1971

Thirty Years With Calhoun, Rhett, and the Charleston Mercury: a Chapter in South Carolina Politics.

John Stanford Coussons
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/2042

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
COUSCONS, John Stanford, 1931-
THIRTY YEARS WITH CALHOUN, RHETT, AND THE
CHARLESTON MERCURY: A CHAPTER IN SOUTH
CAROLINA POLITICS.

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural
and Mechanical College, Ph.D., 1971
History, modern

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan

THIS DISSERTATION HAS BEEN MICROFILMED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
THIRTY YEARS WITH CALHOUN, RHETT, AND THE CHARLESTON MERCURY:
A CHAPTER IN SOUTH CAROLINA POLITICS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by
John Stanford Coussons
B.A., Louisiana College, 1951
M.A. Louisiana State University, 1958
August, 1971
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is grateful to Dr. T. Harry Williams for the patient and expert criticism which typified his supervision of this work. Mrs. Granville T. Prior, who first suggested the project, has also been responsible for invaluable assistance. Dr. William J. Cooper, Dr. John L. Loos and Dr. Anne C. Loveland have provided helpful criticism. Finally, the gracious assistance of Mrs. T. Harry Williams, Mrs. Gladys McNerney, and Messrs. Sinkler, Gibbes, Simons, and Guerard have contributed materially to the completion of this study.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE FIRST LESSON</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE FIRST BATTLE</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE ONE GREAT CAUSE</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. HIGH TIDE</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. IMPATIENT PRODIGAL</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. CROSS-FIRE</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. THE STATESMAN OF THE AGE</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. THE REVOLUTION OF 1848</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. A GREAT CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT.</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X. BADGE OF ORTHODOXY</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI. THE VOICE OF THE LEADER</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

First published on January 1, 1822, The Charleston Mercury aspired to provide Charlestonians with a broad coverage of the general and cultural side of the news. In proclaiming his political neutrality the editor, William Morford, charged that political parties served "selfish ends." Branding the influence of such "factions" as pernicious, he endorsed a policy of "harmony and coalition."

This approach did not satisfy Morford's readers. Subscriptions declined and after eighteen months the editor sold the paper to Henry Laurens Pinckney. An attorney and a politician, Pinckney was a member of the legislature. Reversing Morford's policy of political restraint, he placed the Mercury squarely behind Calhoun.

During Pinckney's eight years as editor, the paper became a primary spokesman for the Vice President. Advocating nullification, it followed Calhoun in his retreat from nationalism. This approach proved more popular and brought about an increase in both circulation and advertising. By 1830, the Mercury was widely read inside and outside the borders of South Carolina.

In 1832 John Allan Stuart replaced Pinckney as editor. Another attorney-politician, Stuart, like Pinckney, was a member of the legislature. Along with his brother-in-law, Robert Barnwell Rhett, Stuart was also a follower of Calhoun. Under Stuart's direction the Mercury became the Calhoun-inspired champion of slavery and
a strong advocate of southern political unity.

Calhoun's influence on the *Mercury* increased steadily during Stuart's years as editor. When Calhoun sought the presidency in 1844, the *Mercury* served as the principal spokesman for the campaign. Only a few months later, however, the Senator and the paper parted company.

As an important financial backer of Stuart, Rhett exerted a strong force on the *Mercury*. Since he was a follower of Calhoun, his connection with Stuart initially strengthened the Senator's influence. But in 1844 Rhett lost faith in Calhoun's manner of promoting southern unity. Despairing of the South's willingness to act in concert, Rhett proposed that South Carolina act independently. This decision resulted in a break with Calhoun. Aware that "no public man in [South Carolina had] ever pitted himself in direct hostility to Calhoun who [had] not fallen for it," the *Mercury* nevertheless followed Rhett.

When Calhoun crushed Rhett's effort, the *Mercury* accepted the consequences of its action. Stuart resigned as editor and Rhett began the long process of rebuilding his political prospects. John Milton Clapp became the new editor of the *Mercury*.

Clapp, a professional journalist, was confronted with a difficult situation. Since the Rhett family had retained its financial interest in the paper, Clapp was pro-Rhett. Accustomed to thinking of the *Mercury* as the organ of Calhoun, his readers were dissatisfied with this situation. Hampered, then, by the results of a political rupture, Clapp was left to edit a paper without a mission. The resulting decline in subscriptions is indicative of his plight.
Clapp was relieved of his dilemma when John E. Carew bought the paper and became editor on February 1, 1845. An attorney and also a member of the legislature, Carew restored the paper to its former position in the Calhoun camp. Under Carew the *Mercury* established a national reputation for faithfully representing the views of the great Carolinian.

Repenting of its former disposition to favor separate state action, the paper endorsed Calhoun's manner of promoting unity. It advocated cooperation with other southern states and hailed the Nashville Convention as the long awaited vindication of Calhoun's position. This return to the orthodox South Carolina stance was popular with readers. It resulted in an expanded subscription list and a generous increase in advertising.
INTRODUCTION

Ante-bellum politicians viewed the newspaper as the primary vehicle for conveying their ideas to the general public. This circumstance is especially discernible in South Carolina between 1820 and 1850. In an effort to build support for his program of southern unity, John C. Calhoun utilized a variety of papers to spread his views throughout both the state and the South. The Pendleton Messenger, the Columbia South Carolinian, the Washington (D.C.) Telegraph, and the Washington (D.C.) Spectator periodically served in this capacity. But the Charleston Mercury furnishes the best example of a political newspaper. For more than twenty years it was published for little reason other than to provide Calhoun with steady and enthusiastic support.

From the journalists's point of view, the Mercury was a characteristic southern newspaper. Neither larger nor smaller than its competitors, it was available at the same subscription rate. Unlike the New Orleans Picayune to whose direction the Mercury's last editor succeeded,¹ the Charleston paper was responsible for no spectacular innovations in the world of journalism nor was it distinguished by superior newsgathering.

¹Fayette Copeland, Kendall of the Picayune (Norman, 1943), 20-41; Laura A. White, Robert Barnwell Rhett: Father of Secession (New York, 1931), 242.
In line with conventional practice, the *Mercury*'s front page was given over to advertising. Advertisements extended onto other pages as well, completely filling the back sheet and, after 1832, frequently accounting for as much as seventy-five per cent of the paper's space. Presumably an indication of the popularity of the *Mercury*'s position on nullification, this increase in advertising amounted to about twenty-five per cent of the pre-1832 total.

Describing the affairs of Charleston's declining port, columns like "Marine News" appealed to local merchants. There were the usual quotations on the stocks of local banks and on those of the Bank of the United States. The *Courier* presented a more thorough picture of commercial conditions, however, and other journals offered more to those interested in cultural matters.

The *Mercury*'s real significance was confined to the field of politics. Even in this area readers could find no more complete coverage than that provided by other city papers. Only in the *Mercury*, however, could they be sure of finding views approved by the state's leaders. Faithfully following South Carolina's young politicians of the Era of Good Feeling in their movement from optimistic nationalism to defensive sectionalism, the *Mercury* was a strong voice in Calhoun's long drive to unite the South. The Senator's ideas found their most complete expression in this paper. During the greater part of its career the *Mercury* served as the quasi-official organ of South Carolina politics.

This analysis is not intended to imply that the Charleston journal was a mediocre paper. Ably and at times brilliantly edited, the *Mercury* maintained a balanced news coverage. Throughout most of
its life, however, the paper was dominated by the will of either John C. Calhoun or Robert Barnwell Rhett. Much of this dissertation, therefore, is devoted to an analysis of the positions of Calhoun and Rhett and their effects on South Carolina politics.\(^2\)

Between 1828 and 1850 the Mercury wove the twin themes of opposition to the tariff and defense of slavery into a contrapuntal song of southern rights and federal oppression. In more recent times, however, scholars have emphasized the importance of slavery as the chief motivation for South Carolina's disaffection, even when it was officially directed at the tariff as in the 1820's. Although the influence of slavery has been cited before,\(^3\) it has taken recent scholarship to define the cause of the turbulent unease which so early gripped the Palmetto State. In 1789 when the very first tariff was being considered, South Carolina's Senator Pierce Butler predicted "a dissolution of the Union . . . as sure as God was in the firmament," if protectionism became government policy. There were many other South Carolina objections to tariff proposals. But more recurrent was the

\(^2\)William L. King, The Newspaper Press of Charleston South Carolina (Charleston, 1872), 147-57. The prevalence of either Calhoun's or Rhett's influence upon the Mercury makes the paper's subscription list into an effective political thermometer. Usually behind the Courier in sales, the Mercury equalled its competitor's circulation of 5,000 in 1850 when Calhoun's stand on southern unity commanded its greatest support. Subscriptions fell off after 1851, however, when the Rhett Family bought into the paper. Under Rhett's influence the Mercury waged an unpopular battle against the rising appeal of nationalism in South Carolina. By 1860 there were only 550 subscriptions on the Mercury's list (Granville T. Prior,"The Charleston Mercury," Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1946, 457; Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Lincoln [2 vols.; 1950], 323).

\(^3\)David F. Houston, A Critical Study of Nullification in South Carolina (Cambridge, 1896), 48-52; Frederic Bancroft, Calhoun and the South Carolina Nullification Movement (Baltimore, 1928),19-20, 115.
problem of slavery and, in particular, insurrection. In the 1790's Senator William Smith warned his colleagues against any thought of emancipation. It "would never be submitted to by the Southern States without a civil war," he said. At the same time John Rutledge told the House of Representatives that Southerners believed the North to be aiming at emancipation. 4

More ominous were the rumors of servile insurrection. During the same decade, even as the state served as a refuge for those—black and white—fleeing Haiti, there were recurring rumors of revolts being inspired by the black emigres. In a letter to the governor of South Carolina, Thomas Jefferson spoke of a plot to incite a Negro insurrection in Charleston. And in 1793 the New York Journal and Patriotic Register reported that Charleston's blacks were "insolent in so much that the citizens are alarmed, and the militia keep constant guard. It is said," the editor concluded, "that the St. Domingan Negroes have sown the seeds of revolt." 5

Neither the rumors nor the concern abated with the turn of the century. The opposite seems rather to have been the case. While there was initially a good deal of skepticism as to the threat imposed by the Denmark Vesey affair, 6 the overall result of it was a heightening of tension. During the three other disturbances between 1820 and nullification, Carolinians became convinced that there was a connection between

4Steven A. Channing, Crisis of Fear (New York, 1970), 54.

5Ibid.; quoted in Ibid.

the rising antislavery movement at the North and unrest within the state. The problem was further compounded by the Carolinians' lingering doubts about the institution of slavery itself. Questioning the suitability of slavery in a republic of free men, many Carolinians could bring themselves to defend it only as a necessary evil. Unnerved by this situation, they deprecated slavery as a topic for public discussion and vented their spleen on the tariff.\textsuperscript{7}

In the process of this dispute, however, South Carolina did not lose sight of the real cause of her trauma. Viewing the tariff as an indirect attack on slavery, Carolinians charged that it would destroy the institution by making a plantation economy unprofitable. Although the abolition of slavery would solve one problem, it would make for a worse one in the form of an undisciplined plural society. Carolinians convinced themselves, therefore, that slavery was a beneficial institution after all. Tightening their control over the blacks, they worried less about insurrection.\textsuperscript{8}

This solution made for an even greater trauma. Nowhere else in the world was the enthusiasm for a slave economy growing as in the southern states of the American union. Although editorial thunder in defense of the institution sometimes obscured the Southerners' awareness of their isolation, they were conscious of it nonetheless. In 1845 Robert Barnwell Rhett received a mournful letter from his kinsman Robert Woodward Rhett observing that "Our institutions are doomed

\textsuperscript{7}William W. Freehling, Prelude to Civil War The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836 (New York,1965), 64, 65, 76, 77, 173-74.

\textsuperscript{8}Ibid.
and the southern civilization must go out in blood." He had despaired of the South's power to repel the abolitionist attack.9

Fourteen years later a Columbia correspondent of the Mercury seemed to feel that the South was at last awakening to the immediacy of her peril. Urging support for a trans-Appalachian railroad, he reminded his readers that the South Carolina Lowcountry was heavily populated by slaves. In the event of secession they would constitute a built-in guerilla force. The railroad would reenforce the besieged plantations and towns of the area with "great hives of the white population" from beyond the mountains.10 And in 1861, after secession had come and the Mercury's dream of the southern nation was realized, a Lowcountry gentleman stood on Charleston's battery to watch the affray with the Star of the West. As he left the crowd assembled there, he encountered a friend who did not like the Mercury's ideas. How would all this end, the friend was asked. "... Don't you know," answered James L. Petigru, "that the whole world is against slavery? So if the South is to fight for that, rest assured, it is lost, never mind which side wins."11

It was in this setting that the Mercury was established by Edmund Morford. Intending to produce a newspaper which would give Charleston a heavy diet of cultural affairs, Morford abhorred

9Quoted in Channing, Crisis, 55.
10Mercury, Dec. 7, 1859.
11Abney R. Childs, ed., Rice Planter and Sportsman The Recollections of J. Notte Alston, 1821 to 1901 (Columbia, 1953), 129. Unless Alston's memory failed him, the crowd must have been disappointed. The action took place off Morris Island and virtually nothing could have been seen from the battery.
political factions and approached the whole subject of politics with a dignified restraint. The first editor's tenure was brief, however, and his influence on the paper so ephemeral that one scholar actually refers to Henry Laurens Pinckney as its founder.\textsuperscript{12} Pinckney, the second editor, aligned the \textit{Mercury} with Calhoun and ultimately stamped it in the image of the southern defender. Under Pinckney's influence the paper became obsessed with the defense of slavery, a preoccupation which it retained until its demise after the War for Southern Independence.

Initial rivals of the \textit{Mercury} included the \textit{City Gazette} and \textit{Commercial Advertiser}, the \textit{Southern Patriot} and \textit{Commercial Advertiser}, and the \textit{Courier}. A morning paper, the \textit{Gazette} was in financial decline during the decade of the twenties and did not long survive to contest the field with the \textit{Mercury}. Until its absorption by the \textit{Courier}, however, it served as an active political commentator and literary critic. The \textit{Patriot}, an evening sheet, emphasized commercial and financial questions and devoted less attention to cultural matters. Advertising itself as a state rights journal, it lasted until 1848. The \textit{Mercury}'s real competition was the \textit{Courier}. Also a morning paper, the \textit{Courier} strove to be "a commercial and business journal, and rather a medium of general intelligence and literature than a political organ."\textsuperscript{13} Despite its occasional disposition to priggishness, the \textit{Courier} was the only one of the original competitors to survive the \textit{Mercury}.

\textsuperscript{12}Daniel Walker Hollis, \textit{South Carolina College} (Columbia, 1951), 41.

\textsuperscript{13}King, \textit{Newspaper Press}, 103.
The Mercury was Charleston's only newspaper that defended the Nullification Ordinance and it was much reviled for so doing. With the times so uncertain and the ever-present subject of the "peculiar institution" of such intensive concern, some Carolinians doubtless wondered at the journal's unilateral action. Finding only a partial explanation in factional politics, commercial interests, and constitutional scruples, the historian must look further to discover that the Mercury's role was that of a pioneer and sentinel: pioneer of southern nationality and sentinel of the plantation slave economy. Undisturbed by the knowledge that the fate of both pioneer and sentinel is to stand alone, the Mercury proudly proclaimed its mission in the motto immediately under its title: Vindice nullo sponte sua sine lege fides rectum-que co lentur, the free and unsupported defender of good faith and right.
CHAPTER I

THE FIRST LESSON

John Caldwell Calhoun appeared first and last in the national capital at a time of crisis. Twelve years before the founding of the Charleston Mercury, an institution with which his story is interwoven, the Abbeville-Laurens-Newberry District elected him to the House of Representatives. Supporting war with England, Calhoun had easily defeated his anti-war Federalist opponent, General John A. Elmore. In December of 1811 the twenty-nine year old upcountry Carolinian took his seat in the twelfth congress. Within a month, he was appointed to the important Committee on Foreign Relations, and shortly thereafter became its chairman.¹

Calhoun's rapid rise in the House was partly due to the favorable impression he had made on the Speaker. Kentucky was also pro-war country, and in the mid-term elections of 1810 had sent Henry Clay to Congress, where he represented the case for war with considerable success. Unlike Calhoun, Clay had previously served in the Senate, and was elected Speaker in this, his first, term in the House.²

¹Gerald M. Capers, John C. Calhoun: Opportunist (Gainesville, 1960), 24, 29. General Elmore was a Revolutionary War veteran and the father of Franklin Elmore who migrated to the Lowcountry and became a close friend of Robert Barnwell Rhett. He also became a Calhoun supporter and succeeded to Calhoun's Senate seat in 1850 (David Duncan Wallace, South Carolina A Short History 1520-1948 [Columbia, 1961], 368).

²Margaret L. Coit, John C. Calhoun, American Portrait (Boston, 1950), 70-72, 81.
did not disappoint the Speaker in his role of committee chairman. Nor was his performance unobserved in other quarters. No less a figure than the British minister was of the opinion that the "younger Deputies" from South Carolina "were very decided on the propriety of going to war in order to protect the Commerce of the Country." He was right. On June 3, 1812—the fourth birthday of a sometime Kentuckian named Jefferson Davis—Calhoun presented his committee's recommendation for war. The declaration came fifteen days later.

This course did not meet with approval from all members of the Congress. John Randolph of Roanoke had long heaped opprobrium upon the heads of those who advocated war. Deriding Henry Clay as the "Western Star," Randolph dismissed Calhoun as the presumptuous son of an unlettered Irish immigrant making "haughty assumptions of equality with the older members." Randolph was thirty-eight. He had, however, been in Congress continuously since his first election in 1799.

Randolph would have an influence on Calhoun, the Mercury, and South Carolina but it was destined to be deferred. He was gavelled into silence by Clay and, in 1813 temporarily left the Congress. In June of that year, however, the equally anti-war Daniel Webster

---


4Coit, Calhoun, 81.

5Ibid., 72, 74.

introduced a set of resolutions into the House, calling upon the government to explain the events leading up to this war that was not going well. The resolutions were productive of much sharp debate, the administration was embarrassed, and the careers of Calhoun, Clay, and Webster had crossed.7

Washington—where all this took place—did not look much like a capital city in those anxious early years of the republic. "No houses are building," one observer said, "those already built are not finished and many are falling rapidly to decay." The whole place, he thought, looked like "some antique ruin." The chamber in which the House debates took place gave, however, a very different impression. Inspired by the architects of classical republics, its Corinthian columns and crimson draperies furnished a sumptuous background for the plum coats, powdered wigs, and knee breeches of the late Federal period. Along with the action in the chamber, the decor tended to obscure the fact that only a few thousand people lived in this unkempt and muddy place. But during the summer adjournment of 1814 the British destroyed Washington's public buildings. On September 2 the National Intelligencer predicted that Washington would never "again be the seat of government."8

Yet the city was rebuilt, and it remained as capital of the confident young republic. By the time of Calhoun's last battle and

7Ibid., XIX, 587. Webster had been elected by Massachusetts in November 1812, when he was thirty years old.

8Coit, Calhoun, 71. The observer was William Dunlap, actor, playwright, theatrical manager, painter, and historian (Malone, ed., DAB, V, 516-18); National Intelligencer, quoted in Coit, Calhoun, 93.
the Mercury's first open call for secession, little remained to remind one of the scars of 1814. It was scars on the body politic that concerned the Congress in 1850. The issue was sectionalism against nationalism as it had been those thirty-seven years before. And Calhoun, Clay and Webster—who had first wrestled with this problem in the session of 1813—would do so for the last time in 1850. In those earlier years of the republic's second war, Calhoun and Clay had represented the majority interest, while Daniel Webster spoke for an outnumbered New England. Long before the triumvirate's last encounter, however, the alignment had shifted, and it was Calhoun who now stood for the minority. His speech of March 4, 1850, summarized his efforts of twenty years to defend this new minority, the plantation South.

Calhoun was not the first to see his section threatened by the ebbing tide of change. Many years before—when South Carolina was still part of the British Empire—Josiah Quincy, a visitor from discontented New England, had heard a gentleman of colonial Charleston express distrust of Massachusetts in particular and northern colonies in general. If Carolinians ever renounced allegiance to their sovereign, this "hot, flaming, sensible Tory," had said, they could expect governors from Massachusetts to replace those appointed from London.9 The stir over Missouri, "... like a fireball in the night, awakened, and filled" Thomas Jefferson "with terror." He considered it, he said, "at once as the knell of the Union."10

9Quoted in Mrs. St. Julien Ravenel, Charleston The Place and the People (New York, 1906), 181-82.

10Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes, April 22, 1820, in Philip S. Foner, ed., basic Writings of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1944), 767.
same issue alerted John Quincy Adams, an aspiring nationalist politician from another region. Confiding his doubts to his diary, Adams wrote, "I take it for granted that the present question is a mere preamble—a title page to a great tragic volume."11

During the session of 1831-1832 the Virginia legislature debated the future of slavery, the institution which was rapidly becoming the catalyst in Adams's "tragic volume." A legislator from one of the Old Dominion's western counties—in urging his fellow assemblymen to grapple for a solution through emancipation—warned that otherwise slavery would someday "provide the rest of the country with a crusade 'in the name of liberty but with the purpose of plunder' . . . in which the South would be held up ' . . . as the common enemies of men whom it will be a duty to overthrow and a justice to despoil.'" The same assembly read a copy of Garrison's new Liberator and joined Virginia's governor in deploring the propositions of that new sheet.12

Legislative action in the direction of manumission might or might not have restored to Virginia the leadership she had enjoyed in earlier times. In any event, Jefferson's mantle had fallen onto different shoulders by 1832, and destiny was directed from other quarters. One of these was South Carolina where the electorate were exercised over two issues. Already annoyed with the tariff, the Charleston


12Clifford Dowdey, The Land They Fought For (Garden City, 1955), 22.
Mercury reacted with alarm to the establishment of The Liberator. Abolitionism raised issues "compared with which all other oppressions are favors and all other insults acts of kindness," the indignant editor proclaimed. He had already warned that this subject could rend "the Union to atoms."

It had not always been so with the Mercury. Charleston's fourth daily newspaper, the Charleston Mercury and Morning Advertiser, first went to press on New Year's Day 1822. Like the city's other newspapers, it consisted of four pages printed in small, clear type. Editorials and news were confined to the first inside page; the rest of the paper consisted of advertisements and matters of cultural interest, commonly called "miscellany." Carolinians received the Mercury six days a week.

Edmund Morford, the founding editor, was graduated from The College of New Jersey with the class of 1797. He came to Charleston a few years later, where by 1805 he owned a successful and--for the time--good bookstore, described by one writer as "the great literary centre of the city." Morford supplemented his income from the

---

13 The Charleston Mercury, Jan. 19, Apr. 7, 1832.
14 Ibid., Apr. 24, 1830.
15 The Charleston Mercury and Morning Advertiser, Jan. 1, 1822.
16 The editor thought the "miscellany" one of his paper's most important departments. In addition to providing pleasure for the reader, it preserved "many brilliant specimens of genius" for posterity, he said (Ibid.).
bookshop by ventures in publishing "pirated" editions of English works, and in 1809 he became what appears to have been the senior partner in the firm that published Charleston's second oldest daily, the Courier. His stint here was a short one. Morford was a Federalist, and having set the editorial course in this direction found it advantageous to retire to his bookshop in 1813.\textsuperscript{19} Federalism was in decline in Charleston.

A rising interest in civic affairs, a continued interest in politics, and some financial support, sent him—nine years later—back to journalism. His new paper, the Mercury, he said, would fill a much needed news and cultural gap in the city since the existing press devoted too much attention to commercial affairs. Without neglecting the merchant the Mercury would cover the "other matters of equal interest which [form] such a varied picture of the concerns of society as may be useful and acceptable to all." Despite Morford's high promises, there was little difference between his new paper and her rivals. The Mercury did, to be sure, deemphasize federal matters for a greater attention to state politics and foreign affairs. But commercial news accounted for around ten per cent of the paper's space, the amount customary in Charleston's older papers. Nor did Morford's Mercury devote more space to cultural matters than did its rivals, the Gazette, Courier, and Southern Patriot.\textsuperscript{20} In fact, the Courier's editor dismissed the paper of his former senior associate as a

\textsuperscript{19}Advertisements in Courier 1805-1809; King, Newspaper Press, 101-102; Courier, Sept. 7, 1824.

\textsuperscript{20}Mercury, Jan. 1, 1822-June 1, 1823.
"bantling" and charged that Morford was motivated by a "malignant hope" to supplant the Courier, "by the fruits of which he so profited." 21

Nevertheless, the "bantling" prospered, at least for a time. Morford did not return the Courier insults in kind; instead he deplored the "Personal abuse, open scurrility, coarse imputations of the grossest nature, directed against individuals . . . ." that he felt was too prevalent in the world of the fourth estate. 22 He extended this moderation into the political arena as well. In his first issue Morford editorially disapproved of the injection of the slavery debate into politics, with a caution not even then characteristic of the Charleston press. His reluctant replies to the fulminations of a New York editor, who was displeased by the punishments following the attempted Negro insurrection of 1822, were also reserved. The Mercury had:

purposely abstained from noticing any of the remarks made in some of the Northern journals upon the late necessary decrees of justice. . . . It did not appear necessary to exhibit any strictures upon the cold and unfeeling jests that have been sported in a manner that indicates a callousness of heart both to the culprits who fell under the laws and the society for whose benefit these laws were enacted. We were willing that the authors of such jibes should enjoy them in undisturbed satisfaction. 23

Otherwise, Morford's Mercury was silent on the subject of anti-slavery. There was no profit in returning attack for attack, the

21 Courier, Sept. 7, 1824.

22 Mercury, July 15, 1822.

23 Ibid., Jan. 1, 1822, Aug. 15, 1822. The January editorial was written in reference to the Missouri Compromise.
editor said. The offense, in turn, would only become more violent.\textsuperscript{24}

Morford was no less displeased by those signs pointing to a revival of the political parties of earlier times. He urged the varying persuasions to unite in support of President Monroe, and so preserve "the present era of harmony and coalition." Denouncing political parties as "factions" which "strike directly at the vitals of a state . . . corrupt the credulous and sharpen the passions and abilities of the bad to a pernicious acuteness," the editor pledged the \textit{Mercury} to "independent American ground." Morford had no use for the machinations of politicians, those "selfish ends, which [could] never be obtained but by public misfortune."\textsuperscript{25}

Morford's policy of political neutrality did not make for

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., Aug. 15, 1822. Richard C. Wade—who views the whole Denmark Vesey affair as no more than "loose talk by aggrieved and embittered men" concludes that Charleston's newspapers "imposed a nearly perfect blackout on the details of the episode throughout the summer, confining themselves to a simple recording of sentences and executions" (Richard C. Wade, "The Vesey Plot: A Reconsideration," \textit{JSH}, XXX, No. 2 [May 1964], 149, 160).

Freehling partially explains this policy by asserting that Carolinians regarded slavery as a "necessary" evil until after the nullification crisis. This being the case, nothing but commotion was likely to result from public discussion of the issue. Editors, consequently, broached the topic with both reluctance and restraint. Not until after 1833 was slavery much mentioned by the South Carolina press (Freehling, \textit{Prelude}, 82-83).

Still, Morford was more restrained than were his rivals: The \textit{Courier} not only sharply reminded a northern critic that thirteen Negroes were "BURNT ALIVE for insurrectionary efforts" in New York City during 1741, but also explained to a Britisher that slavery made southern whites value their liberty more than would otherwise be the case (\textit{Courier}, Jan. 10, Aug. 12, 1822).

For a full study of the significance of the Vesey revolt in South Carolina history, see John Lofton, \textit{Insurrection in South Carolina: The Turbulent World of Denmark Vesey} (Yellow Springs, 1964).

\textsuperscript{25}Mercury, Jan. 1, 1822.
good reading in South Carolina. The death during the early twenties of the Federalist Party resulted in a mass movement of Americans into the Republican fold. This migration produced factional divisions among the Republicans, divisions accompanied by sectional cleavages that were to make and change the parties of the future. In the resulting confusion the electorate turned to politically oriented editors for guidance.

Since the situation in South Carolina was no less fluid than the national one, the role of the state's newspapers assumed a new importance. According to the somewhat prejudiced Courier, Morford was not equipped for this role and his policy made for a decline in Mercury subscriptions. While due allowance must be made for the Courier's somewhat warped vision, it is a fact that Morford sold his interest in the Mercury at the end of a year and a half—to make way for a politician, Henry Laurens Pinckney.

It might be said that Pinckney was born into politics. The grandson of Henry Laurens, he was also the son of Charles Pinckney, veteran of the Constitutional Convention, the South Carolina General Assembly, and sometime minister to Madrid. The new editor was the first honor graduate in the class of 1812 at the South Carolina College and the brother-in-law of Robert Y. Hayne, in whose office he studied law. He was elected to the General Assembly in 1816, re-elected in 1820, and by 1823 was Chairman of the House Ways and Means.

26Courier, Sept. 7, 1824. The Mercury sold for ten dollars a year, the same rate maintained by Charleston's other papers.
Committee and an eloquent spokesman for the Calhoun party.\(^\text{27}\)

Pinckney wasted no time in reversing Morford's policy of political restraint. His first editorial, on June 11, 1823, firmly endorsed Calhoun for president. Pinckney's competitors were quick to take satirical note of this change in course. The Gazette, which favored Crawford, and the independent Courier (whose editor personally favored Adams) soon came to dismiss the Mercury as the organ of the Calhoun "Junto."\(^\text{28}\) The outspoken editor of the Courier went so far as to declare that only the financial support of the Calhoun party had saved his rival's paper from collapse.\(^\text{29}\) The Gazette's editor was so confident of the Calhoun influence that he wrote off the Mercury as the platform for "a combination of . . . apostate republicans . . .


\(^{28}\)Gazette, Aug. 29, Sept. 1, 1823; June 22, 23, 24, July 12, 15, Aug. 30, Sept. 6, 29, Oct. 1, 5, 11, 12, 15, 26, 27, 1824; Mar. 19, July 26, 28, Aug. 1, 8, 11, 15, 20, 24, 26, Sept. 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 15, 19, 20, 30, Oct. 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 14, 1828; Mar. 20, July 29, 31, Aug. 19, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30, Sept. 2, 4, 5, 1829; Aug. 3, 5, 24, Sept. 24, 28, 1830; July 13, 21, 1831; Courier, Aug. 26, 30, Sept. 4, 6, 7, 1824; June 13, 1826; Sept. 8, 1827; Aug. 5, 30, Sept. 22, Oct. 6, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 1828; Jan. 10, 1829; July 2, Aug. 3, Sept. 24, Oct. 14, 18, 1830; Sept. 5, 1831; Aug. 29, 30, Sept. 3, 1832.

\(^{29}\)Courier, Sept. 7, 1824. Morford's Mercury "sustained a very precarious and rickety existence of some months, and was . . . about to descend, loaded with debts to the tomb of all the Capulets," the vindictive editor, Aaron S. Willington reported. It was only when "the Junto who now control its destinies . . . stepped in with the means that . . . infused new life and energy into it," that the Mercury's survival was ensured.
blind partisans of CALHOUN, McDUFFIE, HAMILTON, &c, of hungry expectants of office, deluded or wicked men who would sacrifice on the altar of interest, their dearest rights. . . ."30

The Mercury's new editor also reversed his predecessor's policy of ignoring such blasts from competitors. The paper was his "own exclusive property," he said, but went on to admit with pride his association with the Calhoun faction. That faction, then locked in battle for control of South Carolina politics, had good reason to want a party paper in Charleston, whose legislative delegation frequently cast the deciding vote in the General Assembly.31

The association evidently benefitted both party and paper. Pinckney steadily increased his subscription lists, especially so after 1827, when the Mercury endorsed nullification. A tri-weekly country edition—containing "all the general intelligence of the daily paper" was established in 1823. This edition, Pinckney said, was widely read not only in every district of South Carolina but in Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina as well. According to the standards of the time, the paper did indeed enjoy a generous circulation.32

30Gazette, July 26, 1828.
31Mercury, May 12, 1824; May 2, June 12, 1826; Freehling, Prelude, 101-106. The fight was between the nationalists of the Calhoun school and the states rights followers of William H. Crawford. See also Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nationalist, 1782-1828 (Indianapolis, 1944), 213, 255, 256, hereinafter cited as Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist.
32Mercury, Oct. 7, 1823; Dec. 31, 1824. While no concrete evidence is available for this assertion, it is likely that the Mercury exceeded both the Gazette and Patriot in circulation and closely rivalled the Courier. The Gazette frequently changed hands during these years, which probably indicates circulation trouble. On July 25, 1833, the Courier announced its purchase of the Gazette. In so
Other changes accompanied Pinckney's assumption of command as well. Advertising increased by more than fifty per cent during the years 1823 to 1832, an indication of the paper's growing popularity. Most especially, more and more attention was devoted to politics, at the expense of "miscellany" and cultural affairs.\(^{33}\) And in 1825 the name was shortened to the simpler Charleston Mercury. While Pinckney was making his paper into a political journal, he did not ignore the economic foundation of South Carolina. The economy of the state would do much to set her political course and Pinckney was much interested in crop reports and the proceedings of agricultural societies. The depressed cotton price contributed to his rising concern with the issues of both slavery and the tariff; a concern which early indicated the connection between economy and sectional politics.

Increasing preoccupation with politics did not mean, at least during his early years, a radical sectional approach. Pinckney was a nationalist and his newspaper mirrored this view. It also improved its coverage of political news, state, local, and---to some extent---foreign. News from the statehouse came daily by coach from his "correspondent," instead of from Columbia extracts as formerly. The trip took twenty-eight hours. National news continued to be copied from politically conscious a community as Charleston it is also likely that the neutral Patriot did not attract a large set of readers. In any event, most of the Mercury's thrusts were directed at the Courier and vice versa. Pinckney boasted of his paper's increased circulation on July 1, 1830 and again on January 4 and July 25, 1832: which increase he was convinced vindicated his stand on nullification. Still, he did nothing to challenge the Courier's assertion of April 20 and May 5, 1826, that it had "more at stake in the community." Nor did he contradict that paper's confident report of January 1, 1833, that its circulation was "more extensive . . . than ever before. . . ." The Mercury was, presumably, in second place.

\(^{33}\)Mercury, Jan. 1823-Dec. 1832, passim.
Washington papers but after 1827 only from those with whom Pinckney was in political agreement. Letters from correspondents supplemented this coverage. An indication of the declining state of Charleston's interoceanic commerce, European news came principally by way of New York; it took the form of extracts from foreign sheets. The *Mercury* depended for its Latin American news upon a correspondent in Havana; it sympathized with the rebels, compared Bolivar with Washington, and predicted the eventual independence of Cuba.\(^{34}\)

In the light of later developments, Pinckney's approach to his first presidential election is ironic in the extreme. The *Mercury* denounced those who would inject sectional interests in the campaign of 1824 and came out in favor of "great national principles of policy" which would strengthen defense, cherish the army and navy and military academy, foster internal improvements, develop and expand the national resources and maintain a "high and enviable character abroad. . . ." He even favored "promoting our manufactures as far as they can be promoted without impairing the essential interests of agriculture and commerce. . . ." John C. Calhoun personified these virtues to Pinckney. The "States Rights" faction he characterized as "the most dangerous party which has ever risen in the republic. . . ." Crawford, the candidate of that faction, was roundly denounced and did not represent even South Carolina's second Choice, Pinckney said. He refrained from

---

\(^{34}\)Ibid., May 16, 21, 23, 1825; Apr. 9, Dec. 25, 1827; July 22, Sept. 14, 16, 1829. The *United States Telegraph*—whose editor, Duff Green, came in for much praise by the *Mercury*—was Pinckney's chief Washington source. The *Boston Bulletin* accused Pinckney of flattering the *Telegraph* so as to get its support for Calhoun (ibid., Mar. 8, 13, 14, Nov. 14, 1827; Oct. 17, Nov. 10, 1829; Feb. 9, 11, Apr. 7, 20, 26, 1830; Apr. 28, 1831).
attacking the other candidates and as Calhoun's chances evaporated, the *Mercury* began to praise Jackson, a man of "high and varied endowments" and also "a native of the South." Yet Pinckney also liked Clay and Adams. In October of 1824 the *Mercury* selected Adams for South Carolina's second choice; Jackson was her first. 35

When Jackson did not win a majority of electoral votes in the general election, the *Mercury* rejoiced that he led, nonetheless. It was even happier that Crawford's star was in decline. Adams, Pinckney said, was blameless for the irregular rumors circling about his head; but if the "Hero of New Orleans" were denied the presidency, it would be "an absolute usurpation of the rights and privileges of the people." The successful machinations of Clay he reviled as a defrauding of "desires of whole states." With Adams elected as a result, Clay became Secretary of State by "boldly overleaping" the spirit of the Constitution. But the Charleston editor could hardly approve the tasteless proposal, that "ebullition of popular frenzy" to hang Clay in effigy. His fate in 1828, the *Mercury* said, would be comeuppance enough. 36

In its treatment of the new President, the *Mercury* was much gentler. Pinckney strongly endorsed Adams's Inaugural and urged support for his administration "as long as his policies" were "for the general good." His failure to attack the President's position on internal improvements may be interpreted as a cautious endorsement of a

35 *Mercury,* Jan. 6, June 11, Oct. 27, 28, 1824.

36 *Ibid.,* Dec. 26, 1824; Jan. 6, 20, 21, Feb. 3, 8, 17, Mar. 9, 6, 11, Apr. 9, 28, May 9, 30, 1825. Calhoun, too, was looking to 1828 for the "example" to be "corrected" (Wiltse, *Calhoun Nationalist,* 313-14).
project his paper had strongly supported only a year before. Pinckney also defended Adams's policy in the Georgia Indian lands case. When the President declined summarily to dispossess the Cherokees—and in spite of the ominous warning from a correspondent not to join in "the common clamor" against a sister state whose "confidence and friendship" South Carolina might one day need—Pinckney observed:

The true question is not whether the federal government can put down a state by force of arms, but whether a state can violate at pleasure the provisions of a treaty. Georgia, and not the federal government is the aggressor in this case. . . . And if the federal government had not the power to enforce its laws, or to prevent their violation by a State, its weaknesses would probably witness many a renewal of the scenes that occurred under the old confederation.37

Strange words in light of the future! But not for the paper's present mood. The Mercury was still a nationalist organ. While Calhoun was even then reconsidering his position on internal improvements,38 he had not yet condemned the concept. The Georgians, furthermore, blamed him for their Indian problem. As Secretary of War in Monroe's cabinet, Calhoun had favored a policy of civilizing the Indians even while he urged their removal beyond the Mississippi. Georgia's Cherokees had responded well to civilization and now declined to be moved. They were supported in their determination by title—in the form of a treaty—to their lands, a title which they refused to sell. Georgia was much exercised over this matter, and her vexation was threatening to take the form of force if the federal authority did not vacate both title and

37 Mercury, May 12, 22, 1824; Mar. 11, Apr. 28, May 9, 30, Aug. 20, 22, 1825.

A detached Pinckney urged the Georgians to be calm. Their governor should sacrifice his preferences "upon the altar of his country." Considering the Mercury's developing position on the subject of the tariff, this advice was not the sort that Pinckney could afford to give. For while the editor was so carefully advising the Georgians on the nature of the Constitution, forces in South Carolina were moving to confront him with the same situation at home.

