General Advertiser

REPUBLICAN STAR AND

VOL. XXXII. EASTON, (MD.) TUESDAY MORNING, MARCH 8, 1831. NO. 28...1547.

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED EVERY TUESDAY MORNING
BY
Thomas Perrin Smith.

TERMS

Two Dollars and Fifty Cents per annum, payable half yearly in advance.—No paper can be discontinued until the same is paid for.

ADVERTISEMENTS are inserted three weeks for *One Dollar*, and continued weekly for *Twenty five Cents* per square.

CORRESPONDENCE

Between General Andrew Jackson and John C. Calhoun, President and Vice President of the United States, on the subject of the course of the latter in the deliberations of the Cabinet of Mr. Monroe on the occurences in the Seminole War.

[CONTINUED.]

To the President of the U. States.

WASHINGTON, 29th May, 1830.

SIR: In answering your letter of the 13th inst. I wish to be distinctly understood, that however high my respect is for your personal character, and the exalted station which you occupy, I cannot recognize the right on your part to call in question my conduct on the interesting occasion to which your letter refers. I acted, on that occasion, in the discharge of a high official duty, and under responsibility to my conscience and my country only. In replying then to your letter, I do not place myself in the attitude of apologising for the part I may have acted, or of palliating my conduct on the accusation of Mr Crawford. My course, I trust requires no apology, and if it did, I have too much self-respect to make it to any one in a case touching the discharge of my official conduct. I stand on very different ground I embrace the opportunity which your letter offers, not for the purpose of making excuses, but as a suitable occasion to place my conduct in relation to an interesting public transaction in its proper light; and I am gratified that Mr. Crawford, though far from intending me a kindness, has afforded me such an opportunity.

In undertaking to place my conduct in its proper light, I deem it proper to premise that it is very far from my intention to defend mine, by impeaching yours. Where we have differed, I have no doubt that we differed honestly; and in claiming to act on honorable and patriotic motives myself, I cheerfully accord the same to you.

I know not that I correctly understood your meaning, but after a careful perusal, I would infer from your letter that you had learned for the first time by Mr. Crawford's letter, that you and I placed different constructions on the order under which you acted in the Seminole war; and that you had been led to believe, previously, by my letters to yourself and Governor Bibb, that I concurred with you in thinking that your orders were intended to authorise your attack on the Spanish posts in Florida. Under these impressions, you would seem to impute to me some degree of duplicity, or at least concealment, which required on my part explanation. I hope that my conception of your meaning is erroneous, but if it be not, and your meaning be such as I suppose, I must be permitted to express my surprise at the misapprehension, which, I feel confident, it will be in my power to correct by the most decisive proof drawn from the public documents,* and the correspondence between Mr. Monroe and yourself, growing out of the decision of the cabinet on the Seminole affair, which passed through my hands at the time, and which I now have his permission to use, as explanatory of my opinion, as well as his, and the other members of his administration. To save you the trouble of turning to the file of your correspondence, I have enclosed extracts from the letters, which clearly prove that the decision of the cabinet on the point that your orders did not authorise the occupation of St. Marks and Pensacola, was early and fully made known to you and that I, in particular, concurred in the decision.

Mr. Monroe's letter of the 19 h July, 1818, the first of the series, and written immediately after the decision of the cabinet, and from which I have given a copious extract, enters fully into the views taken by the Executive of the whole subject. In your reply of the 19th of August, 1818, you object to the construction which the administration had placed on your orders, and you assign your reasons at large, why you conceived that the orders under which you acted authorised your operations in Florida. Mr. Monroe replied on the 20th October, 1818, and, after expressing his regret that you had placed a construction on your orders different from what was intended, he invited you to open a correspondence with me, that your conception of the meaning of your orders, and that of the administration, might be placed with the reasons on both sides, on the files of the War Department. Your letter of the 15th of November, in answer, agrees to the correspondence as proposed, but declines commencing it, to which Mr. Monroe replied by a letter of the 21st December, stating his reasons for suggesting the correspondence, and why he thought it ought to commence with you. To these, I have added an extract from your letter of the 7th December, approving Mr. Monroe's message at the opening of Congress, which though not constituting a part of the correspondence from which I have extracted so copiously, is intimately connected with the subject under consideration

