

## SPEECH OF HON. HIRAM BELL, OF OHIO,

In the House of Representatives, January 10, 1853.

In Committee of the Whole on the State of the Union, on the annexation of Cuba, Canada, &c.

Mr. BELL said: Mr. CHAIRMAN: I presume I shall not trespass upon the time of this committee beyond the usual time allotted upon such occasions. I rise now mainly for the purpose of entering my protest before this House, and before the public, in relation to some positions which have been assumed as admitted by honorable members of this House. And I should not consider that necessary, were it not for the fact that, upon former occasions, the popular acquiescence in opinions in relation to, and constructions of, former acts of Congress, have been considered as an assent to those declarations. We have been told by honorable members of this House, that the people of this country were for annexation of Cuba; that they were for progress; that they were for the extension of the country; and even some have gone so far, without a limit as regards time, as to express themselves in favor of taking the balance of Mexico. That may all be right; but I would inquire of honorable gentlemen who entertain those sentiments, and send them abroad, upon what pretext are we to acquire this territory? Why are we talking about the conquest of Cuba? Perhaps some gentlemen may say that they are not in favor of a war, why, then, are we—the representatives of this nation—sending abroad to the world an expression of the legislative branch of this Government, that we are in favor of taking possession of territory to which we admit we have no right, and to the acquisition of which we have not the shadow of a pretext? I ask you, Mr. Chairman, if that is a portion of the present Democratic creed? Are we in a state of war with Spain? No, sir. On the contrary, we are at peace, and professing the most amicable relations toward that Government. How then are we to have an opportunity of accomplishing what it is said upon this floor the people of this country are in favor of? Are we to hatch up some pretext for a disturbance with that country? Why, it would seem to look like it. And, sir, what effect would such a state of things have upon our national character, but to dishonor it in the opinion of all Christendom? I stand here as one of the Representatives of this House, of this nation, and especially of the State from whence I come, to protest against all such doctrines. I tell you, sir,—and in doing so, I would wish to send it abroad throughout the length and breadth of this and other lands,—that these are not the sentiments of the people of this country. They never have been the sentiments of our people, and I trust they never will.

We hear it said in high places that we are to acquire all this territory—that we are to aggrandize ourselves by the acquisition of that which does not now belong to us, and of which there is no possible evidence that we have any right to assume to claim. Why, they say, it is our destiny as a nation—our *manifest destiny*! Why, sir, I have heard of spiritual rappers, and I believe they affect to reveal destiny; but I would like to know if, at this day, we are to risk the future policy of this Government upon the pretended revelations of this class of impostors? If not, shall we sanction these schemes of unlimited annexation of territory, under the plea of “destiny,” which have at least as sandy a foundation as those taught by the delusions of the class just referred to? I hope not, sir. But Mr. Chairman, if we were to pursue and adopt this policy, which is suggested as our interest and as our *manifest destiny*—if we were to assume that we were to become the possessors of Cuba, would it not be well to cast about us before we settled down upon the fact that such is our *manifest destiny* as a nation, and ascertain how we are going to acquire it?

Are we to acquire that island by conquest or by treaty, or other peaceful arrangements? The consideration of these questions requires us to look at the policy the Government must adopt to accomplish the proposed object by either means.

The first is, is it the interest or the duty of this nation to pursue the course of policy recommended by and carried out in the administration of Washington, and the fathers of this country, and continued from the organization of this Government down to the present time; or are we to change that course of policy which has rendered us so prosperous as a nation, and launch our boat upon the wide and boundless ocean of annexation and conquest? We must adopt one or the other. Why, sir, what, in former times, was considered the republican, the democratic, the national doctrines and interests of this country? Was a peaceful administration of the Government repudiated? Were colonial possessions sought? Were entangling alliances with any nations recommended as the policy beneficial to the republic? No, sir. The opposite policy was inculcated, and practically carried out, by the framers of the Government; and in the pursuit of that policy this nation has grown to be what it is, where every citizen is proud to be known as an American citizen, wherever he may be found. In whatever quarter of the world he may be, those stars and stripes, with their ample folds, protect him, and secure to him his rights. I say the advocates of this new doctrine must adopt one of these two courses of policy. If they are in favor of abandoning the policy of Washington, and of changing the entire policy of the country, and seek by conquest the extension of our territorial limits, and as a consequence withholding the necessary protection and promotion of the interests of our people at home, who have the first claims upon our Government and its sympathies, and who are already under our control; if they are prepared to say they are in favor of changing the policy, and abandoning the doctrines of Washington and Jefferson, and Madison and Monroe, Adams and Jackson, I trust they will be willing to abandon also all claim to the name they have so proudly heretofore sought to be known by, whether it be Whig or of the old line Democrat.