The forces were both personal and economic. The personal ones revolved about Judge and sometime Senator William Smith. Like Virginia's Quids, Judge Smith was determined to save the Constitution from the nationalist Jeffersonians. Elected to the Senate in 1816, he was soon much offended by Calhoun's nationalism and perhaps by the much younger Secretary of War's failure to defer to his opinions. In any event, by 1818, he had resolved to retire the dangerous young nationalist from politics. Almost coincidental with Smith's taking umbrage, was the development of a breach between Calhoun and Crawford. Crawford's festering hatred for the Secretary of War was of equal intensity—if not of the same origin—as Smith's. Like Smith, Crawford represented the state rights persuasion. Not unnaturally, the two became allies with a common purpose to destroy Calhoun. While they

39Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 293-96. The Savannah Republican actually alleged that Calhoun had written a Mercury editorial defending the government's policy. The Mercury denied this charge but allowed that it was flattered by it (Mercury, May 22, 1824).

40Mercury, Aug. 17, 1825.

41Freehling, Prelude, 97-104; Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 179.
were finally unsuccessful, they were at least partially responsible for much tactical maneuvering on Calhoun's part.

Crawford was of little aid to Smith in his attempts to erode Calhoun's South Carolina foundation. Carolinians, especially those from the Lowcountry, tended to regard Crawford as somewhat uncouth as well as misguided. They preferred to follow national-minded men like Langdon Cheves, William Lowndes, Robert Y. Hayne, or James Hamilton, Jr.: all allies of Calhoun. Smith's South Carolina allies, however, were likewise men to be reckoned with. Dr. Thomas Cooper, William C. Preston, and Stephen D. Miller supported his strict construction views faithfully, but made little headway before 1825. By that time the battle had raged for nine years, during which circumstances had changed.42

The Smith faction received a serious setback in 1822 when Smith himself was defeated for re-election by Robert Y. Hayne. But the past and future Senator and forevermore Judge, was not done in. His district soon sent him to the General Assembly, from which spot he renewed the war. His goal was unchanged: Calhoun must be destroyed and, incidentally, Crawford elected President of the United States.43

Any number of political forces had combined, by 1824, to wear away the nationalism worn so proudly in South Carolina during the years immediately following the War of 1812. The alert sounded by

42Freehling, Prelude, 101-104.

43Ibid., 104; White, Rhett, 11; Joseph Hobson Harrison, Jr., "Martin Van Buren and His Southern Supporters," JSH, XXII, No. 4 (Nov. 1956), 440.
the Missouri debates turned into an alarm three years later when Denmark Vesey aroused the "deep fears" of planters, especially in the Lowcountry. Then in 1824 the legislature of Ohio proposed a gradual form of compensated emancipation that was soon endorsed by eight other northern governments. Clearly it took a broad constructionist, which is to say a nationalist, view of the Constitution to envision such a development. Cotton prices were on the way down and to make matters worse, the tariff was raised in 1824. Even Calhoun's nationalist faction was having second thoughts. 44

It was a situation ready made for Smith. His ally Thomas Cooper published *Consolidation*, a pamphlet in which he prepared the assembly for the dangers inherent in nationalism; and in which he especially denounced the tariff and internal improvements. If Congress could tax one section for the benefit of another, and if it could appropriate money for whatever purpose it saw fit, then it could do as Ohio said and abolish slavery. In the same vein, Stephen D. Miller introduced resolutions into the upper chamber which declared that Congress had constitutional authority neither to levy a protective tariff nor effect internal improvements. The resolutions passed in December, soon after the assembly met, only to be defeated in the House. But in 1825 Judge Smith introduced the same resolutions into the House, and this time they passed both House and Senate. The Calhoun forces fought them valiantly but to no avail. Thus in

---

44 Freehling, *Prelude*, 106-116. Carolina planters felt that cotton must bring 20c a pound for planting it to be profitable. It was selling at 13c by October, 1825 (Latimer, "Protagonist," *AHR*, LXI, No. 4, 925; Freehling, *Prelude*, 117).
the "revolution of 1825" the assembly had decided for Judge Smith. The storm signals were up and in 1826 Smith went back to the Senate.\textsuperscript{45}

The Mercury's editor was a member of the House, and according to subsequent assertions by his critics, opposed the offensive resolutions.\textsuperscript{46} His address to a South Carolina College audience during the legislative session certainly indicates that his sentiments would have led in that direction. "No doubt," he said, "exists in any reflecting mind of the perfect adequacy of the general government to establish a system of national works for the common advantage of the Union."\textsuperscript{47} The Mercury, however, did not commit itself. Its editorial column simply reported that the action "whether . . . right or wrong" was taken "honestly and conscientiously."\textsuperscript{48}

But Pinckney's reluctance to condemn the tariff as unconstitutional did not make him a supporter of protection. During the debates on the Bill of 1824 the Mercury wished all the protection that manufacturing wanted so long as it did not impair "the essential interests of agriculture and commerce." The bill before Congress, he noted, would do just that. The South must then resist "an unequal and oppressive tax . . . imposed upon one portion of our people." He suggested a boycott of Northern goods as a possible remedy. On March 24

\textsuperscript{45}Freehling, Prelude, 117-18; White, Rhett, 11; Mercury, Dec. 15, 1825.

\textsuperscript{46}Gazette, Sept. 2, 30, Oct. 2, 4, 7, 14, 1828; Sept. 4, 1829; Courier, Aug. 30, 1832.

\textsuperscript{47}H. L. Pinckney, An Oration Delivered in the Chapel of the South Carolina College, before the Clariosophic Society Incorporate and the Inhabitants of Columbia . . . on the 5th December, 1825 . . . (Charleston, 1826), 24-25.

\textsuperscript{48}Mercury, Apr. 6, 1826.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
he indicated that Calhoun and Smith men were as one on at least that single subject. An oppressive tariff policy would make "the property of the South . . . utterly valueless," and might even spark an attack upon slavery. "Is it not possible," he asked, "that when the value of our black population shall be ruined, these same charitable manufacturers may devise a scheme either for their immediate purchase or gradual emancipation?" 49

It was probably inevitable that Pinckney's regard for President Adams would be of short duration. The issues of sectional interests had made for a bitter fight in the election of 1824. It would take more than fervent venerations of the Union to resolve the problems they exposed. It is even possible that "Adams took office with the foundations for disunion" already "in place." 50 In any event the twin issues of slavery and the tariff ultimately destroyed Pinckney's tolerance for the Adams administration.

Pinckney's discourse on slavery commenced before Adams took office and was not diminished by his departure. Slavery, he said, was a necessary institution. Indeed, it provided a better life than that available to New England factory hands; and it was endorsed by the Holy Scriptures. The South would tolerate no "interference in any manner or for any purpose . . . by the General Government" with this institution. He opposed colonization schemes and saw in the "ominous" appointment of

49 Ibid., Jan. 6, Feb. 18, 19, Mar. 20, 26, 1824; Feb. 3, 17, Mar. 9, 11, Apr. 9, 28, May 9, 30, 1825.

the antislavery Rufus King as Minister to the Court of St. James
a disturbing trend in the new administration. 51

The Mercury's mild remonstrance gave way to an all-out and un-
relenting attack when Adams supported the Panama Conference. In so
doing, the President had endangered "the peace and safety of the
Southern States," the Mercury said. This conference proposed to con-
sider "the rights of Africans in this hemisphere" and contemplated es-
tablishing diplomatic relations with Haiti. One of the American dele-
gates to the proposed assembly was "notoriously and violently hostile"
to slavery. It was a "hazardous foreign enterprise"; furthermore, it
ran the risk of war, violated "all the maxims of Washington" and
brought down disgrace upon all those who endorsed it. 52 That included
Pinckney's rival, the Courier. 53 Adams had incurred the wrath of a
determined foe whose opposition he acknowledged--on at least one oc-
casion--as "malignant attacks." 54

No sooner had the debate on Bolivar's congress ended than the
Mercury commenced to campaign for Jackson. The "superior merit and
incorruptible patriotism" of Andrew Jackson stood in stark contrast to
the "impure and disgraceful coalition" with which it now associated Adams.

51 Mercury, July 17, Aug. 9, 1823; Apr. 21, May 5, June 16,
1825; Nov. 11, 1826.

52 Ibid., Mar. 14, 23, 31, Apr. 4, 5, 7, May 1, 2, 4, Aug. 6,
Nov. 11, 1826. Calhoun opposed the Panama Conference (Wiltse, Cal-
houn Nationalist, 324). The "hostile" delegate was John Sargeant.

53 Courier, Mar. 15, 16, 22, 27, Apr. 3-8, May 1, 5, 1826. The
Courier's editor felt that Adams's course would foster U. S. commerce,
promote inter-American unity and protect the western hemisphere against
invasion (ibid.).

Pinckney reviled Adams for "bartering" government office; he saw an unRepublican move in the direction of foppery when the White House procured a billiard table, and instead of being South Carolina's second choice, Adams could now only claim support "utterly too insignificant to mention" in the state. The President's annual message to Congress in 1826 was deficient, his conduct on internal and external affairs unsatisfactory. Adams's supporters among the press were after Calhoun's head—they hoped to isolate him from Jackson. A House committee investigating Calhoun's administration of the War Department was part and parcel of the plot. Labelling the investigation as an unprincipled attempt to advance the cause of the unworthy Clay, Pinckney called down "Shame, eternal shame upon such proceedings..." And when the pro-Adams National Journal, "the principal organ of an unpopular and sinking dynasty," noted these attacks and called Pinckney (among other things) "an apologist of dullness," the fiery Charleston editor referred to its "excessive intemperance of language."

55Mercury, July 15, 1826. Pinckney had originally blamed only Clay for the "corrupt bargain" (ibid., Feb. 3, 17, Mar. 9, Apr. 9, 1825). It can hardly be insignificant that Calhoun's Washington organ, the Telegraph, gave new life to the "corrupt bargain" charge during June, 1826 (Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 343).

56Mercury, Aug. 29, 1826; Jan. 13, 15, 1827. The House committee was investigating the Mix Contract. During Calhoun's stay at the war office, Elijah Mix had contracted to supply stone for the construction of Fortress Monroe and Fort Calhoun, part of the defense system for Norfolk and the capital. Mix's financial arrangements with his brother-in-law, the Chief Clerk of the War Department, were open to question. While Pinckney was right as to the motive of those questioning the transaction, Calhoun requested the investigation and was not blamed in the report (Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 203-05, 344-46).

57Mercury, Oct. 3, 1826.
The Mercury was more certain of its repugnance to Adams than of its admiration for Jackson. Although Jackson was declared to be legitimate of birth, fit for office and incorruptible, throughout 1827 the paper presumed to say little about his political beliefs. But that year's revival of the tariff debate intensified this somewhat undefined preference for the Tennessean. The administration had become clearly unconstitutional in its tariff position, it had exceeded the bounds of reason in supporting internal improvements, and as far as Georgia's Indian lands were concerned, Adams seemed possessed of a "determination to murder the citizens of Georgia." Pinckney had modified his position on all three issues, most decidedly in the case of Georgia. And Andrew Jackson was now the "last sole hope" of South Carolina—short of nullification—an issue upon which Pinckney's view was also destined to change.58

The Mercury's new posture did not escape comment from its main competition, the Courier. Noting that Pinckney's paper tended to follow rather than mold opinion in South Carolina, that hostile sheet compared it to "the weather-glass." In an apt—if satirical analysis—the Courier observed that the Mercury was "fearfully agitated by the changes in the atmosphere."59 Since 1825—when he had opposed the assembly's action in declaring the tariff unconstitutional—Pinckney

58Ibid., Mar. 8, April 9, May 15, June 1, July 7, 10, 12, Aug. 4, 9, 15, 17, 18, 20, Sept. 4, 25, Dec. 1, 5, 12, 17, 1827; Apr. 15, June 27, July 25, Aug. 6, 13, 15, 30, Sept. 16, 30, Oct. 17, 31, 1828. The Mercury questioned Adams's nationalism for the first time in 1827. Its articles in praise of Jackson ran throughout 1827 and 1828.

59Courier, June 20, 1827.
had come to the conclusion that the majority of Carolinians disagreed with him. He accordingly decided to modify his position. Nor was he alone in so concluding. Calhoun's views were undergoing a similar transition during this period—a circumstance not lost upon the Mercury.

The Vice President's complex motives for altering his political stance included national as well as local considerations. While he took no public stand on the outcome of the election of 1824, his private comment was that "a few ambitious men with a view to their own interest" had set "the voices and power of the people . . . at naught." Nor was he indefinite as to the identity of the ambitious victors. Clay had made the President, he said, and "against the voice of his constituents." More alarming was the Kentuckian's elevation to Secretary of State, which appointment left no doubt as to his ultimate object—the presidency. Since Calhoun also aspired to the latter post, he must oppose Clay, and with him, the administration.

Still, he was willing to support those moves of the administration of which he genuinely approved. (The Mercury's early regard

60 The Smith Resolutions of 1825 had been originally introduced by Stephen D. Miller in 1824, when they passed the Senate only to be tabled in the House. The vote in 1825 (73 to 28 in the House and 29 to 14 in the Senate) still revealed considerable division (Freehling, Prelude, 117-18). It would require almost two years for Pinckney to accept this result as the majority sentiment of the state. By 1827, however, his paper was reporting numerous public meetings within South Carolina expressing support for the Smith Resolutions. This evidently convinced him that South Carolina had changed her mind. He altered his position accordingly (Mercury, 1827, passim). For an analysis of the general change in South Carolina politics during the ten years prior to nullification see Freehling, Prelude, 89-176.

61 Calhoun to General Joseph G. Swift, Mar. 10, 1825, quoted in Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 313-14.
for President Adams evidently indicates that Calhoun was not yet ready to advertise his doubts about the new President. The Vice President did not approve of the Panama Congress and when his not inconsiderable influence helped to retard this project, it became evident that the President would not work with a sometime ally. A series of bitter exchanges between the administration party and Calhoun resulted. Faced thus with political isolation, Calhoun offered—in June of 1826—to cooperate with Jackson. The offer was quickly accepted.

The new alliance did not mean that the South Carolinian had abandoned his hopes of the presidency. By associating himself with Jackson, Calhoun gained the favor of Clay's strongest rival. Jackson had committed himself, furthermore, to a single presidential term. This arrangement would fit handsomely into the Vice President's timetable by putting him in line to succeed Jackson in 1832. Unfortunately for Calhoun, the plans of another rising politician would figure into these calculations.

The Crawford party, with Martin Van Buren in their ranks, had also gone over to Jackson. Since Van Buren shared Calhoun's ambition to sit in the presidential chair, this move resulted in an intra-factional rivalry. Second only to Jackson in national prestige, Calhoun would have to be eliminated if Van Buren were to arrive at his

---

62 See above, 22–23.


64 Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 337.
destination at the appointed time. By December of 1826 the wily New Yorker had laid plans to read Calhoun out of the party. In that the Vice President had supported internal improvements, he was to be charged with treason to strict construction.\(^6\)

The interest of the new coalition, however, led Van Buren to postpone the break with his rival. The association of elements so diverse—Jackson, Calhoun, and Crawford men—was bound to be unstable; indeed, the allies seemed often as suspicious of each other as of the Adams-Clay men. At least partially for this reason, then, Calhoun's early support of Jackson was reserved in tone,\(^6\) a reservation reflected in the Mercury's editorial policy.\(^6\)

But bald political rivalries with their origins in conflicting presidential ambitions do not fully explain the Vice President's metamorphosis during the decade of the 1820's. The rising opposition within South Carolina to the confident postwar policies of national development through government subsidy required him to re-examine his position. South Carolina had never shared Calhoun's firm support of the tariff of 1816,\(^5\) and by 1820 the state's delegation was in strong

\(^{6}\)The recently completed Erie Canal left Van Buren's home state in a mood distinctly hostile to rival transport projects. This circumstance coincided nicely with the rising devotion to strict construction in the South Atlantic States (ibid., 347-48; Van Buren to B. F. Butler, Dec. 12, 1826, quoted in Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 347).

\(^{6}\)Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 346-51.


\(^{6}\)The South Carolina delegation voted for it by a narrow four to three margin (Freehling, Prelude, 96). Roundly denounced by some of his constituents for his position, Calhoun was accused of having betrayed his state for the Presidency (Houston, Nullification, 5).
opposition to any increase in import duties. According to Pinckney's Mercury, Calhoun was himself opposed to the proposal at that time. While he recorded no comment on the considerable increase in 1824, his South Carolina followers voted to a man against it, and the Mercury was strong in its opposition. There is little reason to infer that its stand did not represent the then Secretary of War's view. Calhoun still believed the tariff to be constitutional, however.

In any event, Calhoun was having serious second thoughts by 1827. In February he cast the deciding Senate vote against the Woolens Bill. During the summer of that year a tariff convention of formidable proportions assembled at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The one hundred delegates from thirteen states made demands for protection that were no less modest than the size of their assembly. Writing to his favorite brother-in-law, James Edward Calhoun, the Vice President referred to the "great geographical interests" of the Union assembling in array "against one another." Still he did not declare protection to be unconstitutional. But he viewed it as a "highly dangerous" power, subject to being "perverted to purposes most unjust and oppressive." Committing James Edward to silence, the Vice President ventured to hope that the South "would not be provoked to step beyond strict constitutional remedies."

69 Mercury, Feb. 19, 1824.
70 Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 284-91. Capers views the 1824 action as an outright desertion of Calhoun by his followers (Capers, Opportunist, 103-104).
71 Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 195-96.
72 Calhoun to James Edward Calhoun, Aug. 27, 1827, J. Franklin Jameson, ed., The Correspondence of John C. Calhoun (Washington, 1900)
Then there was the matter of slavery. In 1816, when he voted for the tariff, Calhoun regretted that the "odious traffic" of the slave trade had lingered until only eight years before. Being a Southerner, he was partially responsible and accepted "a large part of the disgrace" for it. Calhoun was disquieted by the Missouri controversy, but used his influence to negotiate acceptance of the congressional compromise by Monroe's cabinet. This performance irritated a Virginian whose ideas would come to have a considerable influence on Calhoun's own. Inveighing against the role played by Carolinians in the Missouri settlement, John Randolph wrote that "... Mr. Lowndes ... and some other would-be Leaders ... are the true fathers of the compromise." Denouncing their effort in behalf of the compromise Randolph charged that, "The Slaveholding interest has been sacrificed by Southern and Western men from slave-holding States." Before many years passed, Calhoun would regret not having heeded this warning. So far was Calhoun from sharing this sentiment at the time, however, that he could agree with John Quincy Adams that slavery was morally indefensible. He only contended that it could not be abolished in the South because of economic and social consequences. As the two walked home together from the very cabinet meeting that had endorsed

---

250-51, hereinafter cited as Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence. See also Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 356, and Capers, Calhoun Opportunist, 107.

73 Houston, Nullification, 13.

74 Randolph to Henry Middleton Rutledge, March 20, 1820, quoted in Russell Kirk, Randolph of Roanoke (Chicago, 1951), 119.

75 Ibid., 120; Houston, Nullification, 13.
the Compromise, Calhoun in effect told the New Englander that slavery was an unfortunate necessity.  

During the fall of 1820 Secretary of War Calhoun made a tour of the northern states. His trip convinced him that there was no threat—immediate or impending—to slavery. Even so, he left no doubt as to his view of attacks on the institution. "Should emancipation be attempted it must, and will be resisted at all costs," he said. "Nothing would lead more directly to disunion with all of its horrors."  

Four years later, in 1824, the Secretary of War was called upon to comment on the proposed internal improvements bill. Congress, he thought, was authorized by the Constitution to build roads and canals, a power that he thought must be used judiciously. Randolph did not agree. "If Congress possesses the power to do what is proposed in this bill . . . they may emancipate every slave in the United States. . . ." he said. Continuing with his warning, this clairvoyant harbinger of the doomed went on to advise:

... if ever the time shall arrive . . . that a coalition of knavery and fanaticism shall, for any purpose be got up on this floor, I ask [the] gentleman . . . to look well to what they are now doing—to the colossal power with which they are now arming this government. The power to do what I allude to is, I aver, more honestly inferable from the war-making power than the power we are now about to exercise. Let them look forward to the time when such a question shall arise.

76 Adams, Diary, V, 10. Fehlbing says this was the view of most Carolinians at the time (see above, f.n. 24).


78 Ibid., 287.

It has been suggested that Randolph was ultimately responsible for guiding Calhoun—whom he despised—into the state rights fold. 80

Regardless of who or what inspired the change, by 1826 the vitriolic Virginian of intensifying sectionalism and the circumspect Carolinian of declining nationalism shared a position for the first time. From the Vice President's chair, Calhoun quietly lent his support to those who opposed American participation in the Panama Conference. 81 And in a speech which Calhoun's friend Langdon Cheves would quote twenty-four years later at the Nashville Convention, Randolph outlined the dangers inherent in the cooperation between slave-holding planters and abolition-minded revolutionaries. Emancipation in Spanish America threatened Anglo-American masters, he said. The revolutionaries menaced Cuba. Once they had substituted their own brand of disruption for Spanish authority there, they would threaten the South with servile insurrection. In combination with the growing British abolition movement, they constituted a danger that must be met at once.

"Sir," he cautioned:

I know there are gentlemen . . . who think this unhappy question—for such it is—of negro slavery . . . should never be brought into public notice. . . . With every due respect for the gentlemen who think so, I differ from them. . . . Sir, it . . . cannot be hid . . . it . . . must be treated . . . [and] not tampered with by quacks who never saw the disease or the patient . . . it must . . . [be] let alone. . . . 82

80 Henry Adams, John Randolph (Boston, 1882), 291; Kirk, Randolph, 60; Coit, Calhoun, 171.

81 Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 324.

82 Register of Debates in Congress, Nineteenth Congress, First Session (Washington, 1825-1837), 117-18.
It was also Randolph's words that provided the theme for a pamphlet which Calhoun approvingly read in the autumn of 1827. Robert J. Turnbull's, *The Crisis*, a part of which first appeared in the *Mercury*, recorded the bitter Virginian's admonition for the future. "There is nothing but power that can restrain power." Only a few months later Calhoun began to transcribe privately this sentiment into a workable political formula, *The South Carolina Exposition and Protest*.  

Caught between his reputation as a nationalist and his interest as a South Carolinian, the Vice President determined that only the power of a united South could contain the might of the general government. He concluded that South Carolina must convince the other slave-holding states of the soundness of this Virginian-inspired creed. The Palmetto State must first settle the political quarrels by which she had been divided during the past decade, however. The *Mercury*’s editor was among the first to learn the new lesson. Writing to Governor Stephen D. Miller, a sometime ally of Judge Smith, Pinckney committed himself:  

> to the promotion of . . . the true interests of the Southern States and of So Carolina [,] in particular to keeping the State united at home and respected abroad. . . .

Accompanied by the *Mercury*, Calhoun and South Carolina were in full retreat from nationalism.  

---

83Wiltse, *Calhoun Nationalist*, 355-56, 379. The term "workable" is used here to describe Calhoun's intention.  

84Pinckney to Miller, Aug. 32, 1828, Chestnut-Manning-Miller Collection.
CHAPTER II

THE FIRST BATTLE

South Carolina's retreat from nationalism was an ordered one and was preceded by some years of political skirmishes, battles and occasional withdrawals.\(^1\) But not until 1827 did the nationalists reconsider their position and—having done so—give ground.

The full story of the war is told in the Mercury's pages. Editor Pinckney was no less opposed to the forces threatening the South Carolina economy and society than were his bitterest political enemies. He and they differed only in how to effect the remedy. But as the autumn of 1827 gave way to the winter of 1828 the retreating nationalists—with Pinckney in their ranks—fell reluctantly back on the state rights position. Accompanied in their retreat by the Vice President, the disillusioned nationalists prepared for a new war. Still carrying the standard for Calhoun the Mercury awaited the announcement of his new strategy.

Meanwhile, those twin threats, slavery and the tariff, seldom escaped the attention of Pinckney. He had opposed the tariff of 1824 during the debates prior to its passage, and—once it became law—coupled his acceptance of it with the warning that any further increases in the duty threatened "ruinous consequences." The steady decline in

\(^1\)See above, 23-28.
cotton prices\(^2\) with their consequent effect on overall property values did nothing to moderate his view of import exactions. A change in the nature of Charleston's declining seaborne commerce only added to the problem. Pivoting more and more around New York, it furnished another indication of a sick economy. Thus, when three years later the move to raise duties again commenced, Pinckney looked with little confidence toward the future of the southern states, "taxed," as they were "for the benefit of others." This "gloomy and alarming prospect" could only be averted, he said, by responding to the "oppressors with a corresponding . . . firmness."

The rise at the North of an antislavery sentiment increased the uneasy editor's worries. Plans to provide federal aid to the Colonization Society did nothing to conceal the "ulterior and insidious object at which the Society" aimed. He had already concluded to publish no more communications on this subject, "calculated" as it was "to do no good in a community like ours." Even more to be feared was the appearance in Charleston of abolitionist propaganda and the establishment (in Boston) of the Liberator. For the first time Pinckney spoke of the Union's being endangered. "Men might deliberate about the Tariff," he said, "... and other matters" but upon the subject of slavery there was "one unanimous feeling," and an attack upon it would cause the southern states to "burst their bonds, and . . . cast off a government which could thus mediate their destruction. . . ."\(^3\)


\(^3\)Mercury, Feb. 18, Mar. 20, 26, 1824; June 8, 1826; Feb. 1, June 4, 8, 23, Oct. 6, 9, Dec. 21, 1827; June 15, 30, Aug. 5, 1828; July 30, Oct. 20, 1829; Apr. 24, 28, May 8, June 17, 18, 1830;
But for the slavery dispute, the *Mercury's* (and South Carolina's) opposition to the tariff might not have reached such proportions.⁴

Even so, Pinckney bade farewell to his nationalism with reluctance. Although the Woolens Bill of 1827 was indeed "unwise and pernicious," he did not question its constitutionality. Although he endorsed Dr. Thomas Cooper's speech of July 2 in Columbia (in which Cooper warned that it was time for South Carolina to "calculate the value of the Union"), Pinckney made little reference to that remark. He said that Cooper merely meant that any further "oppressions might cause the South to reconsider the usefulness of the national convention." According to Pinckney, Cooper actually favored moderate duties. So did the majority of Carolinians, and with them, the *Mercury*. "But there is a difference," Pinckney said, "... between that degree of protection, which while it aided manufactures, did not materially injure any other interest, and that now claimed ... which can only be granted at the hazard of destroying the agriculture and commerce of the South." Other than to express his faith in "STATE SOVEREIGNTY AND CONFEDERATED UNION," Pinckney said no more about the tariff until December. In that month the General Assembly resolved that both protective tariff and internal improvements projects were unconstitutional. This time Pinckney endorsed the position of his fellow lawmakers, and--retaining still some of his nationalism--warned that while such laws might only endanger the South in 1827, in the long run they threatened

---

Sept. 23, 24, Oct. 3, 1831; Jan. 19, April 7, 1832.

the whole sweep of the Union with governmental usurpations.\textsuperscript{5}

Pinckney's surprising defense of Dr. Cooper's speech—"the treasonable doctrines lately broached at Columbia," according to the \textit{Courier}—provoked a savage exchange between himself and the pro-administration Willington. Accused of upholding "monopoly," defending "the proceedings of the Hartford Convention" and of blatant disloyalty to South Carolina, the \textit{Courier}'s editor was so incensed at the "frequent paltry insinuations and statements" of his rival that "his sense of personal dignity ... compelled" him to "give HENRY L. PINCKNEY distinctly to understand" that those who "impeached" the "motives" and malign the "character" of the \textit{Courier}'s editor should be prepared to "afford personal satisfaction" for their rashness. Willington then dismissed Pinckney by concluding that the only "uniformity of Mr. HENRY L. PINCKNEY's character" was in his ability to evade the truth. Although Pinckney did not return the challenge, the wordy war continued with scurrility unabated.\textsuperscript{6} "The age of miracles has not ceased; the \textit{Charleston Mercury}, the mouthpiece of the Calhoun school, has become ultra-radical,"\textsuperscript{7} one Pinckney detractor charged.

\textsuperscript{5}\textit{Mercury}, Feb. 12, 15, 19, 29; Mar. 6, 8, Apr. 16, May 15, 24, June 1, Sept. 4, Oct. 6, 9, 11, Nov. 21, Dec. 21, 1827. The Woolens Bill was defeated in the Senate by the vote of the Vice President. In urging the rejection of similar measures in the next Congress the \textit{Mercury} began to attack them on constitutional grounds.

Cooper, the President of South Carolina College and the "arch-radical in the uplands," was as important as Judge Smith—to whose faction he belonged—in converting Carolinians to strict construction (Freehling, \textit{Prelude}, 128-130; Hollis, \textit{S.C.College}, 74-76).

\textsuperscript{6}\textit{Mercury}, Sept. 4, 5, 6, 14, 1827; \textit{Courier}, Sept. 6, 8, 13, 15, 1827.

\textsuperscript{7}Quoted in White, \textit{Rhett}, 12; While its source is not clearly indicated, it speaks in the language of the \textit{Courier}. 

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
During August and September of 1827 the Mercury had published a number of essays entitled "The Crisis." Their author, "Brutus," (Robert Turnbull) attacked the nationalist positions of Calhoun and Jackson and "gave the world the first formulation of the nullification doctrine." The United States Telegraph regretted their publication, and Pinckney himself considered their "tone and temper" too vehement and ultimately discontinued publishing them. He had not yet endorsed nullification. Pinckney also opposed efforts to hold a southern convention which would consider action against the tariff. This proposal he dismissed as being "of doubtful character." The southern opposition had so far been constitutional, he wrote; it should be kept that way. The editor did not favor appeasement, however. "... The next annual meeting of the manufacturers at Washington," the Congress, was likely to bring trouble, he warned. When the tariff of 1828 established the accuracy of Pinckney's prediction, the Mercury denounced it as "pernicious" and declared it to be unconstitutional—along with the internal improvements bill of the same year. Pinckney opened the columns

---

8Mercury, Aug. 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, Sept. 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 27, 28, 29, 1928. Numbers 21 and 22 (Sept. 21-22) bore the signature of "Philo-Brutus" while 23 through 25 (Sept. 27-29) were signed by "Curtis." The depictive quotation is from Houston, Nullification, 72.

9Thirty-three essays appeared in the pamphlet form of The Crisis: Thirty-three Essays on the Usurpations of the Federal Government, by Brutus (Charleston, 1827). The Mercury published only twenty-five. The author of the rejected issues claimed that Pinckney acted because they contradicted the views of the Jackson party. Pinckney, however, said they were refused because they dealt with colonization (Mercury, Oct. 6, 9, 1827; see above, 43). If, as Wiltse says, Calhoun approved the pamphlet form, his opinion was unknown to Pinckney during the serialization, except as the Telegraph may have represented it (see above, 41).
of his paper to general proposals for redress, and—from time to
time—expressed his own opinion. Holding the establishment of southern
manufacturing plants to be "impractical" and a boycott of northern goods
"tantamount to submission," the editor concluded that such proposals
would punish the South more than the North. "Non-consumption is non-
civilization," said Pinckney.  

Then there was the remedy proposed in The Crisis. Without edi-
torial comment this time, the Mercury published an explanation of nulli-
fication which announced that the time had come "to take our stand
under . . . the Constitution of the land, and if necessary to die in
the ditch." Robert Barnwell Rhett addressed a "large and respectable
meeting at Walterboro where he urged non-compliance with the offens-
ive tariff and called upon the governor to summon the assembly or
call a convention to consider the situation. Pinckney hailed the
gathering for urging 'such open resistance.'" It was part and parcel
of the duties of "a Sovereign and Independent State." The Mercury
had, finally, endorsed nullification—at least in principle.

In the meantime the state's representation at Washington was
deliberating as to what its future course should be. Excepting only
Senator Smith—whose aversion for Calhoun had not abated—the South
South Carolina delegation met at Senator Hayne's home following the
enactment of the "Bill of abominations." They concluded, after much
argument, to return home at the end of the session where they would

10Mercury, June 3, July 4, 22, 1827; May 20, 29, 30, June 28,
July 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 16, 17, 25, 30, Aug. 12, 13, 15, 18, 19,

11Ibid., June 18, July 3, 1828; White, Rhett, 14, 15; Freehling,
Prelude, 148.
discourage public meetings and any public statements with regard to the tariff. It was the collective opinion of the delegation—most of whom belonged to "the Calhoun party"—that no radical moves should jeopardize Jackson's election. The Adams administration was committed to protection and must be repudiated in the forthcoming general election. Then if Jackson—whose tariff position was at least open to question—did not produce a solution satisfactory to South Carolina, the state would act. How, they had not decided.  

This policy was followed, though not without some difficulty. The governor declined either to summon the General Assembly into special session or call a convention. Rhett and his followers were dissuaded from further outbursts, and the Mercury was careful to follow the party line. It is likely that Pinckney had considered that he was doing this all along.

Calhoun also came home when Congress adjourned. From Pendleton during the turbulent summer of 1828, he wrote to Andrew Jackson to emphasize that only genuine tariff reform would quiet the South. Calhoun, however, was more certain of the need for reform than of the likelihood of its coming about. In addition, he was disturbed by the

---

12Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 372-74.

13White, Rhett, 15, 16. The returning delegation found excitement throughout South Carolina, but especially in the Lowcountry. Oratorical fireworks characterized July fourth celebrations and during the summer there were numerous bald denunciations of the tariff. By autumn things had quieted, however. One feature of the plea for calm, White says, was that the Mercury "was jerked sharply into line" (White, Rhett, 16). Considering the commotion within the state and the delayed announcement of Calhoun-approved strategy, it is more likely that Pinckney simply did not know the party line. Wiltse says that Calhoun himself "was no clearer than the others as to what action should ultimately be taken (Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 378).
talk of disunion in South Carolina. So—while state politicians streamed in and out of the place soon to be called Fort Hill—he codified the doctrine of nullification. It was to be used only if necessary as the alternative for congressional initiative in effecting tariff reform.

In October one of Calhoun’s summer visitors gave some indication of what had been discussed at Pendleton. With Jackson’s election assured, James Hamilton, Jr., made a speech on the twenty-eighth to his constituents. Like Rhett’s audience of but a few months before, they were assembled at Walterboro where they heard him deliver the first authorized version of the new policy. It was to be nullification. And when the General Assembly met in November, William C. Preston—once a Crawford man—was ready to submit the South Carolina Exposition and Protest for its consideration. Although it was not generally known, Calhoun had written it during the preceding five months. They had been active months for the Mercury.

Although Pinckney had endorsed nullification in principle on June 18, he commenced to qualify his endorsement only a few days later. It is likely that someone informed him of the party line. Nullification did not mean disunion, he assured his readers. He and all other pro-Jackson men abhorred such a prospect. It meant, rather, that the tariff was unconstitutional, that southern rights had been destroyed, and that the endangered union "must be saved"—by repealing the tariff. Pinckney had not retreated from his theoretical position, however.

---

14 Freehling, Prelude, 149; Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 375-86. Wiltse gives the date of Hamilton's speech as October 21, one week earlier.
Throughout the summer of 1828 his paper championed the doctrine that "the legislature not only possesses the right, but [the] duty to interfere. . . ." It was up to the state and the South "generally" to decide whether the tariff was of a concern sufficient to require such action. The right to restrain the general government had to lie somewhere; it could not be in the Congress, since that body was the source of the trouble. The Supreme Court did not possess the necessary power, for it derived its authority from the Constitution. Because the Constitution was a creation of the states, it was from the states that limitation must be imposed. Pinckney was uncertain as to how this should be done and observed "that it is best to leave the decision as to means to the legislature." The Mercury had passed another milestone.

No more would the Columbia Telescope command the ramparts of state rights in South Carolina. Pinckney's paper, the mouthpiece of the conservative "Calhoun school" had displaced it. No more lapses in communication with the rest of the "Junto." Pinckney campaigned faithfully for Jackson, on whom he said "all the hopes of Carolina hang." "To him the people look emphatically as their last sole hope," short of nullification. And although Pinckney probably voted for the Exposition and did cause it to be printed, he neither commented on it nor contemplated any immediate action by the state.

---

15Mercury, July 4, 17, 22, Aug. 27, 29, Nov. 1, 1828. The Telescope, described by one Mercury contributor as the strongest state rights paper in the South, condemned the Walterboro proposals and favored non-consumption instead (ibid., July 4, 9, 1928).

The policy was that South Carolina would wait for Jackson to prove himself. This time the *Mercury* understood it.

The rest of Charleston's press did not share the *Mercury's* dogmatic view of the situation. The *Patriot* condemned the tariff but thought the Walterboro declarations intemperate and premature. It favored a national mercantile convention and took no position at all on the election. The *Gazette* opposed the tariff on economic grounds but had no reservations as to its constitutionality, while the *Courier* actually condoned the protective system. Both the *Gazette* and *Courier* supported Adams. Their indignant editorials on the *Mercury's* position fairly blazed with malediction of the "*Mercury* or Disunion Junto," and had nothing good to say about the Walterboro proceedings. Adams's unpopularity in South Carolina caused them to place more emphasis on the danger to the Union than on the prospects of his re-election. Jackson's alleged friends in the state were a threat to the "INTEGRITY OF THE UNION," thundered both *Gazette* and *Courier*. Echoing the *Courier's* earlier charge that Pinckney was but "a political weathercock whose opposition ... shifted with every popular breeze," the *Gazette* reminded him of the days when he was rather more nationalistic in outlook.\(^7\)

The alarm of the excited administration papers was hardly justified either by sentiment in the state or the *Mercury's* position. As yet there was no organized nullification party and certainly no group advocating disunion. South Carolina was just beginning to

\(^7\) *Patriot*, Feb. 19, 21, Apr. 11, 22, July 22, 24, Aug. 5, 11, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21, 29, Sept. 15, 17, 26, 29, Oct. 3, 1828; *Gazette*, June 19, July 2, 19, 26, 28, Aug. 1, 8, 11, 20, 23, 26, Sept. 1, 2, 3, 11, 15, 19, 20, 30, Oct. 1-20, 1828; *Courier*, July 14, 25, Aug. 30, Sept. 22, Oct. 6, 10, 11, 13-17, 1828. The *Patriot* was basically a state rights paper.
contemplate going beyond the resolution state. Even Pinckney's Mercury still showed traces of nationalism. If it spoke of the possibility of disunion it did not advocate it, and its endorsement of nullification was no more than abstract. Taking the position that Jackson's election would relieve the South from danger, Pinckney contended that this result would also remove the issue of disunion from politics. "If any individual can preserve the Union" and "compose the agitated waves which threaten to engulf us, he is the man," reasoned the confident editor.18

Jackson's margin of victory in the nation was no greater than that of his legislative slate in South Carolina. With considerable satisfaction the Mercury announced that Pinckney was re-elected as Charleston sent only Jackson men to the statehouse. Even when Jackson glared over his glass at Calhoun to toast the permanence of the Union, the Mercury retained its confidence in the "Hero of New Orleans."

