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Political.

Gen. Foote's Letter.

WASHINGTON, JUNE 23, 1849.

Hon. Henry A. Wise, Accomac county, Va.

MY DEAR SIR, I wish I could say that I feel none of that solicitude expressed in your letter to our mutual friend Dr. G*** (which has been just shown to me) in regard to the existing condition of our public concerns, and the consequences likely to arise from certain movements of one or two of our leading politicians, to which you have invited my attention. Never in my life, I assure you, have I felt more sorely oppressed with doubt and despondency, or considered the Union itself in more danger, than I do at this moment. Last year, it seemed to be admitted by all discerning men that our political sky was not a little gloomy and menacing, but, now, the very blackness of darkness appears to have spread like a funeral pall over the whole firmament. Had we been able to effect last winter some fair and fraternal compromise of the question of slavery in the territories, as at one time was confidently expected, there would have been but little in the vista of the future to sadden the heart or alarm the fears of the patriot; but the machinations of wicked and perverse men have triumphed over the straight-forward honesty and manly energy of others; and lo! hope has been transformed into dismay, and confusion has taken the place of order; just, too, as the season of danger and difficulty seemed drawing to a close! For one, I shall ever look upon the defeat of the Walker amendment of our last session as the most unfortunate event of our history; and I shall be indeed greatly disappointed if those who have been heard fiercely to exult over the success of their wicked dexterity, are not fated hereafter to lament the success of their efforts in sackcloth and ashes.

I confess myself wholly unable to divine how any man, wishing well to the administration of Gen. Taylor, and really desirous that the ship of State, while under his guidance, should be favored with calm weather and tranquil seas, could wish, notwithstanding, to keep this alarming territorial question open for future agitation and excitement; nor do I find it a whit less difficult to understand how a leading Democratic Senator from one of the slave States of the confederacy, could reconcile it to his sense of duty to so critical, with the worst and bitterest foes of our domestic southern institutions, in preventing the settlement of a question so full of perplexity and peril, not to the South only, but to the Union also. And yet here is the vote in the Senate, on the 1st day of March last, upon the proposed amendment of Mr. Walker, after it had been agreed to in committee of the whole, and reported for final action:

AFFIRMATIVE VOTE.—Messrs. Atchison, Bell, Berrien, Butler Calhoun, of Mississippi, Davis, Dickinson, Dodge of Iowa, Downs, Fitzpatrick, Foote, Hunter, Johnson, of Maryland, Johnson, of Georgia, King, Mangum, Mason, Pearce, Rusk; Sturgeon, Turney, Underwood, Walker, Westcott, and Yulee.

NEGATIVE VOTE.—Messrs. Alen, Atherton, Baldwin, Benton, Corwin, Davis of Massachusetts, Dixance, Upham, and Wales.

That, after making up his mind to join in defeating the only plan of compromise which seemed practicable, Mr. Benton should follow up his treachery to the South and the Union with further movements in the same direction, was to be expected from the man and

his position; but that even he should have presumed to turn, without provocation, upon those who had been struggling ardently for two sessions to save the Union from destruction, and the South from degradation and ruin, and accuse them of being traitors and disunionists, was surely not to be anticipated. And yet this is precisely what has occurred; and, though the intelligent freemen of Missouri appear to take a correct view of his conduct, still the fact cannot be concealed, that his defection has already imparted much confidence to our enemies in the North; whilst our friends in that quarter of the Union have been proportionately discouraged and paralyzed. It now appears manifest that the Wilmot Proviso will pass both houses of Congress; and if he who saved his country's honor upon the field of Beuna Vista shall be found unwilling to rescue it again in the dread hour which is fast approaching, God only knows what horrid scenes we are to witness. Of one consolation, though, the generous sons of the South can never be defrauded: no instance has yet been recorded on the page of authentic history, in which the faithless soldier, who abandoned his colors, and stole over to the enemy, amidst the heat and confusion of battle, ever afterward found himself rewarded according to his hopes by those whose triumph he had thus become auxiliary.

