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THE TARIFF.

Speech of William B. Shepard,
OF NORTH CAROLINA.

Delivered in the House of Representatives,
January 29th, 1833, on the motion of
Mr. Huntington to strike out the 31st
and 32d Sections of the TARIFF
BILL, imposing a duty on Tea and
Coffee.

MR. CHAIRMAN,
I moved last night that the Committee should rise, not because I had any thing to say, that could not be as well said then as now, or that I had not as lief say then as now, but because I had not the physical ability after a session of six hours, to give coherency to the few ideas, with which it is my intention to trouble the Committee. I am well aware that every gentleman here is desirous of disposing of this tedious subject, without more debate; none can be more tired of it than I am.

Man has been denominated by some enthusiastic admirers of political economy, an animal that makes exchanges, he has here been called a plundering animal; were I permitted to add one to the many definitions which have been given by the philosophers of that singular creature, I should say, he is an animal that makes Tariff speeches. The definition would undoubtedly characterize him, as he is known in the United States, more particularly on this floor—here "docti indoctique," we all speak on this subject; I shall, therefore, make no apology to the House for indulging in a national propensity—

to labor in a manly manner, however, I believe that the subject is too important to me, to be treated with levity.

Subject of fear, and its adjustment, of intellect, Sir, I must require, especially, to be diddy and feebly, the subject of this great responsibility rests on the members of this House, a responsibility which, if we fail now to meet, we have abandoned the high trust committed to our care.

The United States exhibit, at this time, a spectacle hitherto unseen and unknown upon earth, one that for the credit of humanity, is to be hoped will never occur again; a people endowed with all that Heaven or earth can bestow to make them happy and contented, abounding in every thing essential to prosperity, and even grandeur, among the nations of the world (if the term is not offensive to some around me) and yet amidst all these blessings, we daily hear it proclaimed in high places, we are on the eve of revolution. A revolution to put down what? Some usurper living on the exhalation of the community? Some conqueror reveling in the spoils of vanquished provinces, snatching from wealth its abundance, from poverty its pittance, to swell the pride, the pomp and power of an individual? No, Sir! a revolution to put down the power of the majority of the people themselves—a revolution which I can compare to nothing in the history of the madness and folly of mankind, but the infidel fury of the anarchists of France, who desecrated the temple of the only true God, to erect what they called the statue of reason in its stead. The nations of Europe are now contending for self government; we seem to be getting tired of it; they are contending against the will and dominion of one man; some here complain of the dominion of the many. What, on the other side of the Atlantic, is called by an admiring world the beau ideal of liberty, I have heard on this floor pronounced the perfection of despotism. Such, alas, is the unhappy, the miserable condition of poor human nature!

Whatever may be the final action of Congress upon the subject of the revenue, nothing should be done without caution and deliberation, and after a careful inspection of our commercial, agricultural and manufacturing situation, upon our decision of this question rests the prosperity of every man in the community.—I look, Sir, upon the man who would discover these three great interests, in dissoluble in their natural affinities, and essential to the prosperity of every great nation, as a mere empiric, a political quack whose nostrums may momentarily infuse vigor into the body politic, but e-

ventually leave it haggard and depressed. And unless the hickie legislation of Congress is to be the reproach of our institutions, and the curse of the people of this country, we ought to place this matter on such a basis, that hereafter, every man may rest secure, himself and his property being under the protection of equal, just, and permanent laws. For, if there is a tyranny more peculiarly hard to bear, more harassing to the spirit, it is that of fluctuating legislation; its oppression is more severe from being unexpected; no industry can obviate it, no sagacity can foresee it.

