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SPEECH OF MR. CLINGMAN,

OF NORTH CAROLINA,

ON THE LATE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

in the House of Representatives, Jan. 6.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I shall leave it to those who desire it to discuss the constitutionality or expediency of the proposed annexation of Texas. It is not expected by any body that any practical result, in the way of legislation, is to grow out of these proceedings. Doubtless you may be able, as was suggested the other day by the gentleman from South Carolina, to pass an abstract resolution, after the fashion of your Baltimore Convention, declaring that Texas ought to be annexed as soon as practicable. Your agitation of the matter is intended solely to produce capital to operate on our elections at the South during the ensuing year and I shall therefore meet the question on its real and not its ostensible merits.

The chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, (Mr. C. J. Ingersoll,) who opened the debate, stated that there had been a very decided manifestation of popular opinion in favor of the annexation, and was pleased to refer to the late Presidential election as furnishing evidence of it. The gentleman from Illinois, (Mr. Douglass,) who has immediately preceded me in the debate, declared with great vehemence that the popular verdict had been recorded in favor of the measure, and that if those who are now on this floor failed to carry out the wishes of the people, they would be swept away by a torrent of public indignation, and men be sent in their places who were more faithful. If all this were true, sir, it would furnish a strong argument in favor of the measure, because, in a representative Republic like ours, popular opinion is of the greatest consequence. I shall endeavor to show, however; that these gentlemen are totally mistaken in these views; but to do so will oblige me to examine a good deal in detail the causes which contributed to produce the result exhibited in that election.

I must in the first place, however, ask the indulgence of the house for a few minutes, which I advert to a matter not directly connected with this subject.

At the last session, when a proposition to repeal the 25th rule was under consideration, it will be remembered that the debate was prolonged for nearly twelve months, and as each speech was concluded more than twenty chivalric gentlemen sprang to their feet and struggled for an opportunity to manifest their ardor in behalf of Southern rights. And it was only sir, by resorting to the previous question that we were able to terminate the debate before the close of the session.

On the first day of the present session, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. Adams) gave notice that he would on tomorrow introduce a proposition to abolish the rule. Thereupon the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Dromgoole) likewise gave notice that he would object to the reception of the resolution, because it would be out of order. On the succeeding day, the gentleman from Massachusetts, in accordance with his promise, offered his resolution to rescind the rule, but the gentleman from Virginia, though in his place, greatly to the surprise of every body, made no objection to its introduction. In that gentleman, or any other member had objected to its reception, it could only have been gotten in by a suspension of the rules, and it was well known that a vote of two-thirds could not have been obtained for that purpose.—The proposition came in without a word of objection from any quarter. Thereupon, a gentleman from Mississippi, acting under the old dispensation of Democracy, not having, I presume, from his location in the far Southwest, seen the new revelation of light in the Northeast, moved to lay the resolution on the table. A vote was taken by yeas and nays, and his motion was lost by a decided majority, making it evident that the rule would be repealed. The Speaker stated the question to be on the adoption of the resolution to rescind the rule. The previous question had not been ordered, and the matter was therefore open for debate. I looked around to see what bold champion of the South would first sound the tocsin of alarm. There was a full array of the chivalry around. There in his seat on my right was the gentleman from South Carolina, (Mr. Rhett,) who at the last session declared, with so much eloquence and zeal, that a repeal of the rule would be a virtual dissolution of the Union.

There sat my colleague, (Mr. Sanders,) who went off on this matter with a force that sent him during the past Summer over the entire State of North Carolina declaiming against the reception of abolition petitions. There two, were the gentlemen from Georgia and other States, who vied with each other in their denunciation of all those who did not sustain the rule. There all of these gentlemen sat, quiet and mute as though nothing unusual was taking place and saw with much seeming unconcern their favorite rule killed off by a large majority. There was no burst of indignation; no exclamation to the South, "Samson, the Philistines be upon thee!" Not even the note of a goose, to give warning of the irruption of the Gauls. Were they asleep, like the Roman sentinels of the old time? No, no, sir; they were awake, but they were false watchmen of the South—traitor sentinels! I have a right so to call them; for, in denouncing me at the last session, some of them declared that any man who did not sustain the rule by all proper means, was a renegade and a traitor to the Southern States. According to the form of the logicians, the proposition would be as follows: Any Southern man who does not use his efforts to preserve the rule is a renegade traitor. They were southern men, and might have preserved the rule by objection at the proper time, but would not do it.—Therefore they are renegade traitors.—*Quod erat demonstrandum*, as the sophomores say.

