

Western Carolinian.

It is even wise to abstain from laws, which, however wise and good in themselves, have the semblance of inequality, which had no response in the heart of the citizen, and which will be evaded with little remorse. The wisdom of legislation is especially seen in grafting laws on conscience.

Dr. Channing.

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BIOGRAPHY.
Biographical Memoir of
JOHN CALDWELL CALHOUN.

JOHN CALDWELL CALHOUN, the subject of this brief sketch, was born the 28th March, 1782, at the place where his youngest brother, Patrick, now resides, in Abbeville District, South Carolina. Both his paternal and maternal ancestors were from the North of Ireland. His grandfather, James Calhoun, emigrated from the county of Donegal, in the year 1733, with his family, and settled in Pennsylvania. His father, Patrick Calhoun, was then but six years old. After residing there many years, the family removed to the western part of Virginia and settled on the waters of Green Briar river, one of the branches of the Kenhawa. Braddock's defeat having exposed the frontier of Virginia to the depredations of the savages, the settlement was broken up, and the family removed to South Carolina, and in the year 1756, fixed their residence in what has since been known by the name of Calhoun's Settlement, then on the confines of the Cherokee nation, and far in advance of all other establishments of the whites. Shortly after the Cherokees became hostile, and attacked the settlement. On their retreat the whites were overtaken by a vastly superior force. A bloody battle ensued, in which half the males, capable of bearing arms, fell; and among them, James Calhoun, the eldest brother, who commanded on the occasion. Patrick Calhoun, the father of the Vice President, displayed great intrepidity, and made a very narrow escape by breaking through the ranks of the enemy. After the defeat, their mother, then at a very advanced age, the other women and the children, who fell into the hands of the savages, were tomahawked. Those of the family who survived the disaster, retired first to Orangeburgh, and then to the Waxhaws. Patrick Calhoun was appointed by the provincial Government commander of a body of rangers to defend the frontier. In this service, which required great activity and hardihood, he proved himself, by his daring courage and enterprise, worthy of the station which had been assigned him. After the peace of 1763, the family returned, and re-occupied their former settlement, where they continued to reside.

The father of Mr. Calhoun was twice married; first while he resided in Virginia, to Miss Craighead, who died shortly after, without issue; and afterwards, about the year 1770, to Martha Caldwell, a native of Charlotte county, Virginia, and niece to the Reverend James Caldwell, of New Jersey, a Presbyterian divine, who took a prominent part in the war of the revolution. The fruits of this marriage were four sons and one daughter, of whom the subject of this biographical memoir was the fourth in the order of their birth. He received the name of John Caldwell, after his uncle, Major John Caldwell, an active and zealous whig, who had been cruelly murdered by the Tories a short time previous to the birth of Mr. Calhoun.

The parents of the Vice President were exemplary for their piety and virtue. They were both members of the Presbyterian church. The father was a hardy and enterprising pioneer; but, unlike most of that class, he placed a high value upon education. Though he was entirely self-taught, and lived the greater part of his life on the frontier, surrounded by danger he made himself an excellent English scholar and an accurate and skillful surveyor, which profession he long followed. He was the first member elected to the provincial Legislature from the interior of South Carolina. Of this body and the State Legislature, after the revolution, he continued a member for thirty years, without intermission, with the exception of a single term, until his death in 1796. He was a zealous whig and a disinterested patriot. He opposed

the adoption of the Federal Constitution on the ground that it conferred rights on Congress incompatible with the sovereignty of the States.

