he is, he has his domestic altar, and before it God and Freedom are worshipped together. He has his household gods, the names his mother taught him, perhaps in South Carolina, perhaps in Massachusetts, when he, a fair haired boy, played by her side. He has taught in turn and he hears them daily from lisping childhood, and first of these is Washington. Where is the steel clad hand, the iron

heart, that would break down this altar, desecrate this worship, and change upon his children's lips the name of Washington for England's Queen? Rather, were that hut mine, should its fire go out forever rather, far rather, should the serpent wind its devious way among the lifeless bodies of the best loved of my heart, to coil and hiss unharmed upon the hearthstone. . . . But it is not the West alone that forbids it. History, speaking from the sepulchre of the sainted dead, forbids it. The shades of Washington, of Adams, of Henry, of the whole host of revolutionary sires, forbid it. A still small voice from Lexington and Concord forbids it. The holy blood which ran in torrents on the parched fields of Monmouth and Brandywine and Camden forbids it. All the past — the spectre form of the past with mournful looks — forbid it. The present forbids it. Seven-tenths of the American people forbid it. The future with one long-continued, stern, unbroken front forbids it. By all the past glory of our country, and in the name of posterity, of the unborn millions, whose fortune it shall be to direct free and proud America on her high destiny, I protest against the dismemberment of her territory, the abandonment of her interests, and the sacrifice of her honor, before any and every altar of earth, but especially and above all others, before the altar of English ambition”.

Great Britain had not been unmindful of what was going on in the United States in reference to Oregon and was now in fighting mood. A British warship was ordered to the Oregon coast and arrangements were made for a military reconnoissance of the territory in order to be better prepared for war, if war should ensue. The gravity of the situation was now apparent to the thinking people of both Great Britain and the United States. Sober-minded persons in this country now realized that the controversy over Oregon had passed beyond the domain of party politics, and that it must be settled by

other arguments than those that had been heard in stump speeches in the presidential campaign. It was also realized that a halt must be called in the headlong policy of the administration, and a curbing of the impetuosity of the Fifty-Four Forties, or that the inevitable result would be war with Great Britain, and that at no distant time.

War with Great Britain at any time was quite another business from war with Mexico, and Great Britain had never been better prepared for war over Oregon than she was then. She was mistress of the seas; she had no foreign wars on hand of any consequence; she could reach Oregon by sea or land, far more easily and quickly than could the United States. The United States had then only about 5,000 miles of railroad, all told; there were no roads of any kind suitable for transporting men and munitions of war to Oregon; there was no navy fit to cope with that of Great Britain and what few vessels there were would have been compelled to make a long and difficult voyage around Cape Horn in order to reach the Oregon coast. The damage to the commerce of the country in the event of war with Great Britain was evident; the probable damage to the cotton industry of the South was not overlooked; nor was the probability of an alliance between Great Britain and Mexico in the event of war with the latter, then imminent, unheeded.

The more the matter was discussed in Congress, the more clearly did it appear that the claim of title of the United States to the line of 54° 40' rested upon very flimsy foundations. This was shown by Senator Benton of Missouri in an elaborate and exhaustive discussion of the question in a speech in the Senate. Senator Reverdy Johnson of Maryland also made a strong speech in accord with Benton's. Webster, Calhoun, and other able statesmen in Congress, while not going so far as Benton, were nevertheless of the opinion that the claim of the

Fifty-Four Forties was too doubtful to justify the risk of war to maintain it.

Considering the whole matter carefully, sober-minded statesmen foresaw the probability that, in case of war, this country instead of gaining "all of Oregon or none" would probably lose it all; that an alliance between Great Britain and Mexico would bring war to the very threshold of the South; and, if so, that there would be more danger of losing Texas than there would be probability of acquiring additional territory from Mexico.

For months the whole country was in a state of feverish suspense and anxiety. There were other considerations that, although not openly expressed, undoubtedly had great influence with the Southern leaders. An unsuccessful war with Great Britain would be disastrous to all who advocated it, and might possibly be extremely so to the South. On the other hand, suppose that, in the event of war, the United States should succeed in acquiring all of the Oregon territory; its soil and climate were not adapted to slave labor; its inhabitants were opposed to slavery; and the result would be more free States and more Senators and Representatives in Congress hostile to slavery.

