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Letter of Mr. Smith, OF ALABAMA.

To my Constituents of the Fourth Congressional District of Alabama.

WASHINGTON, January 23d, 1855.

Supposing that you participate in the general anxiety which prevails throughout the country in reference to the present extraordinary condition of the House of Representatives of the Congress of the United States, I have thought it due to you and to myself that I should give you a brief statement of the facts as they now exist, and of some of the most remarkable occurrences which find their history in the records of our proceedings up to this time.

That some party is to blame, all must admit; who is to blame is the great question. I shall endeavor to show that the small party with which I have acted, known here as the National Americans, is free from censure.

If I fail in this, you will charge the bias of my judgment to the partiality which every man was expected to have for his own friends; if I succeed, you will give me credit for the loftier purpose of vindicating our integrity, and of proclaiming the patriotic firmness with which we have resisted the efforts of the enemies of our party and of the foes to the Constitution.

It was the opinion of many of the most experienced politicians, upon the opening of Congress, that we should have much difficulty in organizing the House.

Most of us expected to be a week or two engaged in these preliminary labors; the precedent of 1849 was still fresh in our recollection; and when we found ourselves without a Speaker at the end of the first week but little astonishment or anxiety prevailed on the subject in the political circles here.

The second week passed away without awakening any serious apprehensions. The third week came, and (so strong is the force of habit) every body seemed to conclude that the only use in going to the Capital was to vote for Speaker, merely as a matter of form, without even expecting an election.

In the meantime the debates began to assume the character of asperity. Bitter language, sharp retort and fierce denance characterized the speeches of many gentlemen. It was evident that the difficulties in the way of an organization were becoming greater; that the debates widened the breach continually. In this condition of things, on the 20th of December, I offered the following proposition:

Resolved, (for the formal promotion of business,) that the House proceed to the election of two standing committees—the Committee of Ways and Means and the Committee of Foreign Affairs—upon the following plan:

The Republican party (voting one hundred and five) shall nominate four.

The Administration party voting seventy-four shall nominate three.

The National American party (voting forty) shall nominate two.

That the said committees shall each elect its chairman by a majority vote.

That the two chairmen, beginning with the chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, shall preside alternately over the deliberations of the House until a Speaker shall be elected.

That the House devote one hour every day to the reception and reference of bills and petitions, and the usual legislative business; and

That the said committees shall be dissolved upon the election of a Speaker, and their business shall pass into the hands of the committees appointed by the Speaker.

The object of this proposition appears upon its face. There was but little disposition to adopt it on the part of the House, and it went the way of all the other propositions referring to an organization which have up to this time been submitted.

It is now the eighth week of the session and the prospects of an organization are as remote, to all appearance, as on the first day. Indeed, there does not seem to be the slightest hope of the election of Speaker.

This state of things is well calculated to inspire the gloomiest apprehensions as to the future of the Republic; and several should be the punishment of that man or of that party who has contributed to bring about and to prolong this legislative anarchy.

There are three parties in the House—the Republican party, (so called,) whose candidate is Mr. Banks—the Administration party whose candidate is Mr. Richardson—and the National American party, whose candidate is Mr. Fuller.

Outside of those who vote in these parties there are some twelve or fifteen votes scattering.

The Banks party with a part of the scattering votes, could elect their Speaker.

The Richardson party, combined with the Fuller party, with a part of the scattering votes, could elect their Speaker.

The Fuller party, combined with the Richardson party, with a part of the scattering votes could elect their Speaker.

Neither of these combinations has as yet been made; and the only one which can be made, as matters now stand, is that the Banks party should elect by the aid of a scattering vote.

The National American party, from an early period in session, finding it impossible to elect a Speaker of their own choice, have felt as a party, and expressed a perfect willingness to co-operate with the conservative members of the House of all parties with a view to effect an organization.

Several overtures in various ways have been made to the Administration party by leading members of the National American party, all of which, I believe, have been rejected.

Of course it could not be expected that the National Americans would contemplate a combination with the Republican party.

But why have the National Americans not united with the Administration party in the election of a Speaker? The reasons which follow, will, I think be deemed fully sufficient.