"When the President . . . says that the Union must be preserved, it follows necessarily that he refers to the mode of preservation pointed out by Mr. Jefferson." To the optimistic editor this method operated "by the exercise of the sovereignty of the states . . ." and amounted to nullification:

The President's toast puts an end to whatever little doubt may have heretofore existed as to his feelings or opinions in relation to the momentous question now at issue between the federal government and the whole Southern section of the Union.19


19Mercury, Oct. 17, 31, Nov. 18, 1828; Apr. 24, 27, May 6, 1830; Freehling, Prelude, 192.
When Jackson said nothing about the tariff in his annual message of 1829, the \textit{Mercury} saw no danger. Defending the administration when it was criticized for the spoils system, Pinckney also endorsed Jackson's foreign policy, especially on the matter of West Indian trade. The Maysville Road Veto marked "a new epoch in the political history" and proved Jackson's opposition to internal improvements. The President's position on Georgia Indian removals was sound, and ultimately the \textit{Mercury} applauded his opposition to the Bank of the United States, an institution it had once considered most beneficial. Indeed, throughout the first two years of the General's government, the \textit{Mercury} thought of him as one "who would regard the preservation of the Union as the polar star of his conduct, and discarding local or sectional feeling, be governed only by equal justice to all the great interests of the nation."\footnote{20} But the \textit{Mercury} had changed its mind before. It had once liked John Quincy Adams.

Admiration for Jackson did not mean that Pinckney's sheet had abandoned the crusade against the tariff. This "holy cause" was never long absent from the \textit{Mercury}'s pages. Even during the early months of Jackson's administration—when the South Carolina press was relatively silent on the tariff—Pinckney's paper promised a continual fight for "constitutional rights," and warned that the time might still come for the South to "either throw off their chains by a united and decisive effort, or have them rivetted about their necks" forever.\footnote{21} Pinckney favored another appeal to Congress but expected

\footnote{20}{\textit{Mercury}, July 20, Aug. 15, Sept. 20, 30, Dec. 14, 1829; July 26, 1830.}

\footnote{21}{\textit{Ibid.}, June 18-Dec. 31, 1829.}
little relief from it.\textsuperscript{22} By 1830 he felt that nullification was the only hope; "that no recourse is left to Carolina but the prompt and efficient employment of Constitutional measures of redress."\textsuperscript{23}

Congressional expressions of sympathy for the aims of the Colonization Society intensified further his distrust of that body. But while Congress was unreliable, the Webster-Hayne debate benefitted the Southern cause. Newspaper reports of the issues at stake enlightened the previously uninformed northern masses and the common interest of South and West became more apparent. Editors and politicians from the North and West defended the "Carolina Doctrines." Support from Woodbury of New Hampshire and Benton of Missouri inspired Pinckney to see an "arising of the influence of State Rights principles . . . not only in the West, but in the East." Now, if the South but remained strong, relief would be found through time honored nullification. Jefferson had advocated it, while Georgia and Massachusetts had practiced it.\textsuperscript{24}

So, in March of 1830, the \textit{Mercury} began to call for nullification—as the only remedy both peaceful and constitutional. It would preserve the union, and Jackson's toast had indicated his sympathy. At this point—and this one only—did Pinckney's press appear to be disturbed by just the nagging shadow of a doubt. If the President's meaning had been misinterpreted in Charleston, there was still no

\footnotesize{
\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid.}, Aug. 4, 1829.


\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Ibid.}, Mar. 4, 15, 17, 23, Apr. 15, 24, May 1, June 17, Aug. 4, 1830.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
cause for alarm, counselled the Mercury. "... It would be a matter of very little consequence to know that he was against us ... the liberties of the South no more depend upon the nod of the Executive than they do upon the unprincipled usurpations of the majority in Congress." And if Jackson tried force, which he surely would not do, such "a flame" would be ignited as could "never be extinguished but by the dissolution of the Union. ..."25

Admitting that nullification could be accomplished merely by action of the legislature, Pinckney was reluctant to endorse this method. Then in August—on the eve of the fall elections—he concluded that the "prevailing, indeed the almost unanimous determination of the people, is that a Convention shall be called."26

Once again the Mercury was marching considerably in advance of Charleston's other papers. The Patriot agreed that a state could "stand on her sovereignty," but only by seceding from the Union. The protective system was harmful to the South but did not yet demand that she adopt a separate course. The Patriot's editor proposed that a constitutional amendment be adopted instead. This would require approval by three-fourths of the states for any measure denounced by the remaining one-fourth. As an alternative he favored a general convention of the southern states. There were, he said, seven million Northerners and Westerners who agreed with the South on the evils of protection.27

25Ibid., May 6, 1830.
26Ibid., May 1, Aug. 5, 1830.
Pinckney was unimpressed; he spoke of the editor's "long prosing essays which nobody reads."\(^8\)

The **Courier** also disagreed, but for other reasons. The "book learning" of the **Patriot's** editor left the **Courier's** editor singularly unimpressed. The latter cited Senator Livingston of Louisiana, "a veteran of the **JEFFERSON** school," who said that the tariff was perfectly constitutional. Nullification would lead inevitably to "resistance and bloodshed."\(^29\) Pinckney called the **Courier's** editor disloyal to the South and inconsistent as well. He had reportedly supported the Hartford Convention, Pinckney charged. One of the **Mercury's** correspondents spoke of "The Boston **Courier** published in Charleston."\(^30\)

The **Gazette's** new editor, William Gilmore Simms, regretted the injustices perpetrated against the South, believed in "the reserved rights of the States," and said that majority rule had its drawbacks. But he still urged "patience and forbearance to the last point . . ." and did not endorse nullification. When Pinckney characterized his reasoning as "scurrilous," Simms—not to be outdone—heaped an impressive opprobrium upon the former's head. "The refined editor of the **Charleston Mercury** . . . whose Journal for the last four years has been the common sewer for the passing off of all the blackguardism of the State and City," had, he said, only used his position to enslave the **Mercury** to purposes of party. That "chameleon of public life," he

\(^8\)Mercury, Oct. 7, 1830.

\(^9\)Courier, Sept. 4, 1828; May 14, Aug. 3, 1830. The **Courier** also observed that there was no general southern support for nullification and that South Carolina would, consequently, stand alone.

\(^30\)Mercury, Mar. 27, June 17, July 1, 29, Aug. 2, 1830.
indignantly labelled Pinckney's paper. The Patriot, Courier, and Gazette all supported the "Union Ticket" in the fall elections.

Those elections served to indicate the respective strength in South Carolina of the nullifier and unionist factions. In a close contest, the Unionists won in Charleston. Intendant (mayor) Pinckney was defeated for re-election. The unionist slate won control of all municipal offices and also elected eleven of sixteen state representatives. It would seem that nullification was defeated—at least in the city. Pinckney was returned to the General Assembly, however, where on November 27, 1830, he was elected Speaker of the lower house. Furthermore, the Nullifiers had done better outside Charleston, and in December a majority of the assembly voted to call a convention. Since they were unable to muster a two-thirds vote for this action, they adopted a series of anti-tariff resolutions instead. Two of these resolutions endorsed nullification.

This development encouraged the Mercury and convinced it that South Carolina would act when just a few more members of the General Assembly lost faith in the Congress. Bending every journalistic effort

31 Gazette, Jan. 5, Feb. 10, 17, June 9, 16, 28, July 31, Aug. 3-5, 1830.

32 Patriot, Aug. 30, 1830.

33 Mercury, Sept. 8, 1830; Freehling, Prelude, 201-13. Freehling says as the electioneering progressed the Nullifiers beat a "strategic retreat" for two reasons. Certain defeat awaited the party that clearly called for nullification. But the other reason involved something even more basic. A clear cut choice between policies could create "popular parties" and threaten the gentry's control of the state. The Charleston city election of 1829 had clearly illustrated such a danger. By obscuring issues in the general election, the gentlemen candidates could reserve the final decision to themselves—once they got to the legislature.
to enlighten these doubtful solons, Pinckney interpreted the refusal of the national House of Representatives to effect tariff reductions in 1831 as the "proclamation of political vassalage to the South." Reluctant Carolinians now had no choice but to "either support the state or go over to the enemy. . . ." Economic matters aggravated the grimness of the situation. Great Britain was contemplating an increase in duties on raw cotton, he warned, in obvious retaliation for the tariff. Some results were already apparent. As northern prosperity increased "nothing but embarrassment deterioration and decay . . ." overtook "the plantation states." "They have no . . . acts of Congress authorizing them legally to plunder and oppress their neighbors--no millions upon millions annually poured in amongst them from the coffers of the nation." As a result, population was declining, roads and canals were not being built, wages were low, property was depreciated, and foreign commerce was destroyed. Particularly in South Carolina the picture was one of "gloom, dissatisfaction, and despondence."34 Pinckney's rhetoric, if exaggerated, was persuasive. It soon took on overtones critical of his former hero, Andrew Jackson.

Viewed in retrospect, the Mercury's anti-Jackson position evolved with a gradual reluctance not unlike the transition in Pinckney's political views from nationalism to sectionalism. In 1830 Pinckney had condemned any discussion of Calhoun or Van Buren for President; Jackson, he hoped, would run again. Only a year later, however, he was determined to devote little of his paper's space to the General's cause. South Carolina had neglected "her own rights and

34Mercury, Feb. 5, 9, 17, Mar. 31, Apr. 1, 9, 1831.
interests" in the last election so as to vindicate "the great principle of popular sovereignty"; it would not happen again. Until the Constitution was restored to its "original purity" his paper had no time for personal campaigns. Jackson, in particular should contribute to constitutional purification by vetoing "the monstrous acts" almost certain to be passed by the Congress, acts which adversely affected the "liberties and properties and even . . . lives" of Carolinians. In return he could expect Pinckney's support. Otherwise, the Mercury would not "turn aside from matters of such vital import, for the mere pleasure of engaging in a party conflict."

Pinckney's doubts as to Jackson's intentions had intensified by 1831. Although the Jackson-Calhoun quarrel was only "a private affair," it was still disturbing. Van Buren was the villain, the Mercury charged; if he alienated the Vice President he would have to suffer the consequences. The general policy of the administration was still thought to be sound. Jackson's opposition to that "dangerous federal engine," the bank, merited special commendation. But on June 14, 1831, Jackson wrote a letter to the Union Party in Charleston. Complimenting the supporters of that faction, the President commented unfavorably on those whose unwise political conduct damaged the national interest. He could only be referring to those who until May had styled themselves the "State Rights and Jackson" Party. Reacting with "surprise and indignation," the state rights faction filled the Mercury's pages with evidence of a growing concern soon to become outrage.35

35Ibid., July 8, 1829; Apr. 13, July 26, Dec. 15, 1830; Apr. 16, June 9, 1831; Feb. 8, May 28, 1832.

36Ibid., Feb. 3, 12, 19, 24, Mar. 11, Apr. 16, July 7, 9, 12, Aug. 2, 26, 1831.
Contributors to Pinckney's paper viewed the President's now clarified position with alarm; Jackson was evidently contemplating coercion. The Mercury itself merely took note of these "chilling realities" and was loath to credit them. Its doubts were dispelled, however, before the summer ended. In August the outraged editor referred to Jackson's "late unauthorized, undignified, and bitter partisan denunciation" of the "State Rights and Free Trade party of the South." And earlier in the same article, he allowed that "the Rubicon is passed." Pinckney approved of that, if of nothing else. The threat of federal coercion "has done and will do more," he said, "to produce unanimity upon the great question of resistance to aggression than anything, perhaps which could have been devised." He blamed Van Buren for the whole ugly business.37

Throughout 1831 Pinckney had called for nullification as the only "legitimate . . . patriotic, constitutional" solution for the problems of the plantation country. It was not a radical approach, he said. Again he cited the past: the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, Georgia's defiance in the matter of the Indians, Pennsylvania's disobedience in the Oldsmoist Case, and Alabama's recent refusal to charter a branch of the Bank of the United States. These were all real precedents for similar action. So was the annulment of the Embargo Act by Connecticut and Massachusetts, and so for that matter, was the Hartford Convention. Pinckney did not approve of that body, however. In wartime "a patriot should side with his

37Ibid., Feb. 8, 10, July 22, Aug. 2, 10, 1831. The "State Rights and Jackson" party had reflected a growing concern with the President's policies by changing its name to the "State Rights and Free Trade" party (ibid., Jun3 21, 1831).
country right or wrong," he said. Inspired thus by the past and justified by federal oppressions, nullification would be "a calm and deliberate movement."^8

Local sentiment seemed to be moving with the vigorous editor. In the fall of 1831 he was elected Intendant again and reported that the State Rights party was in control throughout the state. He looked to an early call for a convention. The legislature, however, preferred to wait for the outcome of an impending congressional compromise. An October anti-tariff convention in Philadelphia had condemned protection. Although it skirted the constitutional issue, Carolinians (who had sent delegates) were still encouraged by its action. They were even more optimistic after Jackson recommended reduction in his December address to Congress. Like his mentor Calhoun, Pinckney was skeptical of an acceptable result. "There is," he said, "but one way . . . by which a favorable issue can be produced. . . . Let the people assemble in convention while the struggle . . . is going on in Congress." Still he was willing to give mild support to the delaying action. "... The cup of forbearance is not yet quite exhausted," he said. But the South would only accept a duty that taxed "all imports indiscriminately and moderately, say 10 per cent," and South Carolina would nullify anything short of this. In the process she could contribute to the permanence of the Union, for nullification was a union-saving measure. The Union party's proposal that a southern convention be called was not only impractical but separatist in its tendencies. It caused men to think of a Southern Confederacy and so carried "in

^8 Ibid., Jan. 21, 28, 29, Feb. 4, June 7, 8, 10, 18-23, 1831.
its bosom the seeds of disunion." South Carolina wanted no separate nation, only justice in the present one. The editor rejected "the wretched right of secession" along with "any other dangerous experiment." Who then could doubt that nullification was the wise course?  

Pinckney's predictions as to the outcome of the congressional debate proved to be correct. The new tariff bill furnished another evidence of the "usurpation" and "oppression" to which the determined editor had referred. Excepting those on coarse woolens, the only reductions it effected were of a non-protective nature. "To say that this is compromise and conciliation is an insolent mockery..." he charged, adding the warning that its endorsement by Charleston's other papers was an ill-considered attempt "to reconcile the people to that odious act of federal oppression." Congress had, moreover, founded a whole "system of injustice and oppression" on the tariff. The plans for internal improvements, aid to the Colonization Society, pensions for Revolutionary War soldiers and distribution, all depended on the tariff for revenue. "It is the fruitful source from which all these corruptions have issued... Let the Southern states then... conquer that and the whole system falls to the ground. Nullify... and the South will be redeemed from bondage."  

The Mercury had correctly gauged the mood of South Carolina. James J. Hamilton, Jr., now governor, was as displeased with the new...
tariff as was Pinckney. This iniquitous bill did challenge the hateful protective system but still left it "fixed as fate," Hamilton said. Renouncing "further procrastination and delay," the Mercury commenced in March to besiege its readers with appeals for nullification. Such a remedy would be constitutional, peaceful, and effective. Importuning those who shared his view to launch a continuous campaign for nullification, Pinckney stressed the role of Jefferson, "the father of the republican party of '93--the patriot who saved the Constitution then and whose principles alone can save it . . . now." To those who might still doubt that Jefferson's role in nullification clearly established the constitutionality of the doctrine, Pinckney appealed on other grounds. "... Who ever heard," he asked reassuringly, "of a State's deriving a right from the Federal Constitution? The States have delegated power to the Federal Government but they certainly can derive none from it. All power not delegated is reserved."42

This being the case, there could be no issue of treason involved in the process of state interposition. Treason was clearly defined by the Constitution; it consisted of "levying war against the United States" or giving "aid and comfort" to the enemy, and South Carolina was guilty of neither offense. Then, as if to admit that people in high places outside the state might not agree with this contention, Pinckney asserted that the controversy was purely a state matter. Any charges would have to be brought in South Carolina courts.


42Mercury, Jan. 6, Mar. 7, 8, 21, 22, Apr. 16, 30, 1832.
Neither native-born nor "adopted" citizens need have any fears of being convicted there. With a final assurance to the fainthearted that there was no danger of military coercion, the editor concluded his appeal for nullification.  

There remained but one issue, the effectiveness of interposition. The action should be proclaimed by an authoritative agency, preferably a convention called by two-thirds vote of the General Assembly. Since the Unionists controlled the current body, Pinckney favored postponing the attempt until after the October elections. Until that time he was content to campaign.

This proposal was good enough for the electorate. In the autumn of 1832 Pinckney was re-elected Intendant of Charleston and Nullifiers won the other municipal offices as well. The Mercury's editor also went back to the statehouse where he was again chosen to be Speaker of the House of Representatives. The result elsewhere was little different from that in Charleston. The former "State Rights and Jackson" party, having triumphed on "the great question of Liberty and Slavery," was in the necessary legislative majority. It was virtually a foregone conclusion that when Governor Hamilton summoned his new assembly into special session it would vote to call a convention of the sort so long advocated by Pinckney. The action of this special session established the political wisdom of the editor.

---

43 Ibid., Mar. 24, July 17, Aug. 13, 17, 22, Oct. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 1832. Both Unionists and Nullifiers coveted the support of Charleston's immigrants (Mercury, Courier, Sept-Oct. 11, 1832).

44 Mercury, Mar. 8, Apr. 30, 1832.

The legislature called for the election of a sovereign convention, and on November 24, 1832, the convention adopted "An Ordinance to Nullify certain acts of the Congress of the United States, purporting to be laws laying duties and imposts on the importation of foreign commodities."46

Armed then by precedent and secure in the knowledge that the general government was incapable of doing harm to the state, the *Mercury* hailed the long awaited convention action. Pinckney also expressed his confidence that South Carolina's Unionists would give nullification their support. But if they did not, the crusader warned, they would "be crushed by the blow which must be struck at tyranny."47

The *Mercury* had won its first battle. It had also undergone a change of command.

On the last day of October 1832—almost a month before the adoption of the much presaged nullification ordinance—Pinckney wrote a "Farewell" to his subscribers and was succeeded by editor John Allan Stuart. Pinckney gave no reason for this move but it was presumably dictated by the pressure of politics. Pinckney was the Intendant of Charleston and also Speaker of the South Carolina House of Representatives. In addition, he was planning to stand for a seat in the national House of Representatives.

In September of 1833 Pinckney was elected without formal opposition to Charleston's seat in the lower house of Congress. If his


47*Mercury*, Nov. 29, 1832.
stay at the Mercury had been short, it had been significant. Less than a decade of Pinckney's leadership molded the paper in the image of nationalism, pronounced with a southern, indeed with a Charleston accent—a stamp that it retained to the end of its days. And Pinckney was passing on the editorship to a man like himself, "a gentleman ... thoroughly devoted to the rights and interests of the South."\(^{48}\)

The new editor was John Allan Stuart, like Pinckney, from a prominent South Carolina family and like the first editor, Morford, a graduate of Princeton. He was an attorney, a leader of the State Rights faction, and a brother-in-law of Robert Barnwell Rhett. He had served three years as editor of the Beaufort Gazette and one year at the helm of the State Rights and Free Trade Evening Post of Charleston, and thus brought editorial experience with him to the Mercury. Not surprisingly, both the Gazette and Evening Post were supporters of nullification.\(^{49}\)

\(^{48}\)Ibid., Oct. 31, 1832. There was no organized opposition to the Nullifiers in either Charleston's municipal or national elections in 1832. Close upon election time, however, an "independent" ticket appeared. Composed mostly of Unionists, it was reviled by the Mercury as a demoniac plot directed from Washington. As the election returns came in, the Mercury gleefully reported the swamping of all "independent" candidates (ibid., Aug. 23, Sept. 2, 3, 4, 5, 1833).


The Evening Post was established in 1831 by James Hamilton, Jr., after he had clashed with Pinckney over both personal and party issues. Since Stuart and Hamilton were friends, it is likely that the latter was instrumental in Pinckney's retirement from the Mercury (Virginia Louise Glenn, "James Hamilton, Jr. of South Carolina: A Biography," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1954, 158-59).
Stuart became editor at a time when technology was changing the character of the paper. His journal received news reports more quickly than had the *Mercury* of Morford and Pinckney. Despite the roundabout route via New York, fast sailing ships and steam packets often brought the story of Europe to Charleston in less than a month's time. The best overland transport from New York took three and one-half days but this swift pace was unpredictable, if not uncertain. "Western Mails" came in by the South Carolina Railroad from Augusta. The *Mercury* received her first telegraph report in 1844; it brought the latest news of the Democratic convention then sitting in Baltimore. Stuart employed more reporting correspondents than his predecessors had done, and they tended to report the news more and editorialize less.

The paper received regular reports from Washington and New York, along with frequent ones from such scattered places as Key West, Boston, Havana, and New Orleans. Special reporters were hired to cover political and commercial conventions. By 1837 Stuart's paper had built up the biggest subscription list of any journal in South Carolina, a list which included subscribers from as far away as Ohio. Politics had much to do with this increase in the paper's popularity. The state rights and anti-Jackson tenor of *Mercury* articles brought support from both in and out of state. Conversely, her support of Van Buren in a time of rising Whiggery combined with divisions in South Carolina's Democratic party to cut circulation and lead to financial difficulties. Even so, the paper appears to have retained the
subscription lead in the interior of the state.\(^{50}\)

If there were fewer editorials in the post-Pinckney Mercury—and if they were more gracefully formed—they lost none of their vigor under Stuart.\(^{51}\) Nor were they any different in political preference. Nowhere is this more evident than in the continuing battle for nullification. In his very first editorial, Stuart pledged his devotion to "Carolinian and Southern sentiment" and urged his readers to center their full attention on the nullification issue and to ignore "the pitiful by-play of the Presidential contest." His paper faithfully followed that policy; it mentioned the election only once more and then but to announce Jackson's victory. The election of delegates to the impending convention accounted for most of his political reports. Stuart also reviewed the constitutional arguments for nullification. Reminding his subscribers that their "paramount allegiance" was to the state, the new editor held that federal obligations did not exist for a citizen, "except so far as his state has contracted for him." And if the state in exercise of her sovereignty misinterpreted the federal compact, her decision nonetheless

\(^{50}\)Mercury, 1839-1855, passim. In particular see issues for Oct. 3, Dec. 6, 20, 24, 1832; Jan. 4, Feb. 9, 23, 25, May 21, July 4, Sept. 23, 1834; Mar. 10, 1835; June 1, 1836; Jan. 6, 31, Feb. 1, 1837; Dec. 20, 1838; Jan. 3, 1838; June 1, 3, 1841; Jan. 10, 13, 1842: Jan. 2, 1843; May 31-June 3, Sept. 3, 1844. In the issue for Jan. 3, 1844, the Mercury's New York correspondent stated that the Charleston journal was the first out of town paper to maintain a reporter in that city. His Newsletters included a general report of social and cultural life as well as political news. See also John Allan Stuart to Robert Barnwell Rhett, Jan. 9, 1843, Nov. 11, 1844, Robert Barnwell Rhett Collection, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, hereinafter cited as Rhett Collection.

\(^{51}\)Stuart, Magnolia Cemetery, 51; King, Newspaper Press, 151.
bound all who resided within her borders. "Every man is bound . . . to fight for his country, though he deem that she has wantonly and unjustly declared war," wrote Stuart.  

When the adoption of the nullification ordinance made the issue "immediate and direct between South Carolina and Usurpation," Charleston's unionist press thundered in outraged dissent. The Courier denounced "the mad edict of a despotic majority." The Gazette raged at "the most flagrant and outrageous usurpations that were ever heard of in any country." The Patriot attacked the oath of obedience (a reflection of Stuart's reasoning) attached to the ordinance, calling it a "mockery of justice" and "a violation of the liberty of conscience." They all disliked Governor Hamilton's recommendation that the legislature organize a homeguard of 12,000 men. It was, the seething Gazette said, a contumelious reproach; a proclamation so insolent as to "harmonize with the acknowledged attributes of an Eastern despot, haughtily addressing his slaves." The Patriot and Courier detected a conspicuous inconsistency in the nullificationist camp; it had promised the state a "peaceful remedy."  

52Mercury, Oct. 3, Nov. 1, 2, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 1832. The convention in which Stuart was so interested was the Nullification Convention.  

53Ibid., Nov. 29, 1832.  

54Courier, Nov. 29, Dec. 5, 7, 1832.  

55Gazette, Nov. 26, 29, 1832.  

56Patriot, Nov. 24, 27, 28, Dec. 7, 1832.  

57Gazette, Nov. 30, Dec. 1, 1832.  

58Courier, Nov. 30, 1832; Patriot, Nov. 30, 1832.
But the Mercury was seldom worsted in a war of words. Stuart rejoiced at the adoption of the ordinance and defended the governor. Hamilton's action, he said, was merely a defensive precaution, and probably an unnecessary one. It was desirable, nonetheless. Jackson's first message on the subject, if not altogether to Stuart's liking, seemed to bear out his confident predictions of a limited federal reaction. But on December 10 the President issued a proclamation, the forceful nationalism of which was all too clear to Stuart. South Carolina's "vain provisions! ineffectual restrictions!" and "vile profanation of oaths!" would not be tolerated by a government which hoped that "the Great Ruler of Nations" had chosen it "as the only means of attaining the high destinies to which we may reasonably aspire." The pious nature of its closing sentences did nothing to moderate the tone of the Mercury's indignant response. This obnoxious "manifesto" was the edict of a "dictator," a "usurper" of the style of Caesar, Cromwell, and Bonaparte, but of an "inferior spirit." Evil aides "behind the dictator's throne," including one "juggling miscreant" named Van Buren, bore much of the blame for such an outrageous proceeding. It would excite "no other feelings than those of defiance and scorn" in the breast of "every free man worthy of the name" and nothing could be "better calculated to confirm the resistance of South Carolina."59

Intensifying his earlier appeals for support outside the state, Stuart was no more disturbed by dissenting declarations from the Virginia, Georgia, and Alabama legislatures than by official silence from

59Mercury, Dec. 1, 5, 10, 12, 17, 19, 20, 21, 28, 1832.
other southern states. Reports of public meetings and from editors seemed to offset these apparent setbacks. State unity was more essential anyway. Rejoicing that the majority of Carolinians stood behind the "cause," the Mercury noted rising militia enrollments which exceeded "the whole number of votes polled for the State Rights Ticket at the triumphant election . . . of . . . last fall." Supporters of South Carolina's Union party stood accused of betraying "their country" and of fomenting "violence and civil war" for partisan political advantage. Heaping opprobrium upon the heads of the Courier, Patriot, and Gazette, Stuart labelled them "creatures" of the "Administration" with whom the whole threat of a military confrontation had been arranged. But while its verbal attack continued unabated, developments outside South Carolina caused the Mercury to favor, at least temporarily, a policy of restraint. There were proposals in Congress to modify the tariff, and the Virginia legislature was moving for compromise. Even Jackson manifested signs of constitutionalism when, on January 16, 1833, he asked Congress for additional powers with which he proposed to subdue South Carolina. This, Stuart said, at least was a departure from the arbitrary procedure of the proclamation. And five days later, on January 21, his newspaper moved to defer the enforcement of nullification. 60

The adoption of Clay's compromise tariff bill seemed to establish the wisdom of this watchful waiting. Although Stuart objected to even the compromise measure (the reduction was too gradual

60Ibid., No. 14, Dec. 4, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17-21, 28, 1832; Jan. 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 14, 15, 17, 21, 23, 31, Feb. 2, 5-9, 14, 16, Mar. 4, 6, 1833.
and the final duty too high), he hailed it as a triumph of "the good old cause." He also viewed it as a partial surrender of the protective principle. His Unionist rival, the Patriot, was completely disgusted by this point of view. "The Mercury is incorrigible," sighed the rival editor. "We shall have to give up that print in despair." But Stuart had more important enemies upon whom to vent his spleen than the editor of the Patriot. On the same day that Clay's bill passed the Congress, that body gave the President authority to enforce the revenue laws in nullifying states.

The Mercury's mood of moderate satisfaction with the tariff compromise did not include the Force Bill. From the first introduction of that measure the editor spoke of it with a loathing undisguised. This "Bill of Blood" threatened "the very existence of these states as States"; the Force Bill would determine "whether the functionaries at Washington are to be a limited agency or despotic rulers, ..." Stuart charged. Proposing the creation of an "unconstitutional tyranny" its adoption would be reason enough for South Carolina to leave the union. The Mercury had sounded First Call.

For a time its editor tended to mute this extreme position. During just a few days in March it seemed to him that the slightly disguised joint passage of the tariff compromise and Force Bill made the latter no more than an "ebullition of spleen." It is possible that his brother-in-law, Robert Barnwell Rhett, was even then influencing Mercury

---

62 Patriot, July 25, 1833.
63 Mercury, Mar. 5, 1833.
64 Ibid., Jan. 21, 25, 28, 29, Feb. 26, 28, 1833.
policy, for only four days later the paper reverted to her original position. Because of the Force Bill, South Carolina had no "honorable obligations" to accept the tariff compromise. Indeed the Force Bill destroyed "the character of the compromise." But since the Convention nullified the Force Bill even as it authorized the collection of the modified tariff, Stuart accepted and defended the action. It was a pale defense; the Mercury would have preferred a "more qualified" endorsement of the new law.65 Exhausted, perhaps by the vigorous battle, the paper then took "a tolerably long vacation from political essays."66

In an effort to strengthen the State Rights party in the fall elections, the summer issues of 1833 were given over to reviewing the controversy with Washington. Proving the effectiveness of this campaign, the Nullifiers swept the city offices, Henry Laurens Pinckney went to Congress, and a Mercury-endorsed man took his seat in the General Assembly. Similar results in the Upcountry put the Nullifiers in good position for the fierce domestic fight left in the wake of the war with Washington.67

The Nullification Ordinance had required that all state

65Ibid., Mar. 5, 11, 19, Apr. 10, 1833. While Rhett, a delegate to the convention, reluctantly agreed to repeal the ordinance, he saw no "cause for congratulation and triumph" in the action. Nor would he endorse a proposal to express South Carolina's "ardent attachment to the Union" (White, Rhett, 26-28. Stuart did not take kindly to suggestions that Rhett had any influence over the paper. Mercury, June 29, Aug. 27, 1838).

66Mercury, May 25, 1833. The "vacation" may have been a tactical disengagement dictated by unease within the state.

67Ibid., June 4, 19, July 4, 13, 20, Aug. 23, Sept. 2-5, 1833.
office-holders swear paramount allegiance to South Carolina. When the convention repealed the ordinance, this oath was also rescinded. But the bitter opposition of the Nullifiers to the Force Bill merged with their suspicion of the Unionists to revive the question of allegiance. Renewing their support for an oath similar to the one required by the ordinance, the Nullifiers ran headlong into vigorous Unionist opposition. After much wrangling the convention compromised the issue by reviving the oath but leaving its phrasing to the judgment of the next legislature. Quickly defining their positions, the Courier and Patriot denounced the proposed oath with almost as much venom as the Mercury had attacked the Force Bill. Predictably, the Mercury supported the oath.\(^68\)

By late November, however, Stuart had changed his mind. Urging that the oath be discarded lest the Unionists cry "persecution," he reasoned that the Unionist party would be weakened without this issue. Rejecting Stuart's advice, the General Assembly passed a bill which required an immediate oath of militia officers and drafted a constitutional amendment requiring one for civil officials. Purposefully vague in its phrasing, the oath provided "that I will be faithful and true allegiance bear to the State of South Carolina; and that I will support and maintain ... the laws and constitution of this state and the United States. ..." The ambiguous nature of this pledge was meant to reassure the Unionists. But the Mercury, renouncing its brief caution, said what the oath left unsaid:

It does not define, but requires allegiance:—

\(^68\)Patriot, Mar. 9, 11, 21, 1833; Courier, Apr. 9-20, 1833; Mercury, Mar. 11-13, 15, 20, Apr. 11, 13, 19, 22, 24, 1833.
that is enough. The minority . . . may quibble and shape its interpretation to their desires; but the rest of the State know . . . that simple allegiance means paramount duty to the State.\(^{69}\)

The opposition press agreed, as did their readers the Unionists. The *Patriot* and *Courier*, seething with denunciations, rivaled the *Mercury's* record for censuring oppressions.\(^{70}\) It was "a measure of odious tyranny," said the *Courier*, "inconsistent . . . with federal obligations."\(^{71}\) In protest Unionists held local meetings and scheduled a party convention for Greenville.

The *Mercury* was moved to prove its sense of humor by such doings. Laughing at the local meetings, the editor was especially amused by the "Fee Faw Fum Convention" in Greenville. It was curious to see defiance in a group so ready to submit to overbearing federals, said Stuart. Dismissing the whole affair as a move on the part of the administration to obscure its blunders, Stuart was less amused when disaffected Unionists brought suit to test the oath before the Court of Appeals.\(^{72}\) This body consisted of two Unionists and one Nullifier.\(^{73}\) The editor declared that the Court, being a subordinate agency of the state, could not rule upon actions of the sovereign convention. When it ruled anyway, Stuart's mirth vanished altogether. By a two to one

---

\(^{69}\) *Mercury*, Nov. 23, 26, Dec. 9, 1833.

\(^{70}\) *Courier, Patriot*, Jan. - May, 1834, *passim*.

\(^{71}\) *Courier*, Jan. 27, 1834.

\(^{72}\) *Mercury*, Feb. 24, Apr. 2-5, 29, May 7, 12, 1834.

\(^{73}\) The Unionist judges were Joseph Johnson and J. B. O'Neall. William Harper was the Nullifier (Freehling, *Prelude*, 317).
decision, the "subservient agency of Federal usurpation" concluded that
the convention had exceeded its powers. It had been called merely to
determine the fate of the Nullification Ordinance; new oaths were a
matter for constitutional amendment. The Patriot's and Courier's
satisfaction with this ruling was exceeded by the Mercury's disgust.
Urging that the next General Assembly move to reform the judiciary,
Stuart declared that such action would prevent any more judges from
betraying"their country."  

The Mercury spent the summer campaigning for a proper assembly,
one which would foil "all the efforts of the Union Party, of Union
Conventions and Union Judges." Stuart called for men who would defeat
"consolidation," and destroy "federal usurpation" along with Jackson's
arbitrary unconstitutionalism. Standing firmly for "Union, liberty
and Equal Rights," the Courier threw its weight behind the Unionists. After a campaign characterized by vicious insult and threats of re-
bellion in the mountains, the Nullifiers won decisively in the city,
carried the local legislative delegation and sent Pinckney back to
Congress.

Results were little different elsewhere. State Rights men
received a two-thirds majority in the Assembly where they promptly
passed the amendment authorizing an oath of allegiance to the state.  

\[\text{74} \text{Courier, June 4, 1834; Patriot, June 4, 5, 1834; Mercury,}
\text{June 5, 12, 13, 1834.}
\]
\[\text{75} \text{Mercury, June 5, 24, Aug. 11, 12, 21, Sept. 9, 11, Oct. 1, 10,}
\text{11, 1834.}
\]
\[\text{76} \text{Courier, Oct. 13, 1834.}
\]
\[\text{77} \text{Ibid., Sept. 3, Oct. 16, 1834; Jan. 1, 1835; Mercury, Sept. 1,}
\text{3, 7, 9, Oct. 6, 15, 30, 1834.}
\]
Moving to prevent another clash with the Unionists, the victorious Nullifiers declared, however, that the oath meant only "the allegiance which every citizen owes to the state consistently with the Constitution of the United States." As a further concession to the outnumbered but vocal Unionists, the assembly dropped Stuart's proposed treason bill.

By this time both Nullifiers and Unionists were beginning to understand that political division was a luxury that South Carolina could not afford. Speaking for Lowcountry Unionism, the Courier accepted the olive branch proferred by the General Assembly. Then as Calhoun moved to re-establish unity by taking personal command of state politics, the Mercury joined its rival to hail the return of political peace. Although Stuart shared the Courier's wish for "quiet and repose," he doubtless expected little of either in the years ahead. Privy to the counsels of state leaders, the editor knew that his real enemy lay outside South Carolina and that the battle, "far from being over," had only just begun.

---

78 *Mercury*, Dec. 6-18, 1834. The apparent ease with which the General Assembly resolved this crisis is deceptive. The long battle over nullification had left South Carolina bitterly divided. During the confrontation with the general government, the Nullifiers' position had been threatened not only by Jackson from without but by a Unionist military force (some 8,000 strong) from within the state. Clay's compromise bill eased them out of a very tight spot. It was primarily this "treason" at home that caused the Nullifiers strongly to support the test oath. But the Upcountry Unionists who had accounted for most of the military force during the actual crisis, would have nothing to do with such an oath. Threatening an armed uprising they caused James L. Petigru to predict a "border war" in response to the passage of the bill. His unease was shared by the Mercury when it spoke of "butcherly preparations" in the Upcountry. This resurrected crisis caused the Nullifiers to divide into a radical and a conservative wing; it was the latter who worked with the more peaceably inclined Lowcountry Unionists to effect the second compromise in December (*Mercury*, May 21, 22, 30, June 2, 3, 6, 7, 1834; Freehling, *Prelude*, 278, 279, 312-322).

79 *Courier*, Dec. 11, 1832; *Mercury*, Dec. 11, 1834; Coit, *Calhoun*, 258.
CHAPTER III

THE ONE GREAT CAUSE

In the light of after events it is hard to believe how calm and confident those thirty years were. The great questions of the day were vehemently discussed in Congress and in the State legislatures, but the people at large never dreamed of the disruption of the Union, still less of the possibility of war. Many of the Union men had, after the nullification compromise, been sent to Congress or appointed to office at home, and the result was harmony.¹

So reads the reminiscence of one of the Mercury's readers. Harriott Horry Rutledge Ravenel, "a great lady of the Old South" and great-grand-daughter of Eliza Lucas, grew up very happily during those years from 1830 to 1860.² Like the Mercury's editor, Mrs. Ravenel stood for and with all those who defended ante-bellum Carolina Orthodoxy.

