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DEBATE IN THE SENATE.

Speech of Mr. Calhoun,

IN REPLY TO MR. CLAY,

On the Sub-Treasury Bill.

March 10, 1838.

(Continued.)

The Senator next proceeds to state, that in a certain document (if he named it, I did not hear him) I assigned as a reason why I could not join in the attack on the Administration, that the benefit of the victory would not ensue to myself, or my party, or, as he explained himself, because it would not place myself and them in power. I presume he referred to a letter, in answer to an invitation to a public dinner offered me by my old and faithful friends and constituents of Edgefield, in approbation of my course at the extra session.

[Mr. CLAY. I do.]

The pressure of domestic engagements would not permit me to accept their invitation, and, in declining it, I deemed it due to them and myself to explain my course, in its political and party bearing, more fully than I had done in debate. They had a right to know my reasons, and I expressed myself with the frankness due to the long and uninterrupted confidence which had ever existed between us.

Having made these explanatory remarks, I now proceed to meet the assertion of the Senator, and I again take issue on the fact. I assigned no such reason as the Senator attributes to me. I never dreamed or thought of such a one; nor can any force of construction extort it from what I said. No; my object was not power or place, either for myself or party. It was far more humble and honest. It was to save ourselves and our principles from being absorbed and lost in a party more numerous and powerful, but differing from us on almost every principle and question of policy.

When the suspension of specie payments took place in May last (not expected to me,) I immediately turned my attention to the event earnestly, considering it as an event pregnant with great and lasting consequences. Reviewing the whole ground, I saw nothing to change in the opinions and principles I had avowed in 1834, and I determined to carry them out, as far as circumstances and my ability would enable me. But I saw that my course must be influenced by the position which the two great contending parties might take in reference to the question. I did not doubt that the Opposition would rally either on a national bank, or a combination of state banks, with Biddle's at the head; but I was wholly uncertain what course the Administration would adopt, and remained so till the message of the President was received and read by the Secretary at his table. When I saw he went for a divorce, I never hesitated a moment. Not only my opinions and principles long entertained, and, as I have shown, fully expressed years ago, but the highest political motives, left me no alternative. I perceived, at once, that the object, to accomplish which we had acted in concert with the opposition, had ceased; Executive usurpations had come to an end for the present; and that the struggle with the Administration was no longer for power, but to save ourselves. I also clearly saw, if we should unite with the Opposition in their attack on the Administration, the victory over them in the position they occupied, would be a victory over us and our principles. It required no sagacity to see that such would be the result. It was as plain as day. The Administration had taken position, as I have shown, on the very ground I occupied in 1834, and which the whole State-rights party had taken at the same time in the other house, as its journals will prove. The Opposition, under the banner of the bank, were moving against them for the very reason that they had taken the ground they did.

Now, I ask, what would have been the result if we had joined in the attack? No one can now doubt that the victory over those in power would have been certain and decisive, nor would the consequences have been the least doubtful. The first fruit would have been a national bank. The principles of the Opposition and the very object of the attack would have necessarily led to that. We would have been too feeble to resist, but would have been committed by joining in the attack with its avowed object to go for one, while those who support the Administration would have been scattered in the winds. We should then have had a bank, that is clear; nor is it less certain, that in its train there would have followed all the consequences that have and ever will follow, when tried—high duties, over-demanding revenue, extravagant expenditures, large surpluses; in a word, all those disastrous consequences which have

well near overthrown our institutions, and involved the country in its present difficulties. The influence of the institution, the known principles and policy of the Opposition, and the utter prostration of the Administration party, and the absorption of ours, would have led to these results as certainly as we exist.

I now appeal, Senators, to your candor and justice, and ask, could I, having all these consequences before me, with my known opinions and that of the party to which I belong, and to which only I owe fidelity, have acted differently from what I did? Would not any other course have justly exposed me to the charge of having abandoned my principles and party, with which I am now accused so unjustly? Nay, would it not have been worse than folly—been madness in me, to have taken any other? And yet, the grounds which I have assumed in this exposition are the very reasons assigned in my letter, and which the Senator has perverted most unfairly and unjustly into the pitiful, personal and selfish reason, which he has attributed to me. Confirmative of what I say, I again appeal to the record. The Secretary will read the paragraph marked in the Edgefield letter, to which, I presume, the Senator alluded.