John C. Calhoun received his English education in the ordinary country schools. When in his 13th year, he was placed in the academy, kept by his brother-in-law, the Rev. Dr. Waddel, since so much distinguished in the Southern States as a teacher, with whom he was to commence his classical studies. He had scarcely begun, when the death of his father, and Mrs. Waddel, his sister, interrupted his education, Dr. Waddel having after these events discontinued his academy. Mr. Calhoun continued to reside with him; but the frequent absence of the Doctor on his clerical duties deprived him almost entirely of the advantage of his instruction. The time, however, was not lost. A circulating library for the neighborhood, of which the Doctor was librarian, was established at his house. Often left alone, with the exceptions of the domestics, young Calhoun resorted to the library for amusement and occupation. Undirected, he passed over lighter reading, and fixed his attention mainly on history. He applied himself so indefatigably, that in the course of fourteen weeks he had read Rolin's Ancient History, Robertson's Charles V., Robertson's America, Voltaire's Charles XII, the large edition of Cook's Voyages, the first volume of Locke on the human Understanding, and some other smaller works. Such was his eagerness, that he scarcely spared time for his meals or rest, and left none for exercise or amusement. Under such severe application his eyes were so much affected that he was obliged to exclude the glare of light, by drawing in the window shutters; his countenance became pallid, and his whole frame emaciated. Intelligence of the state of his health reaching his mother, she became alarmed, and he was taken home, and separated from his books. Air and exercise reinstated his health; and to the love of books succeeded a fondness for country sports and amusements. Four years passed away in their enjoyment. Though during this period he made no progress in his education, he nevertheless, derived from it an inestimable benefit. He laid the foundation of an excellent constitution, and contracted a love for agriculture, which has ever since continued to increase, and which has enabled him, like the father of his country, to fill up the interval of public duties with pleasure and advantage in that useful and independent pursuit. At this period he had abandoned the intention of acquiring a liberal education. His eldest brother, William, had taken charge of a plantation at some distance from the family residence. His second brother, James, had been placed in a counting house in Charleston, and himself and his youngest brother, Patrick, were the only children left with their widowed mother.

Dr. Waddel had again opened his academy; but it was at the distance of fifty miles, in Columbia county, Georgia. Under such circumstances, the fond and anxious mother felt averse to a second separation; and the growing attachment of John to agricultural pursuits seemed to dissuade him to that occupation. His brother James, however, who had returned from Charleston to spend the summer of 1800 at home, struck with his capacity, remonstrated against his determination, and warmly urged him to turn his attention without delay to the acquisition of a classical education. John at length, after much persuasion, submitted his inclination to the judgment of his brother, but not without a fixed determination, which he strongly expressed at the time, that he never would enter a profession unless he was convinced that he could rise far above mediocrity. With a firm adherence to that resolution, he lost no time in commencing his preparatory studies. He forthwith proceeded to Dr. Waddel's academy, which he entered in June, 1800. At this period, at the age of eighteen, he may be said to have commenced his classical studies.

Engaging in them, however, with his characteristic ardor, his progress was so rapid, that in two years he was prepared to join the junior class in Yale College, which he entered with distinction in the autumn of 1802. He passed through that institution with great credit, obtaining a high standing in all the different studies; but while he was not deficient in imagination and taste, he was more particularly distinguished by the depth and quickness of his perception. Though differing widely in political opinions from Dr. Dwight, who was then at the head of that institution, he, nevertheless, was a great favorite with that very distinguished and good man, with whom he had frequent friendly encounters in the field of political discussion. In the course of recitation in Paley's Philosophy, the Doctor expressed a doubt "whether the consent of the governed was the only just origin of legitimate government. This gave rise to an animated debate between him and Mr. Calhoun, by which the examination was interrupted, and the class held in delightful suspense till the bell summoned them to dinner. In the course of the discussion, the student evinced such depth of thought such power of argument, and such eloquence, that his celebrated preceptor predicted his future rise to the highest honors of the republic. "That young man," said he afterwards to a friend, "has talents enough to be President of the United States."

Mr. Calhoun passed his examination for a degree in the summer of 1804, just four years after he had commenced the Latin grammar; but, notwithstanding the rapidity with which he had passed through his studies, he, in a large and talented class of upwards of seventy, attained the highest grade of honors. An English oration was assigned him, and he prepared one on the qualifications necessary to a perfect statesman; a severe indisposition, however, prevented him from delivering it.