But it was not by private correspondence, only that the view which the Executive took of your orders was made known. In his message to the House of Representatives of the 25th March, 1818, long before information of the result of your operation in Florida, was received, Mr. Monroe states, that 'orders had been given to the General in command not to enter Florida, unless it be in pursuit of the enemy, and in that case, to respect the Spanish authority, wherever it may be maintained; and he will be instructed to withdraw his forces from the province, as soon as he has reduced that tribe (the Seminoles) to order, and secured our fellow citizens in that quarter, by satisfactory arrangements against its unprovoked and savage hostilities in future.' In his annual message at the opening of Congress in November of the same year, the President, speaking of your entering Florida says, 'on authorising Major General to enter Florida, in pursuit of the Seminoles, care was taken not to encroach on the rights of Spain.' Again. 'In entering Florida 'to suppress this combination, no idea was entertained of hostility to Spain, and, however justifiable the commanding General was, in consequence of the misconduct of the Spanish officers, in entering St. Marks and Pensacola to terminate it, by proving to the savages, and their associates, that they could not be protected, even there, yet the amicable relation between the United States and Spain could not be altered by that act alone. By ordering the restitution of those posts, those relations were preserved. To a change of them the power of the Executive is deemed incompetent. It is vested in Congress alone.' The view taken of this subject met your entire approbation, as appears from the extract of your letter, of 7th December, 1818, above referred to.

After such full and decisive proof, as it seems to me, of the view of the Executive, I had a right, as I supposed, to conclude that you long since knew that the administration, and myself in particular, were of opinion that the orders under which you acted, did not authorise you to occupy the Spanish posts; but I now infer, from your letter, to which this is an answer, that such conclusion was erroneous, and that you were of the impression till you received Mr. Crawfords letter, that I concurred in the opposite construction, which you gave to your orders that they were intended to authorise you to occupy the posts. You rely for this impression, as I understand you, on certain general expressions in my letter to Governor Bibb, of Alabama, of the 13th of May, 1818 in which I state that 'Gen. Jackson is vested with full powers to conduct the war in the manner he shall judge best,' and also in my letter of the 8th February, 1818; in answer to yours of the 20th January of the same year, in which I acquainted you 'with the entire approbation of the President of all the measures you had adopted to terminate the rupture with the Seminole Indians.'

I will not reason the point, that a letter to Gov. Bibb, which was not communicated to you, which bears date long after you had occupied St. Marks, and subsequent to the time you had determined to occupy Pensacola, (see your letter of June 2d, 1818, to me, published with the Seminole document,) could give you authority to occupy those posts. I know that in quoting the letters, you could not intend such absurdity to authorise such an inference, and I must therefore conclude that it was your intention by the extract to show that, at the time of writing the letter, it was my opinion that the orders under which you did act, were intended to authorise the occupation of the Spanish posts. Nothing could have been more remote from my intention in writing the letter. It would have been in opposition to the view which I have always taken of your orders, and in direct contradiction to the President's message of the 25th March, 1818, communicated but a few weeks before to the House of Representatives, (already referred to,) and which gives a directly opposite construction to your orders. In fact the letter, on its face, proves that it was not the intention of the government to occupy the Spanish posts. By referring to it, you will see that I enclosed to the Governor a copy of my orders to General Gaines, of the 16th December, 1817, authorising him to cross the Spanish line, and to attack the Indians within the limits of Florida unless they should take shelter under a Spanish post, in which event, he was directed to report immediately to the Department, which order Governor Bibb was directed to consider as his authority for carrying the war into Florida, thus clearly establishing the fact that the order was considered still in force, and not superseded by that to you, directing you to assume the command in the Seminole war.