Such harangues as those of Hannegan and Allen, however effective they may have been at the hustings, had little weight with the Senate and called forth several caustic responses, the most significant of which came from the Southern members of Congress.

Senator Crittenden of Kentucky denied that there was any good reason "why two nations and the world should be set to war and to cut each other's throats". Senator Berrien of Georgia said that "a bloody hand is not the only symbol of a nation's honor", and that in case of war with Great Britain we should be prepared to meet "a strong man armed", and not exaggerate our capacity "to extract sunbeams out of cucumbers of which the pro-

cess is difficult; or what is equivalent, to make men of war out of packet ships". William Y. Yancy, a member of the House from Alabama, afterwards characterized as the "Prince of Fire Eaters", after referring to the territory which the United States had acquired by peaceful means, "more magnificent in domain, more pregnant with national grandeur, than any the blood-dripping eagles of imperial Rome ever flew over in their conquering and devastating career", deprecated the fact that he saw around him "crowds of American statesmen yearning to break this mighty and glorious spell; whose hearts are panting for war; whose hands itch to grasp the sword, whose feet are raised to trample the olive branch; whose every impulse is to grapple with England to decide by the terrible law of arms a territorial right".

Calhoun was in favor of a "wise and masterly inactivity", until we should be better prepared for war, if war must come, and was in favor of peaceful negotiations, believing that by precipitancy we might lose all instead of gaining all of Oregon.

In the progress of the discussions in Congress, there was a singular shifting of party lines. Polk might naturally have expected, and probably did expect, the support of his own party, and especially the support of the Democratic Southern leaders. But most of the Southern Democrats, following the lead of Calhoun and Benton, opposed the administration's Oregon policy. On the other hand general surprise was created by the course of the venerable ex-President, John Quincy Adams, who made an elaborate speech in support of the claim of all of Oregon up to the line of $54^{\circ} 40'$. He said that "there would be no war in his opinion, even if we persevered in these measures, and that what he most feared was that our rights would be sacrificed by the backing out of the administration and its supporters".

Stranger still was the position of Joshua R. Gid-

dings, the well known Abolition member of the House from Ohio. Giddings made a remarkable speech on January 5, 1846. Referring to the zeal and the warlike spirit with which the Southern leaders had advocated the annexation of Texas, and contrasting this with the mild and conciliatory tone in which they discussed the Oregon question and their apparent reluctance to adopt any policy that might lead to war with Great Britain, he taunted them by insinuating that they had acted in bad faith towards their Northern allies, and, that, having secured the annexation of Texas, they were now ready to desert them or let them fight the battle for Oregon alone. "They now see", he said, "difficulties before them; dangers present themselves to the further pursuit of their plan of territorial aggrandizement. They have suddenly called to mind the declaration of British statesmen, that, 'a war with the United States will be a war of emancipation'.

"They see in prospect the black regiments of the British West India Islands landing among them and their slaves flocking to the enemy's standard. Servile insurrections torment their imaginations; rapine, blood and murder dance before their affrighted visions. They are now seen in every part of the hall, calling on Whigs and Democrats to save them from the dreadful consequences of their own policy. Well, sir, I reply to them, this is your policy, not ours; you have forced us into it against our will, you have prepared the poisoned chalice and we will press it to your lips until you swallow the very dregs". Giddings, like Adams, did not believe that there would be any war with England, and gave his reasons in these sarcastic but prophetic words: "But, Mr. Speaker, I am unwilling to resume my seat until I express my perfect conviction that this policy cannot be carried out by the party in power. The northern Democrats will soon be deserted by their southern slave holding allies.