On reading the speech which Mr. Benton delivered at Jefferson city a few weeks since, a copy of which was sent to you a day or two ago from this place, you will not fail to be struck with the fact that, whilst he has taken it upon himself, at the safe distance of a thousand miles or so from the objects of his assault "Address of the Southern Delegates in Congress to their Constituents," of having been found aiding and abetting in a rank disunion plot, he has done you and your patriotic county of Accomac the honor of arraying you in the very front rank of treason and rebellion.

I cannot doubt that you will agree with me in considering this last harangue of Mr. Benton as one of the most remarkable productions of this remarkable age. It would appear to have met with unusual favor in certain vicinages, and to have called forth lusty commendation from one or two editors, who have not been heretofore classed as his admirers. Indeed, he is said to have been actually nominated for the Presidency itself in several rather obscure Abolition neighborhoods. And yet, for the life of me, I cannot see nothing either in the speech or speaker which should provoke such admiration. It is evidently a long meditated, laboriously prepared, and diligently memorized discourse, upon certain national topics of most surpassing interest; and yet do I feel that I can observe of it justly, and without the smallest exaggeration, that its feeble and confused reasonings, its tawdry grandiloquence in some places its coarse scurrility in others—its awkward and clownish attempts at a sort of Cicerone facetiousness—its unmanly dogmatism—its nauseating egotism—and that infernal spirit of malignity which it breathes throughout, and which would have been far better suited to animate the oratories of some "goblin damned," or devil broke loose from hell, than to give grace and dignity to aught of human mould and temperament—would be sufficient to extinguish the glory and blast the fame of the most distinguished orator that either ancient or modern times have afforded. I will not weary you by dilating further upon a theme which could not but prove unsavory. You have heard this "man of head and intellect" attempt to grapple with great questions of State, when he evidently seemed to suppose that a fit of genuine rhetorical inspiration had come upon him; and you will have no difficulty in appreciating the encomiums which have been so lavishly bestowed upon the august deliverer of Calhounias.

It is amusing enough to observe with what pertinacity Mr. Benton keeps up his pursuit of the favorite statesmen of South Carolina. The issues which he makes in his Jefferson City speech are all made with Mr. Calhoun. His denunciations are all for him. He ridicules him—the maligns him—without stint or remorse. He mentions no other signer of the Southern Address by name at all. He glances, to be sure, furtively, and almost as if by pure accident, once or twice at those who united with the draughtsman of the address, in the act of subscribing it; but affects to recognize every mother's son of them as mere "followers" of a sort of idolized

political leader. His reason for adopting this particular course is obvious enough; he imagined that there yet lurked in the public mind a remnant of that once prevalent prejudice against Mr. Calhoun as the expounder of nullification and supposed that if he could manage to connect our movement last winter with the noted measures of State resistance adopted by South Carolina a few years since, his triumph in the contest which he has sought would be quite an easy one. Besides, he had but little right to expect that Mr. Calhoun would come into arena at all with such an antagonist as himself, as he is well known very seldom indeed to notice anything which chances to fall from Mr. Benton in the Senate, and to cherish for him only a sentiment of immeasurable contempt. By cautiously avoiding any special allusion to other signers of the address, he expected to be able to assail them thus indirectly, without affording them a pretext for retaliating his hostility. I regret to feel compelled to disappoint this anticipation of impunity. Representing, as I have the honor to do, a valiant, a patriotic, and Union-loving constituency—a constituency who, upon all questions which involve the honor of the nation, or their own domestic security, are united to a man—a constituency firm, discreet, enlightened; who

Put know their rights, and knowing, dare maintain;
Prevent the long aimed blow,
And crush the tyrant when they read the chain;

acting by the authority of such a constituency, in a high place, I dare not prove recreant before their enemies, or patiently permit my standing and good faith as a trusted functionary to be called in question by any inflated and presumptuous demagogue that has ever yet crushed the republic with his presence.