Again, I would request of those persons who advocate this new policy, to look a little at the results and effects of that policy. Will Cuba be acquired and annexed, and form a part of this Government, without a war? No, sir; the correspondence between the Ministers of France, England, and the Government of the United States, has already settled that. Suppose, then, that there were an attempt to acquire it by a war, that war would not be terminated in a month nor a year, when this Government shall be involved with Spain and two of the most powerful nations upon the European continent in such a contest. And those governments have already informed us, through their authorized agents, that they will never consent to the relinquishment or control and government of that island to or by any other nation than Spain. Suppose, however, that all could be accomplished which those visionary gentlemen imagine, would it be the true policy of this Government to acquire this island either by conquest or by peaceful negotiation?

To answer this question I need only refer you, sir, to those who live nearest, to those who appear to be the best informed, and residing in the southern States; to candid men, who say that they consider that the acquisition of Cuba, whether peaceably or by conquest, would be an injury and a curse to this Government. Have they not reason to suppose so? Would Cuba come into this Union as a slave State, or as a non-slaveholding State? And that, sir, brings up the great question, the agitation of which has heretofore endangered the perpetuity of this Union, as we have been told, and which we have no reason to doubt, considering the authority from which it comes, and considering the evidence which we have all around us. We cannot shut our eyes, nor can we close our ears, to the evidence on all hands which convinces us that the reiteration of similar questions must shake the nation to its centre.

Why, sir, there is hardly any one who contemplates the subject, who looks

at the latitude and location of that island, who knows the character of its inhabitants and their capacity, that would doubt for a moment, if it comes into this Union, that it would be a slaveholding territory, although it is urged here by many that we should acquire Cuba, and seek to bring it under the control of this Government, because by that means we would have the power and the means of abolishing the slave trade.

That may answer as an excuse for some, with which to satisfy a portion of their constituents. But when I hear it urged by my honorable friend from North Carolina, (Mr. VENABLE,) as an argument to the South, that they should go against the acquisition of Cuba, because, if that island should be acquired by the United States, the slave trade would be entirely abolished, and, as a consequence, the means which they now have of keeping up their proportion of slave labor would cease, and slavery eventually be extinguished; and when I hear a directly opposite reason urged from honorable gentlemen from other portions of the country, I may well hold a doubt of the soundness of those suppositions or arguments, that if Cuba should be admitted, it would either be a free State, or secure the abolition of the slave trade.

Mr. Chairman, I would not pretend to say but what the time may come when it may be necessary for this country to hold Cuba; and not only Cuba, but other islands of the ocean, and other territory. I do not know why we should have our attention so exclusively turned to the island of Cuba. Why, sir, what is there in that island that should absorb our whole attention? If we could have her peaceably, and at our own option, and take her to-day, would it be a blessing to us? I think not. I am bold to declare that I believe that if we could have Cuba without war, with all the advantages and disadvantages to this Government, it would be a curse, an injury, and prejudicial to our institutions.

But, sir, I wish to read the opinions of a southern man, the editor of the Charleston Mercury, as described in his own language, of his opposition to the acquisitions of Cuba, even if it could be acquired peaceably. His language is as follows:

"Besides, in what condition would Cuba be to justify her admission into the Union? There is a white population, native to the island, or permanently settled, amounting to near six hundred thousand, (double that of the white population of South Carolina, in a territory little larger than our State,) not one of whom ever exercised a political franchise, or ever took a share in public affairs, other than to submit to the power and shout around the chariot wheels of established authority. We propose to drive out all those who have ever held rule; and of those who have heretofore only had experience of unquestioning submission, we propose to make a democratic republic, and this in the face of two hundred thousand free blacks, and four hundred thousand slaves, freshly imported from Africa. Among all the recent abortive attempts at free governments in Europe, was there a single one commenced under such desperate auspices as this? Is it not absolutely certain that, to preserve order in such a community, an army would be necessary? And where there was an army for the purpose of domestic peace and civil rule, could there be a State? Would we admit into the Union a State which had no power of self government, but was in the hands of the United States army and navy?"