That the Administration party is the implacable enemy of the American party is sufficiently clear in the notorious fact that no member of the American party is allowed to hold office under it. Even the smallest postmaster is removed as soon as it is discovered that he belongs to the American party. This will not be denied. But, apart from this, the Administration party in the House of Representatives, on Saturday night before the meeting of Congress, adopted the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Democratic members of the House of Representatives, tho' in a temporary minority in this body, deem this a fit occasion to tender to their fellow citizens of the whole Union of their heartfelt congratulations on the triumph in the recent elections in several of the Northern, Eastern, and Western as well as Southern States, of the principles of the *Kansas Nebraska* bill and the doctrine of civil and religious liberty, which have been so violently assailed by a secret political order, known as the party; and though in a minority, we hold it to be our highest duty to preserve our organization and continue our efforts in the maintenance and defence of those principles and the constitutional rights of every section and every class of citizens, against their opponents of every description whether the so called Republicans, Know Nothings or Fusionists; and to this end we look with confidence to the support and approbation of all good and true men—friends of the Constitution and the Union—throughout the country."

In this resolution the American party (Know Nothings) is represented to the country, by the solemn resolver of the Administration party, as having "violently assailed the doctrines of civil and religious liberty," and also as "opponents of the principles which preserve the constitutional rights of every section and every class of citizens." These charges, disgraceful in themselves, were published to the world at the very moment when all conservative men were anxiously seeking excuses to come together for the purpose of promoting an organization. This resolution of hostility, so emphatic in itself, was enough to close the door against any attempt at conciliation.

Nevertheless, nearly all the National Americans, in view of the inconveniences and dangers growing out of a continuous and protracted disorganization, were anxious for an accommodation. Regarding this resolution as the last grand flourish of an excited and expiring party, many were willing to let it pass unheeded, and to find its excuse in the political hallucination. But we were not permitted to do this. Day after day the Administration side of the hall of the House resounded with denunciation of the American party. In reply to an overture made by a distinguished member of the American party, that he was willing to have

a conference with the conservative men of all parties, the Hon. Mr. Jones, of Pennsylvania; the author of the aforesaid resolution and the leader at that time of the Administration forces, emphatically said: "The Democratic party will not go into any but a Democratic caucus."

This seemed to be a clincher; for the phrase met with the silent but sitting and approbatory endorsement of the Administration party.

But it remained for the honorable gentleman from Georgia (Mr. Cobb) to crush the last hopes of an accommodation. In a speech which he delivered on the 21st of December, 1855, in the House—a speech more remarkable for its vituperation than for its originality—find the following passages:

"I am speaking of the triumph of the people, in common with the Democratic party, in various States of this Union, over a party which carried before them the banner of proscription, with oaths and obligations in their hands. I will say frankly and candidly to the gentleman from Kentucky that if this House were never to be organized without it, my vote would never be given for the representative of any party which has inscribed on its banner the doctrine of these oaths and obligations."

The gentleman from Georgia (Mr. Cobb) describes the American party as,

"A secret political organization springing up in our midst; and, before we were aware of it, a large part of our people were bound by solemn oaths and obligations to subject their fellow-citizens to a new test unknown to the past political history of the country, and, as we honestly believed then and now, violative of the constitutional rights of many good, worthy, and patriotic citizens of this land."

Again: "As desirable as the organization of this House may be to the Democratic party, as desirable as it may be to a large majority of the people of the country that the organization shall fall into our hands, I say frankly and candidly to my friends of the National American order that a Democratic organization of this House never will be purchased, with my vote, by the sacrifice of the principles involved in the resolution passed by the Democratic caucus."

Here is a distinct avowal, by the honorable gentleman from Georgia, (Mr. C.) that *never will* vote for a member of the American party.

These extracts show that the gentleman from Georgia (and his friends are supposed to agree with him) regards the American party as entirely outside of the pale of the Democratic organization. These extracts but confirm the caucus resolution, that the American party are proscriptive in their policy and *unfaithful* to the Constitution. If it be necessary to show that the gentleman from Georgia regards the American party as enemies to the Constitution the following, from the same speech, will close the proof that such is his opinion:

"Mr. Cox. Will the gentleman from Georgia, as he addresses his remarks to me, allow me to make one remark? It is this: he declares that, on account of the proscriptive character of the obligations of the American party, he never will vote for a member of that party. I leave it to the country to determine whether he has proscribed that party himself, or whether or no they are the proscribers. I say that to save my country I will take a good man, I care not to what party he belongs.—[Applause in the galleries.]