"As soon as I saw this state of things, I clearly perceived that a very important question was presented for our determination, which we were compelled to decide forthwith—shall we continue our joint attack with the Nationals on those in power, in the new position which they have been compelled to occupy? It was clear, with our joint forces, we could utterly overthrow and demolish them; but it was not less clear that the victory would ensue, not to us, but exclusively to the benefit of our allies and their cause. They were the most numerous and powerful, and the point of assault on the position which the party to be assaulted had taken in relation to the banks, would have greatly strengthened the settled principles and policy of the National party, and weakened, in the same degree, ours. They are, and ever have been, the decided advocates of a national bank, and are now in favor of one with a capital so ample as to be sufficient to control the state institutions, and to regulate the currency and exchanges of the country. To join them, with their avowed object, in the attack to overthrow those in power, on the ground they occupied against a bank, would, of course, not only have placed the Government and country in their hands without opposition, but would have committed us beyond the possibility of extrication, for a bank, and absorbed our party in the ranks of the National Republicans. The first fruits of the victory would have been an overshadowing national bank, with an immense capital, not less than from fifty to an hundred millions, which would centralize the currency and exchanges, and with them the commerce and capital of the country, in whatever section the head of the institution might be placed. The next would be the indissoluble union of the political opponents, whose principles and policy are so opposite to ours, and so dangerous to our institutions as well as oppressive to us."

I now ask, is there any thing in this extract which will warrant the construction that the Senator has attempted to force on it? Is it not manifest that the expression on which he fixes, that the victory would ensue, not to us, but exclusively to the benefit of the Opposition, alludes not to power or place, but to principle and policy? Can words be more plain? What then becomes of all the aspersions of the Senator, his reflections about selfishness and the want of patriotism, and his allusions and illustrations to give them force and effect? They fall to the ground without deserving a notice, with his groundless accusation.

But, in so premeditated and indiscriminate an attack, it could not be expected that my motives would entirely escape, and we accordingly find the Senator very charitably leaving it to time to disclose my motive for going over. Leave it to time to disclose my motive for going over! I, who have changed no opinion, abandoned no principle, and deserted no party; I, who have stood still, and maintained my ground against every difficulty, to be told that it is left to time to disclose my motive! The imputation sinks to the earth with the groundless charge on which it rests. I stamp it with scorn in the dust. I pick up the dart, which fell harmless at my feet. I hurl it back. What the Senator charges on me unjustly, he has actually done. He went over on a memorable occasion, and did not leave it to time to disclose his motive.

The Senator next tells us that I bore a character for stern fidelity, which he accompanied with remarks implying that I had forfeited it by my course on the present occasion. If he means by stern fidelity a devoted attachment to duty and principle, which nothing can overcome,

the character is indeed a high one, and, I trust, not entirely unmerited. I have, at least, the authority of the Senator himself for saying that it belonged to me before the present occasion, and it is, of course, incumbent on him to show that I have since forfeited it. He will find the task a Herculean one. It would be by far more easy to show the opposite, that instead of forfeiting, I have strengthened my title to the character; instead of abandoning any principles, I have firmly adhered to them; and that, too, under the most appalling difficulties. If I were to select an instance in the whole course of my life, on which above all others, to rest my claim to the character which the Senator attributed to me, it would be this very one, which he has selected to prove that I have forfeited it. I acted with the full knowledge of the difficulties I had to encounter, and the responsibility I must incur. I saw a great and powerful party, probably the most powerful in the country, eagerly seizing on the catastrophe which had befallen the currency, and the consequent embarrassments that followed, to displace those in power, against whom they had been long contending. I saw that, to stand between them and their object, I must necessarily incur their deep and lasting displeasure. I also saw that, to maintain the administration in the position they had taken, to separate the government from the banks, I would draw down on me, with the exception of some of the Southern banks, the whole weight of that extensive, concentrated, and powerful interest—the most powerful by far of any in the whole community; and thus I would unite against me a combination of political and moneyed influence almost irresistible. Nor was this all I could not but see that, however pure and disinterested my motives, and however consistent my course with all I had ever said or done, I would be exposed to the very charges and aspersions which I am now repelling. The ease with which they could be made and the temptation to make them, I saw were too great to be resisted by the party morality of the day, as groundless as I have demonstrated them to be. But there was another consequence that I could not but foresee, far more painful to me than all others. I but too clearly saw that, in so sudden and complex a juncture, called on as I was to decide on my course instantly, as it were, on the field of battle, without consultation, or explaining my reasons, I would estrange for a time many of my political friends, who had passed through with me so many trials and difficulties, and for whom I feel a brother's love. But I saw before me the path of duty, and though rugged, and hedged on all sides with these and many other difficulties, I did not hesitate a moment to take it. After I had made up my mind as to my course, in a conversation with a friend about the responsibility I would assume, he remarked that my own state might desert me. I replied that it was not impossible; but the result has proved that I underestimated the intelligence and patriotism of my virtuous and noble state. I ask her pardon for the distrust implied in my answer; but I ask with assurance it will be granted on the grounds I shall put it—that in being prepared to sacrifice her confidence, as dear to me as light and life, rather than disobey, on this great question, the dictates of my judgment and conscience, I proved myself worthy of being her representative.

