



THE "FREE PRESS,"

By George Howard,

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COMMUNICATIONS.

To the Editor of the Free Press.

Sir: I discover in your last (8th) paper an attack upon Mr. CRAWFORD, under the signature of "Numa." Will you be so good as to publish the piece, in the enclosed paper, (*National Intelligencer*, Dec. 23, 1823,) in reply to the *Rhode-Island American*. I think it goes fully to shew the claims of Mr. Crawford to the Presidency.

Mr. Crawford may be, and no doubt is, possessed of some qualities, natural and acquired, which would be capable of beneficial exertion, in the exalted station for which he is a competitor. The same admission may be made as to thousand of our citizens, who in the most fantastic dreams of ambition, never yet aspired to the Chief Magistracy of the United States. A man truly worthy of the first office in the gift of the American people, should possess some positive recommendation to their favor. What are the pretensions of Mr. Crawford? He has been long before his countrymen, and has reached that period of life, when, according to prevalent notions, a man is supposed to possess the most ripened and energetic powers. In what display of senatorial eloquence or wisdom, in what trial of diplomatic learning and skill, in what official record of financial ability, are the American people to look for the proof of those powerful and versatile talents, which Mr. C. is alleged by his partisans to possess? He has discharged various offices, and he now occupies an elevated post in the government. This, we grant, is a proof that he is not without talents—but does it establish his claims to the Presidency? Is elevation always the reward of talents and virtues, unsupported by adventitious and other circumstances, of the influence of which in deciding the destinies of political men, we are daily presented with the most mortifying examples? Notwithstanding Mr. Crawford has been so long on the stage of action, with opportunities of exhibiting himself to advantage in the various walks of a Statesman, the interrogatory is still current in every section of the Republic, What has he either said or done, to entitle him to the illustrious honor which is now claimed for him at the hands of his countrymen?—*Rhode-Island American*.

There is so much injustice done to the character of Mr. Crawford, by articles like the above, the substance of which, in different shapes, has of late frequently met our eyes, that we should be wanting, even in common candor, were we longer to remain silent observers of it. We are the less reluctant to break silence upon it, seeing that Mr. Crawford continues to be the mark at which the friends of the other candidates for the Presidency have drawn their sharpest arrows, and that he is the only candidate for the Presidency whose various merits have not been portrayed to the world in all the attractive hues of fancy, as well as the more

sober and subdued tints of truth. Far be it from us to depreciate the real merits and acknowledged qualifications of either of the other candidates for the highest office in the government, or to question their claims to public favor. One only of them can gain the prize; but it is honor enough for any man to be publicly regarded as a fair candidate for the highest mark of confidence that ten millions of freemen can give. Of that honor, we rejoice that so many among us are considered worthy.

It is our opinion, that no man ought to be placed at the head of this nation, to elevate whom it is necessary to depress or degrade other competitors. It is for this reason, and because we consider the reputation of our great men as public property, that we avoid any thing that shall have even the appearance of derogating from it.

"What," says the article before us, "are the pretensions of Mr. Crawford?" This inquiry, wherever made, argues an ignorance, on the part of the querist, of the incidents of the most interesting period of the history of his country. Nor is this surprising, when we look at the youthful age of some of those who most pertinaciously repeat this note, and at the fact that others of them have arrived in our country too recently to be expected to know much of its political history, or of the merits of our public men. In making this remark, of course we consider queries of this description not as indirect expressions of falsehood,* but as the expressions of an honest desire for the information which they ask for. With as much directness and accuracy as a rapid pen and an indifferent memory will allow, we will endeavor to impart it to them.

From the first entry of WILLIAM H. CRAWFORD into public life, we have been near and close observers of his public career; and for some twelve years past we have considered him as a man marked out by Nature for eminence among a free people.

Scarcely had he set his foot in the Senate of the United States, in December, 1807, being his first appearance in the General Government, when he distinguished himself by the active and manly part which he took in its deliberations—by "Senatorial eloquence" and Senatorial "wisdom" too. The display of these gifts, with the qualities of stern integrity and fearless independence which are prevailing ingredients in his character, commanded the respect and conciliated the confidence of the august body of which he was a member. It was not a single flowery speech, a popular proposition, or a blind devotion to party, but a succession of evidences of the strength of his mind, the solidity of his judgment, and the propriety of his personal deportment, that secured for him a character, which no man who was then in the councils of his country, or had an opportunity of watching them, will pretend to deny. If

* *Suppressio veri est expressio falsi*, as a venerable member of the last Congress was wont to say.

these traits of him have faded in the memory of some, or are new to others, it is because for the last nine or ten years (a third of the usual term of the life of man) he has been secluded from the view of his fellow citizens in the chambers of the Executive offices, where he has labored in the public service with unostentatious zeal and untiring assiduity. Of the esteem in which he was held by his compeers in the Senate of the United States, a decisive evidence was afforded by his being selected to preside over the Senate in the year of the war, a few months before its declaration, when the Vice-President, as is usual before the close of every session, had retired for the purpose of allowing a temporary President to be chosen. This is an honor never inconsiderately or lightly bestowed. It never has been bestowed, we believe, except in the case of Mr. Crawford, on a man as young as he then was, and the selection was an incontestible tribute to unquestioned merit. As far as the mere honor goes, the chair of President of the Senate, and that of Speaker of the House of Representatives, are almost as enviable stations as that of President of the United States. To be held in high esteem by those who are themselves most esteemed among the people, is an object worthy of the ambition of a Republican.

We shall not now burthen our columns with quotations from the Speeches of Mr. Crawford at this period of his life. His reputation does not rest upon the turn of a period, or a figure of speech, nor can it fall by one.* It soars above such tests. But, if those who are curious in these matters will consult the files of the *National Intelligencer* from 1808 to 1812, inclusive, they may find some of his Speeches reported which did great honor to him at that time, and may be read with pleasure and improvement now, as examples at once of deep reflection, vigorous thought, and spirit-stirring eloquence.