How are we Mr. Speaker, to account for the extraordinary change in the conduct of gentlemen since the Presidential election? And I may also ask, why is it that Leavitt, the abolition editor, who was refused at the last session a seat among the reporters of the House, is now the occupant of one of the best positions in the Hall?* I told you all at the last session that this 25th rule was a humbug, getting to be so well understood that it would deceive nobody much longer, and must soon be abandoned by its authors. Will gentlemen come out frankly and admit that all their parade at the last session was a mere humbug—one of the most barefaced political frauds ever attempted to be played off for party purposes? If they will not admit this—if they still insist that the rule is of any value, why did they give it up without a struggle? Was it done as compensation to their abolition allies in the North, by whose aid they carried the great States of New York and Pennsylvania, and thereby elected Mr. Polk? I do not wish gentlemen to evade this matter by their silence. If the rule was worthless, why the "sound and fury" of last session? If valuable, for what consideration did they surrender it, except that just stated? They must take one horn of the dilemma. They cannot escape from it.

Ah! I beg pardon, Mr. Speaker, there is still a third mode by which a part of these gentlemen may get out of this difficulty.—Some of them may perhaps excuse themselves by saying if they had grumbled about this matter they might have been expelled from the Democratic party, and thus lost all share of the spoils to be distributed from and after the fourth of March next.—Taking this view of the case, sir, I frankly admit that these gentlemen deserve the sympathy of this House and of the country.—Their fate, in being compelled to make such a submission, is peculiarly hard when it is remembered from what quarter the principle of this rule was originally derived. Mr. Senator Benton did great injustice to John C. Calhoun, when he said, if common rumor be true, that the same John C. Calhoun, so far from being a statesman, had "never invented even a *humbug*." The fact cannot be disputed that John C. Calhoun was the first to take "the very highest ground for the South;" the prime originator of the policy of objecting to the reception of petitions, of which the 25th rule is parcel. Hard then is the necessity which compels the peculiar followers of that gentleman to make a burnt offering of the first and only offspring of their idol. Considering, however, the object for which the sacrifice was made, it is hoped that they will derive as much consolation as did Capt. Dalgetty, who, when mourning the loss of his old war horse on a battle field, remembered that he could convert the hide of the dead animal into a pair of breeches. John C. Calhoun's only humbug converted into breeches for his followers!†

*It is due to the Speaker to state that he declared subsequently that he had not assigned to Mr. Leavitt, the Abolition Reporter, any seat in the Hall, but inasmuch as there were a great number of applicants for reporter's seats, he had not yet completed the arrangements & allotted the seats among them &, until his assignment had been completed his orders had been not to prevent any reporter from entering the Hall, & occupying temporarily one of the seats. The rule of the House, No. 19, is in the following words: "No person shall be allowed 'the privilege of the Hall under the character of the stenographer, without a written 'permission from the Speaker, specefying 'the part of the Hall assigned to him, and 'no reporter or stenographer shall be admitted under the rules of the House, unless such reporter or stenographer shall 'state in writing for what paper or papers 'he is employed to report." As this rule can only be changed by the House itself, and as the reporter in question occupied the seat for some weeks, I presumed, in common with other members who remarked on the transaction that he remained by express permission of the Speaker, and not that there had been a suspension of a standing rule of the House by the speaker for so long a period.

†A story is told, by Paulding, I think, of an Individual who applied to Mr. Van Buren for the office of Secretary of State, but was told that it had already been promissed to another. He then continued asking for various offices, in a descending scale, until he cames to the lowest, and was told that the office in each instance had been already promised to some one else. "Then, sir," said he to the President "as I am in a very needy condition, could you not give me a pair of old breeches?"