It is not insignificant that in 1832, the year of Mrs. Ravenel's birth, her great-aunt published a political catechism in defense of State Rights later described by the younger woman as "a wonderfully clear and forcible exposition of that faith."³ But her own main interests were other than political. In combination with her

¹Ravenel, Charleston, 458.
³Ravenel, Charleston, 320; Maria Henrietta Pinckney, The Quintessence of Long Speeches—Arranged as a Political Catechism By A Lady, For Her God-Daughter (Charleston, 1830).
youth, those interests prevented her from seeing the critical under-currents that made for the resolution of the extreme positions to which she refers—a resolution that was sometimes more apparent than real. Neither could she note the analysis of the situation in 1833 of a fellow Carolinian, the retiring Vice President of the United States. "The struggle, far from being over," he wrote after the convention session, "has just commenced."^4

The death of Robert Turnbull in April, 1833, gave Calhoun the opportunity of making this view public. Turnbull's passing "in the strength of his manhood . . . was a shock to all," said Mrs. Ravenel. Some months after his "immense" funeral,^5 the Nullifiers invited Calhoun to be the principal speaker at a memorial service for this author of The Crisis. Coming from Fort Hill, Calhoun spoke first on the morning of November 22. Since the scene for this address was St. Phillip's churchyard, it would have been inappropriate for the speaker to deal too frankly with political issues. The ubiquitous subject of politics was reserved for a second speech delivered on that evening in a more secular arena. There Calhoun told a large and enthusiastic audience that nullification had lowered the tariff but had also produced the Force Bill. "... Under the fostering encouragement of that Bill," he said, "Emancipation Societies had sprung up like mushrooms." With a united voice the South must "plainly announce to their Northern brethren that either the bill or the political connexion must yield."^6

^4Quoted in Coit, Calhoun, 258.

^5Ravenel, Charleston, 457.

^6Mercury, Nov. 25, 27, 1833; Freehling, Prelude, 325-26.
Calhoun had neither given up on the Union nor was he identifying the Force Bill as the main enemy. The enemy was clearly the Abolitionists and they must be stopped, he told his audience. He now felt that a southern convention offered the best chance to destroy the Abolitionists and along with them the Force Bill. Other Carolinians such as Thomas Cooper viewed a convention as the forerunner of secession but Calhoun thought it the best means of assuring the permanence of the Union. In a call that he would sound repeatedly, Calhoun told the agitated Charlestonians that South Carolina and the whole of the South must put aside all domestic divisions and stand united in the face of an aggressive enemy. His appeal went temporarily unheeded, however. Carolinians were still embroiled in the test oath controversy, and most other Southerners were tired of hearing about South Carolina. In one sense a still partially divided state elected to go it alone again. While Calhoun maneuvered his forces to heal the scars left by the nullification fight, a new crusade was launched. This time the campaign would be a public and frank defense of slavery, one designed not only to destroy Abolitionists abroad but to convert whatever Carolinians who still wondered about the justice of the institution. 7

The Mercury had already launched the new crusade. During the summer and fall of 1833, it gave as one of its defenses for nullification the necessity of protecting the "peculiar institution." By

7Freehling, Prelude, 325-26; Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun Sectionalist, 1840-1850 (New York, 1951), 51-59, hereinafter cited as Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist. Whatever of Mrs. Ravenel's "harmony" existed in the post-nullification decade was largely the result of Calhoun's effort to heal the breach between Nullifiers and Unionists. By 1842 his strategy had generally succeeded and, at least on the subject of slavery, South Carolina stood as one in the face of all comers (See below, IV).
comparison with the tariff, slavery was "not a question of freedom, but of existence," wrote one contributor. The Mercury reported former editor Pinckney's speech of July fourth in which he warned that abolitionism was spreading at the North and that the South must prepare her defense against it. Already on record with his defense, Stuart took second place to none in maintaining it. Contending that slavery—far from being evil—was a positive good, the editor insisted that it made for the superiority of southern civilization. Carrying the campaign into 1834, Stuart reminded his readers of labor unrest at the North and of the unsettling troubles caused by emancipation in the British West Indies. Southerners must countenance no "Northern intermeddling" with their own institution "whatever," he cautioned.

It was not enough that reformers at the North "disclaim the idea of immediate abolition. . . . They must," Stuart said, "abandon all idea of abolition and cease to agitate the subject at all. . . ." Interference with slavery by private persons would require "summary and exemplary punishment," while any such action on the part of the general government "would cause the dissolution of the Union." It is not surprising that the Mercury reported on Calhoun's address with favor.®

Nor is it surprising that this Lowcountry voice of Calhoun again led the Charleston press in blazing new paths. The Patriot and Courier, hastening to declare their firm support of all things Southern, nonetheless felt that Pinckney's speech "cruelly slandered" the North

with deliberate misrepresentations. More dangerous, however, was
his "unnecessary agitation of exciting topics." There were still those
who feared domestic commotion from an open discussion of slavery. But
if the Mercury contemptuously dismissed the Courier as being inco-
sistent and rejected the Patriot's "slanderous and pompous" charges,
even it was obliged to declare for caution. "Enough has been done to
put the people on their guard, and to continue the discussion may do
evil," said the editor. The South must and would "speak by action . . .
not by words."

There were other matters for the Mercury to dispute with its
rivals during 1834. The heated controversy raging over the test oath
provoked the usual exchanges of insults and bald denunciations between
editors. But the fight over how and to whom Carolinians should pledge
their faith was overshadowed by events in the summer of 1835. These
events not only restored the slavery issue to editorial columns, they
produced a virtual unanimity of opinion among Charleston's newspaper
presses. Thus the crusade to unite in defense of slavery gained force.

On July 29, 1835, the northern mails—swollen with "incendiary
publications" dispatched by the American Antislavery Society of New
York—arrived in Charleston. Alfred Huger, the Charleston postmaster
(and a Unionist) was confronted with a situation pressing in its im-
mediacy. He described it to Samuel L. Gouverneur, the New York post-
master:

---

9Patriot, July 5, 18, 19, 20, 31, 1833; Courier, July 16, 24,
25, 26, Aug. 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 1833; Mercury, July 6, 25, 31, Aug. 5,
7, 1833.

10See above, 72-76.
The most respectable men of all gather'd about our doors and windows and in a little time I was formally summoned to give up the incendiary publications . . . and at the same [time] told with very little ceremony that they would be taken from me, if I did not.

The purpose of his letter was to request Gouvener to segregate future southbound mail according to content, labeling all bags containing abolitionist tracts as "Suspicious." Meanwhile, Huger had sent an urgent letter to the Postmaster General requesting instructions as to the disposition of the offending tracts. His concern was anything but premature since the City Guard had already dispersed a mob outside the postoffice. Huger's letter was hardly processed, however, before a "few gentlemen" moved under cover of darkness into the building and confiscated the source of all the excitement. The tracts were burned before a large crowd on the next evening.

Fairly blazing with outrage the Mercury condemned the distribution of these "seditious pamphlets." Although Stuart agreed with Robert Y. Hayne and others of the gentry, Nullifier and Unionist, that the mob's action was premature, his mood can in no way be described as cautious. Even though "the sensible and educated" people of the North condemned the "demented abolitionists," they too looked to the suppression of slavery. But abolition could be secured only by "overwhelming force" and "at the sacrifice of millions of lives of Southern and Northern white men." If "our professed friends at the North" would


12 Freehling, Prelude, 340-41.
not destroy "this Hell born monster," raged the Mercury, Southerners themselves must take "decided . . . action" to convince Northerners of their responsibility. Stuart reported approvingly of Abolitionists coming to violent ends in Aiken and Orangeburg and warned that all such folk "among us" would "meet the fate of Pirates, Spies and Outlaws as certainly as they merit it." It was apparent that as between popular passions and abolitionism, Stuart feared more from the latter. So enthusiastic in their general agreement were the Courier and Patriot that Stuart proposed to make them "honorary members of the State Rights Party, or active members . . . if they prefer it."13

By August 1, three days after the arrival of the tracts and two days after their destruction, Charleston was still in turmoil. The "undivided population . . . Nullifiers and Union men, Jackson . . . and Clay men, Van Buren . . . and White, men who differ on all other points" agreed that the mails should not be used to promote insurrection. The harassed Postmaster said that he would do all in his power to prevent further excesses but that it would be impossible "to restrain the universal indignation that pervaded all classes. . . ."

In a public emergency meeting attended by an "ample representation of the property, respectability and intelligence of Charleston,"14

---

13 *Mercury*, July 27, 29, 30, 31, Aug. 4, 5, 10, 11, 19, 21, 25, 26, 31, Sept. 1, 2, 4, 9, 12, 14, 15, 21, 23, 24, 28, Oct. 1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, Nov. 3, Dec. 1, 24, 1835; *Courier*, Aug. 12, 13, 14, 15, 20, 22, Sept. 28, 1835; *Patriot*, July 29, Aug. 11, 13, Sept. 5, 8, 22, Nov. 19, 1835. For the first time the *Courier* and *Patriot* joined the *Mercury* in threatening disunion.

the city council appointed a special committee and invested it with the extraordinary power of ruling the horrified and furious city. This committee met incoming steamboats and escorted the mails to the post-office. It assured the public that no abolitionist tracts would be delivered and kept watch and ward over the black population, slave and free. Strangers entering the city found themselves regarded with vigilant suspicions, and mobs roamed the streets ready to inflict their own particular brand of justice at a moment's notice. For one week this extraordinary committee presided over by Robert Y. Hayne ruled the city while an unhappy Huger urged that:

the question of slavery be decided elsewhere than in the P.O. where the Post-Master himself is a slave holder, and cannot believe it sinful without convicting his own soul and his own ancestors for five generations.\(^{15}\)

Relief was not long in coming. Gouveneur, in New York, was no stranger to the problems of slavery--his wife was a Virginian. He

resolved to forward no more of the objectionable pamphlets until the Postmaster General could be heard from.\(^{16}\) Acting with dispatch, that official, with Jackson's approval, authorized Huger to suppress such of the mails as might incite insurrection. Thus reassured by the quick action of the Post Office Department, Charleston gradually settled into a somewhat uneasy calm. Hayne's committee restored the authority of


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
the city council, but vigilante groups continued to assist in the maintenance of all that was right and proper until late fall. Letters reflecting great anxiety poured steadily into the Mercury's offices from August through December. The concern of the paper's contributors may have sometimes been influenced by the knowledge that the Postmaster General was not legally empowered to authorize censorship of the mail. Because he was not, the issue came up in the next session of Congress.17

In his annual message Jackson denounced antislavery tracts as "unconstitutional and wicked" and called upon Congress to prohibit "the circulation in the Southern States through the mail, of incendiary publications intended to instigate the slaves to insurrection."18 Calhoun was quick to speak in opposition to the President's proposal. Praising Jackson for his stand against the hated propaganda, Calhoun warned that Jackson's proposal would devolve too much power on Congress. If Congress could decide what mails are incendiary and thus "prohibit their circulation," it could also "determine what are not incendiary, and ... enforce their circulation." A bill of the sort proposed by Jackson to control the Abolitionists would "virtually ... clothe Congress with the power to abolish slavery." Calhoun proposed instead that the states be authorized to censor the mails. When both proposals were defeated, neither South Carolina nor the Mercury was

17Freehling, Prelude, 341-42; Mercury, Aug.-Dec. 1835, passim.

18James D. Richardson, A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1798-1902 (11 vols; Washington, 1897-1909), II, 1394-95.
reassured by the result. 19

Especially irritating to most antislavery men, abolitionist or otherwise, was the "peculiar institution's" presence in the nation's capital. For some years before the dispute over mail, various antislavery groups had been petitioning Congress to abolish both the trade and the institution in Washington. The petitions were invariably referred to committee and forgotten. By 1836 this was no longer satisfactory to Calhoun whose strategy, as outlined three years before in Charleston, called for the Abolitionists to be met head-on. Denouncing the petitions as a "gross, false, and malicious slander" of the southern states, the Carolinian demanded their outright rejection. In the vigorous debate that followed, the Senate managed ultimately to solve the problem by avoiding the issue. Thereafter when reception of an abolitionist petition was proposed to the upper chamber, the proposal was regularly tabled. If this solution did not entirely satisfy Calhoun, it was considerably more to his liking than was the decision reached by the House on this question. 20

Speaking for the Calhoun forces in the lower house, James H. Hammond denounced the petitions presented to that body and called for their rejection. While Calhoun was making his battle in the Senate, the House debated Hammond's proposal for over six weeks. Calhoun's old rival, Vice President Martin Van Buren, grew daily more concerned at the impasse lest his followers be obliged to take one or the other


of the extreme positions. A development of that sort could easily damage his chances for victory in the forthcoming presidential contest. Looking for a compromise that would cut across sectional lines and break that solid southern phalanx now basic to Calhoun strategy, Van Buren sought to resolve the dispute. In what was surely one of the most ironic developments in ante-bellum South Carolina politics, it was a Calhoun man—indeed, a former Mercury editor—who accomplished this feat.

On February 4, 1836, Henry Laurens Pinckney, who had first committed the Mercury to Calhoun, proposed that "all memorials . . . praying for abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia . . . be referred to a select committee. . . ." This committee should be instructed that Congress had no "authority to interfere in any way with the Institution of Slavery in any States of the Confederacy and ought not to interfere with Slavery in the District. . . ." Not only was Pinckney compromising on the rejection of petitions, but his resolution also implied that Congress was empowered to abolish slavery in the capital. The fact that it questioned the wisdom of any such contingency was of little comfort to Pinckney's South Carolina associates who were as surprised as they were displeased.21

Shaken by Pinckney's apparent perfidy, the Calhoun forces recovered sufficiently to try to effect a change in the errant Congress-man's course. The extent of their failure was only too clear when in May the House adopted the following Pinckney proposals: That Congress

---

21Register of Debates, 24 Cong., 1 Sess., 2482-83; Wiltse, Calhoun Nullifier, 280-83.
had no power over slavery in the states; that it would be unwise for Congress to interfere with slavery in the District; and that all petitions relating to slavery or to its abolition should be immediately and finally tabled. In the course of one of the many debates that preceded Pinckney's pyrrhic victory, Hammond coldly notified his colleague of the extent of his treachery:

We deny the power of this House to act upon the subject at all, and desire to exclude it entirely and forever from these walls. My colleague calls upon you to legislate upon it . . . and I believe the adoption of the gentleman's plan of settling this controversy will give [the Union] one of the most fatal blows it has ever received. For I assure this House that a Union based upon the principles of that resolution cannot stand. We cannot give up rights and consent to hold property at your will.22

The admission that Congress could emancipate slaves in the District of Columbia meant to South Carolina that the same body could someday do so elsewhere. Pinckney had given up the Constitution to "repose . . . all upon the tender mercies of [the] House. . . ."

Hammond might easily have spoken for the whole state. Since the postoffice incident of the previous summer, Calhoun's attempts to reunify the state had proceeded apace. South Carolina now presented a solid front, at least to the outside world; in 1836 that front was turned upon Pinckney. Shocked and angered, the overwhelming majority of Carolinians joined James Hamilton, Jr., in assuming that Pinckney had been seized by "religious fanaticism." Thomas Cooper wrote venomously to Hammond saying that Pinckney's action resulted from his being

22Register of Debates, 224 Cong., 1 Sess., 2495-97; Wiltse, Calhoun Nullifier, 284.
tempted by the "immense patronage" used by those in power "upon men ready to sell themselves." Hammond said that Pinckney "betrayed us" and reported that another Carolinian referred to him as "that D...nd traitor Pinckney." All were agreed that Pinckney's political career was over. Only the belief that his future should be left in the hands of his constituents saved Pinckney from being denounced at public meetings throughout the state. Occasionally, however, there was a Unionist—unregenerate still in his loathing for Calhoun—who managed to defend the former editor.23

The Charleston Mercury, whose allegiance was still where Pinckney had first placed it, displayed no less displeasure with its former editor than did its readers. Numerous contributors filed lengthy complaints of Pinckney's course while the paper itself said that Calhoun's solution was the correct one for the problem. Commending the Senator's proposal to reject the "insolent petitions" outright, the Mercury held it to be the only proper "Southern ground." Pinckney had proposed tabling because "he dreaded the Northern clamor and was afraid of those who would falsely assert that the right of petition was violated," said his former paper. As Calhoun had said in the Senate, the Mercury clearly understood that a legislative body had as much right to reject as to accept a petition. The mere presentation of the memorial "consummated the exercise of the right of petition," a right that was not

---

affected by the petition's acceptance or rejection. A man of Pinckney's stripe had neither "firmness or courage enough to represent the South," concluded the Mercury.24

The Mercury correctly observed that political results would follow Pinckney's action. Through conceding on the District of Columbia, Pinckney had allowed Van Buren "to retain his antislavery supporters by dodging the constitutional question." The repulsive resolution was either a tacit admission that Congress could emancipate the District's slaves or "a paltry artifice" that evaded the issue. Calhoun's speech in Charleston during the autumn of 1833 had authorized neither approach, the loyal editor perhaps remembered. Nor did the editor give his predecessor credit for having said that Congress could not interfere with slavery in the states. Even the Abolitionists admitted that.25

Pinckney's "lengthened windings" and "voluminous appeals" in defense of his conduct merely increased the Mercury's irritation. Contending that his was the only solution that could be adopted, Pinckney pointed with pride to the majority with which his proposals passed the House." "... A majority purchased by weak and treacherous concessions" that "... was worse than a thousand vote defeats," the Mercury retorted. "Mr. Pinckney first broke our phalanx," to commence "a recreant retreat," said the editor. But most ominous of all, Stuart

24Mercury, Feb. 14, 22, Sept. 6,7, 1836; Wiltse, Calhoun Nullifier, 280; Capers, Calhoun: Opportunist, 183. Calhoun contended that the right of petition consisted only of the right of presenting a petition. If the prayer of the petitioners was unconstitutional, it could be refused on that ground without damage to the right to present.

charged his predecessor with disloyalty to Calhoun. With this remark the fate of Charleston's "misrepresentative in Congress" was sealed and the *Mercury* read Pinckney out of the State Rights party. On October 4, 1836, the paper quoted the Columbia *Telescope* to prove that Henry Laurens Pinckney was no less unpopular in the Upcountry than William Lloyd Garrison.26

The peculiar institution made for equally peculiar alliances in the fall elections. Hugh Swinton LeGare the Unionist candidate who only three years before had "prayed that . . . the Union party would . . . swear that [the Test Oath] should never be enforced but at the point of the bayonet"—received the reluctant endorsement of the State Rights party. He was "safe" on slavery, the *Mercury* reported. Pinckney, retaining much of his popularity with the "mechanics," ran on "the Independent Republican" ticket. According to the *Mercury*, his narrow defeat at the hands of LeGare was the state's "rebuke" to the "late Representative for deserting it."27

Never one to forget an adversary, the *Mercury* again condemned Pinckney when the petitions appeared in the next Congress. Nor did it neglect that "eccentric old showman, John Q. Adams," whose friends seemed "resolved to . . . experiment on their prediction that the South could not be kicked out of the Union."28

---

26 *Ibid.*, Feb. 14, 22, Mar. 3, 4, 16, Apr. 8, 15, May 12, 21, 25, Aug. 26, 29, Sept. 1, 2, 6, 7, 12, 16, 20, 24, 26, Oct. 1, 5, 7, 10, 18, 1836. Pinckney's stand was frequently discussed in the paper from February through October, 1836.


Slavery was a subject that colored the Mercury's view of foreign as well as domestic affairs. Bringing word of Santa Anna's defeat in Texas, "Glorious News" reminded Stuart that Texas, independent or part of the American Union, was populated by slaveholders who would "insure the stability of Southern institutions." The editor was uncertain as to which course Texans should follow. Both they and the South might be better off with a Texas "untramelled by Northern connections." Stuart did advocate prompt recognition of the new nation, however, and denounced Jackson for delaying action.29

The "high handed proceedings of the British authorities" in emancipating slaves from American coasting vessels forced by heavy weather into Bermuda and Nassau channelled more of the editor's attention to slavery. These "outrages on American property" furnished "much more legitimate grounds of war" than the five million dollars claimed from France for damages to American shipping before the War of 1812. Denouncing Jackson's "menacing language" to France, Stuart said that war with France over the spoilation claims would be "one of the greatest calamities to which the country could possibly be exposed." Disruption of the European trade, certain to follow with a war, would aid northern manufacturers "at Southern expense."30

29 Ibid., No. 12, 1835; May 2, 18, June 1, Nov. 30, Dec. 3, 20, 22, 29, 1836. Stuart urged Americans to volunteer "quietly and privately to the standard of State Rights in Texas." Public demonstrations to raise troops would, he felt, compromise American neutrality (ibid., Nov. 12, 1835).

30 Ibid., Mar. 19, June 18, Oct. 18, Dec. 13, 17, 1834; Jan. 21, 22, Mar. 2, 9, 13, 16, 17, Apr. 9, June 3, 16, July 18, 23, Nov. 18, 26, Dec. 16, 1835; Jan. 1, 12, 13, 14, 25, 26, 29, Feb. 3, 11, 15, 20, 22, Mar. 1, 2, 1836. Calhoun opposed war with France for the same reasons. Nor should it be forgotten that he and Clay were allies from
The *Mercury's* loyalty to slavery did not prevent its attacking slaveholders. Georgia and Alabama got little sympathy from Stuart in their dispute with the general government over Indian lands. Jabbing at Georgia's governor, the paper accused him of quieting the dispute "at the very . . . time during the late crisis . . . to leave a fair field for the North against Carolina nullification." Since Jackson did not "consider the Judiciary a part of his government" Georgians could evidently nullify when Carolinians could not.\(^{31}\)

The slaveholder Jackson came under almost constant attack. Declaring that although the *Mercury* opposed the Bank of the United States on constitutional grounds, Stuart held that Jackson's removal of the government's deposits from the bank was both high-handed and ruinous. The administration proposed to substitute a "stock jobbing monopoly" for the recently destroyed "manufacturing monopoly." Van Buren's Wall Street friends would especially profit from "the same robbery to which the minority States were subjected by the American system through the medium of duties on their imports," which would "now . . . be effected by placing the whole currency of the Union at the mercy of a faction and its tools. . . ." Charging that nothing good would come from "pet" banks, the editor predicted that the "whole mercantile community of the Union" would suffer. Cotton prices would fall and the government itself would suffer a drastic reduction in revenue. There

\(^{31}\) *Mercury*, July 2, Oct. 2, 3, 11, 14, 16, 17, 19, 28, 30, Nov. 8, 12, 15, Dec. 2, 1833; Jan. 11, Nov. 28, 1834.
was evidently no limit to "the monstrous stretch of power which the executive had perpetuated." 32

The removal of those deposits created an inflationary condition that even the administration desired to halt. A result of revenue from the tariff and the sale of public lands, the government surplus, was expected to reach $30,000,000 by 1836. Aware of the danger inherent in entrusting this much money to the banks of political favorites, Jackson's followers wished to deplete this surplus. For once Jackson and Calhoun found themselves in agreement; the money must be dispersed.

32 Ibid., Sept. 25, 30, Oct. 3, 5, 8, 14, 21, Nov. 2, 4, Dec. 2, 1833; Jan. 1, 4, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, Feb. 10, 12, 22, Mar. 3, 4, Apr. 2, 1834. Stuart was right in his contention that the deposit banks would be pets of the administration. There were three general selections of banks made prior to the termination of this policy in 1836. The first round of choices consisted of seven northeastern banks, five of which were "friendly" to the administration. The second selections were overwhelmingly pro-Jackson while the third group chosen was geographically determined, its politics being mixed. Amos Kendall who was responsible for the choices, said that "those which are in hands politically friendly will be preferred" (Frank Otto Gatell, "Spoils of the Bank War: Political Bias in the Selection of Pet Banks," AHR, LXX, No. 1 (Oct., 1964), 35-38.

Stuart's reasoning on executive patronage is another evidence of Calhoun's influence on the Mercury. The Senator feared that spoilsman in politics would delude the electorate and control elections through patronage. Democracy, he thought, could not survive this. By 1835 he was convinced that Jackson's use of executive patronage was turning democracy into dictatorship (William W. Freehling, "Spoilsmen and Interests in the Thought and Career of John C. Calhoun," Journal of American History, LII, No. 1 (June, 1965), 25-26, 36, hereinafter cited as JAH. Capers says that on "most occasions" Calhoun's language was as extreme as "his logic" on this subject. Calhoun "never conceived that such rotteness, such corruption, such abominable violations of trust could . . . exist. . . . It exceeded," he told the Senate, "anything in the history of the rottenest ages of the Roman Empire" (Capers, Calhoun Opportunists, 172-73).
Strict construction did not permit outright distribution of the surplus to the states. Calhoun proposed to amend the Constitution to allow for just such a solution, but the Van Buren faction of the Jackson party would not agree to this. Aware that southern and western senators planned to use the federal windfall to finance trans-Appalachian railroads, Van Buren feared that his political base in New York would suffer. If these plans materialized, New York would lose the monopoly of western transport provided by the Erie Canal. The President stood with Van Buren lest the chances for electing his hand-picked successor in 1836 be damaged. But the movement to dispose of the surplus was too strong for even the administration to resist. After much of the usual heated debate and the defeat of numerous alternative proposals, Calhoun's bill to permit distribution in the form of a loan to the states was enacted. The measure enjoyed so much bipartisan support that Calhoun observed "a complete disorganization of parties for the present." Jackson reluctantly signed the measure in 1836.33

Although officially a loan, the transfer of federal money to the states was called a deposit, but actually amounted to a gift. Clay had repeatedly introduced similar measures since 1830, one of which had

33Wiltse, Calhoun Nullifier, 263-67. Calhoun's primary motivation to distribute the surplus was certainly the restriction of executive patronage. He was, however, strongly of the opinion that Charleston must become the eastern terminus of a trans-Appalachian railroad. This would serve the dual purpose of reviving the declining port and tying western prosperity to the South's. The latter development would strengthen his defense of the South in Congress by adding western allies. In 1836 Robert Y. Hayne attended a railway convention in Knoxville where the delegates studied proposed routes across the mountains. They said that a railroad would make it cheaper for goods to be imported through Charleston than through New York (Magdalen Eichert, "John C. Calhoun's Land Policy of Cession," S.C.H.M., LV, No. 4 [Oct., 1954], 198).
actually passed in 1833 only to be vetoed by Jackson. Congressman Pinckney, the *Mercury*'s editor when the first such bill was introduced, had not liked the measure and had said so. Pinckney's position had not changed by 1836. His attacks on Calhoun's bill provoked a strong response from his former paper.

Answering Pinckney argument for argument, the *Mercury* said that Calhoun's method of handling excess federal monies would restrain the growing executive patronage by depriving the President of his "bribery fund." Despite the general understanding that the loan would never be repaid, Stuart defended the Distribution Bill as a loan and denounced those, namely Pinckney, who called it a "gratuitous donation" to the states.

The *Mercury*'s editor did not credit arguments that distribution would cause a depletion of the government's funds and so inspire demands to raise the tariff. The Compromise of 1830 had settled that issue; furthermore, the excess tariff schedules were responsible for the surplus. It was also preferable for the states to profit from their own contributions rather than see them go into the coffers of "pet" banks and "favored speculators."

But the most important reason given for the *Mercury*'s support of the measure was that it prevented "immensely extended patronage and increased powers" of the executive and so of the general government. Stuart suggested this matter of patronage as the probable reason for what he described as the lack of sincerity among Jackson men in their divided support of distribution. They voted for it, he said, only because they feared to fight "a measure so manifestly due the people."
Pinckney's own opposition to the "Deposit Bill" was but further proof of his abandonment of state rights.34

Stuart's paper made no pretense of impartiality where Jackson was concerned. Admitting a tendency to "take an impression against the President, on the first blush of every controversy in which he is a party," Stuart charged Jackson with having betrayed his native state. The Mercury's enmity extended to issues great and small, including the rumor that Jackson's likeness would adorn the figurehead of USS Constitution. "The menials of the President have always placed him before the Constitution," said the Mercury, and none should be surprised that they would do so again. If, as was rumored, Harvard College wished to confer an honorary degree on Jackson there was ample precedent for such action. Rabelais's donkey had received such a distinction long ago, and a horse had been made Consul in Rome.

Stuart was especially fond of smearing the "menials," "cooks," and "scullions" of Jackson's "Kitchen Cabinet," employed as they were in "a system of pickpocket tactics [of government] calculated only for the meridian of Botany Bay." Holding the autocracy of the President to be comparable only to that of the "Czar of All the Russias,"35 the Mercury was encouraged by the outcome of several state elections.

34Mercury, Jan. 29, Feb. 20, 1830; Feb. 19, 22, 1831; July 9, 1832; June 30, Aug. 29, Sept. 2, 9, 10, 16, 17, 19, 20, 24, Oct. 1, 4. 1836. Clay's proposal called for the revenue from the public lands to be distributed among the states in the form of an outright grant.

The power of "the dynasty" of "King Numbers" appeared to be waning. Congressional setbacks, in particular the Senate censure of Jackson's banking practices, reinforced this feeling. Most encouraging of all was the defection of two Jackson supporters of long standing, John Bell and Hugh Lawson White of Tennessee.

Van Buren, "child of his [Jackson's] adoption" and "heir apparent," might even be defeated. But Stuart could not support Henry Clay. It was one thing to praise Clay for his opposition to the Mercury's enemies but quite another to help make him President. Clay's American System and his support of majority rule were as dangerous to the Mercury as "the creeping meanness of the Great Republican party" or Andrew Jackson. Nor should it be forgotten that Calhoun's forces were with rather than of the Whigs. Calhoun's strategy was to maintain the alliance until the State Rights party was strong enough to stand alone. He was practicing the balance of power. "Others may rally on us," he said, "but we rally on nothing but our doctrine. . . . Better . . . for us, that those in power should remain there against our consent, than that we shall put others there, who do not agree with us, with our consent." 37

Perhaps the Mercury did not clearly understand the strategy. In any event, the paper's dislike for Van Buren constrained it to propose an unauthorized alternative to his election. In 1835 the editor

36See above, 92, n. 30.

saw a chance to restore the Constitution to "its original simplicity and purity" by electing Judge Hugh Lawson White of Tennessee to the presidency. Like so many of Stuart's readers, White was a former Jackson man. A slaveholder, he was inclined to "strict construction," was sound on the tariff, and was opposed to internal improvements. Even more important, White was on record in opposition to "any interference on the part of Congress with the question of slavery in any form or shape whatsoever." This alone, the Mercury said, entitled him to the South's support. Dismissing Van Buren as "an avowed abolitionist in principle," Stuart said that South Carolina need not endorse White's past record. In spite of White's having voted for the Force Bill, Carolina support for him now would intensify the "war against the corrupting despotism of patronage and against the head and front of all corruption in the person of Martin Van Buren."38

For once the Mercury's call stirred little response. Even Charleston's opposition press was largely silent. From time to time the Courier sniped at the Mercury's proposal and even occasionally published something in favor of Van Buren. The leaders of the State Rights party, including Governor McDuffie and Robert Y. Hayne, likewise opposed much agitation of the question. This may have made Stuart understand that his idea was unsuitable. In any event he concluded to "refrain from pressing the matter." Still, he did not conceal his own support of White's candidacy. Only after Van Buren's victory became a certainty did Stuart endorse the Calhoun-approved decision of

the General Assembly to cast South Carolina's vote for W. P. Mangum of North Carolina, an "orthodox Southern State Rights Man." Whether Stuart misunderstood the approved State Rights course, deliberately violated orders, or simply exercised the degree of editorial maneuvering room tolerated by the political power structure, it ultimately became clear that his course was running counter to the approved one. At that point he acknowledged his error and fell into line.

Van Buren's mentor did not pass from the presidency without a parting blast from Stuart. In March of 1837 the Mercury castigated Jackson's pocket veto of the bill repealing the specie circular as a defeat for "the hopes of the business community, who looked to that measure, as the means of partial relief from the present artificial and unnecessary pressure on the money market." The predictable "convulsion" of the panic of 1837 was but the result of Jackson's banking and currency program. With each mail bringing new reports of bank and business failures, Stuart transferred his attack to the new President. Van Buren was doing nothing to correct the situation, the Mercury charged. His decision to call Congress into emergency session was assailed as a scheme to aid some of the "Pet" banks. Predicting that the President's message to Congress would be "nothing . . . but a recommendation to . . . think very profoundly on matters and things in

39Patriot, 1833-1836, passim; Courier, Sept. 11, 14, 16, 1833; Apr. 14, 1835; 1836, passim; Mercury, May 18, June 1, 20, 23, Nov. 10, 1835; Nov. 3, 16, Dec. 14, 1836. True to his word to "refrain from pressing the matter," Stuart had little to say on the subject in 1836. Pinckney's resolutions took up much of his space at that time (See above, 89-91 ) and may have reminded him--in the unlikely event that he needed reminding--of the need for party unity.
general," Stuart cautioned his readers to expect no help from Jackson's successor.  

When the President's address appeared, Stuart was curiously mild in his reaction. He did not think that the sub-treasury plan proposed by Van Buren was practical but he did not condemn it outright. Moreover, he was unusually kind in his references to Van Buren. This was in an editorial in September 13, 1837. He intimated that in the next issue he would propose a plan preferable to the sub-treasury. But on the following day the Mercury came out in defense of Van Buren's measure. This support became enthusiastic after Calhoun endorsed the bill in the Senate.  

The opposition press did not miss an opportunity to charge Stuart with following his leader. Stiffly denying their reports, the editor replied that he had studied the sub-treasury proposal throughout the summer; he and his associate had conversed frequently with "gentlemen in this city" and had concluded "weeks before" that no other proposal "to which we could give preference over Sub-Treasury" was likely to be put forth. Furthermore, the Mercury's position "was determined" before it "knew Mr. Calhoun's position . . . the first communication . . . from him on the subject" having been "a copy of his speech in the Senate, franked to the editors of the Charleston Mercury." Whatever strength the argument had vanished as Stuart (or his associate) continued with an apparent contradiction, "We  

---

40 Mercury, Apr. 6, 15, 29, May 1, 4, 5, 10, 12, 15, 23, 26, June 2, 3, 15, July 22, 28, Aug. 30, 31, 1837.  

41 Ibid., Sept. 12, 13, 14, 20, Oct. 2, 4, 1837.
certainly knew his position before and so did the whole people of the nation. It struck us with no surprise. . . ." The agile editor concluded by stating that it was merely an attentive reading of Van Buren's message that convinced him of the soundness of sub-treasury.  

Whatever the case, the convert's defense of the Independent Treasury system echoed Calhoun's arguments. The proposed measure would "break up the centralization of the money Power," said the Mercury. It would deprive the President of "a great and unconstitutional patronage" and, since neither speculators nor office-holders could profit thereby, it would also prevent the accumulation of a dangerous surplus. The North would then abhor a surplus as much as the "forgotten provinces" of the South did already. In such a circumstance the South would be safe from further tariff exactions. South Carolina would do well to follow Calhoun and not become "the dupe and victim of Northern Shylocks of the Stock-jobbing, money changing, Anti-Texas, Nullifier hating, Abolition loving Whigs."

Contending that the currency would be uniform and sound under an independent treasury, the Mercury said that there would no longer be "one currency for the Government and another for the people" as there was with a "national Bank." Charges that Stuart had abandoned his principles to become a Van Buren supporter did not deter him from pressing this issue. The Mercury would not spurn a measure which

42Ibid., Jan. 5, July 21, 1838. Stuart's brother-in-law, Robert Barnwell Rhett, first took his seat in the House of Representatives during this session, where his conversion was equally startling. His biographer views his shift and Stuart's as a response to Calhoun's direction (White, Rhett, 34). It is not clear from the editorials cited in 1838 whether they were written by Stuart or his associate editor, John Milton Clapp.
"proffers justice and the Constitution" merely because its authors had "sinned and usurped." The paper, like Calhoun and the Whigs, would be "with them though not of them." The "Divorce Bill," as the Mercury often referred to sub-treasury, was after all a "Southern," indeed a "State Rights" measure.\(^43\)

The debate over sub-treasury developed into a long and bitter fight. Extending beyond both the years and subject of the original dispute, its repercussions in South Carolina helped to define once and for all the exact nature of Calhoun's and South Carolina's alliance with the Whigs. It marked, in fact, the end of that coalition and thus served as another milestone in the career of Senator Calhoun and his faithful ally, the Mercury.

The controversy over sub-treasury stemmed from the special session of 1837 when it seemed to Calhoun that his strategy of the balance of power was about to mature. Since the division in Congress between Whigs and Democrats was so nearly even, neither side could carry the day without support from Calhoun's State Rights force. The initial battle of the session took place over the economy. The Whigs naturally looked to a restoration of the national bank as a recovery measure; the Van Buren Democrats just as naturally opposed restoration. The latter group had decided to present a measure providing for a complete

\(^{43}\)Mercury, Sept. 14, 20, Oct. 4, 6, 7, 11, 12, 16, 21, 31, Nov. 18, 20, 23, 24, 27, 1837; Jan. 5, Feb. 15, 22, 24, Mar. 6, 12, June 7, 9, 30, July 2, 10, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, Aug. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 15, 16, 17, 24, 28, Sept. 6, 18, 19, 20, 26, 27, 29, 1838. The Mercury's warning to follow Calhoun was directed at, among others, Charleston Congressman Hugh Swinton Le-Gare, elected with the paper's support.
separation between the banking and treasury systems. In determining what his position should be, Calhoun was motivated by several factors. He had authored the bill creating the Second Bank of the United States and did not question the government's constitutional authority to create a bank in 1837 any more than he had questioned it originally. He did feel, however, that the bank had used its power to favor northern over southern commerce. The economic ills resulting from the clash between Jackson and the bank had evidently convinced him, furthermore, that a separation between banking and the treasury was desirable. At any rate he had concluded by the late summer of 1837 to support just such a separation.

But the issue of sub-treasury or national bank was merely the vehicle by which Calhoun's strategy of the balance of power rode to victory. Calhoun's policy was born out of the tariff dispute of 1832-33 during which time he and Henry Clay had combined forces to fight Jackson. Continuing their association to fight Jackson's financial policy, they had strengthened it by the addition of Daniel Webster. To the general public this coalition represented a new political party. The Revolutionary War names of Whig and Tory were revived by partisans of this alliance to indicate those who stood for liberty as opposed to the defenders of proscriptive executive power. Duff Green's Telegraph used the term Whig to describe the Nullifiers in March of 1832. Clay soon favored it as the label for all those combined against

44 The administration's proposal was on the order of one first proposed by a Calhoun ally, the Virginian State Righter William Fitzhugh Gordan, in 1834. The Jackson forces opposed it at that time (Wiltse, Calhoun Nullifier, 229-29).