"They have been betrayed by the slave power. Texas

is admitted, and the southern wing of the Democratic party will now desert their northern friends, and leave Oregon where it is. They are like the militia captain who, when going into battle, informed his men, that, as he was lame, he would commence his retreat then; but his soldiers, being quick upon the foot, he thought they could overtake him if they waited until after the battle. If this resolution should be adopted, the Executive would find means to escape from the dilemma into which this southern policy has precipitated him. It is most obvious to my judgment that he cannot be driven into a war with England. As I have already stated, a war with that nation must prove the total overthrow of slavery. Every reflecting statesman must see this clearly as any event may be foretold by human perception. I do not think the slaveholding portion of the Democratic party were aware that the carrying out of their Baltimore resolutions would sacrifice that institution. They rather believed that by obtaining Texas, the price of human flesh would be enhanced and slavery supported. The consequences of seizing upon the 'whole of Oregon', were not considered. Mr. Polk in his inaugural address and in his annual message evidently overlooked the momentous effect which his twice declared policy would produce upon the slave interest to which he was indissolubly wedded. He, and his cabinet and his party, have made a fatal blunder. They will soon discover their error and will recede from their position. With the same degree of confidence that I have in my own existence, I declare that they will, before the nation and the world, back out from their avowed policy, and will surrender up all that portion of Oregon north of the 49th parallel of latitude, or let the subject remain as it is now. I wish to place this prediction on record for future reference. Nor would I confine my remarks to the Democratic party. Those southern slave-holding Whigs, who voted for Texas will now, if necessary, turn around and vote to

give up part of Oregon. It is a question between the slave states and the free states and the votes when taken will, with few exceptions, exhibit that character. . . . Yes sir, should this resolution pass both houses of Congress the President will find the means to give up a part of Oregon, or even the whole of it, rather than subject the institution of slavery to the sure destruction which a war with England would bring. I again repeat what I have endeavored to impress upon the gentlemen, that this policy is not mine, I wash my hands of it. I feel a deep and abiding conviction, that, if carried out, it will inevitably overthrow our government and dissolve the Union; but these consequences will be retarded by a continuation of the policy, rather than by leaving the government to the slave power, as it now is. By carrying out the policy it will place the northern and southern portions of the Union upon terms approximating to equality. And when from its broad extent this Republic, like the Roman Empire, shall fall asunder of its own weight, the free states will redeem and purify themselves from the foul disgrace of supporting an institution hated of men and cursed of God''.

It is probable that both Adams and Giddings were looked upon by the Southern leaders in the light of "gift-bearing Greeks''. Giddings's speech in particular, though professedly in support of the President's policy, did far more to condemn it in the eyes of the Southern leaders than any speech he could have made in direct opposition to it.

Senator Hannegan, speaking from a standpoint entirely different from that of Giddings, dwelt upon the fact that in the speeches of the Southern members upon the Oregon question there was an entire absence of the belligerent tone that characterized their speeches in favor of the annexation of Texas, and he charged them with Punic faith in having deserted and betrayed their allies in the West and Northwest who had aided them in securing the

annexation of Texas. "There had been", he said, "a singular course pursued on this Oregon question, and with reference to which he must detain the Senate a moment. It contrasted so strongly, so wonderfully, with a precisely similar question — the annexation of Texas. Texas and Oregon were born the same instant, nursed and cradled in the same cradle — the Baltimore Convention — and they were at the same instant adopted by the Democracy throughout the land. There was not a moment's hesitation until Texas was admitted; but the moment she was admitted the peculiar friends of Texas turned, and were doing all they could to strangle Oregon; but the country was not blind or deaf. The people see, they comprehend, and he trusted they would speak. It was a most singular state of things. We were told that we must be careful not to involve ourselves with a war with England on a question of disputed boundary. There was a question of disputed boundary between us and Mexico; but did we hear from the same quarter, any warnings against a collision with Mexico, when we were about to consummate the annexation of Texas. We were told by those who knew something of these matters that the Nueces was the proper boundary of Texas; and how did they find the friends of Texas moving on that occasion? Did we, for a single instant, halt on the banks of the Nueces? No, at a single bound we crossed the Nueces, and the blasts of our trumpets and the prancing of our war horses were heard on the banks of the Rio Del Norte one hundred miles beyond. Nearly one hundred miles of disputed territory gives no cause for a moment's hesitation. There was no negotiation then, so far as Mexico was concerned; we took all. But when Oregon is brought into question we are called on, as an act proper and right, to give away a whole empire on the Pacific coast if England desires it. He never would consent to a surrender of any portion of the country north of 49° , nor one foot by treaty or otherwise under $54^{\circ} 40'.$ "

But the tide had already begun to set strongly against the policy of the Fifty-Four Forties. The Senate refused to adopt the joint resolution for notice to Great Britain as passed by the House, and it was modified so as to relieve it of its abruptness by inserting a pacific preamble. The joint resolution, so modified, passed in the House on April 18, 1846, by a decided vote of 144 to 40. The President at once gave the notice and the country now breathed easier, relieved, for the time being, of the pressure of suspense that for months had hung over it while confronted with imminent danger of war.