Judging from the action of the House on this subject, what is to become of the repeal of the tariff? I can tell you, sir. If James K. Polk will give to a few individuals that I could name such offices as they desire he will thereby effect such a modification of the tariff as to render it acceptable in the main to the chivalric majority of the State of South Carolina. Should these persons, however, fail to get such portion of the spoils as they consider their due, viz. the lion's share, then the tariff will be found so intolerably oppressive that human nature cannot bear it, and must be nullified. Be not deceived, sir, by all the declamation which we hear from time to time; for all this is merely thrown out to frighten Mr. Polk and his Northern friends into a good compromise with respect to the distribution of the offices. Can this be accomplished with beggerring the other sections of the party? There are not places enough in the gift of the Executive to satisfy the countless thousands of greedy office-seekers. This consideration forces upon my mind the great danger which awaits your party, and, as a frank, benevolent Whig, I warn you of it.

Sir, it is a common remark that the members of this so called Democratic party, however they may take opposite sides on measures of policy, never split in their votes, but always make a common struggle on the election day. This is owing to the fact which I had occasion to state at the last session, that this party is held together solely by the cohesive power of public plunder;" and, therefore, whenever they are making a struggle to get into power, it is a part of their general system of tactics that each segment of the party should adopt that side of any question that is strongest at home, and thereby increase their chance of carrying the election. Though not yet generally known throughout the country, yet the matter is so well understood here that it seldom excites a remark, though every week furnishes conclusive evidence on the point. For example: A gentleman from Pennsylvania some time since charged the Whigs with being less friendly to a protective tariff than the Democrats. Immediately after him rose a gentleman from Alabama, who declaimed furiously against the oppression of the tariff of 1842, taking no notice of the gentleman who was up just before him, but assailing furiously some unlucky Whig who may have taken part in the debate. Says the gentleman from Pennsylvania: "Mr. Clay and the Whigs are for reducing the present duties on iron and coal, and prostrating the great interests of Pennsylvania." The gentleman from Alabama shouts aloud: "The duties on iron and coal, imposed by the present Whig tariff, are so oppressive that they cannot be borne, but shall be resisted." So far, however, are these gentlemen from finding fault with each other, that each of them, by his manner at least, seems to say to the other: "God speed you, brother; you are working bravely for Democracy." As the speech of each of them is intended for home consumption, it contains no allusion to the remarks of the other; and, by consequence, the constituent at the North sees from the speech of his representative that the Whig party are opposed to the protection of home industry, and to the existing tariff, while the planter of the South is driven to madness by learning, in a similar manner, how much he is oppressed by the present Whig tariff. However, therefore, the members of this party may differ about *measures*, they do not split in their votes on the election day, and of course they act together as long as they are out of power. But, sir, very different is their condition when in power. I have already indicated that they are held together solely by the desire of office, and as there are not in the Government places enough for all, there will soon be a real quarrel, and the disappointed will vote against you. The only connecting tie being dissolved, the party will go to pieces. This, sir, is the rock on which you are destined to split.—Though a political adversary, I warn you of the danger; but I frankly admit, sir, that I do not believe you will be able to profit by my advice.

When the Subtreasury bill was under consideration sometime since, it will be remembered that in the very short debate which was allowed on it, a very wide range was taken by some of the speakers. As I was not on that occasion permitted to occupy the floor, I may, I trust without impropriety, advert to some things that were said then. I do not propose, however to discuss the merits of that measure. It was brought in by the committee at the last session, and laid upon our tables, and though I in common with other Whigs called upon the majority to take it up at once, and charged them with holding it back till after the Presidential election in order to deceive the country as to their real intentious, yet it all availed nothing, and it was permitted to sleep quietly on our tables till the close of that session.—And when, during the past summer, we charged the party with designing to pass this measure again as soon as they had the power to effect it, yet it was, as if by common consent, stoutly denied by their partisans all over the country. They affirmed that this measure, having been condemned by the American people in 1840, had been abandoned, and, as a proof of it, referred to the fact that, with an immense majority in this House, the party refused to pass it.—Now, however, the election being over, just as I had occasion to predict perhaps fifty times in the political debates of the past year, this very bill is taken up before any other matter of importance, and in a few hours forced through the House and passed under the gag of the previous question. It is proclaimed that the people have decided in its favor at the late election; and we are told, with that insolence which the large majority here has inspired, that we Whigs ought to sit mute and make no objection to its passage. So far is it from being true that the people, by their late vote have decided in its favor, I venture to affirm that if the party had dared to pass it last spring; and thus directly made an issue on it, the result of the election would have been different. The country understands this matter too well. It is known to be a measure which will place in the hands of the President the money-power of the country, and which would, under the operation of a few years, convert the Government into a practical despotism.