"Mr. Cobb. I cannot save my country by voting for a man who does not recognize the fundamental principles of the Constitution of my country."

Here the American party is denounced as "not recognizing the fundamental principles of the Constitution." Other gentlemen of the same party used phrases equally objectionable.

Thus you see, my fellow citizens, that the National American party found themselves in a condition either not to vote for the Administration candidate or to sacrifice every feeling of self-respect, and to admit publicly that they were unfaithful to the Constitution of the country, and that they were enemies to civil and religious liberty.

The consequence of the caucus resolution and of the speech of the gentleman from Georgia, endorsed as it has been by the Administration party, has been simply to throw the National Americans upon the dignity of self respect; and hence they have been found voting for a distinguished and faithful member of their own organization.

If the National Americans could not be expected to unite with the Republicans; if the Administration party positively, by resolution and speeches, repelled them, what else could they do but remain steadfast to their principles and firm by their candidate? It is true that we have been at liberty at all times to vote for whom we pleased; we have never been debarred from voting for the Administration candidate or for any other man; but we do not choose to lick the hand that strikes us, nor are we quite Christianlike enough to turn our other cheek to the smiter.

I will now call upon the honorable gentleman from Georgia (Mr Cobb) and my distinguished colleague (Mr. Houston) to convict the Republicans of the responsibility.

On the 19th of January the gentleman from Georgia (Mr Cobb) made the following happy and conclusive charge against the Republicans:

"Mr. Cobb. One word more, Mr. Clerk, in reference to the responsibility for the organization of the House, and I am done. I have not risen to go into this discussion. The record of this House during the last few days exhibits this fact to the country: that the Republican party, as they call themselves and are termed, had it in their power to place in the Speaker's chair a member of their own party who, at the commencement of this session, received the highest number of votes of that party for that position. The resolution offered by the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. THORINGTON) declared the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. CAMPBELL) to be the Speaker of the House for the Thirty-fourth Congress. He received, I believe, the votes of fifty members of this House. There were voting against that resolution fifty two members of the Republican party fifty two of those who cast their votes, for the gentleman from Massachusetts, (Mr. BANKS) if these fifty two who voted against the resolution had voted for him the resolution would have been adopted, and Mr. Campbell would have been elected the Speaker of this House. These gentlemen thereby placed themselves before the country in this position—that they are not content to organize this House with a member of their own party at the commencement of the session; they would rather that Congress should remain disorganized and the Government to cease to go on with its operations than place a man of their own party a man having the confidence of that party, agreeing with them in principle, and capable to discharge the duties of the office—in the Speaker's chair. Such is the record, so far, of this session of Congress. Their issue is Mr. Banks and disorganization, in preference to a member of their own party, against whom they have urged no personal or political objection. The responsibility is with them, and they are to satisfy the country that such a position as the one which they have assumed can be justified."

So much for the charge of the honorable gentleman from Georgia, (Mr. Cobb); it is admitted to be supported by the record.—The logic is good and conclusive, was sustained on the same day by my friend from Alabama, (Mr. Houston,) in a speech to this effect. Speaking to the Republicans he (Mr. H.) said:

"You want to elect one particular man. If you had only voted the other day for the honorable and distinguished gentleman from Ohio, (Mr. Campbell,) he would have been elected. If I am not mistaken all these scattering votes, or nearly every one of them, fell in and were cast for that gentleman; and if the Banks men had fallen in Mr. Campbell could have been elected, and would have been elected. You are therefore the party that has the power to organize this House."

The Republican party, having had the power to elect a member of their own party, as earnestly and eloquently urged by the two gentlemen above quoted, and having failed to do so, are justly obnoxious to the charge that for that delinquency they are the responsible party.

But they failed to do it; new responsibilities arose; and now they will put the boot on the other leg and see how it fits.

On Monday, the 21st instant, the honorable gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Carllie) offered a resolution that the honorable William Smith, a Representative in Congress from Virginia, should be declared Speaker of the house of Representatives. Upon that resolution a vote was taken, and Mr. Smith received forty-seven votes—amongst which was, I believe, every member of the National American party present, except one. Here is the vote for Mr. Smith:

Yeas.—Messrs. Bowie, Boyce, Broom, John P. Campbell, Carllie, W. R. W. Cobb, Cox, Cullen, Dowdell, Eatheridge, Eustis, Evans, Faulkner, Foster, Henry M. Fuller, J. Morrison Harris, Herbert, Hoffman, Kenneth, Lake, Lindley, Alex. K. Marshall, Humphrey Marshall, McMullen, McQueen, Millson, Paine, Quitman, Reade, Reedy, Richardson, Ruat, Savage, Wm. R. Smith, Stewart, Swope, Talbot, Taylor, Trippe, Underwood, Valk, Walker, Warner, Watkins, Whitney, John Y. Wright, and Zollicoffer—47.