Jackson. The State Rights forces in Virginia adopted Whig in the winter of 1834; the "Whigs" appeared in the New York City elections of that spring and by summer the term was in general use. To the general public this term meant that Calhoun, Clay, and Webster stood united against Jackson. 46

For Calhoun it meant something else. He made it clear that he and his followers were merely cooperating with those of Clay and Webster in the interest of curbing the "usurpations" of Jackson. They represented "a small independent party" which although it abhorred the practices of the administration also "differed with the opposition in principle & policy." His forces would be absorbed by neither. They would, rather, maintain their own unity and support whomever nationally most nearly approximated their standard. This was the strategy of the solid southern front which he felt would force the national parties to accommodate the South on slavery. Calhoun knew that there was little chance that Clay and Webster, the true Whigs, could be depended upon. Their support of measures which would foster the interests of business and the Northeast required a broad concentration of powers in Washington that represented a direct threat to slavery. Calhoun's alliance with the Whigs was nothing more than a political convenience to destroy Jackson. Even as he was dissolving the coalition, he said, "We disagreed on almost all points except resistance to Executive usurpation." 47

46 Ibid., 209, 213-18, 230. Calhoun preferred to be known simply as a Nullifier (ibid., 231).

47 Congressional Globe, Twenty-sixth Congress, First Session (Washington, 1835-1873), 51-52; Calhoun to Anna Maria Calhoun, Sept. 8, 1837, Jameson ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 378-79; Capers, Calhoun: Opportunist, 186.
His own former party offered much more hope for reform, and by 1837 he was convinced that it showed distinct signs of returning to its pre-Jackson constitutional course. Writing to James Edward Calhoun, the Senator said:

[Van Buren] has been forced by his situation and the terror of Jackson to play directly into our hands and I am determined that he shall not escape from us... I have taken my stand. I go against the chartering of a United States bank... or any other bank. I go in a word for a complete separation from the whole concern.

Calhoun realized that he would meet opposition in South Carolina but he was prepared to deal with it. Like the Mercury, Calhoun was confident of his stand and intolerant of those who opposed it.\(^\text{48}\)

On September 18, 1837, the Carolinian made his Senate speech endorsing the Independent Treasury bill. The administration acquiesced in his insistence upon certain amendments and then retired into the background to watch while Calhoun became the de facto leader of its forces, at least on this financial matter. Openly confident of success, Calhoun wrote that the "union of the political and money power" was in full retreat. Provided the State Rights party held "true to... its principles," this flight would "unite and liberate the South." The Carolinian was ending his alliance with the Whigs to cast his lot once more with Van Buren. This latest maneuver was rewarded with success when on October 24, 1837, the sub-treasury bill passed the Senate.\(^\text{49}\)

\(^\text{48}\) Calhoun to James Edward Calhoun, Sept. 7, 1837, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 377-78; Wiltse, Calhoun Nullifier, 351.

\(^\text{49}\) Wiltse, Calhoun Nullifier, 355-56; Calhoun to J. R. Matthews, Sept. 27, 1837, quoted in ibid., 355; Curtis, Fox at Bay, 103-04.
The opposition from South Carolina was not long in showing itself. Senator William Campbell Preston, who had followed Calhoun into the Whig camp, took his party seriously and remained firmly with the Clay anti-sub-treasury forces. In the House only Calhoun's kinsman Francis Pickens and the freshman Congressman Robert Barnwell Rhett supported sub-treasury. Calhoun carefully noted those of his own state who were with him and against him. Those who were against helped to table the sub-treasury measure. The special session—but not the battle—ended two days later.\(^5^0\)

Calhoun then turned his attention to South Carolina where the Mercury, virtually unassisted, was praising the merits of sub-treasury. It was also warning the delinquents in the state to repent and follow Calhoun. Some of these men were Unionists who would oppose the Calhoun-endorsed measure out of pure habit. But there was critical opposition within the Calhoun ranks as well. George McDuffie, Robert Y. Hayne, James Hamilton, Jr., and others were in revolt. Many Calhounites were against sub-treasury on principle but more were shocked that they should be called upon to endorse the program of the man whom

\(^{50}\)Wiltse, Calhoun Nullifier, 355-56; Preston to H. M. (illegible), Jan. 11, Dec. 25, 1837; Mar. 21, Apr. 2, 1838, William Campbell Preston Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, hereinafter cited as Preston Papers; Curtis, Fox at Bay, 109.

Only a handful of southern Whigs followed Calhoun out of the party. It has been suggested that Calhoun and a small number of his followers were alone among the southern Whigs when it came to regarding state rights as a primary issue. Like northern Whigs, southern members of the party supposedly divided over economic issues (Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., "Who were the Southern Whigs," AHR, LIX, No. 2 [Jan., 1954], 339,346). If this thesis is acceptable for the South as a whole, Calhoun's state furnishes an interesting exception to the pattern.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
they had been taught to despise ten years previously.

Reminding his uncertain constituents of how his strategy had worked in the past, Calhoun asserted that the State Rights party had destroyed the protective system through nullification. Then it had worked with the National Republicans turned Whigs to overthrow executive tyranny. Although the coalition had been successful, its continuation would only restore the initial evil. The invigorated Whigs favored protection, consolidation, and centralization; their support of a national bank was only the first step in the direction of oppression. Moreover, since Van Buren's administration had shown itself receptive to State Rights principles, it was time to change sides.

Indicating its hearty agreement, the General Assembly received Calhoun with enthusiasm in December. At this session a coalition master-minded by Robert Barnwell Rhett's brothers Albert and James, and firmly supported by the editorials of their brother-in-law in the Mercury, persuaded the Assembly to endorse the sub-treasury bill by an overwhelming majority. Calhoun had received a vote of confidence. Some others would have done well to note it.51

Resumption of the battle in the regular session of Congress was delayed by the presentation of new abolition petitions and, in the Senate, an antislavery resolution from the Vermont legislature. After a fierce fight the House re-enacted the gag rule and the Senate resorted to the usual tabling. In the heated discussion that followed the action of the upper chamber, Calhoun condemned the action as

51Wiltse, Calhoun Nullifier, 358-61; Calhoun to Armistead Burt, Feb. 15, 1837, Armistead Burt Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University, hereinafter cited as Burt Papers.
inadequate and proposed a set of resolutions purporting to represent
the southern position on the subject. With minor modification they
were adopted. They restated the compact theory of the Constitution,
condemned attempts to meddle with "domestic institutions" of any
state, identified slavery as one of the inviolate institutions, com-
mitted the general government to resist any attempt to interfere with
it, and held that any move to abolish slavery in the District of
Columbia would "create serious alarm and just apprehension" in the
South. The resolutions did not resolve the controversy but they did
serve as the occasion for the administration to prove its position on
state rights by supporting them. Only one development disturbed the
Carolinian. Senator Preston had "acted with Clay throughout" to
moderate the language of the resolutions; Calhoun made note of this
"ungenerous and unpatriotic [sic] opposition." Asserting that he had
borne Preston's conduct "with perfect patience," Calhoun declared his
"colleague" to be "totally alienated without an act of mine to justify
it." By his action Preston had confirmed his decision to stay with the
Whigs. The policy of unity in South Carolina, the foundation upon which
Calhoun planned to build his solid southern front, did not allow for
such behavior.52

52Wiltse, Calhoun Nullifier, 369-73; Calhoun to Burt, Jan. 24,
1838, Burt Papers; Ernest M. Lander, Jr., "The Calhoun-Preston Feud,
1836-1842," SCHM, LIX, No. 1 (Jan., 1958), 29. Calhoun's fifth reso-
lution--on slavery in the District--had originally declared that any
effort to abolish the institution there would be "a direct and danger-
cus attack" on slavery everywhere. Clay led in modifying this state-
ment. Calhoun also offered a sixth resolution condemning any at-
tempt to restrict the addition of new slaveholding territory to the
Union. Preston succeeded in having this proposal tabled since he
planned to present a resolution on the annexation of Texas which
covered the same ground, he said.
Having disposed of the matter of slavery for the time being, the Senate passed to a reconsideration of the nation's chaotic currency system. Calhoun, armed with proof of the administration's soundness by its position on his resolutions, returned to press the case for sub-treasury. Again the debate was spirited and this time it lasted from February second through March twenty-sixth. Senator Preston remained in the enemy camp the whole time. On March 26 a version of the bill, so emasculated by amendments as to be unacceptable to Calhoun, passed the Senate. In the House, however, there was still a chance for passage of an acceptable measure. Campaigning vigorously for votes in this body, Calhoun was supported by a special session of the South Carolina General Assembly. Here Albert and James Rhett, ably assisted by the Mercury, again secured a resolution that not only endorsed the Independent Treasury bill, but also announced that any public servant who opposed it was on a "course injurious to the welfare and property of the State."\(^{53}\)

The action preserved neither the bill nor South Carolina unity. Preston's opposition remained steady and when on June 25, 1838, sub-treasury was defeated in the House, South Carolina Congressmen Waddy Thompson, Robert B. Campbell, and Hugh Swinton LeGare voted with the victorious negative. Returning immediately to South Carolina Calhoun proposed to purge the deserters. Since Preston would not be up for election, Calhoun would content himself with having the rebel Senator neutralized. But Campbell, Thompson, and LeGare could expect a fatal

\(^{53}\)Wiltse, Calhoun Nationalist, 377-386; White, Rhett, 41-42; Calhoun to Burt, Apr. 19, 1838, Burt Papers.
opposition in the forthcoming fall contests.  

The attacks of the Calhounites on Preston prevented that deserter from aiding those who had voted with him on sub-treasury. In fourth of July orations throughout the state he was called an "alien by birth"—he had been born in Virginia—and an associate of Clay's "dirty gang." He was bluntly told to repent or perish. When Calhoun was invited to a barbecue in Preston's honor, he declined in writing. Those arranging the affair must agree with Preston's course in Congress, Calhoun said acidly.  

Calhoun's plan to purge his enemies from Congress was only partially successful. Curiously enough, Waddy Thompson, who was from Calhoun's own district, won a smashing victory. He was probably aided by his assertion that despite his opposition to sub-treasury he was an administration man whose regard for Calhoun was unbounded. Campbell, from the Pee Dee and less important to Calhoun, also won. But of supreme importance to both Calhoun and the Mercury was the defeat of the Charleston defector, Hugh Swinton LeGare, who disliked Calhoun personally. LeGare, in fact, had snubbed Calhoun on the very steps of the nation's capitol during the last Congress. This insolent Charlestonian would not be on hand to repeat the insult in 1838. His defeat in the fall elections caused extreme rejoicing in the Mercury's office.  


56 Lander, "Calhoun Preston Feud," SCHM, LIX, No. 1, 32; Wiltse, Calhoun Nullifier, 363; Mercury, Oct. 11, 15, 24, 25, Dec. 18, 1838; Calhoun to Burt, Nov. 17, 1838, Burt Papers.
Once Stuart's Mercury got its signals straight, it gave un­wavering support to sub-treasury and the new political haven of state rights; it was, moreover, an enthusiastic and confident support. Not discouraged when Van Buren's—or rather Calhoun's—measure failed to pass the special session of Congress, the Mercury optimistically noted that all attempts to re-establish the Bank of the United States were likewise unsuccessful. Stuart expected success for sub-treasury during the forthcoming regular session. Happily reporting that the General Assembly's resolution, for which his paper had campaigned, was an endorsement of Calhoun's position, the editor trumpeted that "... never was a great public measure so unanimously popular in South Carolina and the South."

Subsequent defeat of the "Southern measure" in the regular congressional session transferred the Mercury's attention to the fall elections in which it hoped "the people" would evidence better judgment than had their representatives. Whigs were damned in Stuart's columns, the national bank vilified and the Independent Treasury extolled. While the Rhett's rallied the General Assembly to more favorable resolutions, Stuart's paper reflected a rising faith in Van Buren's administration. It made short shrift of the Courier's charge of inconsistency; his journal, Stuart said, was still defending state rights. The Courier's argument for a national bank was "as pretty a piece of fowl's flesh as ever strutted on a dung-hill." Hugh Swinton Legare had voted against "the Divorce" so he should be defeated. When

57Mercury, Nov. 4, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24, 29, Dec. 1, 4, 14, 17, 18, 20, 23, 1837.
he was defeated and Whiggery showed a general setback in South Carolina, Stuart's faith in the wisdom of "the people" was vindicated. Perhaps his confidence in their steadfastness allowed his attention to shift from the treasury proposals into other channels; at any rate, the next few months of the Mercury contained only occasional references to sub-treasury. And when the measure did pass in 1840, Stuart bade happy farewell to the "long struggle of four years between the people and the money power. . . ." In this "Second Declaration of Independence," the "will of the people has become law."^^

The Mercury's conviction that the Independent Treasury bill should pass was bound up with another and still more momentous issue; "it would strengthen the defense of slavery." If the apostles of consolidation ever established "their money power . . . the 'right of petition' will very soon turn into the right of dictation," Stuart solemnly warned. With its renewed spate of abolitionist petitions, the congressional session of 1837-1838 sounded the tocsin for Stuart. His brother-in-law was right; the South must convene and resolve that slavery in the District must be guaranteed by the Constitution or the Union was at an end.^^ Viewing the rising whirlwind

58Ibid., June 5, 7, 9, 26, 29, 30, July 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, Aug. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 16, Sept. 6, 13, 17, 18, 19, 26, 27, Oct. 8, 9, 11, 15, 24, 25, Nov. 6, 19, Dec. 18, 1838; July 10, 15, Aug. 19, Oct. 17, 18, 19, Nov. 19, 1839; Jan. 30, Feb. 1, Mar. 11, 19, July 4, 7, 1840. Courier, July 16, 18, 20, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, Aug. 2, 1838. Stuart praised the Patriot for its 1837 endorsement of sub-treasury (Mercury, Nov. 4, 1837; Patriot, Sept. 8, 9, 11, 14, 21, 27, 30, 1837).

59The idea for a southern convention had long been a part of Calhoun's strategy for unifying the South. On December 19, 1837, Senator Benjamin Swift of Vermont presented a set of resolutions from the legislature of his state which affirmed the power of Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia and outlaw the interstate
Stuart urged the South to defend herself:

Why, if we must have war, let us have it in bloody earnest. Union—peace—on the terms of being denounced as monsters whenever the call of that Union bring us together!! Better the line that divides us be drawn with fire . . . than that we should stand in perpetual fear of this armed neutrality, this masked hatred. . . . We must have a Convention of the whole South, and exact the atonement or create the security. . . . What! Congress an emanation from the Sovereign States dare to entertain discussion whether they shall begin the work of confiscating $800,000,000 worth of private property, rooting up the widest and most vital connections of society, blotting out . . . the very existence of twelve states, and we . . . are thus madly to dream of peace and forbearance and the "blessed union"!

But there was no response to his rhetoric. With helpless resignation the frustrated editor decried the "Gag Resolutions" presented by Patton of Virginia to the House; they were only "an evasion" of the issue even though they did omit Pinckney's "equivocal surrender" concerning the slave trade. They also protested the annexation of Texas as well as the admission of any more slave states. Calhoun decided to call a convention of the southern states. "I think the sooner the issue is made the better for us and the country," he said. "... A Southern Convention at the earliest period that the South can be brought [to] act is indespensible." Only through southern unity, he felt, would the abolitionist agitation be put down and only by silencing the Abolitionists could the Union be saved. The South was especially sensitive to all proposals to affect slavery in the District; such proposals were regarded as the opening wedge in a broad campaign to dislodge slavery everywhere. Rhett was an enthusiastic supporter of the convention idea; it is to this support that the Mercury is referring (Wiltse, Calhoun Nullifier, 370; White, Rhett, 37-38). But to many the convention idea was regarded as a radical move that threatened the Union. Others did not see the danger as the pressing force that it represented to Calhoun. Nothing came of the convention proposal. Instead, Southerners supported another gag rule in the House—Rhett refused to vote on the measure and the Patton Resolutions were adopted. Calhoun, unsatisfied by the Senate's decision to table the unacceptable communications to that body, then proposed his own set of resolutions which were adopted with modifications (See above, 109).
In the next Congress, matters took a sudden turn for the better. The Twenty-first Rule, sponsored by Charles G. Atherton, a New Hampshire Democrat, adopted by the 1838 session of the House was much more acceptable. Even though the "Atherton Resolutions" also provided for tabling rather than outright rejection of the despised abolition petitions, they were forthright in their denunciation of unconstitutional congressional interference with slavery in the Districts or the states. Holding them to be "equivalent to a down-right rejection of the petitions," the Mercury reasoned that the South need ask for no more. Stuart's satisfaction was increased because the "Atherton Resolutions" seemed to have the administration's approval. No longer need the "sly Martin's" position on the critical issue be distrusted. Even the Whigs seemed to be coming around; Henry Clay began to "set himself right" by offering a petition against emancipation in the District. Calhoun's strategy had worked, at least for the time being.60

60Mercury, Dec. 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 1837; Jan. 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 16, 30, Feb. 8, 9, 10, 17, 19, 21, 22, Mar. 2, 3, 1838. Even South Carolina was languid in its response to the call for a convention. Only one meeting in the state—and that in Rhett's own district of Beaufort—was held to endorse the proposal. This was in response to an address to his constituents sent to them subsequent to the action in Washington (White, Rhett, 38-40).

61Mercury, Mar. 9, 14, 22, May 3, 1837; Jan. 1, 4, 9, Feb. 9, 10, 17, Mar. 2, Nov. 7, 17, Dec. 14, 15, 17, 1838; Feb. 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, Mar. 11, 1839. In early 1838 the Mercury commenced to castigate the Whigs for their abolitionist leanings at the North. "... Their brotherly love and political identity" was borne out by such things as the Whig-Abolitionist alliance in the New York elections of 1838 (ibid., Jan. 1, 9, Mar. 3, Nov. 7, 12, 13, 14, 16, 19, 22, 23, 29, Dec. 17, 1838).
Stuart's defense of slavery required that he maintain an interest in foreign affairs. Texas figured with special prominence in his paper. In 1837 the Mercury strongly endorsed the General Assembly's resolution urging annexation as soon as it could be "effected on fair and reasonable terms." Abolitionists opposed annexation for fear it would increase southern influence in national councils. Caustically observing "that the condition upon which we are permitted to remain in the Union is that we should continue the weaker party," the editor distrusted "the mercy of [his] Northern brethren."62

His attention frequently returned to Britain's seizures of American slaves. The decision to compensate only for those taken prior to the British Emancipation Act seemed to him "a denial of the right of the people of the South to hold slaves and defend them ... against foreign encroachment." The danger that Northern and British Abolitionists might someday join hands in a "formal alliance" brought forth yet another warning to those disturbers of the peace and order of South Carolina. In language that Calhoun used only with reluctance but that others employed with ready defiance, the Mercury soberly informed the enemy that ". . . the malignant warfare under the mask of brotherhood must cease" or the "unmeaning name of fellow citizens be abolished between us." Piously continuing that nothing could be expected of Great Britain, Stuart accused the British of regularly overthrowing "justice, law, [and] good faith, when [they stood] opposed to [Britain's] lust for power--a lust born from and nourished by her ruling passion, the

love of money." The administration could be trusted to defend southern interests but all Whigs were suspect as usual. For his part in failing to support Calhoun's "Bermuda Resolutions," William Campbell Preston was accused of "treason to his state."63

Administration reliability notwithstanding, Stuart noted that Van Buren's message of 1830 neglected the British high seas attacks on slavery for "the infinitely insignificant question in comparison, of the Maine boundary." Although South Carolina would honor the call for war—if it came over the small boundary matter—the North owed a similar support to the South's grievance. The misguided Whigs received their usual share of denunciation; Stuart was now supporting Van Buren's re-election. The Whigs had compared the Canadian uprising of 1837 to the Texas Revolution, an obvious absurdity. Whereas the Texans had fought against "the tyranny of bigotry and barbarism," the "faction" of rebels in Canada, "in opposition to the progress of civilization and freedom," was mounting an insurrection against "an enlightened and liberal government." The Caroline, a gun-runner of

63 Ibid., Apr. 9, 11, June 11, July 12, 1839; Mar. 2, 4, 23, 28, Apr. 23, May 1, 19, 23, June 2, 15, 1840. When in 1835 the American coasting vessel Enterprise was forced by heavy weather into Fort Hamilton, Bermuda, the British emancipated her slave cargo and refused to pay for it. The slaves were free by virtue of touching free British soil, the authorities said. In response Calhoun committed the Senate to the proposition that international law discredited this position. The nationality of a cargo is determined by the flag under which it sails, Calhoun said. This being the case, Enterprise was American "soil." Nor did Calhoun fail to ask how a nation that professed so much opposition to slavery could make for such appalling conditions in India and Ireland. This British inconsistency was a favorite subject among Southerners, including Mercury editors, who never tired of accusing the British of the most blatant hypocrisy (Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun Sectionalist, 1840-1850 [New York, 1951] 63-64.
American registry, was illegally aiding the rebels and had gotten only her just deserts. There was no need for unpleasantness between Great Britain and the United States over the matter. 64

In July of 1838—with some caution—the Mercury endorsed Van Buren for re-election. This early move was apparently inspired by administration Congressmen who combined advocacy of sub-treasury with censure of those who would interfere with slavery, such interference being called unconstitutional. Should this "truly Southern policy" remain constant, it would become "the duty of every Southern man and state to vote for Martin Van Buren in preference to Henry Clay." 65

The impetuous editor had reckoned too much on his own accord, however, and received a reproof for his action.

Calhoun had been careful to attach the same reservations to his alliance with Van Buren's party that he had maintained during the days of the Whig coalition. The forces of Van Buren were aware of this and had thus far met the Carolinian's conditions. But Calhoun had no illusions about politics, the nature of which could change overnight. He had learned to be cautious; moreover, he expected the same quality of his followers. In a letter to Robert Barnwell Rhett, Calhoun urged him to put Stuart "on his guard"; the Mercury was "leaning a little too much" toward Van Buren. "... [P]osition is everything in politics ... and as we are volunteers and not

64 Ibid., Dec. 21, 1837; Jan. 3, 6, 9, 10, 18, 19, Feb. 5, 1838; Mar. 4, 9, 13, 16, Apr. 3, 6, 20, 1839; Mar. 2, July 3, 1840. Rhett's influence was evidently a factor in Mercury policy by this time. He had called for a Congressional investigation of the Caroline affair and was opposed to war over the matter.

65 Ibid., July 25, 1838.
mercenaries looking to a cause and not pay it is to us all im­
portant," said Calhoun. The Senator also had some advice for Rhett:

It seems to me that our true course is to occupy the
old and independent ground on which we have stood for
so many years holding our principles and policy above
the Presidential election and giving a cordial support
to the administration just as far as they support them
without further commitment of identification.

By retaining a position independent of either party, the Senator ex­
pected to gain support from additional quarters without losing friends
among the anti-Van Buren forces:

If we commit ourselves in advance the danger is that
they will shape their course to gain the support of other
interests and we may thus be betrayed. . . . In this
connection I must say I object to the name of democrat
as applied to our party . . . the word . . . means those
who favor a government of the absolute numerical majority
to which I am utterly opposed and the prevalence of which
would destroy the South.66

Calhoun's admonition did not go unheeded; independent publisher or
not, Stuart modified his position so as to accord with Orthodoxy.

While the tone of Mercury editorials remained decidedly
anti-Whig and pro-Van Buren "in his present position" the chastened
editor asserted that "watching for the safety of all that is worth
watching" was his policy. The President's practice of economy
in government, his opposition to internal improvements and tariff
increases combined with his payment of the fourth installment
of the Distribution Act to convince Stuart that Van Buren was truly
a follower of "Jeffersonian policy." Then in February, 1840, the

66Calhoun to Rhett, Sept. 13, 1838, Jameson, ed., Calhoun
Correspondence, 399-400. There is a manuscript copy of this letter
in the Rhett Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South
Carolina, hereinafter cited as Rhett Papers.
Mercury again called for a Van Buren victory. In all likelihood Stuart had made the proper soundings this time, for in May the Charleston State Rights party took the same stand. The Courier's charge that the rival Mercury was inconsistent in favoring a supporter of both Jackson's Proclamation and the Force Bill bothered Stuart not at all. Van Buren's three-year devotion to state rights had offset his former unsatisfactory record. And the agile Mercury had never minded inconsistency. 67

The Charleston guardian of state rights did not really approve of either of the "president-making" parties but it found little to criticize in Van Buren's performance. Stuart had learned his lesson well. A part of that lesson was evidently that Calhoun's analysis of the character of Whiggery was sound. That they were stained by the "American System" and the Bank was no surprise to those who had followed the career of Clay and Webster. It was even so with all other Whigs. Reminding its readers of the characteristic unsoundness of the Whig party, the Mercury charged it with having "taken fanaticism... to [its] bosom" and "pledged [itself]... to hunt us with blood hounds as the price of abolition votes." Clay's decline after his proslavery resolutions of 1839 was significant proof of the folly of pandering to the wishes of Abolitionists. The nomination of William Henry Harrison who had manifested a "wholly unpardonable hostility" on "the great question" of slavery impressed the Mercury as the final proof of Whig...

treachery. 68

Harrison's proud Virginia ancestry would do him little good in South Carolina where subsequently even Robert E. Lee would meet with criticism. Senator Preston had already been questioned by Carolinians for his Virginia birth. During the campaign of 1840 he would be castigated for supporting Harrison, the man who had voted incorrectly on Missouri, who had once been a member of an abolitionist society, and was currently evasive in his views of the peculiar institution. Preston, the South Carolina press said, was consorting with Abolitionists. At the "noisy and vulgar display" that made for a Preston-Thompson barbecue in Greenville, Preston was said to have given a poor speech as he "not infrequently took his glass of gin water." The Virginia-born resident Carolina Whig would live to regret his abandonment of the Virginian-Carolinian school of government. It was Randolph and Calhoun who moved Preston's electorate, not Clay and Harrison. 69

None saw this more clearly than the Mercurv. If Harrison's record was not distinct enough to Carolinians, they should note that some Abolitionists were deserting the Liberty party to support him.

68 Mercurv, June 23, 28, 29, July 4, 17, 20, Aug. 2, 7, 1837; Jan. 6, Nov. 17, 1838; June 2, 1840.

69 Ibid., May 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 26, 28, June 4, 8, 16, 17, 18, 20, July 2, 4, 8, Sept. 5, 10, 15, 29, Oct. 3, 5, 13, Nov. 2, 4, 1840; Lander, "Calhoun-Preston Feud," SCHM, LIX, No. 1, 31, 34, 35. When the Mercurv was reminded of Harrison's southern birth it denounced him as "a Southern man with Northern principles" (Mercurv, May 12, 15, 16, June 4, 16, 1840); Calhoun to Burt, Aug. 8, 1840, Burt Papers.
Harrison, the "humbug ... hero" of whom the "real glory ... was that ... with 1,200 men [he] did not get wholly defeated by 400 Indians," was "a man of straw." The crusading Mercury warned against "old Federalists ... in the pliant wiggling sleekness of modern Whiggery" who were allied with an "agitating system of fanatics," and shuddered to remember "the abominations of the Adams Administration." Heeding the Mercury's bidding, South Carolina renounced the Whigs; even the Courier and Patriot supported Van Buren. In the entire state the Whigs carried only one district. The delighted Mercury responded by hailing the final healing of nullification wounds and rejoicing at South Carolina's unanimous "devotion to the one great cause."70

70Mercury, June 6, 22, 1838; Feb. 5, May 24, 25, Nov. 15, 19, 29, Dec. 11, 14, 1839; Jan. 10, Feb. 3, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, 29, Mar. 2, 7, 10, 13, 14, 18, 20, 26, Apr. 1, 3, 4, 16, May 25, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 26, 28, June 4, 8, 10, 16, 17, 18, 20, 25, 27, July 2, 4, 8, 11, 17, 27, Aug. 10, Sept. 4, 5, 10, 11, 15, 29, Oct. 3, 5, 13, 28, Nov. 2, 4, Dec. 8, 9, 11, 1840; Courier, Jan. 6, 8, 11, 15, 21, 27, Feb. 24, Mar. 9, 12, Apr. 22, May 7, 12, June 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 29, 30, 1840. The Patriot was vigorous in its support of Van Buren; the Courier—who did not view him as antislavery—less so. The Carolina district carried by the Whigs was Waddy Thompson's—and Calhoun's—own of Greenville-Pendleton (Lander, "Calhoun Preston Feud," AHR, No. 1, 35).
CHAPTER IV

HIGH TIDE

It was the plan of some in South Carolina that "devotion to the one great cause" should pave the way for Calhoun's election to the presidency in 1844. In order to reap so great a dividend from Orthodoxy's post-nullification strategy, however, the policy would have to be perfected; southern unity, in short, must be strengthened. With this goal in mind the Calhounites proposed to obliterate the last remaining in-state differences between the State Rights and Free Trade party and the State Rights and Union party. As their names suggest, the dispute between the two groups was over method of remedy rather than nature of evil. LeGare was no less opposed to high tariffs than was Hayne; nor did anyone in South Carolina admit to opposing slavery. The State Rights and Union men simply limited their political protest to the ballot box and so excluded nullification as a weapon.¹

Much had been done to heal the old wounds when in 1838 the Mercury first endorsed Van Buren. Nullifiers had helped to elect a Unionist to Congress two years before because the Nullifier then sitting there had adopted an unsanctioned method in defense of slavery. Then in 1838 Unionists helped a Nullifier to defeat the Unionist incumbent because the latter had not followed orders on sub-treasury.

¹Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 51; White, Rhett, 55.
It is hardly necessary to say that Calhoun was the source of definition for correctness in both cases. 2

While much progress had been made, it was clear to Calhoun that the whole healing process could be undone if the state split again into factions—as it showed a tendency to do—in response to the increasing abolitionist attacks on slavery. In order to avert so serious a setback, he decided to intensify the drive for a final reconciliation between Unionists and Nullifiers. The Nullifiers would support a Unionist for governor in 1840. 3

The task of carrying out this policy was assigned to the Rhett-Elmore machine, a rising force in South Carolina politics. The principals in the "junto" were Congressman Robert Barnwell Rhett, a Calhoun lieutenant who sometimes showed a disturbing tendency to independence, his brothers Benjamin, Albert, James, and Edmund, and Franklin H. Elmore. Elmore, himself a former Congressman, was president of the Bank of the State of South Carolina; Benjamin Rhett was a director in the bank; Albert—whose wife was Elmore's sister—was the most influential member of the General Assembly, while James and Edmund were serving their apprenticeship for position. Finally, John Allan Stuart, brother-in-law to the Rhetts and editor of the Mercury, was the man who made public the conclusions of the machine.

When the candidate was agreed upon, the Charleston Mercury

2Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 51; see above, 89; Calhoun to Burt, Dec. 24, 1838, Burt Papers.

3Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 51; Stuart to Calhoun, Oct. 11, 1841, John C. Calhoun Papers, Clemson University, hereinafter cited as Calhoun Papers.
nominated Unionist Colonel John P. Richardson as the State Rights choice for governor in 1840. Because of the paper's vigorous campaign for Richardson the whole unification drive came to be called "The Mercury Movement." After a rather embarrassing setback—in the form of a rebellion in the Calhoun ranks—Richardson's election was assured and the "undivided front" prevailed in South Carolina.  

The unanimity of the "undivided front" was short-lived, at least in the press. While the Courier supported proposals for a national bank along with other Whig measures, the Patriot praised President Harrison's Inaugural as "sound and republican." The Mercury, meanwhile, denounced their "wooing of the rising luminary" and proclaimed itself to be "the only Democratic State Rights paper in the city." Stuart had no brief for the party of "coon skins, squirrel

4Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 52-53; White, Rhett, 55-56; Mercury, Jan. 10, Feb. 12, 14, 17,18,19, Mar. 10, 18, Sept. 12, Dec. 8, 10, 11, 1840; James M. Walker to S. W. Trotti, Apr. 12, 1840, James M. Hammond Papers, Library of Congress, microfilm copy in South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, hereinafter cited as Hammond Papers.

The rebellion resulted when Calhoun's cousin, Francis Pickens, annoyed with the Rhett's, easily persuaded James H. Hammond to run for governor. Representing Richardson as the Rhett candidate, Pickens assured Hammond that he would be Calhoun's choice. This move threatened to disrupt the still somewhat fragile state unity until Calhoun—after having explained the strategy to Nullifier Hammond and having unsuccessfully attempted to persuade him to withdraw his candidacy—assured his defeat. The Mercury was unfriendly to Hammond's campaign (Francis Pickens to Hammond, Dec. 15, 1839, James M. Walker to Hammond, Apr. 8, 20, Hammond to Ker Boyce, Apr. 10, George McDuffie to Hammond, Apr. 19, Hammond to Walker, Apr. 23, Pickens to Hammond, June 22, S. W. Trotti to Hammond, July 6, 1840, Hammond Papers; James J. Hamilton, Jr. to Hammond Apr. 5, 1850, James Hamilton Jr. Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, hereinafter cited as Hamilton Papers; Hammond to Mrs. Hammond, Nov. 27, Dec. 21, 1840, James Henry Hammond Collection, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, hereinafter cited as Hammond Collection).
tails, log cabins, gourds and pumpkins."^5

The Patriot ignored Stuart's barrage, but the Courier was editorially incensed. Conveying his umbrage to his readers, the Courier editor convicted "the mere echo" of Calhoun, with its consuming greed for "State loaves and fishes," of a "weathercock propensity to change." The two editors followed with an exchange of maledictions in the process of which Stuart charged his rival with "openly boasting" of plans to "throw the State into the arms of Harrisonism."^6

In language reminiscent of its finest rantings against Jackson, the Mercury then mounted a strong attack upon the new administration. Charging that the "Federalists . . . fought for spoil, not for principle," Stuart accused the Whigs of putting "forth a system of measures at war with all State Rights" and "the prosperity and safety of the South." Aided by Preston and company, this party proposed to strengthen the general government by re-establishing the bank, re-enacting the protective tariff, securing the assumption of state debts, and arranging for the distribution of monies received from the sale of public lands. The "studied . . . non-committalism" of the Presidential Inaugural, moreover, convinced Stuart that Harrison would sign anything Congress passed. Such "surrender to

---

^5Mercury, Dec. 21, 1840; Feb. 15, 1841; Patriot, Jan. 28, Feb. 10, Mar. 6, 9, 26, Apr. 13, June 4, 1841; Courier, Nov. 24, 1840; Feb. 17, Mar. 9, 24, 26, Apr. 12, 14, 16, June 5, 7, 1841.

^6Courier, Feb. 16, 24, Mar. 2, 6, 10, 24, 26, Apr. 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, 1841; Mercury, Feb. 17, 25, Mar. 1, 20, 26, Apr. 13, 14, 17, 1841.
majority rule" was "full of danger." No happier when Harrison's premature death put the Virginian Tyler in the presidential chair, the Mercury offered "neither . . . opposition nor . . . support" to the new President until it saw "what he would be about"; Stuart had little faith in any man who campaigned for high office on the Whig ticket. Deploiring Tyler's proposal to repeal the Independent treasury, the editor warned that such action would pave the way for re-establishing a government bank. The states should resist this move by forbidding branches of the bank to be established within their borders. In addition to the bank's being unwise, unnecessary, and unpopular, it was also unconstitutional, Stuart concluded.

Viewing a central fiscal agency as a thinly disguised bank, Stuart warned that the cost of establishing a "Fiscal Bank" would fabricate an excuse to raise the tariff and serve as "the Keystone" of a system to plunder the South. In order to dramatize their opposition to these Whig moves, Charleston Democrats sponsored a mass meeting at which both Calhoun and Stuart spoke. This "genuine turnout of the people," destroyed the chances of the few local Whigs, "men of Northern sympathies and Northern interests," said the Mercury. Here was the party line again; under the approving eyes of Calhoun, the

7Mercury, Jan. 5, 13, 20, 30, Feb. 1, 18, Mar. 5, 6, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 26, 31, Apr. 1, May 12, 27, 28, 1841. The Mercury explained Van Buren's defeat as "the result of speculation . . . sprung from . . . Bank Rottenness and profligacy." This had enabled the Whigs to win the northern masses with unworthy appeals, said the editor. Repudiating democracy again, the Mercury approvingly noted that South Carolina had preserved her honor by remaining loyal to the "fundamental doctrines of the republican school" (ibid., Nov. 16, 17, Dec. 21, 1840; Jan. 26, 1841, see above, 121-22).
meeting condemned distribution, tariffs, and the bank.®

The meeting and the Mercury triggered another newspaper battle. Castigated by Stuart as "the organ of a foreign and hostile influence," the outraged Courier wrathfully announced itself "as entirely Carolinian" as the Mercury, proclaimed its independence of "John Crisis Calhoun" and dismissed the Mercury as "the ally and champion of Northern Democracy." The President, after all, was a Southerner; indeed, he was a Virginian. But then so was "The Hon. William Circumstance Preston," as the Mercury called him.®

News of Tyler's bank bill vetoes distressed the Courier as much as it delighted the Mercury. Stuart reported the first veto as "an act of deliverance . . . from the domination of the conspiracy and avarice of profligate ambition." In his second message, however, the President seemed to leave the door open to compromise with bank men, the Mercury warned. Distribution after all, was still very much alive, and very dangerous. Aside from its being unconstitutional, it would also reinvigorate high tariff men. The South would pay out ten times in taxes the amount distributed; this measure was just another way "to make the plantation States pay the piper." At a time when foreign affairs were unsettled, it was foolish to divert money from the "legitimate and patriotic purpose" of national defense to "the money changers

®Ibid., Jan. 4, 12, 13, 15, 19, Feb. 10, 13, 15, 23, Apr. 2, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 29, May 1, 6, 21, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, June 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 23, July 10, 13, 19, Aug. 18, Sept. 1, 8, 1841. Calhoun's "instructions" to the General Assembly directed that distribution be condemned and that South Carolina refuse to accept any money from the act (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 59).