Nor can my letter of the 6th of February be, by any sound rule of construction, interpreted into an authority to occupy the Spanish posts, or as countenancing, on my part, such an interpretation of the orders previously given to you. Your letter of the 20th January, to which mine in an answer, bears date at Nashville, before you set out on the expedition, and consists of a narrative of the measures adopted by you, in order to bring your forces into the field, where they were directed to rendezvous, the time intended for marching, the orders for supplies given to contractors, with other details of the same kind, without the slightest indication of your intention to act against the Spanish posts, and the approbation of the President of the measures you had adopted could be intended to apply to those detailed in your letter. I do not think that your letter of the 13th instant presents the question, whether the Executive or yourself placed the true construction, considered as a military question, on the orders under which you acted. But I must be permitted to say, that the construction of the former is in strict conformity with my intention in drawing up the orders; and that, if they be susceptible of a different construction, it was far from being my intention they should be. I did not then suppose, nor have I ever, that it was in the power of the President, under the constitution, to order the occupation of the posts of a nation with whom we were not at war, (whatever might be the right of the General, under the law of nations, to attack an enemy sheltered under the posts of a neutral power;) and had I been directed by the President to issue such order, I should have been restrained from complying by the higher authority of the constitution, which I had sworn to support. Nor will I discuss the question, whether the order to General Gaines, inhibiting him from attacking the Spanish posts, (a copy of which was sent to you,) was in fact, and according to military usage, an order to you, and of course obligatory until rescinded. Such, certainly, was my opinion. I know that yours was different. You acted on your construction, believing it to be right and, in pursuing the course which I have done; I claim an equal right to act on the construction which I conceived to be correct, knowing it to conform to my intentions in issuing the orders.—But in waiving now the question of the true construction of the orders, I wish it however to be understood, it is only because I do not think it presented by your letter, and not because I have now, or ever had, the least doubt of the correctness of the opinion which I entertain. I have always been prepared to discuss it on friendly terms with you, as appears by the extracts from Mr. Monroe's correspondence, and more recently by my letter to you of the 30th of April, 1828, covering a copy of a letter of Major H. Lee, in which I decline a correspondence that he had requested on the subject of the construction of your orders.

In my letter to Major Lee, I stated that 'as you refer to the public documents only for the construction which the Executive gave to the orders, I infer that on this subject you have not had access to the General's (Jackson's) private papers; but if I be in an error, and if the construction which the administration gave to the orders be not stated with sufficient distinctness in the then President's correspondence with him, I will cheerfully give, as one of the members of the administration, my own views fully in relation to the orders if it be desired by General Jackson; but it is only with him, and at his desire, that under existing circumstances, I should feel myself justified in corresponding on this or any other subject connected with his public conduct:' to which I added, in my letter to you covering a copy of the letter from which the above is an extract, 'with you I cannot have the slightest objection to correspond on this subject, if additional information be desirable.' You expressed no desire for further information, and I took it for granted that Mr. Monroe's correspondence with you, and the public documents, furnished you a full and clear conception of the construction which the Executive gave to your orders; under which impression I remained till I received your letter of the 13th inst.

Connected with the subject of your orders, there are certain expressions in your letter, which, though I am at a loss to understand, I cannot pass over in silence. After announcing your surprise at the contents of Mr. Crawfords letter, you ask whether the information be correct, 'under all of the circumstances, of which you and I are both informed, that any attempt seriously to affect me was moved and sustained by you in cabinet council, when as is known to you, I was executing the wishes of the government.' If by *wishes* which you have underscored, it be meant that there was any intimation given by myself, directly or indirectly, of the desire of the government that you should occupy the Spanish posts, so far from being 'informed,' I had not the slightest knowledge of any such intimation, nor did I ever hear a whisper of any such before. But I cannot imagine that it is your intention to make a distinction between the wishes and the public orders of the government, as I find no such distinction in your correspondence with the President, nor in any of the public documents; but on the contrary it is strongly rebutted by your relying for your justification constantly and exclusively on your public orders. Taking, then, the 'wishes of the government' to be but another expression for its orders, I must refer to the proof already offered, to show that the wishes of the government, in relation to the Spanish posts, were not such as you assume them to be.

Having I trust, satisfactorily established that here has not been the least disguise as to the construction of your orders, I will now proceed to state the part which I took in the deliberations of the cabinet. My statement will be confined strictly to myself, as I do not feel myself justified to speak of the course of the other members of the administration; and, in fact, only of my own in self-defence, under the extraordinary circumstances connected with this correspondence.