Here, Mr. Chairman, is the opinion of a southern man, who is well acquainted with the character, the condition, the habits, and the feelings of that people. He says that they are unfit to be attached to this Government, and that those who lay any claims to intelligence and information, are of that class who would be banished from the island, whenever it changed its government.

It is now proposed, by the advocates of that measure, that we shall take that class of population, and make them a part and parcel of this country—a class of people worse than slaves, more vicious and less informed—and that is claimed by some to be democratic doctrine. What, attach a class of people that, so far as they have any knowledge, are antagonistic in their principles, their prejudices, and their feelings, to every principal of this republican Government? They come in as copartners! That, sir, may be the democracy of the present day, but it was not the doctrine of our forefathers.

But, sir, there is a country and there is a people, competent for self-government, that are prepared to take upon themselves the responsibilities of free-

men, and which we may find for our interest to receive among us—I mean peaceably—and allow them to become a part and parcel of this country, and I care not how soon. I refer, Mr. Chairman, to the whole British possessions upon the north, containing an area of two millions two hundred and fifty-two thousand three hundred and ninety-five square miles. There is something worth looking at. There are two millions six hundred and fifty-two thousand of people—bone, as it were, of our bone, flesh of our flesh—deriving their origin from the same Anglo-Saxon source, a large class of them disciplined in that school which is calculated to train them up as independent freemen; and all anxious and ready to come into the possession of the enjoyment of those great principles which we are now enjoying. I say it may be for our advantage to acquire that country and that people, if we can peaceably. They are near three millions, scattered over a large territory, sufficient in extent to make several States, and possessing as healthy a climate, and a large part of it as rich a soil, as any in the world.

And then, sir, by the accomplishment of that matter, and the attaching it as a part of this Union, you banish all the vast expense of maintaining fortifications upon your northern borders, and save the millions of dollars now thrown away in keeping up your custom-houses upon the borders of the north; you give to yourself the free navigation of that mighty stream of the north, the St. Lawrence. You give to yourself the sole control and command of that channel, and of that bay at its mouth, with the great chain of lakes or inland seas which nature has formed for a ready and direct communication and navigation for the commerce of this northern territory to the ocean; and you welcome near three millions of people, who are like brethren, into this family, to form a part and parcel of this Republic, thereby adding strength and vigor to the body politic.

Here, sir, is something worth turning the attention of this nation to. Great Britain can have no object in holding the rule over these northern colonies, except national pride.

Meet this question fairly, frankly, and say to them, we are not going to war with you for this territory and these people; you have rights to all these. Would not the interests of these great nations be promoted and benefited by your withdrawing all claim to them, or over the territory, and permit these colonies, if they choose, to become a part and parcel of this Government, and link their destinies with this nation?

By the annexation of this territory on the north, you would increase your navigation and commercial interest, and the value of every foot of soil in that country four-fold. It is a fact known to those who reside on our northern frontier, that land within Canada, of the same quality as land within the United States, separated only by a line of the nature of the one which divides our townships, is only worth about one-quarter as much as the land within the United States; and what portion of this Union has a greater interest in the accomplishment of that object, than the States of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and New York? Consider for a moment those great lakes to the north, inland seas, surrounded by territory under the control of our own Government, instead of the limit of a midway channel. The accomplishment of that object peacefully will strengthen this Union, and add to its power and influence. The annexation of this territory to this Union (to use terms of gentlemen) *destiny* has ordained, and will ere long take place.