But, if the Senator, in attributing to me stern fidelity, meant, not devotion to principle, but to party, and especially the party of which he is so prominent a member, my answer is, that I never belonged to his party, nor owed it any fidelity; and of course, could forfeit, in reference to it, no character for fidelity. It is true, we acted in concert against what we believe to be the usurpations of the executive; and it is true, that, during the time, I saw much to esteem in those with whom I acted, and contracted friendly relations with many which I shall not be the first to forget. It is also true that a common party designation was applied to the opposition in the aggregate, not, however, with my approbation; but it is no less true that it was universally known that it consisted of two distinct parties, dissimilar in principle and policy, except in relation to the object for which they have united: the National Republican party, and the portion of the State rights party which had separated from the administration, on the ground that it had departed from the true principles of the original party. That I belonged exclusively to that detached portion, and to neither the opposition nor administration party, I prove by my explicit declaration, contained in one of the extracts, read from my speech on the currency in 1834. That the party generally, and the state which I represent in part, stood aloof from both of the parties, may be established from the fact that they refused to mingle in the party and political contests of the day. My state

withheld her electoral vote in two successive presidential elections; and rather than to bestow on either the Senator from Kentucky, or the distinguished citizen whom he opposed, in the first of those elections, she threw her vote on a patriotic citizen of Virginia, since deceased, of her own politics, but who was not a candidate; and in the last, she refused to give it to the worthy Senator from Tennessee near me, (Judge White,) though his principles and views of policy approached so much nearer to hers than that of the party to which the Senator from Kentucky belongs. But, suppose the fact was otherwise, and that the two parties had blended so as to form one, and that I owed to the united party as much fidelity as I do to that to which I exclusively belonged; even on that supposition, no conception of party fidelity could have controlled my course on the present occasion. I am not among those who pay no regard to party obligations; on the contrary, I place fidelity to party among the political virtues, but I assign to it a limited sphere. I confine it to matters of detail and arrangement, and to minor questions of policy. Beyond that, on all questions involving principles, or measures calculated to affect materially the permanent interest of the country, I look only to God and country.

And here, Mr. President, I avail myself of the opportunity to declare my present political position, so that there may be no mistake hereafter. I belong to the old Republican State-rights party of '98. To that, and that alone, I owe fidelity, and by that I shall stand through every change and in spite of every difficulty. Its creed is to be found in the Kentucky resolutions, and Virginia resolutions and report, and its policy is to confine the action of this government within the narrow limits compatible with the peace and security of these states, and the objects for which the Union was expressly formed. I, as one of that party, shall support all who support its principles and policy, and oppose all who oppose them. I have given, and shall continue to give, the administration a hearty and sincere support on the great question now under discussion; because I regarded it as in strict conformity to our creed and policy, and shall do every thing in my power to sustain them under the great responsibility which they have assumed. But let me tell those who are more interested in sustaining them than myself, that the danger which threatens them lies not here, but in another quarter. This measure will tend to uphold them, if they stand fast and adhere to it with fidelity. But, if they wish to know where the danger is, let them look to the fiscal department of the government. I said, years ago, that we were committing an error the reverse of the great and dangerous one that was committed in 1828, and to which we owe our present difficulties, and all we have since experienced. Then we raised the revenue greatly, when the expenditures were about to be reduced by the discharge of the public debt; and now, we have doubled the disbursements, when the revenue is rapidly decreasing; an error, although probably not so fatal to the country, will prove, if immediate and vigorous measures be not adopted, far more so to those in power. The country will not, and ought not to bear the creation of a new debt, beyond what may be temporarily necessary to meet the present embarrassment, and any attempt to increase the duties must and ought to prove fatal to those who may make it, so long as the expenditures may, by economy and accountability, be brought within the limits of the revenue.