And here I must premise, that the object of a cabinet council is not to bring together opinions already formed, but to form opinions on the course which the government ought to pursue, after full and mature deliberation. Meeting in this spirit, the first object is a free exchange of sentiment, in which doubts and objections are freely presented and discussed. It is I conceive, the duty of the members thus to present their doubts and objections, and to support them by offering fully all of the arguments in their power, but at the same time to take care not to form an opinion till all the facts and views are fully brought out, and every doubt and objection carefully weighed. In this spirit I came into the meeting. The questions involved were numerous and important; whether you had transended your orders; if so, what course ought to be adopted, what was the conduct of Spain and her officers in Florida; what was the state of our relations with Spain, and, through her, with the other European powers—a question, at that time, of uncommon complication and difficulty. These questions had all to be carefully examined and weighed, both separately and in connexion, before a final opinion could be wisely formed; and never did I see a deliberation in which every point was more carefully examined, or a greater solicitude displayed to arrive at a correct decision. I was the junior member of the cabinet, and had been but a few months in the administration as Secretary of War. I was more immediately connected with the questions whether you had transended your orders, and, if so, what course ought to be pursued. I was of the impression that you had exceeded your orders and had acted on your own responsibility; but I neither questioned your patriotism nor your motives. Believing that where orders were transended, investigation, as a matter of course, ought to follow, as due in justice to the government and the officer, unless there be strong reasons to the contrary, I came to the meeting under the impression that the usual course ought to be pursued in his case, which I supported by presenting fully and freely all the arguments that occurred to me. They were met by other arguments, growing out of a more enlarged view of the subject, as connected with the conduct of Spain and her officers, and the course of policy which honour and interest dictated to be pursued towards her with which some of the members of the cabinet were more familiar than myself, and whose duty it was to present that aspect of the subject, as it was mine to present that more immediately connected with the military operations. After deliberately weighing every question, when the members of the cabinet came to form their final opinion, on a view of the whole ground, it was unanimously determined*, as I understood in favor of the course adopted, and which was fully made known to you by Mr. Monroe's letter of the 19th of July 1818. I gave it my assent and support, as being that which under all the circumstances, the public interest required to be adopted.

I shall now turn to the examination of the version which Mr. Crawford has given of my course in this important deliberation, beginning with his 'apology for having disclosed what took place in cabinet meeting.' He says, 'In the summer after the meeting, an extract of a letter from Washington was published in a Nashville paper, in which it was stated that I (Mr. Crawford) had proposed to arrest General Jackson, but that he was triumphantly defended by Mr. Calhoun and Mr. Adams. This letter, I always believed, was written by Mr. Calhoun, or by his direction. It had the desired effect; Gen. Jackson became inimical to me and friendly to Mr. Calhoun.'

I am not at all surprised that Mr. Crawford should feel that he stands in need of an apology for betraying the deliberations of the cabinet. It is, I believe, not only the first instance in our country, but one of a very few instances to be found in any country, or any age, that an individual has felt himself absolved from the high obligation which honor and duty impose on one situated as he was. It is not, however, my intention to comment on the morality of his disclosure; that more immediately concerns himself; and I leave him undisturbed to establish his own rules of honor and fidelity, in order to proceed to the examination of a question in which I am more immediately concerned—the truth of his apology.

I desire not to speak harshly of Mr. Crawford, I sincerely commisserate his misfortune. I may be warm in political contests; but it is not in me to retain enmity, particularly towards the unsuccessful. In the political contest which ended in 1825, Mr. Crawford and myself took opposite sides; but whatever feelings of unkindness it gave rise to, have long since passed away on my part. The contest ended in an entire change of the political element of the country; and, in the new state of things which followed, I found myself acting with many of the friends of Mr. Crawford, to whom I had been recently opposed, and opposed to many of my friends, with whom I had, till then, been associated. In this new state of things, my inclination, my regard for his friends who were acting with me, and the success of the cause for which we were jointly contending, all contributed to remove from my bosom every feeling towards him, save that of pity for his misfortune. I would not speak a harsh word, if I could avoid it; and it is a cause of pain to me that the extraordinary position in which he has placed me, compels me, in self-defence, to say any thing which must, in its consequence, bear on his character.

I speak in this spirit when I assert, as I do, that his apology has no foundation in truth. He offers no reason for charging me with so dishonorable an act as that of betraying the proceedings of the cabinet, and that for the purpose of injuring one of my associates in the administration. The charge rests wholly on his suspicion, to which I oppose my positive assertion that it is wholly unfounded. I had no knowledge of the letter, or connection with it; nor do I recollect that I ever saw the extract. But why charge me, and not Mr. Adams? I wish not to be understood as intimating that Mr. Adams had the least connection with the affair. I believe him to be wholly incapable of such baseness. I had then been but a few months in the administration, and Mr. Crawford and myself were on the best terms, without a feeling, certainly on my part, of rivalry or jealousy. In assigning the motive that he does for the letters, he forgets the relation which existed then between you and himself. He says it had the desired effect; that you became friendly to me, and extremely inimical to him. He does not remember that your hostility to him long preceded this period, and had a very different origin. He certainly could not have anticipated that a copy of his letter would be placed in your hand.