When the tariff laws of 1824 and 1828 were under discussion, it was contended with great force and justice by the anti-tariff party, that all free governments should interfere as little as possible with the domestic arrangements and industry of its citizens, that all material changes in the policy of a nation, the object of which was the transferring capital from one occupation to another, should be made with great caution, and only on great emergencies. If these propositions are true, of such governments generally, they are still more worthy of attention in a government like ours, which is of strictly enumerated powers, and dependent for its stability on public opinion—in a government where the fashion of today may be repudiated by tomorrow, and an investment of capital, made under the sanction of the national legislature, may be prostrated by a hickie legislation, influenced by the whim and caprice of the moment, or the varying policy and interest of rival political parties. It was upon such principles of general reasoning, that I am now, and always have been, opposed to the policy of the tariff

which might such a system ought not to be permitted to follow such a course. That if by this system, the property, they are exposed to the loss of ordinary wealth, a state of little congenial with plain institutions. I thought, like the policy of protective laws, the tariff of 1828 was an unjust and inexpedient, it attempted to embrace subjects of opposite characters, with one hand it gave a bounty, with the other it imposed a tax upon the same thing, showing, as has been correctly observed by the anti-tariff memorial, that where there was "an avowed want of information on the subject, it would have been a wiser course to wait until that information was obtained." In fact, Sir, the tariff of 1828 was not intended by many of those who assisted in making it, to aid peculiarly any species of manufacture except that of a President, and we are now reaping the bitter fruits of such legislation.

The act, however, has passed; it was imposed on the country for weal, or for woe; it has disappointed in some measure the hopes of its friends, and the predictions of its enemies; it is recorded among your laws, and no human power can place the country in the same situation it was in, prior to its passage.

The question now however, is not one of laying on, but of taking off duties; we are enquiring how we shall provide for the present posture of affairs, our national debt is about to be paid off, we shall have upon our hands a large surplus revenue, how shall we relieve the country from the anticipated danger of this alarming plethora? We are told by some of our statesmen—I beg pardon of the shades of the illustrious men who once bore that name—I meant some of our politicians, that the national legislature cannot be trusted with one dollar more than the bare necessities, the stern exigencies of the government require.—Bargain, intrigue and corruption, we are told, will still barefaced and uncovered throughout this hall, unless speedily prevented. I have not yet, Sir, lost all confidence in republican institutions; I do not believe the people of this country are yet sufficiently corrupted to send members to this House, base enough, either to barter away their liberty or squander their money; when I do believe it, I shall think representative governments a mere delusion. I have, however, no objection, that gentlemen should estimate their power of resisting temptation, by whatever standard they please.

It is impossible at this period to discuss this matter of the tariff exclusively on its own merits; it has become so intermingled with all the political questions of the times, has been the cause of so much excitement, that it is thrust into

every question and relation in society.—In the few discursive remarks which I intend making on this subject, I hope the committee will pardon me, if in following the examples of others, I talk about that subject most interesting to myself. It may very properly be asked why this inordinate desire, at this session of Congress, to hurry through the House a bill of such vast importance as this evidently is? The bill of July, 1832 has not yet gone into operation; no man can tell its precise effect upon the revenue of the country. Has that bill been found to deceive its friends in reducing the revenue? I will trouble the Committee with a few words in relation to that measure: I am more inclined to do so, because I perceive it is about to be murdered in the womb, and before the final blow is struck, I will do it an act of passing justice. Having voted for that bill, in company with a large majority of my colleagues, and a majority of the Southern delegation, as a bill to reduce the revenue of the government and to relieve the people from the pressure of the tariff system, I am surprised to find endeavorers very industriously made to circulate a belief, that so far from alleviating the burdens of the South, they are aggravated by that bill. I saw an article in the Telegraph, of this city, published a few days ago addressed to the people of Georgia, and bearing among others the signature of a gentleman on this floor, [Mr. Clayton] containing the following words: "The character of the act of 1832 is distinctly marked. Its diminished credits, its requisition of cash payments, its increase of the value of the pound sterling, its discriminating duties will show that the burdens imposed upon you are decidedly increased, yet you are told that this act is a concession—an effort to moderate the burdens of the South; that, like the travelled dove, it comes with the olive branch to give you future security. The treacherous kiss of Judas is not more desecrating a concession with the odious principle of protection retained as the permanent policy of the government! No, it is no concession, its object is rather to lull you into a false security." This paper, although addressed to the people of Georgia, is evidently intended for the whole South, and conveys an imputation upon the intelligence of integrity of every Southern anti-tariff gentleman who voted for the bill of 1832. As one of those individuals, I am not disposed that the slightest taint of inconsistency shall be attached to any vote of mine to gratify any man, any set of men, or any party whatever. Upon the subject of this tariff, I have acted upon but one set of principles, and upon those same principles, I intend to continue to act.

