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BY GEORGE HOWARD,

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DOMESTIC.

MR. VAN BUREN'S LETTER.

The following is Mr. Van Buren's reply to the Committee of the Shocco meeting:

Owasco, Cayuga Co. Oct. 4, 1832.

Gentlemen: Your letter of the 25th August found me at this place. I regret extremely that the delay in its reception, occasioned by my absence, has prevented an earlier attention to its contents.

By the resolutions which you have been appointed to communicate to me, I am advised that those by whom they were adopted, desire to be informed of my sentiments "on the subjects of the Protective System and its proper adjustment, Internal Improvement, the Bank of the United States, and Nullification."

The right of those you represent, to be informed of my opinions upon these interesting subjects, as derived from the position in which the favor of my fellow citizens has placed me, is undoubted; and in cheerfully complying with their request, I have only to regret, that the inconvenience of the situation in which it finds me, consequent upon the hurry and confusion attending the further prosecution of my journey, and the importance, to the fulfilment of the objects of your constituents, of as little delay as possible in the transmission of the communication, preclude any thing like an elaborate discussion of the subjects under consideration, if indeed such a course would, under more favorable circumstances, be desirable to you. The regret, however, which I might otherwise experience on this account, is relieved by the hope, that my fellow citizens of North Carolina, preferring, with characteristic good sense, results to speculations, will be as well satisfied, and as effectually aided in the intelligent bestowment of their suffrages, by a brief but explicit avowal of my opinions, as they would be by an elaborate dissertation upon subjects which have been so thoroughly and diffusively debated.

Although my official acts in relation to the Protective System, might well be regarded as rendering the avowal unnecessary, I think it, nevertheless, proper to say, that I believe the establishment of commercial regulations, with a view to the encouragement of domestic products, to be within the constitutional power of Congress. Whilst, however, I have entertained this opinion, it has never been my wish to see the power in question exercised with an oppressive inequality upon any portion of our citizens, or for the advantage of one section of the Union at the expense of another. On the contrary, I have at all times believed it to be the sacred duty of those who are entrusted with the administration of the federal government, to direct its operations in the manner best calculated to distribute as equally as possible its burthens and blessings amongst the several States and the people. My views upon this subject were several years ago spread before the people of this State, and have since been widely diffused through the medium of the public press. My object at that time was to invite the attention of my immediate constituents to a dispassionate consideration of the subject in its various bearings; being well assured, that such an investigation would bring them to a standard, which, from its moderation and

justice, would furnish the best guarantee for the true interests of all. If, as has been supposed, those views have contributed in any degree to produce a state of feeling so much to be desired, I have reason to be gratified with the result.

The approaching, and if the policy of the present Executive is allowed to prevail, the certain and speedy extinguishment of the national debt, has presented an opportunity for a more equitable adjustment of the tariff, which has already been embraced by the adoption of a conciliatory measure, the spirit of which will, I doubt not, continue to be cherished by all who are not desirous of advancing their private interests at the sacrifice of those of the public, and who place a just value upon the peace and harmony of the Union.

The Protective System and its proper adjustment, became a subject of frequent and necessary consideration, whilst I formed a part of the cabinet; and the manner in which the President proposed to carry into effect the policy in relation to imposts, recommended in his previous messages, has since been avowed with that frankness which belongs to his character. To this end, he recommended "a modification of the tariff, which should produce a reduction of the revenue to the wants of the government, and an adjustment of the duty upon imports, with a view to equal justice in relation to all our national interests, and to the counteraction of foreign policy, so far as it may be injurious to those interests."

In these sentiments I fully concur; and I have been thus explicit in the statement of them, that there may be no room for misapprehension as to my own views upon the subject. A sincere and faithful application of these principles to our legislation, unwarping by private interest or political design; a restriction of the wants of the government to a simple and economical administration of its affairs—the only administration which is consistent with the purity and stability of the republican system;—a preference in encouragement given, to such manufactures as are essential to the national defence, and its extension to others in proportion as they are adapted to our country, and of which the raw material is produced by ourselves; with a proper respect for the rule which demands that all taxes should be imposed in proportion to the ability and condition of the contributors; would, I am convinced, give ultimate satisfaction to a vast majority of the people of the United States, and arrest that spirit of discontent which is now unhappily so prevalent, and which threatens such extensive injury to the institutions of our country.

Internal Improvements are so diversified in their nature, and the possible agency of the federal government in their construction, so variable in its character and degree, as to render it not a little difficult to lay down any precise rule that will embrace the whole subject. The broadest and best defined division, is that which distinguishes between the direct construction of works of internal improvement by the general government, and pecuniary assistance given by it to such as are undertaken by others. In the former, are included the right to make and establish roads and canals within the States, and the assumption of as much jurisdiction over the territory they may occupy, as is necessary to their preservation and use: the latter is restricted to simple grants of money, in aid of such works, when made under State authority.