Mr. Chairman, I hope the time will not arrive when it may become necessary for this nation to engage in a war for the acquisition or possession of Cuba, or any other island or territory, for the purpose of preserving and protecting our maritime interests or national rights. But, should that time ever come, whether brought about by European diplomacy or aggression upon our rights by any Power, whether upon this or other continents, I am free to declare that

I should wish this Government to act under the circumstances as our national interests and honor should require; and if necessary to preserve these to acquire more territory, Cuba or other territory south or north, without regard to any local interests, I would say, as an American citizen, let it be done. But now we are at profound peace with all the nations of the world, and have no cause to quarrel about the possession of Cuba, or any other territory. I am opposed to the agitation of this question at the present time, because I believe it will be a renewal of those exciting scenes witnessed within the past few years. I am well satisfied that no Union man, and especially no man who has felt that he was the advocate of those Compromise measures which it was said were calculated to preserve the Union, can be in favor of the agitation of questions that will result in bringing about the sectional feeling that existed at the passage of those measures. The annexation, or the attempt to annex Cuba, must inevitably bring up those questions which were pending during the Congress preceding this one, and which were then intended to be settled by the series of measures called the Compromise. It will not do to say or imagine that those questions will not arise again under similar circumstances.

I hold that it is the duty of every citizen of our Government, when he sees danger in the advocacy or bringing forward of a particular measure, to point it out at the earliest possible time; and I would, therefore, warn these people, and especially the advocates of the annexation of Cuba, that there is danger in the bringing forward of such a measure before the public mind of this country; for so soon as it is, the exciting question of slavery will be introduced. The slave population of the United States, at this time, have a representation upon this floor equal to that of the States of New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Iowa, Wisconsin, and California; or equal to that of Indiana and Illinois; or equal to the entire representation of the State of Ohio. And the annexation of Cuba would add to the slave representation in Congress, equal to four additional members.

Now, however much we may desire, and I claim to be one of those who desire, that the laws of Congress shall be faithfully administered and executed, affording equal protection to the rights of citizens of one State, as well as to those of another; that the southern States, their citizens and their property, under their local institutions, as guaranteed to them by the Constitution and laws of this country, shall enjoy equal protection with those of the North; still, I say to the advocates of this measure, whether from the North or South, East or West, that the people of the free States never will consent to the addition of slaveholding territory, simply for securing the balance of power or the extension of territory. While they desire to protect their southern brethren in all of their rights, they will oppose the increase of slavery. And why? Because they believe that by becoming responsible, as the guardians of additional slave territory, they will act in opposition to the spirit of the Constitution, to the interest of the nation, to the progress of the age, and contrary to their own convictions of duty, and the injunctions of God Almighty. My friend from Georgia, [Mr. STEPHENS,] asks whether they did not agree to let Texas in? Surely they did; and why? I trust they were governed by such motives as I would always ascribe to my friend from Georgia. They were not governed by their own desires, but were willing to yield something for the purpose of compromising difficulties, and preserving the rights of all parties.

Mr. STEPHENS, of Georgia. If similar questions were hereafter to arise, would they not display the same compromising and national spirit?

Mr. BELL. I will endeavor to answer the gentleman's question. He asks me, because we have been liberal, and gone almost beyond the bounds of patriotism—because we have heretofore compromised our prejudices and feelings for the purpose of maintaining the integrity and good feeling of this country, that we shall do the like again. I am not prepared to say what I would act

do to preserve this Union, but I would avoid testing the local prejudices of the different sections of this country. When you see breakers ahead, keep the craft near the shore. That is the policy we adopt as individuals, and which we should carry out as a nation. Whenever the question of the annexation of Cuba arises, it will not come alone: it will be accompanied by the question of the annexation of the vast territory to the north, and it may be that the equipoise of additions of territory will do away with apprehended danger. But, sir, I would avoid the alternative of making the experiment.

Mr. Chairman, my honorable friend from Georgia, on a former occasion, if I understood him correctly, to quiet the fears that some honorable members might have as to the danger to be apprehended from the annexation of Cuba, said that the principle settled in the Compromise act would apply and extend to the acquisition of other territory than that Congress was then acting upon. I enter my protest against any such construction. Nothing was settled by that act but what had reference to the territory then acquired.