These are not the only difficulties accompanying the apology; there are others still more formidable, and which must compel him to assign some other reason for disclosing the proceedings of the cabinet

Mr. McDuffie's letter* to me, of the 14th instant, of which I enclose a copy, proves that Mr. Crawford spoke freely of the proceedings of the cabinet on his way to Georgia, in the summer of 1818, and dates will show that he could not at that time have seen the extract from the Nashville paper, on which he now rests his apology. The deliberation of the cabinet took place between the 14 h and 25 h July, 1818. On the former day, Mr. Monroe returned to Washington from Loudon, and on the latter a general exposition of the views of the Government in relation to the operations in Florida appeared in the Intelligencer. The letter of Mr Monroe to you of the 19th July, 1818, fixes probably the day of the *final* decision of the cabinet. Mr. Crawford passed thro' Augusta on the 11th August, as announced in the papers of that city, on which day, or the preceding, his conversation, to which Mr. McDuffie's letter relates, must have taken place. On a comparison of these dates, you will see that it was impossible that Mr. Crawford could have seen the extract from the Nashville paper when he was in Edgefield, and he must consequently find some other apology for his disclosures. This was not the only instance of his making the disclosures before he saw the extract. He was at Milledgeville on the 10th of August, 1818, a few days after he passed through Augusta, and a little after, there appeared a statement in the Georgia Journal, somewhat varied from that made at Edgefield, but agreeing with it in most of the particulars. I cannot lay my hand on the article, but have a distinct recollection of it. You no doubt remember it. Circumstances fixed it on Mr. Crawford, and it has not to my knowledge, been denied.

With such evidence of inaccuracy, either from want of memory, or some other cause, in what relates to his own motives and actions, it would be unreasonable to suppose that Mr. Crawford's statements will prove more correct in what relates to me. I will now proceed to examine them: He first states that I proposed that you should 'be punished in some form, or reprimanded in some form,' and to make my course more odious, as I suppose, he adds, that 'Mr. Calhoun did not propose to arrest General Jackson.' I will not dwell on a statement which, on its face, is so absurd. How could an officer under our law be punished without arrest and trial? And to suppose that I proposed such a course, would be to rate my understanding very low.

The next allegation requires much more attention. He says, 'indeed my own views on the subject had undergone a material change after the cabinet had been convened. Mr. Calhoun made some allusion to a letter that General Jackson had written to the President, who had forgotten that he had received such a letter, but said if he had received such a one, he would find it, and went directly to his cabinet and brought it out. In it General Jackson approves of the determination of the Government to break up Amelia Island and Galvestown, and gave it also as his opinion that Florida ought to be taken by the United States. He added, it might be a delicate matter for the Executive to decide, but if the President approved of it, he had only to give a hint to some confidential member of Congress, say Johnny Ray, and he would do it, and take the responsibility on himself. I asked the President if the letter had been answered; he replied no; for that he had no recollection of receiving it. I then said that I had no doubt that General Jackson, in taking Pensacola, believed he was doing what the Executive wished. After that letter was produced unanswered, I should have opposed the infliction of punishment on General Jackson, who had considered the silence of the President as a tacit consent; yet it was after the letter was produced and read, that Mr. Calhoun made the proposition to the cabinet for punishing the General.' Again: 'I do not know that I ever hinted at the letter to the President; yet that letter had a most important bearing on the deliberations of the cabinet, at least in my mind, and possibly on the minds of Mr. Adams and the President; but neither expressed any opinion on the subject. It seems it had none on the mind of Mr. Calhoun, for it made no change in his conduct.'

It will be no easy matter for Mr. Crawford to reconcile the statement which he has thus circumstantially made, with his conduct in relation to the Seminole affair, from the time of the decision of the cabinet, till the subject ceased to be agitated.