Mr. Calhoun having returned to South Carolina, entered himself a student at law in the office of H. W. Desaussure, at that time a distinguished advocate, and now one of the chancellors of the State, after remaining a few months with him, he went back to New-England, and entered the law school at Litchfield, then superintended by Judge Keove and Judge Gould. During the eighteen months that he attended their celebrated lectures, he was a close student, and made great progress. The mornings he devoted to law, and the rest of the day to general literature. He cultivated the powers of extemporaneous speaking with great assiduity. The students had formed a debating society; and, in order to agitating political topics of the day were usually selected for debate. The school was nearly equally divided between the two great parties which were then contending in the nation against each other. Mr. Calhoun was the champion of the republican side; and, as the meetings were open, and the debates conducted in the usual parliamentary manner, great interest was often felt in the discussion by the inhabitants of the town. It was in this admirably conducted society that Mr. Calhoun first developed his great powers of parliamentary debate. He usually prepared himself by reflection on the subjects proposed for discussion, but rarely, if ever, committed to writing the arrangement of his topics, or took notes of the arguments of those who preceded him. He relied on his tenacious memory for preserving the order established in his own mind; and his wonderful power of rapid analysis and classification enabled him, even in the hurry and excitement of an ardent debate, to assign to its proper place in that order, the answer and refutation of all the various arguments of the speakers, however numerous, whom he followed. On several occasions, when it was known that a settled majority was opposed to him at the commencement of the discussion, he broke down the barriers of party obstinacy, and triumphantly carried his side by the force and fervor of his eloquent and logical arguments.

In the autumn of 1806 he again returned to Carolina, and completed his study of the law in the offices of Mr. Desaussure, in Charleston, and Mr. Bowie, a very respectable lawyer residing at Abbeville court-house. He passed his examination for admission to the bar in December, 1807, and immediately afterwards commenced in his native district a lucrative practice. He ranked from the beginning amongst the first lawyers of his circuit. But talents and acquirements, such as he possessed, could not

long be permitted to be absorbed in private pursuits. Even before he was admitted to the bar, an incident occurred, which turned the eyes of the people on him as one destined for the public service. We allude to the affair of the Chesapeake. The south partook deeply of the excitement which followed that outrageous act. A meeting was called at Abbeville court house to consider the subject, and to express the sentiments of the people. A committee was appointed to report to an adjourned meeting. Though he had not yet been admitted to the practice, Mr. Calhoun was selected as one of the committee, and discovered such an intimate knowledge of our public affairs, that he was appointed by the committee chairman of the sub committee to draught the address, and report resolutions to be submitted to the people. He was also requested by the committee to address the meeting when the resolutions should be proposed for their adoption. The day of meeting arrived. The assemblage was very large. It was the first time he was brought before the public. The situation was trying, but he acquitted himself in such a manner as to excite the most enthusiastic feelings in his favor, and the speech with the address and resolutions were received with the warmest approbation. The consequence was, that, as soon as he was admitted to the bar, he was proposed as a candidate for the next election to the Legislature; and in spite of a long standing prejudice, which had for many years prevented the election of any lawyer, he succeeded by an overwhelming majority, but placed him far ahead of all the other candidates, though they were among the most popular men of the district.

The first important object which, after he took his seat in the Legislature, excited the attention of the members, was the selection of candidates for the President and Vice President of the United States. A meeting of the republican members was called for that purpose. Mr. Madison was their unanimous choice for the Presidency. A division existed as to the Vice Presidency. In offering his sentiments on the occasion, Mr. Calhoun entered into the state of our public affairs, pointed out the probable necessity of an appeal to arms before the expiration of the next presidential term, and urged, that, with such prospects before them, it became necessary to put down the first appearance of schism in their ranks. He stated his apprehensions, from many indications which he pointed out, that Mr. Madison would not receive the cordial support of some of the leading politicians, who had before acted with the party, particularly in New-York, and urged that great care should be taken, in selecting a candidate for the Vice Presidency, not to propose a person around whom the discontented might rally. Under this view of the subject, he suggested the name of John Langdon, of New Hampshire, as one who not only possessed the confidence of the country, but every other suitable qualification. This speech was received with loud applause; and the evidence which it gave of sagacity and knowledge of public affairs, placed him at once among the leading members of the Legislature. The war, which followed two years afterwards, and the dangerous schism which detached for a time the State of New York, at a critical period, from the support of Mr. Madison's administration, and which threatened to defeat his second election; by the rallying of the discontented with his opponents in support of a distinguished citizen of that State, presented a striking instance of that clear conception of the future, for which he has since been so much distinguished.

Mr. Calhoun remained two sessions in the Legislature, and took an active and leading part on all the important subjects which, during that period were presented to the consideration of that body.

