

SPEECH
OF THE
HON. WILLIAM C. RIVES, OF VIRGINIA.
ON THE
RESOLUTION FOR THE ANNEXATION OF TEXAS.

IN SENATE UNITED STATES—FEBRUARY 15, 1845.

The Senate having resumed the consideration of the joint resolution from the House for the admission of Texas—

Mr. RIVES rose and addressed the Senate in opposition to the joint resolution for the admission of Texas to the Union. He commenced by observing that it was very well known to the Senate, and not unknown to the country, (as far as any feasible opinion of his could be deemed of any consequence,) that he was not opposed to the acquisition of Texas whenever it could be fairly and honorably accomplished, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, and without materially disturbing the harmony of existing relations between one section of this country and another, and between this Government and other Governments. So far from it, that he regarded that measure as containing many important national advantages, commending it to the consideration of the whole country—of the North and the West more than the South.

In much of what had been said by the honorable Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. BUCHANAN) yesterday, in regard to the expediency of the annexation, he concurred. But a far higher question than that is now before us. Every thing that might be deemed by an expedient is not, therefore, lawful and justifiable. What would it profit us should we gain Texas, if in doing so we lost the security and protection of that sacred instrument which was the bond of our national union, the pillar and palladium of our liberty and happiness? The mode in which Texas was to be acquired, in its aspect upon the principles of our political compact, was, with him, a vital and a paramount consideration. We had heretofore made important acquisitions of foreign territory, none then doubting the area of our original limits; but we had made the acquisition by means of the treaty-making power; and in this case of Texas, too, the treaty power had been called into action to achieve the measure of annexation; but the treaty not having received the constitutional sanction of two-thirds of this body, it was now at last discovered that all this reference to the treaty-making power was a mere useless ceremony; a work of supererogation; an idle, unmeaning formality; and that the object could be better accomplished by a joint resolution, to be passed by a mere majority of the two Houses of Congress. Under these circumstances, the question now put to the judgment and conscience of every Senator was, whether this summary mode of proceeding was warranted by the Constitution, and in conformity with that good faith which the people of the several States had pledged to each other when they adopted the Constitution and promised to abide by it.

It was the proud distinction and the peculiar happiness of this country to possess a written Constitution—an instrument which not only limited the general mass of power delegated to the Government, but which defined the particular powers to be exercised by each branch of that Government. According to its provisions, each department had its own appropriate sphere of action; each of them checked and was in turn checked by the others; and thus the whole together preserved the safeguard of the public liberty. The legislative department in other Governments arrogated to itself supreme power, the form against imperium, but, thank God! such legislative supremacy was unknown in ours. The legislative as well as the other departments of Government in this system, were, in the impressive language of Mr. Jefferson, "chained down" by the limitations of delegated authority. "An elective despotism," as he had so well said, "was not the Government we fought for." In our system the powers were so divided and balanced between the several branches of magistracy that neither could transgress its own limits without being immediately checked by the others. This was the fundamental conception of American constitutional liberty, as sanctioned by the enlightened founders of this Republic, and it had been faithfully carried out in the Constitution of the United States. In that instrument all the legislative powers of the Government were specifically enumerated and vested in the two Houses of Congress; the Executive power was defined and entrusted to the hands of the President; while the Judicial authority was confided to the Supreme Court, and to each other subordinate courts as should be established from time to time by Congress. This organization embraced all the great internal interests of the country.

But there remained other interests to be provided for, which had respect to the relations of this country with foreign Powers. So important was the power which controlled these, that Locke, in his celebrated Treatise on Government, had ranked it along with the Legislative and Execu-

William Virginia Resolution Annexation Classic

Gordon S. Wood, Louise G. Wood



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Speech of the Hon. William C. Rives, of Virginia, on the Resolution for the Annexation of Texas (Classic Reprint) William C. Rives, 2018-03-12 Excerpt from Speech of the Hon William C Rives of Virginia on the Resolution for the Annexation of Texas It was important to know in what sense this term treaty was understood by the people when they were called on to ratify the treaty making power as laid down in the new Constitution And on this point it gave him great pleasure to turn the attention of the Senate to a brief passage of the Federalist which not only furnished a definition of a treaty but went to explain the whole nature philosophy About the Publisher Forgotten Books publishes hundreds of thousands of rare and classic books Find more at www.forgottenbooks.com This book is a reproduction of an important historical work Forgotten Books uses state of the art technology to digitally reconstruct the work preserving the original format whilst repairing imperfections present in the aged copy In rare cases an imperfection in the original such as a blemish or missing page may be replicated in our edition We do however repair the vast majority of imperfections successfully any imperfections that remain are intentionally left to preserve the state of such historical works Publications of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1925 Vol 1 Preston and Virginia Papers Vol 2 Kentucky Papers Vol 3 Tennessee and Kings Mountain Papers

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