Mr. STEPHENS. While I stated that the settlement covered only the territory, yet the principle out of which this controversy grew was settled, and it was that this Government should never interfere at all with the domestic institutions of a foreign State, within a Territory or a State, leaving it for the people in the Territory to manage them as they pleased. That was the principle settled in the Compromise; and by adherence to this principle, it will be utterly impossible for a controversy to arise.

Mr. BELL. I understand the gentleman now as I did before. I did not aim to misrepresent him. But where does he get his authority for that assumption, that the Congress preceding this was more wise, patriotic, and had more enlarged views, or were more devoted and attached to this Government and its institutions, than that Congress which framed, adopted, and established the ordinance of 1787, for governing the territory northwest of the river Ohio? Let the fruits of that ordinance speak. Let that mighty Northwest, with its teeming millions of population and its wonderful improvements, speak as to the result and the benefits of that ordinance. There we have an evidence of the fruits and benefits of the wisdom of that ordinance, which said that no slave should live northwest of the Ohio river.

Mr. STEPHENS. That ordinance was not passed by Congress since this Constitution was framed. Not at all. Since the beginning of this Government the great principle in controversy between the North and South was never settled until 1850. The gentleman asks where I got the authority that it was settled. I got it in the act making a Territorial Government in Utah and New Mexico, in which it is expressly declared that the people of these Territories, when they desire to come into the Union, can come in with or without slavery, as they please. As I stated before, it was the first time since the formation of this Government when that principle has been placed upon the records of the Congress of the United States.

Mr. BELL. I repeat, again, that the settlement of that question was a settlement of the then pending questions only, and which will go to the credit of those men who sacrificed their personal predilections for the purpose of compromise. I say that the settlement, as to the organization of these Territories, by its language, and by its terms and spirit, was only intended for the present time, and fixing the rights of the people of those Territories as prescribed and limited by the acts adopted. The very meaning of compromise is that a controversy is not settled upon generally recognised principles, but that there is a meeting half way of conflicting views and opinions for the purpose of terminating some particular question. But the gentleman said that the ordinance of 1787 was not passed after the adoption of the Constitution. Does that deteriorate from the wisdom, foresight, and principles of that Congress as recognized by the father of this Government? No! They were fresh from Con-

gress Hall, the hall of independence, breathing as it were the spirit of liberty ; and millions of human beings will hereafter, as they have before, bless that Congress for laying down the landmarks that forbid slavery within this Territory.

But, sir, what says the third and fourth sections of the fourth article of that Constitution that my honorable friend has referred to?

Sec. 3. New States may be admitted by the Congress into this Union; but no new State shall be formed or erected within the jurisdiction of any other State; nor any State be formed by the junction of two or more States, or parts of States, without the consent of the legislature of the States concerned, as well as of the Congress.

The Congress shall have power to dispose of, and make all needful rules and regulations respecting, the territory or other property belonging to the United States; and nothing in this Constitution shall be so construed as to prejudice any claims of the United States, or of any particular State.

Sec. 4. The United States shall guaranty to every State in this Union a republican form of government, and shall protect each of them against invasion; and on application of the legislature, or of the Executive, (when the legislature cannot convened) against domestic violence.

Then, sir, according to my construction of that instrument, Congress has full power over her territory to prohibit slavery or not, as the wisdom of that body may determine, and that right has never been changed or taken away by the action of Congress or the people, by any change in our organic law.

I have already addressed the committee longer than I intended. When I heard the remarks of my friend from Georgia, (Mr. STEPHENS,) of the gentleman from Oregon, (Mr. LANE,) and the gentleman from California, (Mr. MARSHALL,) I only had it in view to rise and enter my protest, as one of the members of this House, against their construction of that Compromise.

Mr. STEPHENS. Perhaps the gentleman was never a party to it.

Mr. BELL. My honorable friend from Georgia knows that I had not the honor of a seat in this House at that time. Had I been a member here at the time—for I have nothing to conceal, and those who know me here will give me that credit, at least—I should not have voted for all of those measures known as the Compromise acts.

Mr. STEPHENS. That is what I expected.