®Courier, Apr. 21, 22, 23, May 19, 28, 29, June 2, 4, 11, 25, 28, 30, July 5, 9, 10, 17, 28, 30, Aug. 4, 1841; Mercury, June 3, 11, 1841.
of the nation . . . menacing us with insolent threats." When distri-
bution became law in 1841, the Mercury characterized it as "one of the
worst measures that ever emanated from a body of men acknowledging
responsibility . . ." Laughing at Senator Preston's failure to vote
on the issue, Stuart urged South Carolina to refuse her share of the
monies. Again he knew whereof he spoke; the legislature voted un-
amiously to reject whatever amount was allotted to South Carolina. 10

Then in 1842 the Whigs raised the tariff. Stuart had discussed
this possibility throughout the previous year. Fearing that southern
planters of tobacco and sugar contemplated "a grand scheme of log
rolling" with Northern manufacturers, the editor warned that an alli-
ance so ill-considered could only work to the advantage of the latter.
Planters needed to extend overseas trade while manufacturers stood
only for restricting it. The selfish policy of the latter group pro-
tected products of one-tenth of the nation at the expense of the rest.
Criticizing the grasping restrictions imposed by manufacturers, the
Mercury contended that the tariff damaged foreign markets for Ameri-
can exports which were primarily agricultural. The tariff of 1842--
the "black tariff" James H. Hammond called it--was "more oppressive
than ever before." A death struggle between Congress and the states
had begun, Stuart said, and he predicted that the South would be tricked

10 Mercury, Jan. 29, Feb. 2, Mar. 5, Apr. 8, May 27, June 25,
28, July 5, 10, 14, 15, Aug. 3, 5, 10, 11, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 25,
26, 27, Sept. 1, 4, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 18, Oct. 1, 4, 7, 8, 14, 19,
21, 22, 23, 25, Nov. 6, 8, 18, 20, 22, 24, 25, Dec. 2, 15, 20, 1841;
Stuart initially said that South Carolina should accept her "pittance"
from distribution. Calhoun's sentiment to the contrary was not with-
out significance in his change of mind (see above, 128, n. 8).
by no more compromises. For months he berated the new law which in its effect bore no "fruit, not utterly poisonous."

Stuart continued to judge Anglo-American disputes in the light of their effect upon slavery. The editor saw no cause for war in the Caroline affray, even—when through the arrest of Alexander McLeod—the issue of State rights became involved. The luckless McLeod, a Canadian deputy and thus a British subject, was arrested on the New York side of the Anglo-American border and charged with having helped to destroy Caroline. Since one American had been killed in the process of the vessel's destruction, McLeod was indicted for murder and held for trial by a New York court. Conviction of the charge of murder carried with it the distinct possibility that the Canadian would be executed. Such an event, Her Majesty's Government said quite un-equivocally, would mean war. Fortunately for all concerned, however, McLeod was acquitted. Although the state rights disposition of the Mercury required it to uphold the jurisdiction of the New York court, Stuart felt that McLeod's acquittal represented the wise course.

Stuart was likewise not much interested in the dispute with Great Britain over Oregon. Oregon, like Maine, was inconsequential in comparison with the outstanding troubles with Britain over slavery, he said. Those vessels off Africa which wore the American ensign

---


and were suspected by Britain of being slavers should not be subject to the British request for permission to board and search them. The editor called for Americans to realize that such authority would menace the "whole commerce of the country with Africa" more than it would damage southern property. Indeed, it portended destruction of the principle of freedom of the seas. When a New York paper asserted that America had the sympathy of the world in the Maine boundary dispute but was universally condemned for all controversies arising out of slavery, the Mercury was unimpressed. The question of the freedom of the seas was more important than the clearance of title to a country in which no one lived. Then there was the "far more momentous question" of the Creole, a direct "aggression upon southern rights and property."\(^{13}\)

Creole was another American coasting vessel which engaged in the interstate slave trade and ran afoul of the abolition-minded British. During the process of her transit from Norfolk to New Orleans, Creole's cargo of slaves mutinied, killing a white passenger in the course of their action. The mutineers then put into Nassau where the British hanged the murderers but freed and gave asylum to the remaining slaves. For once Stuart was "clear for fighting." If only the American Supreme Court had not upheld a similar action on the part of American Abolitionists, this country could press the point with honor. Stuart was displeased when the Webster-Ashburton Treaty did not satisfactorily resolve the Creole controversy, although he did

\(^{13}\)Mercury, Dec. 4, 5, 1840; Mar. 23, June 10, 1841; Mar. 18, 23, Apr. 9, July 14, 23, Aug. 2, 12, 20, 30, 1842; Jan. 30, Feb. 2, 7, Apr. 26, July 26, 1843.
note with apparent approval the British envoy's pledge against future "officious interference" by colonial officials. He was also satisfied by the treaty settlement involving vessels off Africa.\(^\text{14}\)

The Texas question was even more important to Stuart. No longer so sure by 1840 that annexation would be best for the Texans, the *Mercury* reported a sometime Texan's view that independence might save the young nation from filling "the pockets of Northern manufacturers and abolitionists." Firm friendship for the "advancing state" was Stuart's policy. His preference for peaceful settlement of disputes extended to the matter of Texas. Despite his sympathy for fellow Southerners, Stuart did not believe that Mexican military threats justified American intervention. The United States should do nothing, he said, to damage the chances for a peaceful settlement of their own dispute with Mexico. Consequently, the *Mercury* joined Calhoun to endorse Secretary of State Webster's policy of neutrality.


Stuart would have been much happier had he known how much trouble the British negotiator got from the Americans over Creole. Tyler was "disposed to be obstinate on the subject," Lord Ashburton said. Ashburton informed his superiors that he was "satisfying the Southern people as well as " he was able. "My great plague was the Creole," he lamented (Wilber Devereux Jones, "The Influence of Slavery on the Webster-Ashburton Negotiations," *JSH*, XXII, No. 1 (Feb., 1956), 49, 52.

The Webster-Ashburton Treaty provided for the United States to maintain a naval squadron off Africa. It would be this squadron's job to search any vessel wearing American colors, which was suspected of being a slaver (Jones, "Webster-Ashburton Negotiations," *JSH*, XXII, 53-58).

Calhoun supported the Webster-Ashburton Treaty.
By 1843, however, Stuart's view of the situation was losing some of its detachment. Britain's abolitionist designs on Texas had made immediate annexation the only way to "repel the dangerous inter­vention of Europe in the affairs of this Continent," he said. The "peace of the Union" was threatened. Unrealistic in their preoccupa­tion with the Oregon issue, Northerners were "inflamed by the danger of England encircling us by getting possession of the remote territory of Oregon." Their reasoning could hardly be more specious. Deluding themselves with make-believe dangers from non-existent British threats to that distant place, the North was blind to the obvious menace in Texas. The *Mercury* saw the British presence there as encirclement "hard and fast in our settled country and on the course of our greatest commerce. . . ." Nor could the design of British Abolitionists on Cuba be taken lightly. Texas and Cuba were "slave States and Anglicizing them would be the triumph of Abolition." 15

Generally speaking, Stuart left the evidence of Britain's ulterior motives to communications and extracts from other news sources. He expended his energies in demolishing those who opposed the *Mercury's* latest program for Texas. By the fall of 1843 the editor was convinced that annexation was the only honorable solution to this question. The curiously strict-constructionist argument of Daniel Webster that the Constitution permitted on such extension of the American domain impressed the Jeffersonian state rights editor as drivel.

15 *Mercury*, Aug. 1, 1840; Apr. 26, June 23, Dec. 3, 1841; Jan. 25, 26, Feb. 18, Mar. 8, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 30, Apr. 1, 29, May 12, 13, 14, 16, July 20, 1842; June 17, Oct. 13, 28, Nov. 21, 29, 1843. The sentiment that through independence Texans might save themselves from northern exactions was that of James W. Simmons, a Charlestonian who spent some time in Texas. The *Mercury* quoted it on February 10, 1842.
Expansion of the national border to include Texas was "perfectly constitutional, expedient and just," said the Mercury. Defending President Tyler for his decision to press for annexation, the editor dismissed the charges that Tyler had manufactured the Texas issue to promote his presidential ambitions. When the Abolitionists carped that Texas would allow "the slave population to expand," the Mercury observed with satisfaction that slave labor was more advantageous than free labor. The full opposition to annexation was, in fact, "palpably an Abolitionist move—slavery is—the only argument urged with any zeal by Northern papers," Stuart said. "We have given much space to... Texas today," the editor reported on April 5, 1844. "But it is the greatest topic of the time." And indeed it was—at least in South Carolina.16

Texas was a timely topic all over the South by 1844. This timeliness was at least partially the result of the interest in Texas displayed by European governments. The first evidence of this interest occurred in London in the summer of 1842.

At that time Duff Green and General James Hamilton, two Calhoun partisans of long standing, were in Europe. Green was on special assignment for President Tyler. General Hamilton who, like many Carolinians, had emigrated to Texas, had only recently been replaced as the Texan representative to London and Paris. In London they learned of a startling announcement made to the House of Commons by Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister. They immediately conveyed their displeasure at

---

16Ibid., Nov. 21, 1843; Mar. 20, 21, 25, Apr. 5, 10, 18, 19, 30, May 12, 13, 16, 18, 21, 27, 29, June 7, 12, 19, 20, 24, 26, 28, July 19, Dec. 17, 1844.
Peel's statement to colleagues in the slave states.  

Peel had told the Commons that Her Majesty's possessions in the West Indies could no longer compete with products of lands in which slave labor was employed. Whatever satisfaction the slaveholding South might have gained from Sir Robert's apparent endorsement of Stuart's argument that slave labor was superior to free labor, was destroyed by the minister's next statement. In consequence of this situation, Peel continued, Her Majesty's Government had concluded that promotion of manumission everywhere in the Western Hemisphere must be its policy. An intensive effort to effect abolition in Texas, where one of two tactics could be employed, would inaugurate the new program. Britain could ensure the emancipation of Texas's slaves either by restoration of that province to Mexico or by extending the protection of Her Majesty's Government to the Texas Republic. If the latter course were adopted, the British reformers must be prepared to underwrite a compensated emancipation.  

The American reaction, at least in the South, was swift and direct. John Randolph of Roanoke had long since predicted the alliance between British and American Abolitionists; now that prediction

---

17 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 150-51. Hamilton was a frequent contributor to the Mercury on the subject of Texas during 1844. Having previously broken with Calhoun over the question of sub-treasury, Hamilton was virtually without political influence in South Carolina. A series of financial reverses combined with the rupture with Calhoun to convince the former Nullifier to go to Texas. Chastened perhaps by his fate, Hamilton made peace with Calhoun in 1844 and worked with him on Texas (Glenn, "James Hamilton, Jr.," 260-67; Hamilton to Calhoun, Sept. 19, 1843, Hamilton Papers).

18 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 150-51; Justin H. Smith, The Annexation of Texas (New York, 1941), 84-86.
seemed to be verging on reality. Holding that the United States must immediately annex Texas if it hoped to contain Britain's abolitionist-inspired expansions, Southerners of such divergent belief as Andrew Jackson and John Tyler joined to support annexation. American Abolitionists, quite predictably, did not. John Quincy Adams allied himself with twelve other abolition-minded Congressmen to proclaim the addition of Texas to the United States to be tantamount to dissolution of the Union.¹⁹

One year later, in the summer of 1843, the British Foreign Minister assured a delegation from the World Convention of Abolitionists that Her Majesty's Government would "employ all legitimate means" to effect abolition in Texas. When Ashbel Smith, who had replaced Hamilton as Texas's envoy, asked for an explanation of these remarks, he was not reassured by Lord Aberdeen's restatement of his announcement to the Abolitionists. In informing his government of this development, Smith felt that Great Britain's conception of the importance of emancipation in Texas was that it would precipitate the same action in the United States. British motives were twofold, he said. They were philanthropic in that Englishmen conceived of slavery as an immoral institution and economic in that the peculiar institution destroyed the competitiveness of Britain's own tropical products of free labor. There was yet another area in which abolition in America would aid the British economy. Smith said that Great Britain thought that southern cotton supported both shipping and manufacturing in the United States. Without slavery the cotton crop would decline precipitately

¹⁹Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 152; Kirk, Randolph, 123-24.
and would take with it northern competitors of Great Britain. Little wonder that the Mercury felt encircled.\(^{20}\)

The Texan envoy was a native New Englander who had made his way to Texas by way of a residency in North Carolina where he had edited a nullification paper. Not unnaturally, he was acquainted with Calhoun's strategy in defense of slavery, and he wrote the South Carolinian an account of these unsettling developments in London. Calhoun forwarded the letter to Abel P. Upshur who had recently succeeded Webster as Secretary of State. Concluding that Texas must be annexed, Upshur found himself in agreement with both Calhoun and Tyler. And by the fall of 1843 the administration had begun to work for the adoption of annexation as a conscious policy.\(^{21}\)

The whole of South Carolina seemed to catch fire over annexation in 1844. In Upcountry and Lowcountry public meetings resolved that Texas must become American; some gatherings proposed disunion as the alternative. Almost seven hundred people packed a Charleston theater to decide for immediate action "of vital importance to our country." Since Stuart was out of town, John Milton Clapp, the Mercury's associate editor, represented the paper. Pinckney, the former editor, was also there and so was Jacob Cardozo, editor of the Patriot. Both Pinckney and Cardozo loudly voiced their agreement with the assembly's

\(^{20}\)Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 153.

\(^{21}\)Ibid., 153-55. Wiltse says that Calhoun had "nothing to do" with Tyler's decision to annex Texas and that he only gave his opinion when it was requested. Since, however, his information came from the same general sources as did theirs, he and they arrived at parallel conclusions at about the same time (ibid., 155-56). The Mercury's course coincided with Calhoun's.
decision to press for annexation. Even the absent Courier's chief indicated a tepid agreement if annexation could be effected without war, disunion, or nullification. It was not, after all, "a vital question," at least not to the Courier. Demonstrating his undiluted contempt for the cautious, Whig-tainted, rival Courier's position, Clapp railed that the Courier "could be expected to throw up like a buzzard every day. . . ." Continuing in the same tasteless vein, he advised his own readers to exercise caution and "stand from under!"

The Mercury's store of vitriol was not diminished by Stuart's absence.

The threats of the Abolitionists to slavery were not limited, however, to the Texas question. New York's delay in surrendering slave "kidnappers" to Virginia furnished another of the malignant abolitionist attacks on the South. The Prigg case in Pennsylvania brought the Abolitionists into "direct legal conflict with the Union."

Pennsylvania had enacted a statute to hinder recovery of fugitives

22 Mercury, May 8, 11, 14, 15, 18, June 4, 1844. Clapp became associate editor in 1837. He was especially active on the paper after 1843 due to Stuart's bad health. Cardozo, the Patriot editor, strongly endorsed annexation (Patriot, May 6, 8, 11, 13, 14, 16, 1844).

23 Mercury, Apr. 21, May 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 25, 27, 28, 30, June 4, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, July 1, 2, 1844; Courier, June 26, 28, 29, July 1, 1844. Former Senator Preston said that South Carolina's reaction on the Texas issue was a directed one. "The public mind is not heated on the subject in this state nor can the newspapers inflame it," he wrote, "but orders have been received for public meetings, etc. which may succeed" (Preston to John J. Crittenden, May 4, 1844, quoted in White, Rhett, 71, n.15). While due allowance must be made for Preston's Whiggery, he was probably right in his analysis. Calhoun was Secretary of State at the time of Preston's comment and had launched an intensive drive for annexation.
and it took the Supreme Court to invalidate it. The Prigg controversy only made Virginia's and South Carolina's Inspection Laws more necessary to protect southern property from Yankee thieves, said Clapp. Northern Fanatacism threatened even the churches. Lamenting the division of "one of the most powerful of the Christian sects," the Methodist Church, into "a Southern and a Northern Religion," the Mercury viewed this "most ominous and decisive event of our times" as another result of "the ruthless intrusion of abolition." The message was plain enough to be understood on all sides:

If the clergy whose business is peace and good will cannot tolerate each other of the same sect, what will become of the politicians whose vocation is strife and dissension [sic]?

To this outspoken editor the answer was clear; the Methodist division was "the first dissolution of the Union."24

24Mercury, Jan. 16, 20, Feb. 5, 6, Mar. 22, 25, 29, 30, Apr. 1, Dec. 16, 18, 1841; Jan. 20, Mar. 7, Apr. 18, 30, May 3, Dec. 30, 31, 1842; Jan. 5, 10, 11, 1843; June 14, 20, 1844. The editor's analysis of the significance of the Methodist division was more accurate perhaps than he realized. Evangelical Protestantism at the North, no longer content with the strict spiritual and religious realm, was becoming "a pragmatic, activistic force for social" reform. This aggressive force held emancipation to be an important step in the coming of the millenium (Anne C. Loveland, "Evangelicalism and 'Immediate Emancipation' in American Anti-Slavery Thought," JSH, XXXII, No. 2 [May, 1966], 172-88). This intolerant crusade ran headlong into southern Methodists. Methodism in the South had substituted concern for the black man's soul for its former interest in emancipation. So effective where southern Methodists in reaching the slave that by 1826 of all Georgia Methodists 40 per cent were black. Three years later the South Carolina planter, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, asked for Methodist preachers for his slaves. And he told the Agricultural Society of South Carolina that religion could take the place of emancipation. At the time of the schism the southern Methodists' only defense for slavery was that they saw no other way to regulate race relations. They denied being a pro-slavery church (Lewis M. Purifoy, "The Southern Methodist Church and the Pro-slavery Argument," JSH, XXXII, No. 3 [Aug., 1966], 326-328; Donald G. Mathews, "The Methodist Mission to the Slaves, 1829-1844," JAH, LI, No. 4 [March, 1965], 615-31).
The "Gag Resolutions," which had been repealed temporarily in 1841, were finally repealed in 1844. Fulminating at the "treacherous surrender of Southern rights," the editor was not surprised at the first action, "the proof, the Damning Proof!" as it was, of the unreliability of Whigs. He felt betrayed, however, when "in the second day of the session," the Democratic Congress of 1844 struck down the resolutions. It "will doubtless give comfort to the souls of our Union loving friends," said the satirical editor. The "South was conquered, and conquered by their Northern allies." Those same "Northern Allies" likewise prevented the Democratic Congress from righting the wrongs of the tariff. Had not the Democrats of New York assembled in convention in 1843 to endorse "a tariff founded on revenue principles"? The *Mercury* declared them to be "heart and hand with Mr. Clay and the Whig party" and it wrote them into opposition.25

While Stuart's paper faithfully related the chilling threats to slavery, it also looked ahead to the presidential election of 1844. The tariff would be of momentous concern in this election, the *Mercury* said; thus the candidate must be a follower of "those great fundamental doctrines of the republican school." If the Democrats would only select the right man, they would have no trouble in overthrowing the "wasteful and oppressive system" of the hopelessly divided Whigs. Although throughout 1841 Stuart counselled that any discussion of likely candidates was premature, privately he favored Calhoun. During the summer of 1842, the *Mercury* began to probe for the sentiments of other

---

25*Mercury*, Jan. 20, Mr. 2, 4, June 11, 14, 16, 17, 19, 24, 1841; Mar. 1, 2, 4, Dec. 7, 14, 18, 1844; Jan. 7, 1845.
states by cautiously advancing Calhoun's qualifications. Stuart took care lest a strong stand by South Carolina alienate northern Democrats and he vowed not "to make the choice of a candidate a cause for contention and ill blood." The Mercury would support any sound candidate who was fairly chosen.

So circumspect a policy was hardly characteristic of the Mercury. The stakes, however, were high; so for more than a year the editor warily approached his goal— the nomination of Calhoun for the presidency. Explaining his caution to the senior Senator, Stuart reported:

... all agree that for this state to move now in a nomination would be ruinous. It would be as bad as to effect as if the nomination came from yourself or your immediate family. For such is the relation in which abroad the State and yourself are regarded; and such in fact is the feeling of our State—a feeling which no local division or internal State quarrel can impair.26

In the process of its prudent campaign, the Mercury went so far as to declare itself an orthodox party sheet, even if the Democrats chose to tap someone else for the high office. By late autumn of 1842 indications were that this policy had served its purpose. On November 28, 1842, the Mercury abandoned its reserve. Hoisting at its masthead the banner of "Free Trade, Low Duties, No Debt, Separation from Banks, Economy, Retrenchment and Strict Adherence to the Constitution," Stuart's paper declared these ideas to be the political principles of "John C. Calhoun." The action was taken only after careful consultation with Calhoun, Rhett, and others of the party leaders

26 Mercury, Jan. 16, Mr. 19, Sept. 24, 1841; June 22, July 2, Aug. 15, Sept. 2, 10, Oct. 1, 14, Nov. 8, 10, 12, 14, 1842; Stuart to Calhoun, Oct. 11, Nov. 19, 1841, Calhoun Papers.
in South Carolina. Calhoun was "the man best qualified by character and position" for the nation's highest office, the Mercury proclaimed. Acting to express its quick agreement, the General Assembly nominated Calhoun for the presidency in December 1842. Two months later the Carolinian received the formal endorsement of his faithful ally, the Mercury.

FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES -- JOHN C. CALHOUN,
SUBJECT TO THE DECISION OF A DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION
appeared at the paper's masthead where it remained until January 27, 1844. Meanwhile the Carolinian had resigned from the Senate in order to avoid becoming involved in needless controversy.27

During the months of the Mercury's discreet, then open, campaign for Calhoun, the association between leader and paper was closer than it had ever been. It was, in fact, high tide for the forces of this coalition. Throughout the campaign the Mercury's strategy was directly determined by Calhoun's planning force, of which Stuart was a part. The idea of Calhoun's again trying for the presidency had appeared as early as 1848, the Democratic party's return to orthodoxy on slavery and the tariff being responsible for it. In 1841 Calhoun himself concluded to allow his friends to bid for the nomination on his behalf, and Robert Barnwell Rhett commenced to organize

27Mercury, Nov. 28, Dec. 19, 1842; Jan. 2, Feb. 8, 1843; Calhoun to Hammond, Nov. 27, 1842, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 519-22. Calhoun regarded the Mercury's role in the forthcoming campaign as an important one. Referring to the announcement of his candidacy, the retiring Senator said "Much will depend on the notice that . . . the Mercury may take of it" (Calhoun to Hammond, Nov. 27, 1842, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 519).
the Senator's forces in South Carolina for the task. Others like Colonel Elmore, president of the state bank, Dixon H. Lewis, Elmore's brother-in-law who was also an influential Congressman from Alabama, and Robert M. T. Hunter of Virginia, lately Speaker of the House of Representatives, contributed to Calhoun's chances by contacting favorably disposed politicians in other states.  

The plan of the Calhoun backers called for South Carolina to play a quiet role lest she frighten away support from other parts of the country. With this in mind, it was decided that Calhoun's formal nomination would be made by a legislature other than South Carolina's. Unfortunately for this plan, the effort of the Calhounites to placate South Carolina Unionists did not prove wholly successful; Governor Richardson relayed details of the nomination strategy to Van Buren's confidant, Joel Poinsett, and the machinations of the Van Buren machine may be supposed to have foiled the Calhoun intentions.  

---

28 George R. McFarlane to R. B. Rhett, June 6, 1841, Richardson to Rhett, May 17, 1842, E. J. (illegible) to Elizabeth Rhett, July 8, 1842, R. M. T. Hunter to R. B. Rhett, Sept. 25, 1842, Wm. A. Elmore to Rhett, Nov. 10, 1842, Rhett Collection; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 89-90; Capers, Calhoun Opportunist, 203-05; White, Rhett, 57; Matthew A. Fitzsimmons, "Calhoun's Bid for the Presidency, 1841-1844," MVHR, XXXVIII, No. 1 (June, 1951), 45; Calhoun to Hammond, Sept. 24, 1841, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 489-93. Wiltse says that Calhoun undoubtedly indicated the tone he wanted the Charleston Mercury ... to take" (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 89; see also Calhoun to A. Rhett, Sept. 27, 1843, Rhett Collection).

29 Francis Pickens to Calhoun, Oct. 12, 1841, Charles S. Boucher and Robert P. Brooks, ed., Correspondence Addressed to Calhoun (Washington, 1940), 163-64, hereinafter cited as Boucher, ed., Correspondence to Calhoun; Stuart to Calhoun, Nov. 19, 1841, Calhoun Papers; F. H. Elmore to R. B. Rhett, Jan. 11, 1843, Stuart to Rhett, Jan. 9, 11, 1843, Rhett Collection; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 89-92. The original intention of the Calhoun party was for the Georgia legislature to nominate the Carolinian. South Carolina

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
event it was left to the General Assembly of South Carolina to make the nomination.\textsuperscript{30}

There was one serious obstacle in the way of victory for the Carolinian. Political trends indicated a Democratic victory in 1844; if Calhoun could secure the nomination, he was virtually assured of election. But the manner of selecting delegates to the Democratic convention would have the distinct effect of favoring Van Buren. Customarily, delegates were chosen by majority vote of state conventions; they were also pledged to vote by the unit rule which gave the entire state delegation to one man. As matters stood in 1843, Van Buren

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{30}The General Assembly had a busy time of it in 1842. Not only did Calhoun have to be replaced but so also did Preston who had resigned for reasons quite different from those of the senior Senator (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 89-92; White, Rhett, 57-58). Preston, by remaining firmly in the Whig camp when Calhoun signalled a return to the Democrats brought the full wrath of the Calhoun forces down on his head. He was so completely defeated in the process that by 1842 Pierce Butler, once his friend, called him the "deadest" man in Congress. Preston was not even denounced at the July fourth gatherings in 1842 (Lander, "Calhoun-Preston Feud," SCHM, LIX, No. 1, 36-37). Then there was the gubernatorial election. George McDuffie, the Nullifier and Daniel Huger, a Unionist, were sent to the Senate. Rhett who had expected Huger's seat was sacrificed in a further attempt to placate the Unionists and thus assure unity in South Carolina. Rhett incorrectly blamed Pickens for this development, contributing thereby to a subsequent rift in the Calhoun camp. Hammond became governor.
\end{flushright}
could command small majorities in enough states to deny Calhoun the nomination. Consequently the Carolinian's forces proposed a change in electoral procedure, but in the process impaled themselves on the horns of a dilemma.  

Free-trade sentiment was strong in the northern commercial cities; delegates from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia who were not bound by a unit rule could prevent a protectionist from being nominated. Barring complications, such a situation would be favorable to Calhoun. His planners counted on being able to carry the South. There was also some contention as to when the nomination convention should meet. Van Buren wished to call the convention for November but the Calhounites favored a date in the late spring. By that time the Congressional session would have ended and Van Buren's forces in Congress would have been forced to take a position on the recently enacted Whig tariff.

On January 25, 1843, the Mercury published an "Appeal to the Democratic Party on the Principles of a National Convention for the Nomination of President and Vice-President of the United States." Its author was Rhett. Circulated also in pamphlet form, this document contended—quite curiously for both Calhoun and the Mercury—that the Constitution meant for the President to be elected not by

---

31 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 109-10; White, Rhett, 60-61.

32 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 109-10; White, Rhett, 61. Calhoun's position on the date of the convention was dictated by some of his radical partisans at the South. They would agree to support no one whose followers did not vote to repeal the tariff of 1842. By scheduling the convention after the Congressional session, they could determine Van Buren's tariff stance (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 109).
the states but by the people. The presidency was a popular office which represented every American, Rhett said. Reminding his readers that Andrew Jackson had once proposed a constitutional amendment that would authorize the President's being directly elected by the people, Rhett concluded that the aged Tennessean had been right. Adoption by the Democratic party of the district system would accomplish this purpose. Suggesting that congressional districts should choose their own representatives to the nominating convention, Rhett contended that these representatives should be able to vote as individuals rather than being bound by the then existing unit rule. This system would make the selection of the nominee truly an exercise of the will of the people.

Robert Barnwell Rhett had declared himself to be in favor of democracy, the Mercury's age-old enemy of majority rule. But if the editor choked upon receipt of the "Appeal," there was not even a hint of disapproval in the paper. Defending the "Appeal" on both practical and ideological grounds, the Mercury said that the district system as advocated by Rhett provided the best means for destroying Van Buren's machine. Delegates should be elected by Congressional districts and should also vote as individuals. The unit rule was denounced as undemocratic; it should be discarded, said the Mercury. Rhett's method was not only more democratic but it also protected the right of the minority from abuse by the larger and more populous states.33

It was seldom that this journal of South Carolina gentlemen took a stand in defense of popular government; indeed, it had never happened before. But the Mercury spoke in just such a manner in 1843. Nor was response in South Carolina long in manifesting itself. Mass meetings endorsed Rhett's proposal while a state convention recommended it to other states. Calhoun himself, however, had some trouble swallowing all its implications and was obliged to equivocate on the issues raised by the "Appeal" on more than one occasion. When the question of whether this method was consistent with state rights was raised, a Mercury correspondent provided the answer. The whole question of the selection of delegates as well as of the date of the convention should be left to the states, he said. Calhoun gratefully accepted his reasoning.\(^{34}\)

Not unnaturally, the Van Buren camp was as quick to oppose this proposal of the Calhounites as it was to question the extent of

\(^{34}\)White, Rhett, 63; Mercury, July 19, Aug. 17, 28, 1843. Calhoun's explanation of the district system sometimes ran directly contrary to Rhett's. Under the current convention system, Calhoun said, the most populous states controlled the election of the president. Since they already determined the make-up of the House of Representatives, they had, by the convention system, destroyed the balance in government. The district plan, Calhoun continued, would restore the balance by increasing the power of the less populous areas. Yet Rhett had based his argument on the will of the majority. A frustrated Rhett admitted that the explanations did not "reach the popular mind" (White, Rhett, 63).
South Carolina's conversion to democracy. But the advantage was with Van Buren since it was Calhoun who was proposing the change. Van Buren's own position on the date of the convention was not so advantageous. If the convention were delayed, he would lose support in one or another sections of the country, regardless of the position his followers took in Congress. Naturally, then, he favored an early meeting of the convention, one which would precede the congressional session. In an effort to distract public attention from his predicament, Van Buren charged Calhoun's forces with insincerity to the Democracy. Contending that the Calhounites would only support the party if Calhoun were the candidate, Van Buren's followers called upon Calhoun himself for an answer. The Carolinian replied that he did not doubt the loyalty of his friends to the party. They would abide by the decision of any convention that was "fairly called and fairly constituted that would allow ample time for the full development of public opinion and would represent fully, equally, and fairly, the voice of the majority of the people." The Mercury dutifully added this qualified pledge to its banner, the ensign of the campaign.35

Once the Mercury declared its formal endorsement of Calhoun's candidacy on February 8, 1843, it devoted more of its space to attacks upon Van Buren than to praise of the Senator. Calhoun's virtues were too well known in South Carolina to require much comment. While Van Buren was personally acceptable to the Mercury, his friends were suspected of hostility to the South. They were, in fact, often unsound on both slavery and the tariff. If Van Buren's own opposition to "the

35Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 110; Mercury, Feb. 8, July 26, 1843.
injustice and inequality" of protection was obvious, it was also
equivocal in that it rested "not upon the rock of the Constitution
but upon the faithless and capricious sands of policy and expediency."
This might well make him vulnerable to unsound party factions, the
editor feared. Never much troubled by charges of inconsistency, the
Mercury now called it "miserable childish folly" to blame the 1840 de-
feat—as it had done at that time—on the deceit of the despised Whigs.
Now blaming the defeat on Van Buren's "own want of manliness and elevation in statesmanship," the Mercury asserted that never "in the hearts of the people," could he awaken any enthusiastic support.  

Calhoun, on the other hand, would be supported by all the
Democrats of 1840 in addition to the many Southerners who did not and
would not vote for Van Buren. Mass meetings for the Carolinian in
New York City indicated more support for Calhoun even there than for
Van Buren. "... Indications [were] thronging in from all quarters, South, North, East and West, that ... the people," were "insisting ... to be led by the only man upon whom every Democrat in the Union can rally with enthusiastic confidence. ..." Throughout 1843 this official voice of the candidate proclaimed that it was John C. Cal-
houn, "the man for the crisis." 

36Mercury, Jan. 19, 23, 27, 28, Feb. 16, 17, 23, Apr. 3, 8, 17, 18, 20, 24, 25, May 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 17, 18, 19, 20, July 4, Aug. 2, 9, 17, Sept. 4, 12, 13, 14, 20, Oct. 3, 5, 15, 16, 26, Nov. 10, 16, 1843. The editor noted with some unease that Van Buren's friends were attacking Calhoun's views on slavery. Still, the Mercury felt that the country wanted no more wavering candidates and would support a "cast iron" man like Calhoun (ibid., Feb. 17, Apr. 8, 1843).

The Mercury's prediction was more optimistic than credible. During the spring of 1843 the Virginia state convention declined to follow Rhett's proposal for selecting delegates to the national nominating convention. In what was an even greater victory for the Van Buren group, Virginia also decided that "any individual, however eminent," who did not support the nominee of the national convention in the general election was no longer a Democrat. New York, Tennessee, and Missouri followed the example of the Old Dominion in rejecting the Rhett proposals. The Calhoun forces did win on one of their contentions, however. The nominating convention would meet in the spring. This was an empty victory as matters stood by October, 1843. With Van Buren triumphant in four important states, Calhoun had no chance to win the nomination from a regularly constituted Democratic convention. 38

On December 21, 1843, the former Senator, acknowledging that Van Buren men would control the Democratic Convention, withdrew his name from consideration by that body. It was a conditional withdrawal; he could not, he was careful to say, permit his name to go before a convention so constituted. Putting these sentiments into the form of a letter, Calhoun sent one copy to the South Carolina Central Committee in Charleston and another to the state's senators in Washington. After having consulted the committee, the Mercury concluded that the terms of the letter should be honored. 39

38 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalists, 134-36; White, Rhett, 63; Capers, Calhoun: Opportunist, 206-07. New York acted to retain the convention procedure in September.

39 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalists, 147-48; White, Rhett, 65-67; Capers, Calhoun: Opportunist, 207-08; Mercury, Jan. 27, Feb. 15, Aug. 30, 1844.
The issue of January 27, 1844, was conspicuous by the absence of Calhoun's banner at its masthead. Two days later, in an editorial that endorsed the sometime Senator's creed as "the ground of our support of him and . . . the condition of our assent to the election of any man to the Presidency," the Mercury officially announced Calhoun's withdrawal as a candidate. Calhoun's supporters from outside the state faithfully followed suit and hauled down their colors also. Neither they nor the Mercury realized that the intentions of the complex Carolinian had been misread.¹⁰

Calhoun was not pleased by the Mercury's action and hastily wrote acting editor Clapp with instructions to correct his misinterpretation. He had intended only to withdraw his candidacy for the Democratic nomination, Calhoun informed the wayward editor. He might yet run for the presidency as an independent.

For some time Calhoun's supporters had discussed this possibility. A candidacy uncommitted to either of the national tickets might deny both regular candidates a majority and throw the election into the House of Representatives. This proposal did not command the support of the whole Calhoun party, however. Rhett, who still had his hopes in the Democratic party—where Calhoun had placed them—joined Elmore to oppose such a move. The Congressman expected Van Buren to be defeated in the forthcoming election and the Democrats

¹⁰Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 134; R. M. T. Hunter to Calhoun, Feb. 6, 1844, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, II, 927-31. Hunter's letter was written to explain why Virginia assumed that Calhoun was no longer a candidate. "Such seemed to be the position of the Mercury," he said, "which seemed to us the true position." See also Hunter to R. B. Rhett, Feb., 1966, Rhett Collection.
to nominate Calhoun in 1848. While Rhett's view carried with the Central Committee—and the Mercury—it still left the Calhounites divided among themselves. Calhoun lent his support to those opposing Rhett. Led by Francis Pickens this group urged the Committee to reverse itself partially. In response to this pressure, the Committee agreed that South Carolina would boycott the Democratic Convention, preserving thereby the opportunity to support Calhoun at a later date.41

The Mercury supported the new policy and so did Rhett. There was an impression about, however, that the Calhoun connection with the paper was flowing more and more through the channel prescribed by Robert Barnwell Rhett. Nor was this a wholly unfounded assumption, although its full significance would not be apparent until after the election. For the time being the Mercury was as regular as ever in its support of the Calhoun version of South Carolina Orthodoxy. Calhoun was no stronger in his condemnation of the Baltimore convention than was the Mercury. "[I]rrconciliably opposed" to that body, editor Clapp approved the decision of the South Carolina Central Committee to send no delegates and asserted that the Mercury would

---

41 White, Rhett, 65-67; Pickens to Calhoun, Mar. 3, 1844, Hammond to Calhoun, May 10, 1844, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, II, 933-34, 953-54; Mercury, Feb. 15, Aug. 30, 1844. Clapp, still acting for Stuart, accompanied the Mercury announcement of Calhoun's withdrawal as a candidate with a letter from Calhoun to the Committee. It gave Calhoun's reasons "for withholding his name as a candidate for the Presidency from the Convention." The letter was ambiguous in its wording and was, as Calhoun's reaction indicated, intended to leave him with room for maneuver. Clapp acted for Stuart during most of this period. He was assisted by Albert Rhett until the latter's death in the fall of 1843 (Albert Rhett to Calhoun, Sept. 5, 12, 15, 18, 19, 24, 25, 1843, Calhoun to Albert Rhett, Sept. 27, 1843, Calhoun Papers; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 144).
support the Democratic nominee only if he endorsed "the principles which we hold above party." Van Buren's friends did not meet this standard; they looked daily more dangerous on the tariff issue.\footnote{Mercury, Jan. 29, 30, Feb. 2, 29, Mar. 1, 2, 12, 19, Apr. 25, 30, May 1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 10, 1844.}

The Texas issue brought forth new \textit{Mercury} doubts as to the candidates. Van Buren himself opposed annexation and was largely responsible, the \textit{Mercury} believed, for defeat of the annexation treaty. Although Tyler was guiltless of the Whig's unworthy charges, he could hardly be admitted into "full communion" with the Democracy. His economic cooperation with the Whigs was not forgotten and should not be forgiven, the editor reminded his readers. Regular Whigs were beyond the \textit{Mercury}'s consideration. However Van Buren's future course might wander, he could do no more than bring himself "down to the level of the Whigs in treachery and turpitude."\footnote{Ibid., Aug. 20, Sept. 11, 13, 15, 16, 18, 21, Oct. 22, Dec. 16, 1841; Mar. 11, July 4, 19, Aug. 13, Nov. 25, Dec. 12, 1842; Feb. 16, Apr. 8, June 14, 19, 22, 29, July 1, 10, 24, Aug. 4, 9, Sept. 4, Dec. 9, 1843; Jan. 4, 26, 29, Feb. 2, 29, Mar. 12, 20, Apr. 25, 30, May 1, 2, 6, 27, 29, June 11, Aug. 24, 1844. The \textit{Mercury} denounced Clay's position on Texas with even more vigor than it put into its attacks on Van Buren (\textit{Ibid.}, Apr. 30, May 1, 27, 29, 1844.)