This is a repetition of a charge contained in an address published by the S. Carolina delegation shortly after the close of the last session, and circulated very generally throughout the southern country. These loving appeals to one's constituents are not generally fair subjects of criticism; they are intended for the partial eye of friendship, some of those names attached to these statements are, however so notorious in connection with this tariff matter, that they carry great weight with them, among two thirds of the people south of the Potomac, it therefore becomes necessary that even small errors, such as great minds inadvertently make, should at once be corrected. It is very idle to say, that the tariff bill of 1832, recognized the principle of protection; it recognized it no more, and no less, than every act for reducing revenue, or raising revenue has done since the organization of the government, the allegation therefore is merely gratuitous. As regards "diminished credits and cash payments," the impolicy of the existing law was so satisfactorily shown, by the memorial of the anti-tariff convention that I voted to repeal it, in compliance with the unanimous wish as expressed in the memorial of the southern people.

Another source of lamentation is "the increased value of the pound sterling."—By the law of 1799 regulating the value of foreign coins, the pound sterling of England was estimated to be worth \$4 44 of our currency; owing to the fluctuation in the relative value of gold and silver its real value had become \$4 80 cts. I voted to put it at its true and real value, because I like to call things by their right names; I had, however, a still better reason, when I voted for a bill laying a duty of 10, 15, or 25 per cent, when I assist in publishing to the world that such a duty has been laid, I am desirous of dealing candidly and fairly with the public. I would not assist in

granting a boon in the first part of an instrument, and insert a condition in the latter part rendering the boon valueless. To have pursued a different course might have evinced more political cunning, but would not have added much to the reputation of the American Congress; as one of the humblest of its members, I am willing to share the blame of this measure.

The bill of July, however, it is said, makes discriminating duties; it releases luxuries from taxation, and throws the burden of supporting the government upon the necessities of life, it oppresses the poor, "this is pitiful, 'tis wondrous pitiful," and doubtless has been the foundation of many a moving address and eloquent harangue. It may have been said in the furious language of the day, that grinding, cruel, and unrelenting majority of Congress, insensible to the miseries and suffering of an oppressed people, have had the unprecedented, enormous, and daring effrontery to grant to a high toned and chivalrous people, their wa and coffee without tax. Horrible as this charge seems to be, and alarming as it is to a conscientious man, it is very easy to show that it comes with a very bad grace from the source it does; and as applicable to the state of things in the South, has little or no foundation. It is difficult in a country so prosperous as every part of the United States is to draw a distinction between luxuries and necessities in every community, they are merely relative terms, in rude and savage states of society necessities are such articles as sustain existence; as society advances in refinement what was formerly a luxury becomes a necessity. I would here remark that the argument of the honorable gentleman near me [Mr. Choate] that the southern people, in proportion to their wealth and population, are non-consumers, is literally true.