At the next general election he was brought forward as a candidate for Congress to represent the district composed of Abbeville, Newberry, Laurens. His opponent was Gen. Burnside, Laurens. Mr. Calhoun succeeded by an overwhelming majority. After his election to Congress he abandoned the practice at the bar, and has since devoted himself exclusively to public affairs and agriculture. He took his seat in Congress in the autumn of 1811 at the commencement of the first session of the 12th Congress, distinguished as the session which declared what has been justly called the second war of Independence. Young as he was, his reputation had preceded him and he was placed second on the Committee of Foreign Relations, which was in the existing posture of our political affairs, considered the most important in the House. They made an able report,

and recommended immediate preparation for war, and finally, in 1812, to arms, if Great Britain should not redress our wrongs. On this occasion the great discussion of the session ensued. The chairman, General Perce, opened the debate. He was followed by Mr. Grundy, a member of the committee, in a very powerful speech in defence of the measures recommended. Randolph also a member, replied in one of his ablest and most eloquent speeches. It was allotted to Mr. Calhoun to follow him. This may be considered his first effort in Congress. The occasion was trying and the public excitement great. The gallery of the House was crowded to overflowing. Under these circumstances, he had to measure strength with one of the most sagacious opponents and powerful orators which this or any other country has ever produced. Not to sink under such a trial was to gain credit. Sustained by the justice of the cause, profoundly impressed with a solemn sense of the greatness of the occasion, roused to indignation by the injuries inflicted on his country, and the dishonor offered to her name by haughty belligerents, he delivered a speech which for lofty and patriotic sentiments, for close and irresistible arguments and an ardent and soul-stirring eloquence has been rarely equaled. It is received with unbounded applause in and out of Congress. The Richmond Enquirer, in a burst of enthusiasm, compared him to "one of the old sages of the old Congress with the graces of youth." Alluding to this speech, which filled the whole country with admiration, and marked him as one destined to exercise a controlling influence on the affairs of his country, Mr. Ritche says: "Mr. Calhoun is clear and precise in his reasoning, marching directly to the object of his attack, and felling down the errors of his opponent with the club of Hercules; not eloquent in tropes and figures, but like Fox in the moral elevation of his sentiments; free from personality, yet full of those fine touches of indignation which are the severest cut to a man of feeling. His speech, like a fine drawing, abounds in those lights and shades, which set off each other, the cause of his country is robed in light, while her opponents are wrapped in darkness. It were contracted to wish Mr. Calhoun were a Virginian; though, after the quota which she has furnished to the opposition, such a wish might be forgiven us. Yet we beg leave to participate, as Americans and friends of our country, in the honors of South Carolina. We hail this young Carolinian as one of the master spirits who stamp their name upon the age in which they live."

But it was not in the character of a parliamentary debater only that Mr. Calhoun appeared to advantage during this long and important session. Young and inexperienced as he was, he proved himself an able and sagacious leader. General Porter, at an early period of the session, retired from his seat in Congress, which placed Mr. Calhoun at the head of the Committee of Foreign Relations; which committee, by a vote of the House, in addition to the appropriate duties, was directed to report bills to carry into effect the military preparations which they had recommended. He was thus, by the force of circumstances, as well as by pre-eminence ability, at this early period of his congressional life, placed at the head of the party which sustained the war, and performed the arduous duties which belong to so high and responsible a station to the entire satisfaction, not only of the party, but of the country; for his patriotism was of too lofty a character, as his acts demonstrated, to permit him to be subservient to mere party views. In common with his able and virtuous colleagues, Cheves and Lowndes, he differed from the administration and their friends on several important points of policy, particularly in regard to the restrictive system and the navy. At this period, organization on both sides was so complete that instances of members leaving the ranks of their party were rare, and consequently attended with danger. This did not prevent Mr. Calhoun from seizing every suitable opportunity to oppose resolutely the whole restrictive system, and to sustain the navy with zeal. One of his earliest and best speeches was delivered in opposition to the former; but he so conducted his opposition when differing from the majority with which he was proud usually to act; and leaving ordinary topics, he presented such forcible, profound, and philosophical views, appealing directly to the nature of man for his support, that he left a thorough conviction on the minds of all, that he was governed solely by the most disinterested and patriotic considerations, without the slightest tincture of factious feelings. Of this we cannot present a better illustration than by an