Mr. C. was in Congress at the critical and momentous periods of the embargo and the war of 1812. His enemies have objected to him that he was opposed to the first, and was not among the most hasty to embark in the latter. Firmness, not rashness, is the distinguishing characteristics of Mr. Crawford. Although he voted against the Embargo, because he thought the necessary time for deliberation upon it was refused, yet, when the Embargo was laid, he gave it his most efficient aid. We well remember the indignant strain in which he denounced its violators, and the energy with which he supported the measures for its enforcement. Of the war he was one of the firmest supporters. He completely identified himself with the cause of his country, by his zeal and enthusiasm in

*The greatest share of the conscientious opposition to Mr. Crawford, at this day, is attributable to a hasty phrase at the close of a Report, made by him to Congress, on the subject of the condition of the Indians, which has been twisted, by hypercritics, into every meaning but that which was intended.

its behalf. Of this, were such matter fit for the newspapers, we recollect at this moment several proofs, being incidents not in the Halls of Congress, but in the private walks of life, where enthusiasm has greater play than in grave legislative assemblies.

It was about this time that, on the Department of War becoming vacant by the resignation of Mr. Eastis, the situation of Secretary of War was offered to Mr. Crawford by the President. This offer Mr. C. declined to accept, on the ground that the business of that office in time of war required an acquaintance with military affairs which he did not possess, and he could not consent to jeopardize the public safety by taking upon himself the discharge of duties for which he felt that he was not qualified. Being, as we heard in the time of these occurrences, further urged, he peremptorily declined the office, on the same ground, adding, however, that, to shew his attachment to the public cause, and to the administration of Mr. Madison, there was no other duty to which he could be called, that he was not called to undertake, where his services should be thought useful. Shortly afterwards, the mission to France became vacant, by the death of that revolutionary whig and consistent patriot Joel Barlow. It was necessary, at that crisis, to send to Europe some citizen, eminent in the national councils, who would truly, faithfully, and undauntedly represent the American character and interests in France, then the theatre of great events. This trust Mr. Madison, devolved on Mr. Crawford, who, after what had passed, could not, if he would, have declined the acceptance of this second appeal from that virtuous and upright man. A more distinguished proof could hardly be afforded of the estimation in which Mr. C. was held by the first men and the purest politicians of the country, at that day, than these repeated marks of the confidence in him with which his public course had inspired Mr. Madison.

In the spring of 1813, if we are right, Mr. Crawford, separating himself from his family and domestic concerns, and encountering the risk of capture by the enemy, passed over to Paris, and there remained in the capacity of Minister of the United States, until after the termination of the war and the restoration of the Bourbons, when he returned to his country, bringing with him, as we have read, the respect and esteem of all who knew him there, but particularly of La Fayette, the almost only remaining republican of France.

Never having enjoyed the advantage of intimacy with Mr. Crawford—our knowledge of him being chiefly confined to his public course—we cannot say what were his views in resigning his foreign mission. If his object was, as we believe it to have been, besides re-uniting himself to his family, to return to the profession, the pursuit of which had been interrupted, to the injury of his private fortune, by his public engagements, he was diverted from it by an invi-

tation from Mr. Madison to enter his cabinet, as the successor of Mr. Dallas, in the Department of War. Of his conduct in this station we never heard any thing but what was to his credit. He was the author of many measures for reforming the abuses which in time of war had crept into the military service, and for giving efficiency and character to the Army, which had then just been reduced to a peace establishment. The promptitude and decision of his character here found ample scope.

In the next year, Mr. Madison, having his confidence in Mr. Crawford increased by a nearer view of him, appointed him to the Treasury Department, when that office became vacant. For presiding over this Department, Mr. Crawford was particularly qualified by his strict notions of right, and his tenacity in adhering to them. [If he has a fault as a public man, it is, perhaps, the carrying these principles too far.] It was by his agency, principally, with the co-operation of Mr. Monroe and the other cabinet officers, that the Accounting Offices were re-modelled, to give them that efficiency which they now possess. The office of Secretary of the Treasury, in a settled government, in time of peace, affords little opportunity for display. Not like the field which is opened by the establishment of a new and untried system of government, in which a Hamilton gathered renown, or that of national embarrassment and temporary insolvency, where a Dallas earned the admiration of all who knew his situation, and saw his almost incredible exertion of talent and industry—the administration of the Treasury in time of peace is necessarily almost entirely barren of incident and attraction: it presents a dry routine of duties, which, however necessary to be performed, do not, when best executed, afford eclat, or elicit popular applause. A few reports, however, on general subjects, Mr. C. has had an opportunity of making since he has been in the Treasury Department, and those reports, as well as such of his official letters as we have seen, are characterized by the same strength of mind and originality of thought which are to be found in his reported Speeches in Congress.

When we say that Mr. Crawford was, in 1816, the only person thought worthy to compete with Mr. Monroe as a candidate for the Presidency;* that, tho'

*We have not dwelt upon the magnanimity displayed by Mr. Crawford at that time, in withdrawing from competition with the last of the Revolutionary Worthies, but cannot help quoting from our files, to refresh the memory of our readers, the language of Mr. C. on that occasion, as stated by the late lamented Mr. Bibb, thro' the medium of the *National Intelligencer*:

"In consequence of repeated inquiries whether Mr. Crawford was to be considered among the competitors, accompanied with a desire that his views should be ascertained, I communicated to him what had passed. He replied, without reserve, that he did not consider himself among the number of those from whom the selection ought to be made, and that he was unwilling to be held up as a competitor for that office."