It is perfectly well known to every gentleman familiar with the domestic arrangements of the mass of the southern people, that two thirds of them are clad in their own domestic manufactures; I have known many planters, the owners of large families of slaves, who purchase nothing from the stores but iron, salt, tea, coffee, sugar, and a few other trifling articles of luxury or convenience. Now, is it not more important to these men that they should purchase such articles as tea and coffee cheaply, which are of daily and constant use, than the broad cloths of England; the latter surely are not so essential to their comfort, and the want of them is not depriving them of an article upon which they set much value? They prefer their own domestic manufactures, and I hope the day never will arrive when the loom and the spindle are to be silent around the hearths of our fathers; to me there is no sight more cheering, than that of a family clad entirely by its own labor; it presents a spectacle of substantial comfort and sturdy independence, not surpassed in any quarter of the globe. I confess I never visit such scenes, without returning from them elevated and purified in feeling; I go back in imagination to other times, when the men of homespun were legislating in your halls of Congress and fighting the battles of the revolution. So long as the Federal Government's tax gatherer does not cross the doors of this worthy class of society, they are independent of its legislation; secure in the "noiseless tenor of their way," they are happy, unmolested by the visions of avarice, or the dreams of ambition. If this distinction between necessities and luxuries were substantially true, who has any right to complain? If luxuries tend to elevate man in the scale of social existence; if they follow in the march of civilization and make a part of it, why in a government of equals should not every thing that tends to refine our natures, to smooth the asperities of life and elevate man in the scale of animated beings, be placed within the reach of the poorest individual in society?

Having disposed of the morality of this matter, let us now look to its logic. I will not take up the tariff bill of 1832, and comparing it with the act of 1828 ask gentleman if a reduction of the duties on iron, on cotton goods, on sugar, on woollen cloths, on negro clothing, on blankets, &c. was not a reduction of the duties on the necessities of life, this would be confuting them by the plain rule of subtraction, a species of argument utterly beneath gentlemen, who deal in the subtilties of metaphysics; I will take the rule they themselves have furnished.

The theory which has produced

such excitement in one portion of the South against the tariff, and which I presume is believed by all those who condemn the act of 1832, if we include the ultra tariff men, who by their associations in that vote, illustrate the truth of the proposition, that the extremes are ever nearer together, than the means, is thus expounded by one of its ablest supporters, [Report Committee of Ways and Means by Mr. McDuffie, February 8, 1832.] "As the restrictions imposed upon the production of southern industry are affected by the agency of indirect taxes, the burdens imposed upon the planting States by the protecting system, are not very inaccurately measured by the amount of taxes levied upon their productions. And when the inequality of the government disbursements are added to the inequality of contributions exacted by import duties it may be confidently affirmed that the burdens imposed upon the planting States by the taxation, prohibition and disbursements of the federal government are more than equal to the amount of taxes levied upon those imports which are obtained in exchange for the three great agricultural staples of cotton, tobacco and rice. That a duty upon an import is equivalent to the same amount of duty upon the export which has been exchanged for it, is but a self evident proposition to all who correctly comprehend its import. The planting States, accordingly, affected by the tariff, are not only burdened by the

present occasion, the growers of rice cotton and tobacco, which articles constitute two thirds of the American productions exchanged for foreign goods, pay two thirds of the gross amount of duties charged on foreign importations, or as has been estimated 40 per cent, a per cent somewhat below the true amount, let us apply this rule to the reduction of duties by the tariff of 1832, to ascertain the relief yielded to the rice, cotton and tobacco men: if the reduction of the revenue by the bill of July, 1832, amounted to \$5,187,978, as was estimated by the Treasury Department, the relief to those individuals exclusively, was \$2,074,831. Is this no relief to this class of society? They must know otherwise, if they honestly believe they bear so large a share of the burden; and if we take into consideration the small class of individuals even in the South, directly interested in the production of these articles, the relief to them, under this view of their case and by that bill, was of vast importance. But, Sir, what becomes of this oppression on the poor? Are the poor the growers of rice, cotton and tobacco, or was it intended as a mere figure of speech, a pathetic appeal.

Spargere ambiguas voces
In vulgum.

Had I voted against the bill, believing this modern doctrine, I should have felt myself bound, as a consistent man, to have gone home and told my constituents, that a proposition was made in Congress to relieve them from two millions of their burdens, which I had rejected with scorn, but that I had brought them the glorious remedy of nullification. I knew the temper of that people too well,—I know they are devotedly attached to the Union of these States, as the last hope of liberty upon earth, and that they were not inclined to jeopard it, upon a doubtful point of political economy. Whenever, sir, I persuade the people whom I repre-

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