Although Great Britain and the United States had been brought to the verge of war by the policy of the Polk administration and the reckless course of the Fifty-Four Forties, negotiations between the two nations had not ceased, and after the notice given by the administration, they were diligently pursued, the United States being represented by James Buchanan, Secretary of State. Whatever else may be said of him it must be confessed that for such business he was admirably adapted and equipped.

It was plain, as it had been all along, that Great Britain would never concede any of the disputed territory north of the 49th parallel, but Buchanan thought that she might be willing to compromise on that parallel as the boundary line, and he so advised the President. To compromise on that line, would, of course, be a backdown for the administration from the policy unequivocally declared by the Baltimore Democratic platform and as unequivocally advocated by Polk in his inaugural address and in his annual message. But that was the most that could be gotten from Great Britain without war, and the President's advisers deemed it wiser to back down from that indefensible, or, at least, very doubtful claim, than it was to risk the hazards of war in attempting to maintain it. Finally, Polk himself, if not converted to the wisdom, yielded to the necessity, of abandoning his former Oregon policy.

The next thing to do was to break the news of the President's change of policy to the Senate and to the country, but to do this in such a way as to let the President down as easily as possible. For this purpose Senator Haywood of North Carolina, a personal and political friend of the President, was enlisted in his behalf. It was the mission of Haywood not only to announce the President's change of policy, but to show that he was not guilty of any inconsistency. This, of course, was a difficult if not an impossible undertaking, but Haywood performed it as well as anyone else could have done in a speech in the Senate on March 6, 1846.

Haywood's speech excited the ire of Hannegan and Allen, who at once demanded to know whether Haywood spoke by the authority of the President or not, but Haywood avoided giving a direct answer, although we have Benton's word for it that he was so authorized. Then Hannegan, pretending to believe that Haywood had spoken without the authority of the President, proceeded to show, and to show very clearly, by extracts from the President's messages, that his present policy, if it was that attributed to him by Haywood, was altogether inconsistent with that formerly advocated by him. Going still further, he proceeded to exhaust his stock of invectives in berating the President over Haywood's shoulders for an abandonment of his political principles and for treason to his party.

"In plain words", he said, "he [Haywood] represents the President as parenthetically sticking in a few hollow and false words to cajole the ultraisms of the country. What is this, need I ask, but charging upon the President conduct the most vile and infamous. If this allegation be true, the intentions of the President must sooner or later come to light, and, when brought to light, what must follow but irretrievable disgrace? So long as one human eye remains to linger on the page of history

the story of his abasement will be read, sending him and his name together to an infamy so profound, a damnation so deep, that the hand of resurrection will never be able to drag him forth. He who is a traitor to his country can never have forgiveness of God, and cannot ask mercy of man." Continuing, he said: "I have only to add, that, so far as the whole tone, spirit, and meaning of the remarks of the Senator from North Carolina are concerned, if they speak the language of James K. Polk, James K. Polk has spoken words of falsehood, and with the tongue of a serpent."

Benton found in some ancient precedents a way in which to extricate the President from his embarrassment. The proposition of the British government was submitted to the Senate for its advice, and Benton interviewed the Whig Senators, and ascertained that they would favor a treaty based on that proposition. The Senate voted advising the President to accept the proposition. A treaty was contracted accordingly and approved by the Senate. The Democratic papers at Washington and elsewhere raised a great outcry, but by this loud cannonading of the rear guard, all that was intended was to cover the retreat of the President and the Democratic Party which had assumed the character of a stampede. So ended the long controversy over the Oregon boundary question.

As Giddings had predicted there had been a complete backdown by the administration from its original Oregon policy. The Fifty-Four Forties did not get "all of Oregon". They did not get a "fight". They got only so much of Oregon as Great Britain was willing to concede and no more, but their Southern allies had gained the annexation of Texas — all that they cared for, all that they had fought for in the preceding presidential campaign. Another great area was now added to the vast territorial domain of the United States in which the status of slavery was yet to be settled.