Mr. BELL. There is nothing new about that. But, sir, if the question was now pending whether that law, which was considered the most objectionable, should now be repealed, I should say no. As I have said to my constituents, give us peace, give us quiet, although there are some things in that act which I believe wrong, and contrary to principles of justice. But I would forego those objections, and I would not agitate the subject. I would not now repeal the act, but give it a fair trial.

Mr. STEPHENS. What are those great principles?

Mr. BELL. I have not time to answer my friend. They will show for themselves. When I said I had nothing to conceal, is it because the Compromise acts appear to have become popular, and I could easily fall in with the popular cry? No; I will do what I believe to be right if I stand alone; and when I say I would not agitate it, but let it remain for the present, this opinion may run counter to the views of many of my constituents. But I tell you the views of the great mass of my constituents, and of the people generally in my State, are, let it alone until it has a fair trial. What I desire now is, that those who claim to be such warm friends of the Compromise, as well as those who opposed it, shall, by the influence of their votes and voices, prevent the agitation of similar questions, which gave rise to so much excitement and recrimination of feeling.

Mr. Chairman, there are some other questions that have been discussed before this committee that I should like to say something about, but my time has nearly expired, and I can only refer to them briefly. I regret, sir, that some of the opponents of the measure proposing to confer the title of *lieutenant general* upon General Scott, have deemed it necessary, in their opposition, to

attack or consider the private character of that *old veteran and hero*. For it is hard to entirely separate, in this country, the public and private character of our citizens and officers; and the history and public character and services of General Scott, for the last forty years, have become a part and parcel of the history of this Government. His services and sacrifices are known to the people of this country, and the more they are canvassed and examined, the higher will they be appreciated by his countrymen. Although he has been defeated for the high civil office for which his political friends had placed him in nomination, yet there has been instances before of *temporary* defeat being the *harbinger of final success*.

Some honorable members have given vent to their indignation before the committee in attacks upon the present Administration, as well as General Taylor's, in regard to our foreign relations. But, when the official papers are brought forward, it appears that all the charges they prefer against General Taylor or President Fillmore's administration, if they have any foundation at all, are applicable only, and apply to their own friends and their own party; and that the present, as well as General Taylor's Cabinet, have, with master wisdom, maintained our interests and foreign relations with a watchful care and truly American spirit. But why, sir,—since the elections are over, and there is now no longer any political capital to be made,—why all these unfounded charges, and of a character that should only be expected preceding a great political campaign for political effect? I will tell you.

The triumphant party in the last political struggle, now made up of not only the Democratic party proper, but of all the discordant elements in professed political creeds in the country,—brought together upon the celebrated Baltimore platform, and in which each section claims a plank, and brought upon that platform by the cohesive power of the love of office, and not by any great principle that they held in common—this new party are about to take upon themselves the entire responsibility of the administration of this Government, executive as well as legislative, the latter of which they already have. This party of the last canvass, having advocated as many different political doctrines as there are different sections or localities of the country, know well that all of their different and antagonistic political theories cannot be adopted and carried out by the incoming Administration. Hence the necessity of getting up new issues and talking about any and every thing, but especially to make some charge against the Administration, to turn the attention of the people from the acts of the Democratic party, or, in other words, the Pierce party, until after there should be a division of the spoils, and prevent a disruption of their party. Such a game, however, will not take this time. I would just say to our Democratic friends on the other side of the House, employing the terms used by some, that "destiny" has settled the question that their party is to be divided and broken up about as soon as it was formed, and before half of four years shall roll round.

Mr. Chairman, some honorable members upon the other side of the House have spoken about the defeat and disbanding of the Whig party. It is true, sir, we have been defeated, but *not conquered*. No person is deserving the name of Whig, unless he can bear defeat in defending his principles. I believe it to be the duty of the Whigs, as well as every other citizen, to sustain an Administration, whether of our friends or opponents, in all measures we think are calculated to promote the interest of our common country; as well as to oppose all that we believe prejudicial. The Whig party dead? No, sir; no, sir! As long as the principles of Washington and our revolutionary sires are revered and esteemed—as long as our republican form of Government shall last—the Whig party will continue to exist, to support and maintain those principles—sustain and support the Republic and our glorious institutions.

[Here the hammer fell.]