I propose now, Mr. Speaker, to follow the example of some of the debaters who have discussed the issues involved in the late election, and the effect of the popular verdict. At the termination of the late session of congress, when I left this city though I was sanguine as to the general result, I knew that we were to be hardly pressed at the South. James K. Polk, the nominee of our opponents, was understood to be, and had always been, opposed to any other than a mere revenue tariff, and was avowedly in favor of the immediate annexation of Texas. Though I knew that the position of the Whig party was right on both these questions, yet, inasmuch as it had formerly been the custom of Southern politicians in the main to denounce all tarifs, and the policy even of incidental protection had rarely been advocated, I feared that the time intervening before the election was too short to enable us fully to enlighten the public mind with respect to the character of the act of 1842, and our position in relation to its policy.

There was also, in many quarters of the Southern part of the Union, a strong feeling in favor of the annexation of Texas, and I also apprehend that there would hardly be time enough for the people to become fully acquainted with the terms of the proposed annexation, and to understand clearly the position of the Presidential candidates with respect to the question.—Though we Whigs of the South knew that it had fallen to our lot to defend the point of greatest pressure, yet we went into the contest with a determination and a spirit worthy of the noble cause in which we were engaged, which, but for causes that we had no reason to anticipate, would have afforded a success fully equal to all our hopes.

At the North this state of things was reversed. Our candidate occupied the side of the questions that was most popular with both parties in that region, and we had a right to anticipate a gain in that quarter, equal at least to any loss that might be sustained with us. Nor did I feel any serious doubts as to the result until we saw the developments of the month of September. Then it was that the extraordinary spectacle was presented to the world of a convention of the so-called Democratic party in the State of New York, which openly, and with a degree of impudence till then unseen, in solemn form repudiated the leading principles avowed in their National Convention, and at the same time declared their determination to support its Presidential nominee. It likewise nominated for the office of Governor of that State Silas Wright, whose views were on both of these great questions, directly opposite to those of James K. Polk. Mr. Polk declared himself utterly opposed to the tariff of 1842, and in favor of the immediate annexation of Texas, while Silas Wright had voted *for* the tariff of 1842, and had likewise voted *against* the annexation of Texas; and these two individuals were voted for on the same ticket, in order that no man might be so silly in future as to doubt but that the said Democratic party was held together solely by the love of office, or, in language now become classical, "the cohesive power of public plunder."