The federal government does not, in my opinion, possess the power first specified; nor can it derive it from the assent of the State in which such works are to be constructed. The money power, as it is called, is not so free from difficulty. Various rules have from time to time been suggested by those who properly appreciate the importance of precision and

certainty in the operations of the federal power; but they have been so frequently infringed upon by the apparently unavoidable action of the government, that a final and satisfactory settlement of the question has been prevented. The wide difference between a definition of the power in question upon paper, and its practical application to the operations of government, has been sensibly felt by all who have been entrusted with the management of public affairs. The whole subject was reviewed in the President's Maysville message. Sincerely believing that the best interests of the whole country, the quiet, not to say the stability, of the Union, and the preservation of that moral force which perhaps as much as any other holds it together, imperiously required that the destructive course of legislation upon that subject, then prevalent, should, in some proper and constitutional way, be arrested, I throughout gave to the measure of which that document was an exposition, my active, zealous and anxious support.

The opinions declared by the President in the Maysville, and his succeeding annual message, as I understand them, are as follows: 1st. That Congress does not possess the power to make or establish a road or canal within a State, with a right of jurisdiction to the extent I have stated; and that if it is the wish of the people that the construction of such works should be undertaken by the federal government, a previous amendment of the Constitution, conferring that power, and defining and restricting its exercise, with reference to the sovereignty of the States is indispensable. 2d. An intimation of his belief that the right to make appropriations in aid of such internal improvements as are of a national character, has been so generally acted upon, and so long acquiesced in by the federal and State governments, and the constituents of each, as to justify its exercise; but, that it is nevertheless highly expedient that even such appropriations should, with the exception of such as relate to light-houses, beacons, buoys, public piers and other improvements, in the harbors and navigable rivers of the United States, for the security and facility of our foreign commerce, be deferred at least until the national debt is paid. 3d. That if it is the wish of the people that the agency of the federal government should be restricted to the appropriation of money, and extended in that form, in aid of such undertakings, when carried on by State authority, then the occasion, the manner and the extent of the appropriation, should be made the subject of constitutional regulation.

In these views I concurred; and I likewise participated in the difficulties which were encountered, and expressed by the President, in adopting the principle which concedes to the federal government the right to make appropriations in aid of works which might be regarded as of a national character—difficulties which arose as well from the danger of considering mere usage the foundation of the right, as from the extreme uncertainty and consequent insecurity of the best rule that had ever been adopted, or that could, in the absence of a positive constitutional provision, be established. The reasons on which these objections were founded, are so fully stated in the document referred to, and have been so extensively promulgated that it is unnecessary for me to repeat them here. Subsequent reflection and experience have confirmed my apprehensions of the injurious consequences which would probably flow from the usurpation of appropriations for internal improvements, with no better rule for the government of Congress than that of which I have spoken; and I do not hesitate to express it as my opinion, that the general and true interests of the country would be best consulted by withholding them, with the exceptions I have already

referred to, until some constitutional regulation upon the subject has been made.

In this avowal, I am certainly not influenced by feelings of indifference, much less of hostility, to internal improvements. As such, they can have no enemies. I have never omitted to give them all the proper aid in my power; for which, by the way, I claim no particular merit, as I do not believe there is an honest and sane man in the country who does not wish to see them prosper. But their construction, and the manner in which and the means by which they are to be effected, are quite different questions. Rather than again expose our legislation to all the corrupting influences of those scrambles and combinations in Congress, which have been heretofore witnessed, and the other affairs of the country to the injurious effects unavoidably resulting from them, it would, in my opinion, be infinitely preferable to leave works of the character spoken of, and not embraced in the exception which has been pointed out, for the present, to the support upon which they have reposed with so much success for the last two years, viz: State efforts and private enterprise. If the great body of the people become convinced that the progress of these works should be accelerated by the federal arm, they will not refuse to come to some proper constitutional arrangement upon the subject. The supposition that an equitable rule, which pays a proper respect to the interests and condition of the different States, could fail to receive, ultimately, the constitutional sanction, would be doing injustice to the intelligence of the country. By such a settlement of the question, our political system, in addition to the other advantages derived from it, would, in relation to this subject at least, be relieved from those dangerous shocks which spring from diversities of opinion upon constitutional points of deep interest; and, in the mean time, the resources of the country would be best husbanded by being left in the hands of those by whose labor they are produced.

I am unreservedly opposed to a renewal of the charter of the United States Bank, and approve of the refusal of the President to sign the bill, passed for that purpose, at the last session of Congress, as well on account of the unconstitutionality, as the impolicy of its provisions.

I am equally opposed to the principle of Nullification, as it is called. With whatever sincerity that doctrine may be entertained by others, I believe that it is entirely destitute of constitutional authority, and that it could not be adopted, without drawing after it the ultimate but certain destruction of the confederacy.

That these views will be universally acceptable to those who have called them forth, I do not allow myself to expect. He who thinks in a country, the interests of which are so diversified as ours, and in respect to the Constitution of which, construction is made to perform so great a part, that the purest intentions, or the most profound reflections, can enable him so to shape his political tenets as to meet the approbation of all; or who is so unreasonable as to require that those of the public servants should, in all respects, correspond with his own, must expect to make up his account with disappointment or deception. For myself, I cherish no such hope. All I ask, is a fair confidence in the sincerity of the principles I have avowed, and in the fidelity with which they will be maintained. It is not possible that any nomination could have been more entirely unsolicited, by word or deed, than that which has been bestowed upon me. Had it not been for the event to which, as I have before said, I feel myself principally indebted for it, I should not have hesitated to decline, however highly distinguished the honor intended for me is felt to be. And I beg my fellow citizens of North Carolina to believe, that, notwithstanding the deep sense