Those italicized are amongst the immortal seventy-four (as the Union calls them) who have voted for Mr. Richardson throughout the ballotings. Of the seventy-four Mr. Smith received but nineteen votes: forty-five Richardson men voted against Mr. Smith. Forty-seven and forty-five make ninety-two votes. The whole vote polled was one hundred and seventy-eight, of which ninety would have been a majority of all the votes given. So if the Richardson men had voted for Mr. Smith he would have been elected Speaker, with two votes to spare, and this protracted and painful controversy would have been brought to a close by placing in the chair an old Democrat, a good Nebraska man one of the seventy-four who have rigidly adhered to Mr. Richardson!

Who is William Smith? A distinguished Democrat, once Governor of Virginia,

member of the last Congress, a man of high political attainment and great political sagacity—honest, faithful, capable! Where, now, rests the responsibility? Will any man say that Mr. Smith, of Virginia, is not as fully national on the great test the *Nebraska* act, as Mr. Richardson? Where, now, rests the responsibility? I here take the liberty of repeating to you, my fellow-citizens, and through you to the once-great Administration party of the House of Representatives, the exact speech which the honorable gentleman from Georgia (Mr. Cobb) repeated with so much force and energy to the Republican party, only changing the name of Mr. Campbell to that of Mr. Smith, and making such alterations as the figures and facts authorize.

Here is Mr. Cobb's speech, slightly changed:

"One word more, Mr. Clerk, in reference to the responsibility for the organization of the House, and I am done. I have not risen to go into this discussion. The record of this House during the last few days exhibits this fact to the country: that the Administration party, as they call themselves and are termed, had it in their power to place in the Speaker's chair a member of their own party. The resolution offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Carllie) declared the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. SMITH) to be the Speaker of the House for the Thirty-fourth Congress. He received, I believe, the votes of forty-seven members of this House. There were voting against that resolution forty-five members of the Administration party—forty-five of those who have cast their votes for the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Richardson.) If these forty-five who voted against the resolution had voted for him the resolution would have been adopted, and Mr. Smith would have been elected the Speaker of this House.—These gentlemen (the Administration party) thereby placed themselves before the country in this position—that they are not content to organize this House with a member of their own party. They would rather that Congress should remain disorganized and the Government to cease to go on with its operations than place a man of their own party—agreeing with them in principle and capable to discharge the duties of the office—in the Speaker's chair. Such is the record, so far, of this session of Congress.—Their issue is Mr. Richardson and disorganization, in preference to a member of their own party, against whom they have urged no personal or political objection."

The gentleman from Georgia will pardon me if, in using his sledge-hammer, I have knocked out some of his brains, (words.)

My honorable colleague (Mr. Houston) will pardon me if I make a similar use of his speech. He said:

"And if you (the Administration party) had only voted the other day for the honorable and distinguished gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Smith) he would have been elected. You are, therefore, the party that has the power to organize this House."

The italics in the two last speeches of Mr. Cobb and Mr. Houston are my own.—I only wish to avail myself of their arguments, for which I have already given them full credit.

Now, fellow-citizens, where rests the responsibility? The Administration party have charged and proved that the Republican party is the responsible party, thereby admitting that the National American is not responsible. I have shown the precise degree of responsibility resting on the Administration party which authorized this charge against the Republicans. Upon the same state of facts the Administration party is the responsible party. And I feel assured that the country at large will sustain the National Americans in the position in which circumstances placed them, and which they have occupied with so much fortitude during this great and trying emergency.