A similar state of things was exhibited in Pennsylvania; and I have heard Democratic members of this House speak laughingly of seeing in that State numberless banners with inscription borne on them of "Polk, Dallas, and the Democratic Tariff of 1842." Yes, sir, & when the Whigs attempted to set this matter right, they were told by the honest but ignorant yeomanry of that State that they could not believe that Mr. Polk was opposed to the tariff, because they had been assured by their leaders, the men in whom they had been accustomed to confide, that he was much more favorable to a protective tariff than was Mr. Clay. The political leaders of the party in these two States, as well as elsewhere at the North, humiliated themselves so far as to come into the support of a man who had been forced upon them by a small and till then contemned minority of their own party, and whose opinions were directly the reverse of those which they themselves had publicly professed. But they did not stop here. Lest their prostitution should go unrewarded, and to secure as many accomplices in political crime as possible, they seem to have deliberately entered into a scheme of misrepresentation and fraud. To bring to the support of a man whose principles, if he had any, were hostile to the views of the great mass of their followers, they deliberately resolved to misstate the principles of that man, as if they could thus turn wrong into right, and make that true which was false. By false declarations, steadily persevered in, they deluded the ignorant, who trusted to their truth. To further their conspiracy, their candidate, worthy of his party, wrote in phrases indefinite, unmeaning, vague, ambiguous, double faced as the responses of the Delphic oracle. When inquiries from any quarter whatever were put to him which would have elicited a definite answer, he remained mute and permitted the truth to be trampled under foot. Mr. Speaker, there are recorded many instances of individual misrepresentation, dishonor, and breaches of faith by those who previously enjoyed the public confidence; but, sir, the history of the world affords no other instance of a total destitution of a moral sense exhibited by so large a number of individuals, no example of fraud and falsehood on a scale so extensive. To furnish materials to the active agents, there was established in this city a mint managed by it is not necessary for me here to say whom, for it is too well known by all around. That establishment worked with amazing rapidity, and threw off every variety of falsehoods. To the North, for example, it sent infamous libels on the Whig candidates such as were supposed best calculated to array against them all the profligate factions there, especially the unprincipled abolitionists; while to the South was directed handbills, warning the people of that section that imminent danger was impending, and that, if the Whigs came into power, slavery would be abolished and all the interests of the South utterly prostrated. These publications were thrown out purposely on the eve of the election, in order that they might not be contradicted. They were signed by no name, or the name of an unknown & irresponsible person. If, therefore, one of them found its way to a region for which it had not been intended, its parentage was stiffly denied, and it was affirmed and certified to be a Whig forgery. For some weeks before the election these handbills were scattered far & wide. I wondered at their numbers, for they covered the land like the locusts of Egypt. I have since been informed that several and perhaps all of the departments of the Government were constantly employed to aid the party in their distribution: One of the Heads of Department, I am credibly informed, franked them in packages weighing in some instances as much as a thousand pounds. As far as I know, however, the circulation of these things produced little impression in my own State or in the Southern country generally. It is the custom there for men of opposite parties to debate political questions face to face before the people, and the voters thus have a better chance to ascertain the views of parties and of their candidates. It is true that our adversaries sometimes attempted to deny Mr. Polk's views as to the Sub-treasury and other questions, but these denials were seldom successful. Sir, I never yet have met a man that I could not, in a day or two's debate, by continued question, cross-examination, and denunciation, compel to admit the truth, when I had documentary or other plain evidence to establish it. Providence seems to have denied to man the power to persist in falsehood with the same steadiness of eye and countenance with which truth can be maintained. I doubt if Talleyrand himself, who used to say that language was given to men to enable them to conceal their thoughts, could persevere successfully in falsehood during the whole of one of our Southern campaigns.

At the North the mode of conducting a canvass is different. The speakers on opposite sides seldom if ever met each other in debate. The meetings being composed of one party only, the matter thrown out goes uncontradicted alike, whether it be truth or falsehood, and the members of either party adopt the views of their own speakers. To the uninformed, however honest they may be, the best authenticated document carries no more evidence of its truth than the libel representing both by pictures and writing, Mr. Clay hanging three Dutchmen, which was so extensively circulated in Pennsylvania.

If this state of things continues, our constitution of Government is virtually at an end. Our republican system is based upon the principle that those who exercise power here represent and carry out, under the Constitution, the views of the people. But if the matter be so managed that the great mass of the voters do not and cannot ascertain the views of the candidates before them, the consequence follows that those elected do not in fact represent the people, and our republican form of Government is virtually abolished. As a means of averting, to some extent at least, this great evil, let the practice of requiring the speakers on both sides to confront each other in debate be generally adopted. To effect this, let there be a union of all those who desire truth to prevail, who wish to see our free constitution preserved in substance as well as in form, and who desire that the blessings of liberty should be transmitted to those who are to come after us. At any rate, I call upon every Whig to adopt his mode publish your appointments, and challenge your opponents to meet you.—If they fail to meet you, denounce them as being afraid of such an investigation, because they know that the facts are against them. Persevere in this course, and they will be compelled by public opinion, yes, by their own followers, to meet you; for there are in the hearts of our countrymen of all parties a desire to know the truth and a generous love of fair play.