I respect Mr. Calhoun very highly, and believe that few better, purer, and more patriotic men have ever lived on earth; but whilst I am not ashamed to acknowledge my high reverence for his mind and character, I am not afraid of being regarded by any man who knows me as his obsequious follower. A few days will determine, whether he who has been set forth as our leader, may not, in spite of his known aversion to controversial strife, and the feeble state of his physical health, prompted by the peculiar perils of the hour, a deep and swelling sense of long accumulating wrongs, and this last vandalic outrage upon his feelings and character, snatch the sword of vengeance from the scabbard where it reposes; and wield it with a giant's strength for the destruction of such monsters as have seldom appeared in the world since the old days of Mythical renown.

Perrypit Acheronta Hercules labor! until he shall consider his assailants worthy of death at his own hands, it would ill-become one wholly uncommissioned for the purpose to presume to lift lance in his defence. I shall confine myself to points which involve alike the honor of all who subscribed the Southern Address. What are the circumstances connected with the origin of this much censured document? They are easily stated, and as easily comprehended. Let it be borne in mind that when the meeting or convention of the Southern members of Congress was held in the Capitol last winter various aggressions of a most serious character had from time to time been committed upon the peculiar institutions of the South; a graphic delineation of which will be found in the address itself. These aggressions must have been most serious and alarming as all will admit that the outrages perpetrated within a few years past have been grosser and more vital than any heretofore complained of; and since Mr. Benton himself, who now has the effrontery to declare, in his Jefferson City speech, that he "has seen no danger to the slave property of any State in this Union from the action of Congress;" then nineteen years ago, in his speech on Foote's resolutions, averred, with every appearance of deliberation, that the passage of a general emancipation law by Congress was not only "by no means improbable," but, "on the contrary absolutely certain, in the event of the success of certain measures then on foot." When we held our meeting in the Senate Chamber, a resolution had been introduced into the House of Representatives, the object of which was to repeal all acts or parts of acts which recognize the existence of slavery, or which authorize the selling or disposing of Columbia; and almost enough votes

had been cast in support of this resolution to carry it triumphantly through. At this period, also, a resolution had passed the House, by a vote of 107 to 80, instructing the Committee on Territories forthwith to report bills providing for the exclusion of slavery from California and New Mexico. This had been followed up by a bill providing for the taking of the votes of their inhabitants of the District of Columbia, inclusive of slaves and free negroes, upon the question whether slavery should not be abolished therein. A resolution had passed the House, by a vote of 98 to 88, directing the Committee on the District of Columbia to report a bill, so soon as practicable, prohibiting the slave trade in said District. Upon all these several questions much exciting debate had occurred, and the language of reproach and menace had been freely and fiercely employed by certain abolition members. Various new recruits, also, had, in the progress of these transactions, been seen to take their stand amid the ranks of our enemies. Mr. Benton affects to think that there was nothing in the least degree alarming in this state of things; though, I repeat, he had expressed his fears of the passage of a general emancipation law by Congress as early as 1830; yea, had asserted that the passage of such a law was "always most absolutely certain in the event of the success of measures then on foot." We of the meeting did not agree with Mr. Benton. We saw dangers, in the most appalling form, about us and around us, and that there was absolute necessity for looking at once to our own safety and that of our constituents. We believed the Union itself to be in imminent peril, and we resolved to do all in our power to preserve it from destruction. The meeting which has been so much denounced was accordingly convoked. No secrecy whatever was observed or enjoined: on the contrary, the utmost publicity was sought to be given to the whole affair.

Mr. Benton asserts, in his Jefferson City speech, that our meeting was gotten up by Mr. Calhoun. A statement more groundless could not have been hazarded. So far as I know or believe, Mr. Calhoun had no participation whatever in getting up this particular meeting; nor do I believe that he knew it was to be assembled until most of those whose presence was desired had been already summoned. I gave an account of this meeting, as to its origin and objects on the 22d day of February last, which no one understood at the time to call in question, and which I do not believe that even the redoubtable Senator from Missouri will ever be proud enough to deny in my hearing. In reply to Mr. Dayton, of New Jersey, who had evidently received some misrepresentations in regard to its character, thus did I express myself:

"Mr. President, the honorable Senator from New Jersey permitted several allusions to drop from his lips which have induced me to suppose that he designed to reflect somewhat upon the proceedings of a body which lately assembled in this city, called the Southern Convention. Now, Mr. President though I can declare, without affectation, that I regard myself as among the humblest of those who participated in the deliberations of that August assembly; yet, as I had a very particular connection with it, and have been made, from accidental circumstances, more the subject of coarse denunciation and ruffianly ridicule than any other member of it, I beg leave to avow my whole responsibility in this affair, and to incur all the discredit to which the public may judge me entitled by reason of my acts. I avow, then, sir, (as I find I am charged in various newspapers with doing,) that I did, in conjunction with a worthy friend of mine, (also a member of this body,) enter the hall of Representatives, in order to summon the Southern members of that body to meet in this chamber, at night, for that was the time when such a meeting could be possibly held,) for the purpose of taking into grave consideration the various aggressions upon our rights which had been perpetrated, or which were in a course of being perpetrated, by wicked and unscrupulous men; and for the counteraction of which it was obvious that the most prompt and vigorous measures were necessary. Yes, sir, I did perform this subordinate ministerial part of summoning the Southern members of the House of Representatives. I summoned Whigs and I summoned Democrats. I myself summoned directly or indirectly, the representatives of nine of the sovereign States of the Un-

ion. Moreover, I talked freely with those whose presence I requested, in explanation of the objects of the contemplated meeting. I could confidently appeal to them, and each of them, whether in all I said, I hinted at disunion. Well, sir, that convention assembled. Much debate occurred, and much division sprang up, chiefly on minor points—such as the time most proper for decided action against our adversaries, and the mode in which such action should take place. I maintain (and defy contradiction) that there was not a single sentiment uttered in that body that fairly and dispassionately considered, if made known to the world, could bring the least discredit upon the assembly in which it was announced.

"An address was sent forth to the people of the South, every statement of which is true beyond contradiction—every sentence and line of which is every sentence and line of which is marked with high toned patriotism and devout regard for the Union. This address, sir, was subscribed by a large number of the Southern members of Congress present. It was not subscribed, for different reasons, by others, whose refusal to subscribe it is, I hope, capable of satisfactory explanation to their respective constituents. I feel bound to go further, and say, that there are among those who thought it not politic, under all the circumstances of the case, to subscribe the address, (as preliminary to its publication,) some of the most worthy men and unquestioned patriots to be found in the republic. And now, sir, the address has gone forth—it has performed its high office. The South is roused up to a circumspect and scrutinizing survey of all the dangers which threaten her present peace and future safety. Our enemies stand paralyzed by the moral energy so suddenly and so imposingly displayed by Southern Senators and Representatives, and the contemporaneous legislative resolves of nearly all the Southern States of the confederacy. At last there is some prospect of pacification, of compromise, of the final settlement of the most distracting and dangerous question which has been agitated in our times. Darkness is fleeing away, and light is beginning to beam upon us.—Who shall dare to denounce those who met in that convention as traitors to the Constitution and the Union? Who shall presume to arraign now the sound intentions of that noble body of Southern gentlemen and patriots? Who among all those that so fraternally co-operated for the defence and vindication of southern rights and southern honor, will ever cease to be proud that he was one of that glorious Southern Convention, the members of which dared, in spite of maledictions, misrepresentations, and ridicule, to perform a high and sacred duty to their constituents and country, by which those constituents and that country have been, in all probability rescued from dangers which could not have been effectually warded off save by the means so providentially adopted, and so fearlessly put in exercise?"