It is well known that the "Union" newspaper the leading organ of the Administration, sustained the Administration party in the House in all of its movements during this great controversy. The abusive character of the article of that paper against the American party is one equalled by the phrases of the Administration orators in Congress. Notwithstanding an occasional expression of anxiety on the part of the organ that an organization should be made, ought to be apparent to the close reader that the Union does not want an organization. Judging from the paragraphs of the lesser organ of the Administration party, the Star, the Administration party seem to be perfectly content without an organization. Some weeks ago the Star uttered the following sentiments:

"HAPPY FELLOWS.—The Democrats of the House are evidently perfectly satisfied with the existing state of things in the Representatives' chamber, and will not mourn if the first of next July arrives with no Speaker chosen. The truth is the Executive branch of the Government will hardly feel the want of a dollar for carrying on its portion of the public business until perhaps next September, the means for footing the bill until the first of July next having been provided last winter. The Democrats of the body argue that they are perfectly satisfied with the public law as they are, and

therefore have few changes in any of them to propose; and, further, that if the opposition who have come to Washington loaded down with pledges to change almost every thing conceivable to the Government, can rest content to 'carry on' longest as they have been doing for the last month, they (the Democrats) will be slow, indeed, to complain therefore, as they are well aware that the popular odium that must grow out of the incapacity of the House to transact any business whatever must fall on those who, having so large a numerical majority in the chamber have also on them, and cannot escape, the collateral of sole responsibility for the existing condition of things.—Indeed, we find the opinion unanimous among the Democratic members that the failure of the House to organize is to prove a great 'card' for their cause in the approaching Presidential election. They are evidently preparing to make the most of it before the people."

This article of the Star has not been publicly rebuked, as I have seen, by any member of the Administration party. What, then, are we to suppose? Are we to conclude that the Administration party do not want an organization. Are they perfectly satisfied with the existing state of things, in the language of the Star: Place this article of the Star side by side with the various articles of the Union laudatory of the stand taken by the immortal 74, and view them all, together with the caucus resolution and the speeches which have been made in Congress by the members of the Administration party, and will not the people of the country have the right to conclude that the Administration party does not want an organization." What says the honorable gentleman from Pennsylvania, (Mr. Cadwalader?) In answer to a few remarks of my own, in which I deprecated the waste of time consequent upon the protracted disorganization of the House, that gentleman said:

"I beg leave to dissent from the conclusions of the gentleman (Mr. Smith, of Alabama) who has just taken his seat, that the House are altogether wasting the public time in their efforts to elect a Speaker or that there has not been profit from the developments attendant upon the delays and apparent difficulties which have stood in the way of its organization."

Again, he says:

"I am not sorry that they (the National American party) are able to throw into the teeth of the Democratic party, as they do, that we have not conciliated and will not conciliate them. We do not conciliate them, and we will not involve in any compromise with them."

We do not ask their votes."

That honorable gentleman (Mr. C.) says further, in his plain and frank way, to the National Americans:

"An Abolitionist or the Democratic candidate (Mr. Richardson) must sooner or later be elected Speaker of this House by a majority or by a plurality of its votes. If you deem the choice of the Democratic candidate a less evil than that of an Abolitionist, vote, if you see proper, for the Democratic candidate. If you do so, you can except nothing from him, or from the party which he will, in that case represent. We do not ask this of you. We can offer nothing in return for it."

This sounds as if it came from the party *ex cathedra*. What are we (the National Americans) to understand from this! We have in our view the proposing of measures dear to us as patriots and vital to us as a party. We cannot move in our measures if the committees are stoked against us. Have we not a right at least to expect a fair division of power on the committee? I do not believe that there is a member of National American party in Congress who would not scorn to ask for any particular place on any particular committee; but as a party they have a right to expect a fair chance in the division of power—power to be created by the Speaker. Yet the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Cadwalader) says, in advance, "You can expect nothing from him, or from the party which he will represent."

You will not fail to see, fellow citizens, that the Administration party in Congress have been proclaiming their repugnance to us in advance first, in their caucus, then in their published speeches, all going to verify the deadly proscriptive policy which is registered in the decrees of the Administration at the White House.

But I must bring this letter to a close, I have been speaking as a member of the National American party. You all know that in the last canvass I proclaimed and defended the principles of that party; that I was re-elected alone upon the issues arising out of the policy of that party; that I dodged nothing; and that my majority was nearly two thousand votes. I am here as the representative of the National American party, and I shall shrink from no duty which my allegiance to the party may demand.

Respectfully and gratefully, your servant,
W. R. SMITH.

"Come, tell how much you cleared by your wild land speculation!" Cleared! Oh, ah, cleared my pockets!"