I am now brought, Mr. Speaker, to the consideration of another most important matter in connexion with the late Presidential canvass. After the nominations in the spring, the Whig party held many large political meetings, at which there was much able and eloquent discussion.—Our orators went through many parts of the country and debated most successfully the principles of the two parties. All this was well, for it secured to our standard a vast majority of the intelligent and reflecting portion of the Union. But this alone as the event has shown, was not sufficient. Resting on the goodness of our cause, the soundness of the principles advocated by us, and the belief that the wisdom of our measures would bring a majority of the voters to the support of our candidate, we neglected that complete organization in detail which was necessary to prevent undue influence and imposition on the voters at the election.

Since the beginning of the world, regularly trained soldiers have always been able to beat raw malitia. Hence, when any one nation keeps up a well disciplined standing army, the neighboring States must adopt a similar system or be overpowered. This truth, so universally admitted with respect to military affairs, has not been generally understood in its bearing on elections in a country like ours. In every part of the Union there are some individuals whose opinions are not so firmly fixed but what they may be changed at or about the time of the election. This may be brought about in various ways. A man naturally irresolute or unstable in his purposes may be persuaded; one not informed as to the principles and conduct of the candidates may be deceived by artful misrepresentation; the dishonest are liable to be biased by improper influences. These classes constitute what is sometimes denominated the floating vote—that is, a vote which is liable to be easily changed from one party to another. It is doubtless largest in the great cities, and varies considerably in different sections. But every where there are those who, by persuasion, misrepresentation, fraud, or other means, may be induced to vote differently from what they intended a short time previous to the election. The number of these individuals is sufficiently large to decide the result in all closely contested elections. Take as an example the great State of N. York in the late Presidential election There were cast in all about four hundred and eighty thousand votes, and the majority for Mr. Polk was some five thousand three hundred. If twenty-seven hundred of those who actually voted for Mr. Polk had changed to Mr. Clay, the electoral vote of the State would have been given to the latter gentleman, and he would have thereby been elected President. Or, upon the supposition that one voter for every one hundred and seventy-five that actually voted had cast a different ballot, it would have varied the result of the election. Taking the whole State over, it will not be questioned by any one that there is a much larger proportion than one hundred and seventy-fifth part of the voters there whose views on political matters were not fixed as to prevent their being influenced at the time of the election. Though of course not unaware of this condition of things to some extent in all the States, yet the Whig party has in the main relied on the justness of its cause and the voluntary exertions of its individual members to counteract improper influences. Our adversaries, however, have been practising on a very different system. They have acquired a skill and discipline in party tactics unknown to any other faction that has existed in this country. Whether this system was perfected in the State of N. York, & brought into the administration of the Federal Government by Mr. V. Buren, as some suppose, I shall not stop to inquire. As at present organized, the so-called Democratic party, though it allows the individuals composing it to profess such opinions on all measures of Legislative policy as they may think it most advantageous to adopt, yet it requires the utmost fidelity in all party manœuvres, especially in elections. To stimulate this feeling, the offices are promised to those who may have rendered the party the most efficient service. Each member is required to stand by his party at all hazards, though in so doing he should act in opposition to the best interests of the country. In turn, the party will stand by him & protect him from the consequences of any crime he may commit provided it be done for the benefit of the party. A thousand instances might be given to establish the truth of this conclusion. I will refer, however, only to a single one, of recent occurrence in my own State. When our Legislature now in session, assembled, there was a tie between the parties in the Senate. Each party was of course desirous of electing a Speaker and other officers. According to the old and well settled law of the State, each member elect was bound to produce before his qualification, the certificate of the Sheriff of his having been elected. But one who claimed to be a Democratic Senator, was not provided with such certificate and the fact became known through the indiscretion of those friends that he consulted in his dilemma. When the time came for the opening of the first day's session, this individual, much to the sur-

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