But the Senator did not confine his attack to my conduct and motives in reference to the present question. In his eagerness to weaken the cause I support, by destroying confidence in me, he made an indiscriminate attack on my intellectual faculties, which he characterized as metaphysical, eccentric, too much of genius, and too little common sense, and of course wanting a sound and practical judgment.

Mr. President, according to my opinion, there is nothing of which those who are endowed with superior mental faculties ought to be more cautious than to reproach those with their deficiency to whom Providence has been less liberal. The faculties of our mind are the immediate gift of our Creator, for which we are no farther responsible than for their proper cultivation, according to our opportunities, and their proper application to control and regulate our actions. Thus thinking, I trust I shall be the last to assume superiority on my part, or reproach any one with inferiority on his; but those who do not regard the rule, when applied to others, cannot expect it to be observed when applied to themselves. The critic must expect to be criticised, and he who points out the faults of others, to have his own pointed out.

I cannot retort on the Senator the charge

of being metaphysical. I cannot accuse him of possessing the powers of analysis and generalization, those higher faculties of the mind (called metaphysical by those who do not possess them,) which decompose and resolve into their elements the complex masses of ideas that exist in the world of mind, as chemistry does the bodies that surround us in the material world, and without which those deep and hidden causes which are in constant action, and producing such mighty changes in the condition of society, would operate unseen and undetected. The absence of these higher qualities of the mind is conspicuous throughout the whole course of the Senator's public life. To this it may be traced that he prefers the specious to the solid, and the plausible to the true. To the same cause, combined with an ardent temperament, it is owing that we ever find him mounted on some popular and favorite measure which he whips along, cheered by the shouts of the multitude, and never dismounts till he has rode it down. Thus, at one time, we find him mounted on the protective system, which he rode down; at another, on Internal Improvement; and now he is mounted on a bank, which will surely share the same fate, unless those who are immediately interested shall stop him in his headlong career. It is the fault of his mind to seize on a few prominent and striking advantages and to pursue them eagerly without looking to consequences. Thus, in the case of the protective system, he was struck with the advantages of manufactures, and, believing that high duties was the proper mode of protecting them, he pushed forward the system without seeing that he was enriching one portion of the country at the expense of the other; corrupting the one and alienating the other; and, finally, dividing the community into two great hostile interests, which terminated in the overthrow of the system itself. So, now, he looks only to a uniform currency and a bank as the means of securing it, without once reflecting how far the banking system has progressed, and the difficulties that impede its farther progress; that banking and politics are running together to their mutual destruction; and that the only possible mode of saving his favorite system is to separate it from the Government.

To the defects of understanding, which the Senator attributes to me, I make no reply. It is for others, and not me, to determine the portion of understanding which it has pleased the Author of my being to bestow on me. It is, however, fortunate for me, that the standard by which I shall be judged is not the false, prejudiced, and, as I have shown, unfounded opinion which the Senator has expressed, but my acts. They furnish materials, neither few nor scant, to form a just estimate of my mental faculties. I have now been more than twenty-six years continuously in the service of this Government, in various stations, and have taken part in almost all the great questions which have agitated this country during this long and important period. Throughout the whole I have never followed events, but have taken my stand in advance, openly and freely avowing my opinions on all questions, and leaving it to time and experience to condemn or approve my course. Thus acting, I have often and on great questions separated from those with whom I usually acted, and if I am really so defective in sound and practical judgment as the Senator represents, the proof, if to be found anywhere, must be found in such instances, or where I have acted on my sole responsibility. Now, I ask, in which of the many instances of the kind is such proof to be found? It is not my intention to call to the recollection of the Senate all such; but that you, Senators, may judge for yourselves, it is due in justice to myself, that I should suggest a few of the most prominent, which at the time were regarded as the Senator now considers the present; and then, as now, because where duty is involved, I would not submit to party trammels.

I go back to the commencement of my public life, the war session, as it was usually called, of 1812, when I first took my seat in the other House, a young man, without experience to guide me; and I shall select, as the first instance, the Navy. At that time the Administration and the party to which I was strongly attached, were decidedly opposed to this important arm of service. It was considered anti-republican to support it; but acting with my then distinguished colleague, Mr. Cheves, who led the way, I did not hesitate to give it my hearty support, regardless of party ties. Does this instance sustain the charge of the Senator?

The next I shall select is the restrictive system of that day; the embargo, the non importation and non-intercourse acts. This, too, was a party measure, which had been long and warmly contested, and of course the lines of party well drawn. Young and inexperienced at