Mr. Benton complains that he was not invited to attend the meeting of the Southern Members of Congress. I should have thought that a man of his sagacity would have been able to account for this failure to secure his valuable presence, without feeling himself compelled to impute unworthy designs to those who got up the meeting. I will enlighten him though on this point. He was not invited to be present, because he was hostile to the adoption of all defensive measures against Abolition and Free Soil hostility; because it was as well known then, as it is now, that he was a Free Soil man in opinion and feeling; because he was known to be in secret correspondence with the enemies of the South, and had already entered into a compact with certain Abolition and Free Soil Managers, to sacrifice Southern honor and Southern prosperity upon the altar of his own political advancement. It was known to some of us at that period, as well as it now is from his own confession at Jefferson city that his "personal sentiments were against slavery." We had perfectly ascertained, and I had charged the fact upon him in public debate, not when he was absent, but when present: in sight, and not ten feet distant—that he had openly avowed the Wilmot Proviso faith. His formal declaration at Jefferson city, that "it is absurd to deny the power to Congress to legislate as it pleases upon the subject of slavery in Territories," was not at all necessary to assure us that such was his opinion; and, there-

fore we did not perceive any advantage which could accrue from his presence or counsels. Indeed, he avows that he would not have attended the meeting had he been summoned. Therefore, no consequence, good or bad, could have proceeded from our not inviting him. It is most evident, now at least, if it was not so before his late speech; that we could not have at all profited by his suggestions; for does he not, even in that same speech, use this language: "I have seen no danger to the slave property of any State in this action by the action of Congress, and cannot contribute to alarm the country by engaging in discussions which assert or imply danger?" These are his very words; and, if sincerely spoken, his presence among us would have been as little beneficial as are his present Free Soil speeches in Missouri.

But is he sincere in thus declaring? I cannot believe that he is not, and most approved speech of his political life. I allude to the one he delivered in the Senate of the United States during the winter of 1830—nineteen years ago—upon Foote's resolutions. Then, there was not a single member of either house of Congress who was an open and avowed Abolitionist. The Free Soil question, in its present terrible form, had not been ever heard of. Wilmot himself was a boy; Hale, Seward, and Tuck were, I should suppose, scarcely grown up to manhood. John Quincy Adams had not concluded to figure in the House of Representatives. Giddings had not yet become a name of fearful augury. Full six years after the delivery of this speech, Martin Van Buren, in his inaugural speech as President, voluntarily pledged himself to veto any bill providing for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, if such a monstrous horridness of congressional legislation should ever dare to show its accursed visage at the White House. Then Mr. Benton, who now sees no "danger whatever to the slave property of any State in the Union from the action of Congress," whilst making a speech on the subject of the public lands, went out of his way to express himself as follows:

"The annihilation of the States, under a doctrine which would draw all their conflicts into the federal judiciary, and make its decisions binding on the States, and subject to the penalties of treason all who resisted the execution of those decrees, would produce that consequence; it would annihilate the States! It would reduce them to the abject condition of provinces of the federal empire. It would enable the dominant party in Congress at any moment to execute the most frightful designs. Let us suppose a case—one by no means improbable; on the contrary, absolutely certain, in the event of certain measures now on foot: The late Mr. King, of New York, when a member of the American Senate, declared upon this floor that slavery in these United States, in point of law and right, did not exist, and could not exist, under the nature of our free form of government; and that the Supreme Court of the United States would thus declare it. This declaration was made about ten years ago, in the crisis and highest paroxysm of the Missouri agitation. Since then we have seen this declaration repeated and enforced in every variety of form and shape, by an organized party in all the non-slaveholding States. Since then we have seen the principles of the same declaration developed in legislative proceedings in the shape of committee reports and public debate in the halls of Congress. Since then we have had the D'Auterive case, and seen a petition presented from the chair of the House of Representatives, Mr. John W. Taylor being Speaker, in which the total destruction of all the States that would not abandon slavery was expressly represented as a sublime act. With these facts before us, and myriads of others, which are seen by all, the probability of a federal legislative act against slavery rises in the event of the success of certain designs now on foot. So much for what may happen in Congress."

"Then, in 1830, Mr. Benton, the present deliverer of Calhounias, said in the same speech:

"A geographical party, and chiefly a political caste, are incessantly at work on the subject. Their operations pervade the States, intrude into this chamber, display themselves in innumerable forms, and the thickening of the signs announces the forthcoming of some extraordinary movement."

Again, he said in the same debate: "I foresee that this subject is to act