How will he, in the first instance, reconcile it with his Edgefield statement, of which Mr. McDuffie's letter gives an account? The contrast between that and the present is most striking, to illustrate which, I will give an extract from Mr. McDuffie's letter. Mr. McDuffie's letter says that 'he' (Mr. Crawford) 'stated that you' (Mr. Calhoun) 'had been in favor of an inquiry into the conduct of General Jackson, and that he was the only member of the cabinet that concurred with you. He spoke in strong terms of disapprobation of the course pursued by General Jackson, not only in his military proceedings, but in prematurely bringing the grounds of his defence before the country and forestalling public opinion; thus anticipating the administration. On this point, he remarked, that if the administration could not give direction to public opinion, but permitted a military officer, who had violated his orders, to anticipate them, they had no business to be at Washington, and had better return home.' Such was the language then held, and such his tone of feeling at that time. We hear not one word of the letter which makes so conspicuous a figure in his present statement; not one word of the change it effected in his mind in relation to your conduct; not a word of his taking a course different from me, but, on the contrary, he then stated, directly, that he concurred with me in favoring an inquiry, and indicated no difference on any other point; and so far from exempting you from the charge of breach of orders, as he now attempts to do, he asserted, positively, that you had violated your orders. Shall we find an explanation of the contrast in the two statements in the difference of his motives then and now? Is his motive now to injure me, and was it then to attack another member of the administration? Or must it be attributed, as the more charitable interpretation, to the decay of memory? Whatever may be the true explanation, all will agree that a statement, when events were fresh in the memory, is to be trusted in preference to one made twelve years after the transaction, particularly if the former accords with after events, and the latter does not, as is the case in this instance. At the next session of Congress, your conduct in the Seminole war was severely attacked in both branches of the legislature. Let us see if the course pursued by Mr. Crawford and his personal and confidential friends, can be reconciled to the statement which he now gives of his course in the cabinet. Mr. Cobb, of Georgia now no more, was then a prominent member of the House of Representatives. He was the particular, personal, and confidential friend of Mr. Crawford, his near neighbor, and formerly a law student under him. What part did he take? He led the attack; he moved the resolutions against you; he accused you expressly of the violation of your orders, and sustained the accusation with all his powers.* All this accords with Mr. Crawford's statement of his sentiment and his course at the time; but how can it be reconciled to his present statement? How could he, on any principle of justice, stand by and hear you thus falsely accused; in the face of the world, when he, according to his showing now, knew that it was all false? And how can he reconcile his silence then, when you stood so much in need of his assistance, with his disclosures now, when the agitation has long since passed away, and his aid no longer required? But let us turn to the other branch of the Legislature, and see whether any occurrence there can explain this apparent mystery. General Lacock, of Pennsylvania, the particular friend of Mr. Crawford, and in the habit of constant intercourse with him, was the chairman of the committee in that body to whom the part of the message which related to the Seminole war was referred. Mr. Forsyth, then and now a Senator from Georgia, and who now acts a prominent part in the transaction which has given rise to the present correspondence, was also a member, and was then, as he is now, an intimate personal and political friend of Mr. Crawford. With two such able and influential friends on the committee, he had the most favorable opportunity that could be offered to do you justice. According to his own statement, he felt no obligation to observe silence in relation to the proceedings of the cabinet. Why, then, did he not interpose with his friends on the committee to do you justice? That he did not, I need not offer you arguments to prove. The report of the committee is sufficient testimony. Should he say that he was restrained by feelings of delicacy from interfering with his friends on the committee, how will he reconcile, on the principles of justice and honor, his silence after the report so severely assailing your motives and conduct was made, when, admitting his present statement, it was completely in his power to shield you from censure?

But why should I waste time and words to prove that Mr. Crawfords whole course is in direct conflict with his present statement of the proceedings of the cabinet, when there remains an objection that cannot be surmounted? The statement is entirely destitute of foundation. It is not true. Strange as it may appear, after an account so minute and circumstantial, no

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*See appendix from A to F inclusive, being an extract from a private correspondence between Mr. Monroe and Gen. Jackson in the Seminole campaign.

**Acquiesced* would probably be more correct at least as applicable to one member of the cabinet.

*The letter of the Hon. George McDuffie, Appendix marked G.

*See Appendix H and J, Letters from Hon. Robert Garrett, and of the Hon. John S. Barbour.

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