The hopes of those favoring an independent candidacy for Calhoun were destined to be titillated just once more. On February 28, 1844, Secretary of State Abel P. Upshur was killed by an explosion in \textit{USS Princeton}, the Navy's proudest, newest battleship. One week later President Tyler nominated Calhoun to fill Upshur's position; Calhoun, the President believed, would succeed in annexing Texas. For a time the hopes of Calhoun's supporters revived. Van Buren and Clay
had both come out in opposition to annexation; a stand for it by Calhoun might revive his candidacy. The nomination was confirmed by the Senate and Calhoun accepted the post. Proceeding to the capital by way of Charleston, the new secretary boarded ship there for the remainder of the journey. As the vessel in which he was embarked steamed across the harbor, a revenue cutter, USS Van Buren, pulled alongside and its crew gave three cheers for Calhoun. The Mercury thought this was a good omen.44

But Calhoun's campaign was beyond the aid of omens. Calhoun concentrated on the problems of being Secretary of State and watched the major parties. When Van Buren defected on the Texas question, Jackson urged James K. Polk of Tennessee to try for the nomination. In a compromise decision this other Tennessean was selected and Calhoun concluded to support the party.45

For the first time just the shadow of a doubt crept into the faces of those readers of the Mercury who were accustomed to finding the views of the great Carolinian reflected in its pages. The Mercury had not really deserted the cause but it did not speak of Polk's capability with that assurance party counsels would have preferred. The initial news of Polk's nomination did excite a brief confidence in the

44Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 159-65; Fitzsimmons, "Calhoun's Bid for the Presidency," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXVIII, No. 1, 52-60, hereinafter cited as MVHR; Mercury, Mar. 28, 1844.

45Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 165, 172-86; Capers, Calhoun: Opportunist, 208. Laura White implies that Calhoun might still have had a chance for the nomination had South Carolina attended the Democratic convention. Van Buren's position on Texas provided the opportunity. Differences in Calhoun's own camp had left it unorganized, however, and it was Polk who profited from the new situation (White, Rhett, 66).
Democracy, however. Polk would "unite the strength and rouse the spirit of the country," Clapp told his readers. He also believed that the Democratic candidate would also receive "the hearty support of the state." But Clapp soon became suspicious of Polk's tariff stance. More and more, the Mercury saw appearances of his having "gone over to the enemy." Polk's position looked like that of all those others who approved "the present Black Tariff of 1842." Although Polk was sound on slavery, stood for annexation, and was preferable generally to Clay, the Democratic candidate received only lukewarm support from the Mercury. For once the paper was not speaking for Calhoun. Party leaders in the state talked with confidence of both the Democratic platform and nominee. Popular support likewise exceeded that of the Mercury. Clay, for his part, stirred little interest in South Carolina even after he paid a visit to Charleston. Speaking of the strange crowd of curiosity-seekers that turned out for him, the Mercury contrasted it with the spontaneity of those who always came to hear Calhoun. There was no press endorsement of Clay, not even from the Courier. Clearly unexcited about the forthcoming election, the Mercury for a time played the role of champion without a cause.

Mercury, Dec. 1, 2, 11, 14, 28, 29, 1843; Jan. 4, 9, 31, Feb. 5, 6, 7, 12, Mr. 1, 20, Apr. 2, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 16, 22, 23, 25, 29, May 1, 28, 30, June 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 13, 19, July 17, 19, 22, 25, 26, 27, 29, 31, Aug. 1, 5, 7, 20, 21, 24, Sept. 17, 18, 23, 26, Oct. 1, 5, 17, 18, 30, Nov. 12, 18, 1844; Courier, Jan. 27, 29, Apr. 5, June 3, 26, July 10, Nov. 12, 1844; Patriot, Aug. 19, 1844.
CHAPTER V

IMPATIENT PRODIGAL

The Mercury's curious apathy toward the election of 1844 signified political uncertainty. Calhoun, the architect of South Carolina Orthodoxy, had decreed that his state should throw her full weight behind the Democratic candidate's bid for the presidency. Yet the Mercury could only damn that candidate with faint praise. Polk's election, the unenthusiastic editor said, was preferable to that of the Whig, Henry Clay.\(^1\) Clapp's tepid response to Calhoun's directive was startling and unexpected; so equivocal an endorsement was—for the Mercury—no endorsement at all. The hitherto loyal journal was clearly ignoring at least the spirit of party orders, an action that implied a declaration of editorial independence. The resulting dissolution of a long-term alliance loomed as a distinct possibility.

The question of Polk's fitness or unfitness for high office was hardly sufficient to destroy an alliance that had endured for greater crises in times past. For more than twenty years, agile Mercury editors had trimmed their sails to fit the winds of Calhoun strategy; indeed, they had willingly made their paper into the enthusiastic "house organ"\(^2\) of Calhoun. Henry Laurens Pinckney

\(^{1}\)Mercury, Aug. 1, 7, Sept. 3, 1844.

\(^{2}\)The term "house organ" is from Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 190.
inaugurated the policy in 1823 when he wrote the Mercury endorsement of Calhoun's first attempt at the presidential nomination. Pinckney retreated from nationalism with Calhoun; he followed, then doubted, and finally condemned Jackson with Calhoun. And the Mercury was among the most loyal of those who supported nullification.

John Allan Stuart's editorial loyalty to Calhoun exceeded even that of his predecessor Pinckney's. It was Stuart who committed the Mercury to support Calhoun's post-nullification strategy of an aggressive southern resistance to outside attacks on the South's slave-oriented agrarianism. From time to time Stuart had misunderstood tactical deployments in pursuit of the strategic goal; he had even thought as he evidently presumed Calhoun to be thinking. But the orthodox editor was never guilty of independence. Careful to avoid any action that could be interpreted as disloyal, Stuart could be blamed for nothing more than impetuosity.

Stuart's own support of Calhoun's policy was made firmer by Robert Barnwell Rhett's adherence to the senior Senator's party. The result of his intellect and of his power over South Carolina Orthodoxy, Calhoun's influence on the Mercury was less direct than Rhett's. As Stuart's brother-in-law, Rhett was a member of the family of the paper; he exercised thereby a tie not to be taken lightly in South Carolina. Since Rhett considered Calhoun to be his "political

3See above, 45-64.

4Mercury, Sept. 12, 13, 14, 20, Oct. 2, 4, 1837; Jan. 5, July 21, 25, 1838; see above, III.

5Rhett was also financially involved in the Mercury. The extent of his investment is unclear, nor is it certain that it existed from the beginning of Stuart's editorship; see below, 184, n.1, 223.
father," however, there was little reason for *Mercury* readers even to be aware of Rhett's position. When the Congressman's own ideas ran contrary to those of Calhoun, the influence of the latter prevailed with both Rhett and the *Mercury.*

After 1837, when he made his entry into national politics, Rhett served as the *Mercury's* most direct liaison with Calhoun, and was an increasingly important contact. Rhett rose steadily in Calhoun's estimation. His only weakness was an earlier tendency toward extremism. He had once talked of disunion. After five years in Washington, however, Rhett's disposition to be radical had abated somewhat. When it did assert itself, it took the form of nullification as outlined by Calhoun. By 1842 Stuart's brother-in-law enjoyed enough of the Senator's confidence to become a manager of Calhoun's campaign for the presidency. Rhett also acted as editor for the presidential aspirant's Washington organ, the *Spectator.* The occupancy of positions of such import is indicative of Calhoun's high regard for Rhett's ideas as well as for his judgment. Both the importance and the intimacy of the *Mercury's* association with the

---

6 Rhett was probably the source of Stuart's sometime impetuosity. It is certain that Calhoun either thought so or expected Rhett to restrain Stuart. When in 1838, for example, the paper followed Calhoun from the Whigs back to the Democrats, Stuart exceeded Calhoun's desires in praising the *Mercury's* new allies. Rhett, who was likewise too enthusiastic, received a letter of admonition from Calhoun. The Senator criticised Rhett's action and advised him to restrain the *Mercury* as well (Calhoun to Rhett, Sept. 13, 1838, Jameson, ed., *Calhoun Correspondence*, 399-400; see above, 118-19.

guiding force of South Carolina politics were increased thereby. Clearly then Rhett played an ever larger role in interpreting the Mercury's traditional allegiance to Calhoun.

When it became apparent in the fall of 1843 that Calhoun could not be nominated by the Democrats, it was Rhett who counselled caution. He argued against an independent campaign for Calhoun with the latter's own logic. By remaining within the ranks of the Democratic party, the South would yet see the restoration of the Compromise of 1833. Van Buren, furthermore, could not win the election and the Democrats would turn to Calhoun in 1848.8

Calhoun's advisers were not unanimous in endorsing this approach. The recent candidate's own support for it was unenthusiastic and reluctant. In the long run it was Rhett's position that prevailed, however, and Calhoun himself belatedly endorsed it. But as the campaign progressed, the blight of political doubt, verging perhaps on distrust, cast its shadow over the intimacy between Calhoun and Rhett.9 The shadow was a long one and in combination with other political developments would have its effect on the future course of the Mercury.

With Calhoun's withdrawal as a candidate for the Democratic

8White, Rhett, 64-66; see above, 151-52.

9Ibid., 61, 64-66; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 109. White indicates that Francis Pickens was involved in the gradually developing coolness between Calhoun and Rhett. Pickens held Rhett responsible for Pickens' own failure to be elected Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1839. White also feels that Pickens was jealous of the special favor with which his kinsman Calhoun regarded Rhett. Pickens was violently opposed to the Rhett-Elmore machine which urged loyalty to the party in 1844 and by the spring of 1844 Calhoun's kinsman appears to have displaced Rhett as principal adviser to Calhoun (White, Rhett, 46, 56, 57, 58, 65-67).
nomination, the scene of the political affray was transferred to Washington. The Calhoun forces had won a part of their battle over the nominating convention; it would be convened in May as they had wished. Thus delayed, the convention would give the Democrats in Congress a chance to prove the sincerity of their pledge to reform the tariff. They would also be afforded the opportunity to prove their continued reliability on the subject of slavery. Expecting the Abolitionists to present the usual petitions to abolish the peculiar institution in Washington and restrict it elsewhere, Calhoun's following demanded further assurance that the Van Buren men would remain faithful to the "gag rule." If the Van Buren camp failed to meet the test of acceptability on either the tariff or slavery, the New Yorker would presumably lose the nomination. The Calhounites also planned to unite all those House Democrats who were either opposed to or lukewarm in their support for Van Buren. Aided by the Whigs they would then organize the House around Calhoun men. In the disorder resulting from such a defeat, the Van Buren machine could well fail to maintain control of the forthcoming convention and Calhoun might yet win the nomination.  

The session got off to a most unpromising start. Due partially to division within the Calhoun ranks, Van Buren's forces swept away all opposition to win every House office. Once the House was called to order, John Quincy Adams offered a set of resolutions from the Massachusetts legislature which proposed to abolish the three-fifths compromise. Slaves, the resolution contended, should not be

---

10 White, Rhett, 63-65; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 109-10.
counted for apportionment purposes. With the support of Van Buren Democrats, the resolutions were referred to committee. The Van Bureni
tes had actually initiated the objectionable resolutions since they controlled the Massachusetts legislature. Hard on the heels of this disturbing news came the report that the House Committee on Rules—with the affirmative vote of two Van Buren Democrats—proposed to eliminate all barriers to the discussion of slavery. The unpromising start was evolving into an unsatisfactory performance.\textsuperscript{11}

On the recommendation of the rules committee, for two months the House postponed a decision. Then on February 28 it voted to retain the gag rule. Despite the fact that the Democrats were present in a large majority, this motion was carried by only one vote. There seemed to be no doubting that Van Buren Democrats were proving themselves unreliable by reneging on their pledges. Far from being routed, the New Yorker's forces were dominating the session. In spite of the "resistless stream of eloquence" that Rhett "poured out" in opposition, two internal improvements bills also passed the House. The Lowcountryman's confidence in the Democracy was shaken, perhaps mortally.\textsuperscript{12}

There was also the matter of the tariff. Rhett and others among the Calhounites had urged that their remaining within the Democratic party offered the best assurance of a tariff for revenue only. Van Buren men would be obliged to pay this price for Calhoun's support. Reluctantly agreeing to this approach, Calhoun had admonished that

\textsuperscript{11}White, \textit{Rhett}, 64-65; Wiltse, \textit{Calhoun Sectionalist}, 172-73.

"Nothing ought to be taken but performance." As Rhett accepted Calhoun's advice, he expected that his mentor's patience would be rewarded by a low tariff.\textsuperscript{13}

In late February, 1844, the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, James I. McKay of North Carolina, showed the Democratic party's tariff proposal to Rhett. Already alarmed by the fight over the rules, the latter was incensed by the bill. He conveyed his reaction to Calhoun, predicting that the bill would "be the grave of the free trade cause forever." Warning that "... a protective tariff ... made by the Whigs, and only modified by the Democrats," would be construed as a surrender of the free trade principle by both parties, he asked for Calhoun's advice on how to proceed. Calhoun agreed with Rhett and so informed Senator McDuffie, who had endorsed the McKay bill. McDuffie's protesting reply goes far to explain some of the origins of Calhoun's reservations about Rhett.

Assuring the recent presidential candidate that, excepting Rhett "and perhaps Holmes," the whole South Carolina delegation disagreed with Calhoun "as to the propriety of supporting" the McKay bill, the irate McDuffie first delivered himself of a diatribe on Rhett:

\begin{quote}
And frankness requires me to say ... that I now regret as I have long done that you have made such a man as Rhett your confidential adviser. You could not have selected a worse. ... He is vain, self conceited, impracticable and selfish in the extreme, and by his ridiculous ambition to lead and dictate in everything, has rendered himself odious in Congress and in the State. I know of no man who is injuring you so much. Everything he does in Congress and writes in the Spectator is ascribed to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13}White, Rhett, 68; Calhoun to R. M. T. Hunter, Feb. 1, 1844, Jameson, ed., \textit{Calhoun Correspondence}, 563.
you. . . . I think the Spectator should be stopped.14

In the meantime, without awaiting the advice he had requested from the mentor from whom he would soon part, Rhett demanded a better tariff measure of Van Buren. The price of the New Yorker's refusal would be disruption of the party, Rhett threatened. Van Buren refused, nonetheless. And McDuffie was correct in his analysis of the South Carolina delegation; Rhett was in an isolated, if articulate, position. Fortunately for the divided Calhoun following, their leader was appointed to Tyler's cabinet. The appointment was confirmed by the Senate and accepted by the former Senator. On March 29, 1844, the new Secretary of State arrived in Washington where he not only undertook his new duties but resumed command of his bickering followers.15

Determining that the main energy of his party be reserved for the forthcoming vote on Texas, Calhoun directed that the McKay bill be supported as the best available compromise. Rhett obeyed orders and "in a brilliant speech" proclaimed to the House that the McKay bill must be accepted as the first installment in payment of the Democratic party's tariff pledge. While Calhoun completed the Texas treaty, Rhett urged its support in the Spectator. In phrases the Mercury would echo, he said the issue was Texas or disunion.16


15 White, Rhett, 70; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 163-65.

16 White, Rhett, 71; see above, IV.
Van Buren's rejection of annexation followed by a widespread revolt against his candidacy made for the next development in the unwinding of this significant session. Carolinians denied that they were responsible for the revolt against Van Buren, but his furious supporters rejected their protestations and voted to table even the controversial McKay bill. An even more vigorous battle followed over Texas, accompanied by the usual calls for a southern convention should annexation fail. When exactly that fate befell this proposal of the frustrated Calhounites, Rhett's faith in the Democracy was shattered. The party which he had supported since 1838 because of its defense of those two goals of the South, free trade and slavery, had deserted its program; Rhett now proposed to desert it.

Robert Barnwell Rhett had been an apt pupil of Calhoun as his conduct would soon indicate. He reasoned that the South was aroused as never before; she would at last unite on the question of Texas. Gathering the South Carolina delegation, Rhett proposed to submit an address to the people of South Carolina similar in content to the one of 1832. There was no other solution, he said. If the South could not force the Democratic party to live up to its obligations before the election, new and more vigorous pressure must be applied. Calhoun should not be bothered since he was a member of the government "with which it was proposed to bring South Carolina

---

17 White, Rhett, 70-71; The southern convention proposals were the result of Calhoun's strategy to unite the South. There was more response to the calls over Texas than there had been over any other issue. Polk's candidacy and the Democratic platform plant on Texas convinced Calhoun that this was not the time to act outside the party. Consequently, he deprecated further talk of convention activity. He feared it might endanger Polk's election. See also R. W. Barnwell to Rhett, May 5, Robert D. Owen to Rhett, July 1, 1844, Rhett Collection.
into conflict." He might have added that the action he was proposing was inspired by an earlier move of the current Secretary of State. The delegation agreed with Rhett's plan, but Senator Huger insisted that Calhoun be informed of their intentions.\textsuperscript{18}

Accepting Huger's condition, South Carolina's representatives invited Calhoun to meet with them. There was little reason to expect his view to differ from theirs; as recently as 1842 he had talked of state action on the tariff and it was Calhoun who both attached and maintained the condition of performance to South Carolina's allegiance to the Democracy. The Secretary accepted the invitation and surprised the delegation with his reaction to their proposal. Polk represented the best hope for Texas annexation, an all-important goal, Calhoun said. No radical action must jeopardize victory for the Tennessean. Calhoun's disapproval of Rhett's proposal was as final as it was surprising. That ended the matter, or so it was thought.\textsuperscript{19}

When the congressional session ended on June 17, Rhett did not join the South Carolina delegation in its return home. This was a small matter; he had been in the state during May and his political base was secure. Of far greater consequence was his decision to act independently of the delegation's acceptance of Calhoun's direction. Rhett concluded instead to inform his constituents of his own impression of their proper political course. He viewed the situation in exactly the same way he had before Calhoun convinced the delegation to remain

\textsuperscript{18}White, Rhett, 72; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 187-88.

\textsuperscript{19}White, Rhett, 72-73; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 187-88.
with the party. The ironic wheel had "come full circle." Only a few months earlier it was Rhett who urged Calhoun to leave his hopes with the Democrats; Calhoun was now returning the advice. For the first time Rhett ignored Calhoun's counsel to proceed in spite of rather than with his "political father."

Having made his difficult decision, Rhett prepared an address to his constituents. It recited the dangers confronting the South from the action of the previous session of Congress. The matter of the tariff demanded immediate rectification, Rhett said. South Carolina had warned that unless Congress moved she would do so. The state must now prove herself to be as good as her word—and she must do it alone. A convention should be called—this would "place the State in an attitude of Sovereignty"—for the following April. By that time the election would be over and so would another session of Congress. If by then events had moved to mollify southern fears, the convention could adjourn without action. Rhett wrote from Washington, and the Mercury published his address without comment on June 27. His proposal was also distributed in pamphlet form. There was no mistaking the implication of it all; Calhoun had been defied.

In July, Rhett returned to South Carolina where the consequences of his action were dividing the party. Toasts on July 4, one of which hailed Rhett as "the invincible sentinel on the Watch Tower of Liberty," rang with defiance. Party leaders, initially inclined to ignore Rhett's revolt, were obliged instead to enter the

---

20 White, Rhett, 72-73.

21 Mercury, June 27, 1844; White, Rhett, 73.
fray. As the Courier castigated "disunionism" Whigs gleefully endorsed Calhoun's position in an effort to embarrass Democrats.

Rhett's manifesto was received with especial enthusiasm by his Bluffton constituents. They gave a dinner in his honor on July 31. His "thrilling eloquence" on that occasion served to launch the "Bluffton Movement." Throughout the district Rhett was welcomed by audiences who heard him promise "a glorious triumph" in return for resistance to Yankee oppression. The Calhoun men had their hands full.22

Throughout it all the Mercury was strangely silent. Becalmed in an eerie political sea that promised to become stormy without notice, the editor must have agonized as to which course he must take. Would the Mercury continue to steer by Calhoun's star or come about to guide on a rebelling satellite? The uncertain editor's decision would be the most significant for the Mercury since 1823. Similar dilemmas had confronted others in the state during the Mercury's twenty years of unwavering loyalty to Calhoun. South Carolina politics was dotted with the wrecks of the careers of those who had made the wrong choice. The fate of William Smith, Henry Laurens Pinckney, William Campbell Preston, and James J. Hamilton, Jr., furnished eloquent evidence of the importance of the Mercury's inevitable decision. The editor was not unaware of his predicament. "In all times past," said the Mercury on September 3, 1844, almost a month after its awesome decision had been made, "no public man in this state has ever pitted himself in direct hostility to Calhoun who has not fallen for it."23

22White, Rhett, 73-74; Mercury, July 15, 1844; Courier, June 27, 29, July 12, 1844.

23Mercury, Sept. 3, 1844.
The *Mercury*’s initial indecision was aggravated by the absence of Stuart. Clapp was doubtless reluctant to commit the journal on so momentous an issue without consulting his associate. He did make rather sympathetic references to the campaign of Stuart's brother-in-law as he inveighed against "those fatal influences . . . that are fast . . . eating out" the Union's foundation. Clapp also endorsed the correctness of the principle of state action, "Calhoun's great conservative remedy . . . in an extreme case," he took care to call it. But he was resigned to await the results of the general election when "the storm of party conflict" would have spent its "fury." The *Mercury*’s readers were not a little confused by all this caution. "Hampdem" inquired as to the necessity of bearing "the wrongs and the insults, the plunder and the degradation." The insistent contributor demanded to know "... what is the remedy" in a "tone that call[ed] for answer."

"Where is the *Mercury*?" cried "Cato!" "Never until now has its voice faltered." Gradually Clapp edged toward Rhett. On the first of August he observed that "But one influence—the interposition of this State" had ever brought down the tariff. Still, he said, state action should be the resort only when "all moderate means should be exhausted." And Clapp could not determine whether that had yet been done.  

Stuart's return removed Clapp from the horns of his dilemma. On August 7 the *Mercury* resoundingly sided with Rhett. Reviewing

24 *Ibid.*, July 10, 15, 16, 18, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, Aug. 1, 1844. Laura White's conclusion that Clapp at first "had only depreciating comment on Rhett's action" (White, *Rhett*, 73) does not hold up under analysis.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
at length the evils of the tariff and abolitionism, the paper concluded that "We must make the fight on the outer wall of the tariff... if we would defend successfully our slaveholding institutions."

The proceedings of the Bluffton dinner followed on the day after this manifesto. It was that affair that enlivened Rhett's call into a vigorous campaign for state action. Rhett was praised at dinners elsewhere and in the Mercury's pages. His followers rejoiced to be called the "Bluffton Boys" while Rhett was hailed as the "Brutus of 1844."25

The Mercury with Stuart at the helm reflected none of Clapp's past indecision. The greater battle for slavery was already underway; only tactical decisions were in dispute. A Democratic triumph at the forthcoming election would aid little in the fight, if at all, Stuart said. Carolinians could expect no southern convention; they must resort to "Separate State Action" or prepare for "hopeless submission." But Stuart was not wedded to the idea of a state convention. If some other means of state action were possible, "let it come," the editor said. He meant for it to come soon, however. It was "full time to be up and doing."

Stuart had made his position quite clear in his manifesto of August 7. The South must make the battle appear to be over the tariff, not slavery, the Mercury had warned on that day. The prophetic

25Mercury, Aug. 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 18, 28, 29, 30, 31, Sept. 5, 6, 12, 14, 16, 27, 30, 1844. Stuart wrote the editorial of August 7, in which he identified "Separate State Action" as "the only remedy left us..." Clapp's "fettered and embarrassed" indecision was evidently due only to Stuart's absence. After August 7 there was no major disagreement between them and editorials were usually unsigned. The declaration of August 7, however, was made over the initials of "J.A.S." (Ibid., Aug. 7, Sept. 4, 1844); Elmore to Calhoun, Aug. 26, 1844, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 967.
editorial had admonished Carolinians that "If we wait until abolition brings on the direct issue, it will be too late." The issue was as clear as it was immediate. Convinced as it was of the importance of its crusade, Stuart's Mercury was undisturbed by the charges of "disunion" which flew thick and fast. "Union as the first of considerations" was suited only for "serfs in soul and mercenaries of Yankeedom." There were few of such folk in South Carolina where "rights and liberties" meant more than political association.26

Stuart's new crusade brought forth a divided response from his rivals of the Charleston press. If the Patriot received the Courier's praise for "patriotic and sturdy Unionism," it, nonetheless agreed with Rhett as to "the magnitude and flagrancy of Southern Wrongs." The Courier coupled its declamations against "the effort to create another disturbance . . . with the General Government" with cries for loyalty to "CALHOUN AND UNION." This journal of Carolina Unionism tinged with Whiggery hurled daily abuse at the "Southern demagogue" and "his brother-in-law and trumpet of the Mercury."27

As usual, Stuart more than proved his adequacy in disputa-

tion. He sharply denied any desire to replace Calhoun's leadership with Rhett's. The doctrine of state action as preached by Rhett was

26Mercury, Aug. 7, 13, 23, Sept. 2, 9, 11, 13, 16, 20, 23, 1844. All unsigned editorials will be referred to in the text as though they were written by Stuart. While it is not certain that this is the case, it is certain that it was his return that committed the Mercury to the cause of his brother-in-law. The new policy, then, was Stuart's, at least in its origin.

pure Calhounism, Stuart reminded his readers. Advocated "without orders though it [might] be," it had produced a dispute "merely as to time and in no sort as to principle." That voice of Carolina Whiggery, the "great AH! HUM!," of the Charleston Courier disturbed Stuart not a bit. Mercury readers agreed with the editor. One contributor called the Courier "a traitor in the camp, while another praised "that bold thought and utterance which the country expected to hear" from the Mercury. Stuart's boldness of thought defended the "revolution to restore" against those perpetrating "flagrant abuse of the Compact." The "sleepless Sentinel upon the Watch-Tower of the Constitution" had returned to duty.28

The sentinel was sleepless, indeed, for it stood guard over a divided camp. The "Bluffton Boys" met with opposition not only from Carolina's powerless Whiggery but also from the badly split State Rights party itself. Charleston Congressman Isaac Holmes fell in with Rhett to urge "Resistance - combined Southern Resistance, if you can procure it. If not, then State Resistance" would do, he said. Governor Hammond also favored Rhett's policy but most of the state's leaders stood with Calhoun in support of the Polk candidacy. Calhoun himself was quietly attempting to localize Rhett's appeal. Protests came in from all sections of the country urging that South Carolina calm herself lest she jeopardize the much touted Democratic victory. Not unnaturally, Calhoun received much of the blame for

28 Mercury, July 15, 27, Aug. 12, 13, 22, 24, 27, Sept. 3, 4, 13, 18, 24, 27, 1844.

The Courier's endorsement of Calhoun's position ended an era in Carolina journalism. There were no significant moves against Calhoun in the Charleston press after 1844.
Rhett's agitation.  

The process of localization took many forms. James J. Hamilton, Jr., who had learned the futility of opposing Calhoun some years before, urged his home district of Colleton to stand with the rest of the state. The Polk forces had already capitalized on the earlier appeals for a southern convention by scheduling a giant rally of Democrats from North, South, and West for Nashville on August 15. Calhoun sent Pickens to represent South Carolina. The latter gentleman took Calhoun's assurances that nothing would come of Bluffton. In return for this he was instructed to secure Polk's pledge to lower the tariff; this would, Calhoun hoped, mollify the insurgents in South Carolina. Meanwhile, Franklin H. Elmore organized an assemblage of the Democracy in Charleston for August 19. The gathering reasserted its loyalty to Calhoun's leadership and pledged its support of Polk. One prominent casualty of the Bluffton Movement was the Rhett-Elmore in-state alliance; the machine had split. And neither Rhett nor Holmes was prepared to denounce the resolve of the assembled Democracy.

Calhoun's plan was working.  

---


Pickens returned in early September to report that Polk would not only restore the Compromise of 1833 but would also annex Texas. Rhett read the inevitable in these setbacks for his policy and in mid-September laid down his cudgels to return to Washington. On September 23 the *Mercury* reluctantly gave up the watch. The editor was "willing not to press the question now and . . . the more willingly inasmuch as we are assured that as soon as certain party objections are out of the way, all our friends of the State Rights party hold themselves pledged to State resistance. . . ." The *Mercury's* uncharacteristic revolt was ended by an unrepentant and conditional disengagement rather than by reconciliation or surrender. Calhoun, grateful for the returning calm, exhibited an equally uncharacteristic reaction; he exacted no retribution from the rebels; Rhett even returned to the *Spectator*. The Secretary did, however, assure a Northerner that the insurrection was over. "I had to act with great delicacy, but at the same time firmness," Calhoun said.31

Calhoun's assumption was premature. His old friend Langdon Cheves, who had long opposed nullification and radicalism generally, filled several columns of the *Mercury* with a letter ominous in its warning for the future. The South, Cheves said, must choose between abolition and secession. Although he abhorred both alternatives, Cheves preferred the latter to the former. Separate state action, however, was suicide, he said. The South must unite in support of Polk for the time being while she put her whole energies into a plan

---

for future secession and formation of a southern nation. As it revived their cause, Cheves's letter sent an electric thrill through the "Bluffton Boys." Rhett praised the letter but reminded Cheves that the South would never act in concert; Rhett had watched too many attempts at unity among southern Congressmen fail. One state must show the way by her action before others would follow, he said. McDuffie, who had supported Calhoun's resolve to oppose state action only with reluctance, added to the reviving din. Speaking to a dinner meeting at Edgefield, McDuffie said that Rhett had been right to call for a convention. The people, however, should not be involved, he thought; the convention should be called by the General Assembly. Proclaiming the "final crisis" to be upon them, he exhorted his constituency with no less fervor than Rhett had roused his own flock. Blufftonism had not only revived; it was spreading to the Upcountry.32

Once again Rhett saw a chance for his proposal to succeed. Resigning from his post on the Spectator, he suggested that the delegation in Congress be strengthened by Cheves. Huger was planning to retire from the Senate and Rhett proposed Cheves for his replacement. The Mercury hailed this nomination and only dropped its campaign for Cheves when he refused to run. Such enduring traces of Blufftonism soon brought Calhoun back to South Carolina. Arriving in Charleston on September 30, the Secretary spent the day in assuring Lowcountry doubters of Polk's "political orthodoxy." As September

32Mercury, Sept. 11, 1844; Chauncey S. Boucher, "The Annexation of Texas and the Bluffton Movement in South Carolina," MVHR, VI (June, 1919), 22-25; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 191; White, Rhett, 81.
ended, Stuart and Holmes returned to the Calhoun camp and the Mercury opened a campaign for party unity. Stuart was even persuaded to stand for election to the General Assembly. Rhett and McDuffie—if still unconverted—agreed to remain silent until after the election. Governor Hammond—also unconverted—likewise maintained a surly official silence that masked his plans for decided action. "We are as calm as the dead Sea," he confided to his diary. This time the rebellion was quelled. The prodigal Mercury proudly hoisted the colors of the great Carolinian as of yore. And still no one had been disciplined.33

The election results were all the reunited Calhounites could have wished for. Not only did their approved ticket triumph locally—"no avowed Whig" being elected to either state or local office—but the Democrats also won the presidency. The Mercury's comment on Polk's victory, however, was not that of a jubilant supporter. Although Stuart put his seal of approval on the Democratic success, he also conveyed a warning to the victors. The President-elect was reminded that only "an honest fulfillment of all the requirements and pledges of the Democratic Republican Creed" would preserve South Carolina's allegiance to the administration. Not even the Courier could smell rebellion in this remark, for Calhoun had carefully taught the Mercury

33Cheves to Rhett, Oct. 16, 1844, Rhett Collection; McDuffie to Hammond, Dec. 12, 1844, Hammond to McDuffie, Dec. 21, 1844, Hammond Papers; Calhoun to Thomas Clemson, Oct. 7, 1844, Calhoun to Stuart, Oct. 21, 1844, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 624, 626; Stuart to Calhoun, Oct. 25, 1844, Boucher, ed., Correspondence to Calhoun, 253-54; Hammond Diary, quoted in Merritt, Hammond, 69.

"John Stuart has seen Calhoun and been conquered, not that he abandoned his principles but believes that Calhoun also adheres to them," wrote Robert Barnwell (Barnwell to Rhett, Nov. 10, 1844, Rhett Collection).
to attach the condition of performance before proffering its allegiance. But then Calhoun had also taught the *Mercury* to honor nullification.\(^{34}\)

Calhoun had quenched the fires of rebellion but Bluffton was still to have its afterglow. In spite of his conviction that "So. Ca. & Mr. Calhoun [had] been left high & dry," the resentful Governor Hammond had held his peace before the election; he proposed to do so no longer. Calhoun expected trouble from this quarter. In addition to his awareness of Hammond's discreet support for Rhett's campaign, Calhoun was alerted by the governor's recent infraction of Carolina protocol. Hammond had neither called upon Calhoun during the latter's visit to South Carolina nor had he responded to Calhoun's request for a meeting. As the Secretary returned to Washington, he again passed through Charleston where he left a message for Hammond. James Hamilton, Jr.,—careful to maintain his reasserted loyalty to the leader—was commissioned to convey it. There must be no more excitement, said Hamilton, lest South Carolina cut herself off from the sympathy of the rest of the South. Hamilton was giving the advice that he had followed himself. He had sympathized with Rhett's proposal for a convention but had declined to support the Bluffton Movement. Hamilton was also diplomatic with his advice to the governor; he did not reveal its source.\(^{35}\)

\(^{34}\) *Mercury*, Nov. 13, 14, 19, 1844; Stuart to Rhett, Nov. 11, 1844, Rhett Collection.

\(^{35}\) Calhoun to Hammond, Sept. 21, 1844, Hammond Papers; Hamilton to Hammond, Oct. 4, Nov. 12, 17, 1844, Hammond Papers; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 192; Merritt, Hammond, 68-69; Hammond to Burt, May 18, 1843, Burt Papers.
Calhoun's fears were not without foundation where Hammond was concerned. The unrepentant governor proposed to call upon his legislature to summon a convention. Expecting a fight in the process, perhaps even failure, Hammond confided his bitterness to his diary.

"... [T]he State will do nothing but what Mr. C. wishes now. There is only one hope. If Mr. Clay is elected President which is highly probable Calhoun may out of hatred to him attempt at once to make war on the Fed. Gov. and call up Nullification."

Hammond venomously wrote that Calhoun's ambition to be President had "recklessly trampled on every thing [sic] else." When the election ended in a Polk victory, neither Hammond's mood nor intentions changed. The Calhounites, he said, "are extremely decided against state action & most of the rest are paralysed." Writing shortly before he made his proposal to the Assembly, he concluded that "None--not even Stuart of the Mercury ... are for action." The state was "Wet-blanketed by Calhoun & Co." Hammond's reasons for wanting action by South Carolina bore an ominous portent for the future. He was convinced that separation of the South from the national Union was inevitable. "It might now be effected peacefully & properly--A few years hence it must take place in blood or the South remain in it as a subjugated region," he wrote. 36

---

36 Hammond Diary, Oct. 25, 1844, quoted in Capers, Calhoun Opportunist, 222; Hammond Diary, Nov. 24, 1844, quoted in Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 192; Merritt, Hammond, 68-71.

During the administration of Governor Richardson, South Carolina expanded her preparedness program started in 1833 and continued throughout the decade. In the event of a clash with the general government, the state would need more qualified military leaders than had been available in 1833. Richardson, consequently, sponsored the establishment of two military colleges, The Arsenal in Columbia, and
The governor delivered his message in spite of the odds against its having the desired effect. The address was calm in its foreboding. Reminding his Assembly of the repeated failures of efforts to lower the tariff or to effect the annexation of Texas and of the rising attacks on slavery, Hammond called upon the body for activation of the Bluffton Plan. The tariff, he said, had "never been checked but by . . . interposition." Pickens, now a state Senator, immediately offered resolutions expressing South Carolina's full faith in the Polk administration. No man present could doubt that his action spoke for Calhoun. The Senate quickly and unanimously adopted the Pickens resolutions.37

The governor's defeat in the House was more involved but just as complete. Christopher Memminger, Unionist become Calhounite, succeeded in having Hammond's message referred to the Committee of the Whole. Since this amounted to tabling the governor's proposal, the "Bluffton Boys" were outraged. Stuart's Mercury—evermore ready to denounce an old Unionist—hurled invective at Memminger's maneuver. But Pickens knew that Calhoun had decreed harmony for South Carolina. Showing that Memminger's action was anathema to the Bluffton remnant, Pickens insisted that the House adopt his own resolutions instead. Again Calhoun's magic carried the day. And Hammond in defeat was at

37Pickens to Calhoun, Dec. 28, 1844, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 1015-17; Hammond to Simms, June 15, 1847, Hammond Papers; Mercury, Dec. 2, 1844; Merritt, Hammond, 70-71; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 192-94; White, Rhett, 82-83.
least spared the humiliation of seeing his bold call for confrontation routinely tabled.  

The Mercury accepted Pickens's resolutions but without its old ardor. Stuart took this occasion to make his readers aware of his own small regard for Polk's tariff stance. The Tennessean was sounder, however, on that matter than was Memminger, the editor said. That being the case the Pickens resolutions represented something of "a gain for the Bluffton boys."  

In view of all that happened in Columbia, Charleston, and Washington during the General Assembly's session, Mercury readers were hardly surprised by Stuart's frequent references to Blufftonism. Indeed, his persevering reservations about his allegiance to the national Democracy seemed more and more to be justified. During the very time that the Assembly was debating the Pickens resolutions, word came that the Democratic Congress had repealed the "gag rule." The Mercury took note of this perfidy; it amounted to a "virtual assumption by Congress of power over the existence of slavery." Bitterly inveighing against "their Northern allies" by whom "the South was conquered," Stuart's paper could not resist the satirical assertion that the latest setback would "doubtless give comfort to the souls of our Union loving friends. . . ."  

Before the unsettling news from Washington had grown cold,  

---

38 Mercury, Nov. 13, 14, 19, 28, 29, 30, Dec. 2, 3, 5, 18, 19, 1844.  
39 Ibid., Dec. 3, 1844.  
40 White, Rhett, 83; Mercury, Dec. 7, 14, 18, 1844; Jan. 8, 1845; see above, IV.
even more distressing tidings settled upon Charleston. On November 28, 1844, the distinguished Massachusetts jurist, Judge Samuel Hoar—who was also an outspoken Abolitionist—arrived in that city. He was commissioned by the Governor of Massachusetts to test the validity of South Carolina's Negro seaman law. This measure, dating from 1794, initially required masters of vessels to report any free Negroes they brought into the state and to assume responsibility for them. As modified in 1835, it provided that all transient "free man of color" should be clapped into jail upon arrival of their vessel. There they would remain for the duration of their visit. Hoar intended to determine whether any Massachusetts citizen was being held in such custody. If the Judge found any such man confined without criminal charges, he was authorized to bring suit on the prisoner's behalf and take the case to the Supreme Court. Judge Hoar informed Governor Hammond of his mission on the day of his arrival; Hammond conveyed this information to the already excited Assembly.41

The Governor, the Assembly and the Mercury were incensed. If the law in question were invalidated by the high court, South Carolina could expect abolitionist-trained free Negroes to flood the state. All the outer ramparts erected in defense of slavery would be of little use in that eventuality. The Assembly directed Hammond to expel the "emissary of a foreign government" forthwith. This "bolt from the Jupiter of New England has electrified us all . . . and made old South Carolina one Bluffton. . . ." the Mercury thundered.

41Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 195-96; Wikramanayke, "Free Negro in South Carolina," 201-02, 220; Merritt, Hammond, 63.
Not surprisingly, Hoar concluded that he was unwelcome in Charleston and left before Hammond could have him ordered out.\footnote{John B. Irving to Henry Bailey, Dec. 3, 1844, Chestnut-Manning-Miller Collection (Bailey was Hammond's Attorney General); Hammond to Bailey, Dec. 5, 1844, Hammond Papers; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 196; Mercury, Dec. 3, 7, 9, 11, 16, 17, 1844. Hammond's instructions were that Hoar should be shown every courtesy but firmly escorted aboard an outbound ship. Prior to the arrival of Hammond's aide in Charleston, however, Hoar accepted the advice of local authorities to leave. Charleston crowds around his hotel had become unruly, a factor which doubtless affected Hoar's decision.}

The state had hardly repulsed this alarming attack when a Charleston public meeting invited President-elect Polk to visit the city "as an exponent of our principles." This was too much for Stuart, Calhoun notwithstanding. In an editorial that verged on outrage, the Mercury's senior editor reminded his readers that "politically" they differed "very, very widely" from Polk and his retinue. A furious Stuart could see neither dignity nor wisdom in the course advocated by his fellow citizens. "In the name of God!" he proclaimed, "if we are to submit, let it be in silence, if not remonstrating" or "resisting ... at least not making bondage more vile by singing paeans and hallelujahs to deluders and oppressors."\footnote{Mercury, Dec. 30, 1844.} Yet the prodigal editor presided over a paper considered still to be allied with Calhoun, defender of the incoming administration.

The explanation for the Mercury's new tone lies in the altered nature of South Carolina politics. Formally, in that all South Carolina still acknowledged Calhoun's leadership, the political structure was no different from pre-Bluffton days. In point of actual fact, however, the acknowledgment was an unwilling one for a large
part of the Calhoun following. Revolving principally around Rhett and Hammond, the radical and, to some extent, younger faction did not understand why Calhoun would not countenance the activation of state interposition, the doctrine in which he had schooled them. They did not agree with their mentor that nullification was a restraining device, a conservative remedy that strengthened the bonds of union. To them it provided instead a cogent method of parting from their tormentors and building a new nation in which slavery would be free from attack. These, the disaffected and disillusioned, were but taking Calhoun's carefully taught lesson to its logical conclusion; secession was a recurring word in their conversations.  

The Mercury belonged to the faction of Rhett and Hammond. Destined to continue its association with Rhett to the end of its days, the journal that had made so many tortuous turns with Calhoun would continue to follow him. It would tread his path, however, in the footprints of Rhett. Calhoun knew of the growing dissatisfaction with his policy and of the Mercury's new and conditional allegiance. Both Rhett and the Mercury understood that he knew it. They understood something else as well. Calhoun was still too much the master of South Carolina to be defied; those who longed to oppose him could do nothing but wait. If, in the meantime, the incipient opposition conformed generally to the course laid out by Calhoun, he would regard

their recent aberration with a tolerance hitherto unknown. The frustrated Rhett and the impatient prodigal accepted the terms of the "political father" of them both. They could do nothing else—except plan for the day when Calhoun no longer made the signals.
CHAPTER VI

CROSS-FIRE

The change in the nature of Stuart's allegiance to Calhoun blinded the editor to an important new lesson in South Carolina politics; the leader did not mean for his recently displayed tolerance to be misread for indulgence. By December of 1844 Calhoun was moving to emphasize this point. Concluding that the Mercury must either rid itself of its recurring symptoms of Blufftonism or cease to be the spokesman for Orthodoxy, Calhoun's followers made plans to establish a new paper in Charleston.

Probably urged on by the "Elmore Clique" and Pickens's anti-Rhett following, the Calhounites identified Stuart as the most direct source of Mercury Blufftonism. Well aware that the paper's reputation—and subscription list—was heavily dependent upon party support, the leaders of Orthodoxy apparently forced Stuart to step down as editor. In return for his retirement, they abandoned their plans to set up a new journal in the city.¹

Stuart's decision to retire may also have been influenced by the ill health with which he had been plagued for some time. In any


184
event there is little evidence to indicate that he was chastened by the lash of the leader. On December 30, the retiring editor defiantly enjoined his readers against any undignified truckling to Polk and his "oppressors." And when on January 3, 1845, he published his "Farewell Address," Stuart spoke in the language of Bluffton.

Pledging the Mercury to maintain its twin loyalties to "the kindred points of Carolina and Republicanism," the retiring editor identified "the money power, and the mean and sordid spirit of this age of steam" as his journal's most dangerous enemies. Should this "sordid spirit" take the form of Federal oppression to threaten South Carolina, "armed men" must

spring up . . . and defend the honor and avenge the insulted graves of Marion, Moultrie, Sumter, Rutledge--men who knew that freedom's heritage is care and toil and a perpetual watch and warfare. . . .

The unrepentent Stuart left the Mercury secure in the knowledge that his successor, John Milton Clapp, would keep the watch.²

Clapp had become "associate" editor of the paper in 1837. Born in Ohio, he was graduated from Calhoun's alma mater, Yale University. He ultimately settled in Beaufort, South Carolina, Stuart's own home. It was from there that he accepted Stuart's invitation to come to the Mercury. Following in the tradition of Morford, Pinckney, and Stuart, the Mercury's fourth editor was an able penman. One contemporary lauded Clapp as "a writer of classical taste and culture." His formal promotion to editor occurred more suddenly than events would otherwise indicate. Stuart's bad health had frequently made for long absences on his part. As Clapp rose to command, he announced

that he had borne "the whole burden of" the Mercury's "conduct" for "at least two years." Therefore, subscribers need fear no change in policy.

Clapp was as good as his word; there was no change in policy. If, unlike Stuart, the new editor did not advocate a specific remedy for the deleterious influence of the northern Democracy and Yankees generally, he did constantly and insistently remind his subscribers of that influence:

We will speak, warn, encourage—fight to the last for the rights, honor and salvation of the South; and if the people will not sustain us—if the Mercury is to go down with the great and glorious cause for which it has battled for twenty years, at the mandate of the Dictator at Washington, the last sheet that is flung from our press, shall have emblazoned upon the proud epitaph of the entombed Regicide—"resistance to tyranny is obedience to God."3

Southerners need look for no hope in appeals to the North, Clapp admonished his readers. There the "spirit of tyranny, of dogmatism, of strife, of usurpation," he said, "moves and governs . . . on this question of slavery." Yankees believed "themselves to be the United States and the South only a territory . . ." Clapp was as disgusted as Stuart had been at the repeal of the "Twenty-first rule." When the governor of Massachusetts cited "State Rights" in defense of the actions of his agent, Judge Hoar, Clapp's indignation was unbounded. "State Rights with us is the right of defence," he blazed, "with Massachusetts it is the right of vexing and harassing her

3King, Newspaper Press, 151-52; Mercury, Jan. 3, Oct. 27, 1845.
neighbors.\(^4\)

Clapp maintained his interest in the effect of the slavery dispute on national church bodies. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church showed remarkable "discretion and moderation," the *Mercury* said, in its approach to this sensitive question. But Yankee Baptists mounted such strong attacks on slavery that their fellow communicants from the South parted from them to organize a southern church. The Methodists had divided earlier; Clapp felt that division in "the two greatest denominations of Christians in the Union" was more significant than accommodation among the smaller group of Presbyterians. The editor's own position in regard to final political separation had also advanced. Only a year before Clapp had referred to the Methodist schism as "the first dissolution of the Union"; his tone was one of resignation and perhaps even of regret. Neither of these sentiments was present as the *Mercury* described the same development in Baptist ranks. On January 4, 1845, its editor gave thanks for the wisdom of "the Church which heralds the way to redemption and safety."\(^5\)

\(^4\) *Mercury*, Jan. 7, 13, 14, 17, 20, 21, 23, Feb. 6, Mar. 12-15, 26, Apr. 8, 10, 14, May 21, June 4, July 3, 1845. On August 27 and September 17, 1845, the *Mercury* approvingly noted the expulsion of Cassius Clay from Lexington, Kentucky. Clay was noted for his hostility to slavery. The moving force behind his precipitous departure was a mob.

The "twenty-first rule" refers to the gag rule (see above, III).

\(^5\) *Mercury*, May 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 21, 29, June 4, 1845; see above, 138-39. Calhoun had also attached a gloomy significance to the Methodist division (Wiltse, *Calhoun Sectionalist*, 187). The Presbyterian reaction to the sectional dispute was more moderate; Presbyterians did not divide until May, 1861 (Margaret Burr DesChamps "Union or Division? South Atlantic Presbyterians and Southern Nationalism, 1820-1861," *JSH*, XX, No. 4 [Nov., 1954], 484, 497-98).
While defending the South from northern assaults on slavery, Clapp inserted his brief for the peculiar institution itself. Calhoun was commended for demonstrating that southern Negroes lived in circumstances superior to those of many workers elsewhere. "Everybody that knows anything," Clapp smugly asserted, "knows that slavery is established by the Jewish law and stands uncondemned by the Christian." Slavery as practiced in the South was "neither a Moral, Social or Political Evil" but "... on the contrary" it was "the most beneficent form of organized society that has yet existed." The editor hailed Hammond's "Free Church Letters" as "the ablest ... vindication of our ... slavery that we have ... witnessed in anything like the same space." Truly, the Mercury's policy had not changed.6

Clapp's furious polemic in defense of slavery was more than an attempt to reassure Mercury subscribers of the paper's continuing orthodoxy; it was a frantic effort to alert them to the condition of the South's rapidly eroding defenses. Through it all the shadow of Robert Barnwell Rhett fell intermittently over Clapp's shoulder. Although Rhett denied that he still had a "pecuniary interest" in the paper and asserted that Clapp was "a man of independence and ability who would scorn the idea that he was controlled ... by me or any other man," the Mercury's course leaves little doubt of the Congressman's influence. Less than a year after Rhett's forceful assertion, Clapp refused even

6Mercury, Apr. 1, June 9, July 10, Sept. 16, 1845. The Mercury reprinted Hammond's "Free Church Letter" from the Columbia South Carolinian. The response was such that crowds besieged Mercury offices and it was forced to issue 15,000 "extras" (ibid., June 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 1845; Merritt, Hammond, 73-76).
to publish the nomination of Elmore to oppose Rhett in a bid for a seat in the United States Senate. The latter's influence is also indicated by the sometime uncertain nature of the paper's allegiance to Calhoun. While neither Rhett nor the Mercury openly broke with South Carolina's senior statesman, they did from time to time indicate disagreement with one or more of his tactics. The form taken by this divergence—at least in the Mercury—was usually editorial silence when Calhoun expected support. The latter once complained that Clapp sometimes published important announcements "without the slightest notice." While the Mercury occasionally sailed without instructions on an independent tack, it was careful to watch for storm warnings and to change course when they were clearly visible. Only once did Clapp take direct issue with Calhoun and he subsequently repented of this.\(^7\)

The Mercury had always required agility of its editors; its demands on Clapp merely added a new dimension to the exaction. Caught in an intermittent cross-fire between Rhett and Calhoun, the editorial voice of South Carolina politics was obliged to steer between the "Scylla and Charybdis" of their respective influences. Clapp proved his seamanship to the general satisfaction, if not to the enthusiasm, of both parties. There was no rupture with Calhoun who continued to use the Mercury for official policy announcements. Leaders of the

\(^7\)Rhett to Burt, Sept. 3, 1846, Rhett Collection; Clapp to Hammond, Feb. 17, 1847, Hammond Papers; Rhett to James Buchanon, Oct. 20, 1845, quoted in White, *Rhett*, 89; Calhoun to J. R. Mathews, Aug. 18, 1845, quoted in Prior, "Mercury," 459; see below, 203 – 05. When the Mercury changed hands again in 1847, Rhett's elder brother, Benjamin, acted as trustee for Stuart and Clapp referred to the paper as "property held in trust" (*Mercury, Feb. 1, 2, Apr. 5, 1847; Cardozo, *Reminiscenses*, 33).
Calhoun faction even wrote *Mercury* editorials from time to time. Their contributions do not, however, lessen the evidence of Rhett's influence. Inconstant as his own loyalty to Calhoun was during this period, Rhett still did not desert his senior, nor was he banished from the camp. After each of his periodic forays into independence was outflanked by Calhoun influence, Rhett returned to bivouac. He was always received as a Calhoun ally though no longer a confidant.

To Clapp and the *Mercury*—as well as to Rhett—the outcome of the congressional session of 1844 represented an unqualified defeat for the South. The failure of the Democratic-dominated Congress either to reform the tariff or annex Texas left much of South Carolina with the same impression. The state's very interest seemed to be jeopardized by the existing political situation. The Bluffton movement, contained by Calhoun, was the most immediate indication of this feeling. And as *Mercury* editorials would subsequently indicate, the paper's decision to follow Orthodoxy in abandoning Bluffton had not restored its confidence in the future. The action of the new Congress in repealing Atherton's gag rule strengthened this impression.

Clapp's gloomy fulminations as the *Mercury*'s editor served to remind his readers that he saw no relief in sight short of a radical political adjustment. His editorial of June 4, 1845, indicated that he had not fully abandoned hope of so extreme a solution. As he

---


9*Mercury*, May 27, 28, 30, June 2, 4, 5, 1845; see above, 186.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
praised southern churchmen for severing the ties with their Yankee brethren, thus "herald[ing] the way," the Mercury's new editor all but endorsed secession. He had clearly not forgotten Bluffton. But Calhoun would be offended by anything more than allusion to so final a remedy, so Clapp went no further.10

While the Mercury's forebodings grew daily more aggravated, events at Washington gradually moved to produce another deceptive calm in the war between the sections. On June 11, 1844, three days after the Texas treaty was defeated, Senator George McDuffie inaugurated Calhoun's alternate annexation policy. He submitted a joint

10The Bluffton movement could almost be interpreted to mean "all things to all men." Most of the rhetoric was directed toward the calling of a convention and very little was said about what it should do. Few doubted, however, that it could, if it wished, resort to either nullification or secession. Rhett later said that he concluded to support disunion in either 1844 or 1845—he sometimes gave one date and sometimes the other. Robert Barnwell Rhett, Jr., a later Mercury editor, also said that his paper had supported secession during the Bluffton movement. Yet Stuart, the Mercury's contemporary editor, had trusted "in God" that Bluffton would "rescue liberty, the Constitution and the Union." At the same time the senior Rhett avowed that his purpose was to "maintain the Constitution, and the Union, too." White concludes that secession was not Rhett's goal in 1844. My own opinion is that both Rhett and Stuart were attempting to blunt the charges of extremism being hurled at their heads by their protestations of loyalty to the idea of the Union. There was little reason for them to share in Calhoun's emotional attachment to that ideal. Calhoun had been reared by Revolutionary veterans and matured at a time when the country gloried in its nationalism. Rhett's and Stuart's first adult associations, on the other hand, were with a minority sections' resistance to the rest of the Union. All things considered, it appears that Cheves and Hammond, by making the issue clear, removed the onus of having first resorted to extremism from Rhett and Stuart and so made it possible for them to favor an ultimate separation. Clapp's Mercury certainly alluded to secession (Mercury, Sept. 3, 1844, June 4, 1845, Jan. 29, 1863; Rhett to R. M. T. Hunter, Aug. 30, 1844, C. H. Ambler, ed., The Correspondence of R. M. T. Hunter [Washington, 1918], II, 70-71; White, Rhett, 76-77; see above, 181-83.
resolution which proposed that the defeated treaty become effective whenever it was ratified by Texas. Although the Democratic convention, the Bluffton movement, and the general election served to upstage McDuffie's proposal during the summer and fall, Secretary of State Calhoun was oiling the ways for its implementation.

Calhoun's maneuvers were anything but premature. The British goal of maintaining Texan independence had taken the form of a concrete proposal even as the Texas treaty was being defeated. Her Majesty's Government was willing, it told the Texan envoy in London, to guarantee the independence of his country in return for her pledge to remain out of the American Union. As Calhoun quickly discovered, the Texas government was disposed to consider the Queen's offer. Texas officialdom was obliged to move carefully, however, since popular opinion in that country favored union with the United States.

Calhoun, then, had not only to contend with antislavery forces in this country but also with a Texas government disillusioned by American delay and fearful of Mexican invasion. Through his State Department the Secretary negotiated with Britain, Mexico, and Texas while he instructed his followers in Congress to move in support of a resolution similar to McDuffie's. Rhett was prominent in his support of the venture. The debates were bitter and the vote disturbingly sectional in its implications, but on January 25, 1845, a satisfactory

---

11 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 184, 199; Justin H. Smith, The Annexation of Texas (New York, 1941), 272, 352.

12 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 199-204; M. P. Norton to Calhoun, Apr. 29, 1844, W. S. Murphy to Calhoun, Apr. 29, 1844, Jameson ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 947-52; Smith, Annexation of Texas, 356-413. France was also involved in the British offer to guarantee Texas independence.
resolution passed the House. One month later the Senate also approved an annexation resolution. The invisible hand of the President-elect probably determined the Senate's decision; Clapp's disgruntled Washington correspondent reported that Polk had promised to exclude Calhoun from his cabinet in return for one crucial affirmative vote. On February 26 the House accepted the Senate's version of the resolution, and Tyler signed the resulting bill on March 1.\textsuperscript{13}

Reinforced by unofficial representatives of Polk and the ubiquitous Commodore R. F. Stockton, Calhoun's charge in Texas played on popular feeling to force the reluctant Texan government into accepting Washington's latest offer. Lest the Mexicans take umbrage at this trespass, Commodore Stockton's fleet stood into Texan waters and Colonel Zachary Taylor was instructed to encamp along the Sabine. Pressured thus from within and without, Texas elected to approve the American offer on July 4, 1845.\textsuperscript{14}

Throughout the uncertain travail of the congressional struggle over Texas, the \textit{Charleston Mercury} offered little reassurance for its readers. Northern Democrats, Clapp's paper reported, had supported plans to partition Texas so as to exclude slavery from much of the area. These Democrats, with whom South Carolina was allied, had, thereby, again proved their faithlessness. But for the affirmative vote of nine southern Whigs, annexation would never have been approved. Clapp said that his reaction to the narrow victory was a moderate one.


\textsuperscript{14}Wiltse, \textit{Calhoun Sectionalist}, 214-16.
The South had "triumphed . . . in spite of foes and traitors" and would stand "with stern defiance on her brow . . . her yet unsheathed and dripping sword in her hand." The editor's "moderation" had not blunted his pen.15

The Mercury was not alone in regarding the annexation victory with reserve. Three days after the House vote on Texas Armistead Burt wrote to Hammond:

I confess frankly that I regard the Union as it is a degrading and ruinous alliance to the South, and if she have spirit, or self respect, she will not endure the dishonor and shame of submission. I would await the fate of annexation and some of its consequences before I would determine what it becomes the South to do. That she must do something, he is blind not to see.16

The Mercury's despondent view of the political association was spreading throughout South Carolina though not necessarily as a result of the Charleston paper's efforts. Doubts about the future had become endemic in the state, especially among her younger leaders. The incipient panic was no respector of persons. Armistead Burt was not only the Congressman from Calhoun's district but also was married to the Secretary's niece. In Charleston, however, the gloom was temporarily dispelled when Texas ratified the annexation resolution. Decking her streets with flags, the city rang her church bells to signal the glad event. Even the Mercury improved its mood as it

15Mercury, Jan. 3, 8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 23, 28, 29, Feb. 4, 8, 11, 12, 14, 17, 20, March 2, 28, Apr. 14, June 2, 1845.

16Burt to Hammond, Jan. 28, 1845, quoted in Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 211.
hailed the firing of a one hundred gun salute to signal the addition of a new slaveholding state.  

Soon after the election of 1844 Calhoun's friend A. B. Longstreet wrote the President-elect. Acting by direction as he was, Longstreet minced no words. "If you mean to take a decided stand against the tariff," he advised Polk, "retain Mr. Calhoun" in the cabinet but "if you do not, by all means dismiss him." On February 26, 1845, Calhoun learned officially that he would not be retained. It was not clear, however, that this action inferred either a cavalier attitude on the part of the administration toward tariff reform or an unfriendly feeling toward South Carolina. Calhoun was on several occasions offered the Ministry to the Court of St. James but refused it each time. Elmore also received a chance to decline this appointment and so did Francis Pickens. Even Rhett was apparently considered for the post.

So many favors to South Carolinians could be interpreted as an effort of the incoming administration to prove its reliability. Unfortunately for Polk, South Carolina did not adopt this view. Still, Calhoun maintained his resolve to cooperate with the new President. His determination endured even after he heard Polk's inaugural address in which Polk declared for a reduced tariff that was still protective in principle. He notified Great Britain that America's title to all of Oregon was "clear and unquestionable." Calhoun was opposed to both positions; he, nonetheless, restrained his following and 

17Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 59; Mercury, July 7, 8, 1845.
prevented a rupture with the administration.  

Then in May of 1845 a number of Calhoun's former campaign managers met in Charleston where they decided to resort to their strategy of the preceding autumn. In return for satisfactory action from Polk on the tariff, Calhoun had at that time agreed to renounce any intention of running for President in 1848. Since the administration had not redeemed its pledge, the Calhounites now proposed to remind Polk of the terms of their agreement. Rhett was present for the meeting and Calhoun endorsed its conclusions. Pending some satisfactory action from the administration on the tariff, the former Senator would again become a presidential candidate.

For some time after this meeting nothing was heard from either Calhoun or Rhett; the former was in temporary retirement while the latter was out of the country. The Mercury, however, maintained a steady barrage aimed at the administration. Polk was reviving the spoils system, the Mercury charged. The "oracular nonsense" of the President's inaugural was weak on the tariff; his party was divided on Texas and unsound on the gag rule. Clapp reserved the greater

---

18Burt to Hammond, Mar. 2, 1845, Hammond Papers; James Buchanan to Calhoun, Apr. 9, 1845, Elmore to Calhoun, Apr. 16, 1845, Boucher, ed., Correspondence to Calhoun, 292-93; Richardson, ed., Messages and Papers, 2223-32; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 218-20.

19Dixon H. Lewis to Calhoun, May 9, 1845, Boucher, ed., Correspondence to Calhoun, 293-94; Calhoun to Lewis, May 16, 1845, Ambler, ed., Hunter Correspondence, 77-79. The name of the addressee is missing in Calhoun's reply. Wiltse concluded that the second letter was obviously addressed to Lewis (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 227, n. 24). Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 218, 227. Capers, in his treatment of Calhoun's plans for running in 1848, ignores the events of the fall of 1844 to conclude that Calhoun never gave up his intention of running four years later (Capers, Calhoun Opportunist, 225-29); Walker to Hammond, Mar. 10, 22, 1845, Hammond Papers.
part of his invective for the subject of the tariff. Almost daily he belabored the administration's tariff pose. Without the tariff, Clapp thundered, Britain's exchanges for southern cotton and rice would make for "a commerce richer to her than all her colonies." The island empire would never have sponsored abolition, he said, but for the tariff. That obnoxious policy of trade restriction was also behind her failure to compromise on Oregon.20

The iniquitous influence of the tariff on foreign affairs continued, however, to be less important to the Mercury than its fateful implication for domestic matters. Clapp had not forgotten that the outer wall of the southern citadel was built of an uncompromising opposition to protection. With arguments the Mercury had used before, the editor reminded his readers that the tariff was directly related to the program for destroying slavery. Abolitionists feared that the agricultural interest in America would overthrow industrialism but for the tariff. Moreover, the tariff made slave property less valuable. The principle behind regulation was even more dangerous, "... for it is a conclusion the most simple that if the Federal Government is omnipotent in laying taxes, it is omnipotent over slavery."21

Since it was impossible to contain the mad ravings of the abolitionist bombardment, Clapp determined to hold the line on tariff reform. This is "the only issue on which we can meet the question

---

20Mercury, Jan. 15, Mar. 8, 10, 15, 28, 31, Apr. 1, 2, 11, May 27, 28, 30, June 2, 5, Oct. 16, 1845.

21Ibid., Jan. 3, 8, 15, Feb. 10, Mar. 8, 10, 15, 20, 28, 31, Apr. 1, 2, 8, 11, May 14, 15, 19, July 10, Aug. 9, 21, 23, Sept. 12, 18, Oct. 2, 3, 6, 7, 11, 17, 22, 24, 27, 28, Nov. 3, Dec. 8, 9, 12, 17, 1845.
of slavery itself," he said. The South must "stand immovably on
the principle that Congress shall 'lay taxes for revenue' only"; her
only alternative was destruction. For its part the Mercury would
support the administration only if it redeemed Polk's tariff pledge.
Implying that this determination transcended both man and events,
the Mercury resolved to

Hold to account the party with which we act,
and we intend to do it without fear or favor,
confident that in that way more than any other,
we can be of service to the people.22

In the days since Bluffton, the Mercury had refrained from
launching an undisguised frontal assault on the tariff but with in­
creasing reluctance. Out of respect for Orthodoxy, Clapp called for
nothing "beyond the ordinary action of the Government." He did re­
mind his readers, however, that the Abolitionists would never let
them alone "while the Union lasts." Then as the anniversary of
Bluffton's famous dinner drew nearer, the Mercury commenced to print
letters which acclaimed the ideas of the late movement. "The Bluff­
ton boys have been silenced, not subdued. . ." the correspondent
"Bluffton" wrote on the first anniversary of Rhett's speech in that
picturesque place. The fire of Bluffton, he said "smoulders" yet
"and will burst forth in another glorious flame. . . ." The bellows
of the Mercury vigorously fanned the embers with an unremitting attack
on the tariff evil.23

22 Ibid., Jan. 15, Mar. 8, 10, 15, May 14, 19, June 5, July 19,
Aug. 9, 21, Sept. 18, Oct. 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 17, 22, 27,
Nov. 3, Dec. 9, 12, 17, 1845.

23 Ibid., Jan. 15, 27, May 21, June, July, Aug., Sept.,
1845, passim. In particular see issues for Aug. 7, 9, Sept. 12,
18, 1845.
In September 1845, as the *Mercury's* rhetoric was rapidly reaching the blazing point, Rhett returned from a trip to England. After stopping in Washington to talk to President Polk and Robert J. Walker, Polk's Secretary of the Treasury, Rhett concluded that their tariff intentions were unsatisfactory in nature. As he had done in the days of the debates on the McKay bill, Rhett wrote to Calhoun for advice. The impetuous Congressman's subsequent conduct was also reminiscent of that earlier occasion. Without waiting Calhoun's reply, Rhett took a strong position on the tariff, a position much stronger than his experience in such matters should have allowed. South Carolina would, Rhett proclaimed, nullify any tariff measure sponsored by the administration that did not result in a tariff for revenue only. Furthermore, Calhoun would be ignored if he stood in the way of such action.24

Calhoun's reaction was both swift and tactful. Identified as he was with having supported Polk and opposed Bluffton, he made no direct response to Rhett's challenge. Instead, he authorized McDuffie who had supported Bluffton—at least in spirit—to do so. McDuffie's timely opportunity presented itself when an unidentified correspondent, alleging alarm over the *Mercury's* posture, asked McDuffie his opinion of administration intentions. McDuffie replied with a Calhoun-inspired defense of free trade accompanied by the assurance that Polk would redeem his pledge to produce a revenue

---

The letter ultimately reached Clapp who published it on October 7.\textsuperscript{25}

By this time the \textit{Mercury} was embroiled in a battle with the \textit{Union}, Polk's Washington organ. The \textit{Union} was castigating the \textit{Mercury} for its alleged misrepresentations of Polk's position. Coincidental with his publication of McDuffie's letter, Clapp denied that either he or his Washington correspondent had ever "intimated that the administration would not propose 'a reduction of the tariff' . . . " The \textit{Mercury} had only predicted that Polk "would recommend some compromise . . . retaining the protective principle, and thus by committing free trade men to that, put them in a false position . . . ." That, however, was as far off course as Clapp could afford to go. Again both Rhett and the \textit{Mercury} deferred to Calhoun's wishes; if they were still not enamored of Polk, they nevertheless ceased either to imply the desirability of or to agitate for separate state action. It was as Hammond said, "So. Ca. belongs to Calhoun. He will not agitate."\textsuperscript{26}

The resurgence of Blufftonism served as the catalytic agent to produce Calhoun's decision to return to the Senate. There were more fundamental reasons for the move, however. The international situation was in need of attention; Polk seemed bent on risking war with England over Oregon while Mexico was openly threatening hostilities over Texas. Pleas for Calhoun's return to the upper chamber came from persons of such divergent persuasions as John S. Barbour of Virginia and Massachusetts's famous Daniel Webster. Too, the free-trade

\textsuperscript{25}Wiltse, \textit{Calhoun Sectionalist}, 229; \textit{Mercury}, Oct. 7, 1845.

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Mercury}, Oct. 7, 1845; Hammond to William Gilmore Simms, July 14, 1845, Hammond Papers.
ranks in the Senate needed bolstering. Calhoun was doubtless motivated by the thought that his going back to the Senate would improve chances for tariff reform and thereby retard the growing disaffection in South Carolina. At any event, October 9, 1845, Calhoun accepted Senator Daniel Huger's long-standing offer to step aside in his favor.\(^{27}\)

At the same time the meeting of a South-West commercial convention in Memphis afforded another opportunity for strengthening the chances of tariff reform. The convention, called for November, proposed to discuss agriculture, manufacturing, and transport in the South and West. Senator Edward A. Hannegan of Indiana let it be known that in return for southern support for river and harbor improvements, the Cumberland road, and a graduated price for public lands, the West would vote with the South on the tariff. The Jeffersonian-inspired, Jacksonian-strengthened alliance between southern planters and northern farmers was giving way; the antislavery groups in combination with rising forces of industrialism were seeing to that. Hannegan's offer might well represent the best, if not the only, means of effecting tariff reform.\(^{28}\)

There was strong support in South Carolina for the convention, especially from the railroad interest. Calhoun was persuaded to attend as one of the state's official delegates. He was only one of six hundred delegates from fifteen states and two prospective states,

\(^{27}\)Wiltse, *Calhoun Sectionalist*, 229-32.


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Texas and Iowa. These men wasted no time in electing Calhoun permanent president of their convention. Calhoun's days in the War Office had provided him with an enduring vision of a vast country united by both defensive works and improved transport. "Let us conquer space," he had said in those days. At Memphis he resurrected the old dream. Submitting proposals which included fortifications for the Florida straits along with trans-Mississippi railroads that would finally link Atlantic with Pacific, he made his bid for western support on the tariff. Calhoun said, furthermore, that the Mississippi River should be improved; indeed, it should be connected with the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River.29

With all this the delegates agreed. But the West wanted something more—a grand scheme of internal improvements. It was clearly beyond the power of the private sector of the economy to underwrite so large a program. The West wanted federal aid for its projects. Asserting that this was possible, Calhoun contended that the steamboat had converted the Mississippi River into an inland sea. As a result Congress could improve the river with the same power that it maintained coastal harbors. This authority could not be used to finance railroad construction but Congress could help even here. The general government could grant alternate sections of the public domain to burgeoning railroads. Furthermore, by reducing the duty on railroad iron, Congress could save construction companies $2,000 per

29J. D. B. DeBow, ed., DeBow's Review (January, 1846), I, 7-21; Richard K. Cralle, ed., The Works of John C. Calhoun (6 vols.; Charleston, 1851-56), V, 293; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 237-38; Calhoun's admonition to "conquer space" actually dates from February, 1817, shortly before he took the War Department, when as a Congressman, he defended the Bonus bill (Cralle, Calhoun Works, II, 186-96).
mile in costs. Finally, Calhoun advocated, as he had long done, that the price of public lands be scaled downward, and saving only those areas required for defense and public buildings, the public domain itself be ceded to the states. The convention president's general recommendations were put into the form of resolutions to be submitted to the forthcoming session of Congress. Calhoun was thus prepared to pay the price of internal improvements in return for western support of tariff reform. Prospects for a South-West coalition appeared to be bright, indeed. 30

South Carolina's response to the Memphis proposals was unfavorable. Rhett did not accept Calhoun's vision of the "inland sea," and this time Clapp endorsed the younger man's dissent. Bewailing the surrender of "the old and cherished doctrines of South Carolina," the Mercury displayed some reluctance, however, to censure Calhoun. While Clapp readily attacked the results of the Memphis convention, for several days he refrained from identifying Calhoun with his target; when he did so he trod lightly. "It is indeed lamentable," the editor observed, "... that Mr. Calhoun had anything to do with the Memphis Convention." 31

Congress convened with two important changes in the Calhoun camp. Calhoun himself was back in the Senate; no Carolinian had

30 DeBow, DeBow's Review, I, 7-21; Cralle, ed., Calhoun Works, V, 293.

31 Mercury, Oct. 25, Nov. 28, 29, Dec. 5, 1845. Pickens was a casualty of South Carolina's reaction to the Memphis convention. Calhoun believed him to be the author of a Southern Quarterly Review article which criticized the Memphis proposals. Pickens denied the authorship but admitted to having seen the article before it was published and to agreeing with its contentions. This cost him his preferred position in the Calhoun camp (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 242).
voted against his return, Memphis notwithstanding. But Holmes instead of Rhett was now the Calhoun spokesman in the House. Again the Congress was destined to sit in significant session. War with both Mexico and Great Britain loomed as a possibility even as the questions of internal improvements and the tariff threatened to aggravate domestic divisions. Polk's annual message to Congress reasserted America's claim to all of Oregon and endorsed free trade. Both matters produced a quarrel. 32

The President's message to Congress surprised Clapp. Polk offered more "than we dared hope," said the Mercury. When Secretary Walker submitted his Report during the same month, the Mercury's skepticism about the administration tariff stance vanished altogether. Clapp's sudden conversion was not unlike an earlier Mercury shift to the Democracy during Van Buren's time. That move, however, was clearly in response to orders. In those days Stuart had employed a reliable connection with Calhoun by working through Rhett. But Clapp, a victim of the estrangement between Calhoun and Rhett, was obliged to pick his course without reference to an approved chart. Always before him was the possibility of foundering on the shoal of someone's displeasure. Using perhaps Stuart's earlier maneuver as a beacon, Clapp indicated that his own conversion to the administration was neither less complete nor less sudden than had been his predecessor's. Robert J. Walker's Report made it possible for the Mercury to "Cheerfully and heartily avow" its "adherence to the Administration on the Tariff question." Holding the Report to be the ablest and most

32 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 231; White, Rhett, 88.
thorough examination of "the purposes and limits of the taxing power . . . from the Executive" since "the foundation of the Government," the "Sleepless Sentinel" was as lavish in praise as it had been free with invective. 33

The Mercury's current conversion was not an enduring one, however. While the Senate debated the situation in Oregon, the House took up the tariff. The resulting dispute indicated that the way of the revenue-only forces was going to be a rough one. So strong were the protectionists that some sort of compromise was inevitable. Chafing at the slow progress of the bill through Congress and at times losing all hope of its passage, Clapp renewed his attack on the administration. Polk's Washington organ, the Union, retaliated by reading the inconstant Mercury out of the party. 34

Debate on the tariff was frequently deferred as the news from Mexico became critical. The Oregon question also absorbed much congressional attention, but the nature of import duties persevered as an issue in war as in peace. Calhoun's strategy of securing Western support for a lower tariff caused him to sponsor a compromise internal improvements bill. He cooperated to produce a Senate measure which underwrote the cost of improving navigation on four western rivers—the Mississippi being among them. The proposal passed the Senate but when it reached the House it was shelved for a general pork-barrel bill, one which funded internal improvements

33Mercury, Dec. 8, 9, 12, 17, 23, 1845.

34Ibid., Feb. 20, Apr. 8, 18, 29, May 18, 27, 28, June 3, 5, 20, 23, 24, 26, July 7, 8, 22, 31, Aug. 1, 1846.
according to the vision of local politicians. Congressman Rhett was among those who stood opposed to the whole concept. Assailing the House measure as "the murder of the great principle of the Republican party," he was rewarded by the Mercury's salute to the defender of the "old and cherished doctrines of South Carolina." Internal improvement projects, Clapp said, threatened "not only the ruin of the Democratic party, but the Constitution itself." Neither Congressman nor journal directly referred to the Memphis convention but their enduring disapproval of its proposals was there for all to see. 

Calhoun's strategy was destined to triumph, nonetheless. On June 26, 1846, the Senator submitted a Report in justification of the Memphis proposals. It was complete with constitutional arguments. The legitimate authority for his suggestions, Calhoun said, lay in the commerce clause of the Constitution. The Mississippi River, flowing as it did between the states, could hardly be controlled by any one state. Congress alone, he continued, had authority to regulate the commerce that flowed over this great "inland Sea"; the same Congress could improve the liquid highway with the authority it already exerted over coastal harbors and the Great Lakes. Although Calhoun voted against the House version of the internal improvements bill when it reached the Senate, the latter body approved the measure and the South-West alliance held.

---

35Ibid., Mar. 12, 19, Apr. 27, June 20, 1846; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 262-72; White, Rhett, 88.

36Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 262-72. Calhoun was Chairman of the Senate committee to which the Memphis petition was referred. His Report was on behalf of that committee.
Calhoun had given further evidence of his good faith to the West by sponsoring a land graduation bill which received Senate approval and was sent to the House. His exertions were not in vain; the over-all plan worked. A tariff acceptable to both sides passed House and Senate by virtue of western support and was signed by President Polk on July 30. Almost obscured by the general excitement over the tariff, an Independent Treasury was revived in early August. Southern reaction to both measures was favorable. The Mercury's reservations about the tariff bill were few, and tended to disappear as Clapp noted a "very cheering despondency" among Whigs and others of arrant protectionist persuasion. The editor hailed the restoration of the sub-treasury system removing as it did the "temptation to intrigue and corruption" inherent in the practice of pet banks.37

There now occurred an unexpected end to the internal improvement program. President Polk was displeased with the measure. He decided that its huge expenditures for local projects had little to do with the national interest. Hence, after the tariff was safely signed into law, he vetoed the bill. The House retaliated by tabling the graduation bill and the South-West alliance died still-born. While Calhoun denounced the reasoning of the President's veto, the Mercury—not yet a party to those favoring the alliance—congratulated Polk for not having forgotten "his own principles" after all.38

At this point the course of the Mercury veered in the direction of irony; after it was too late, Clapp endorsed the late

37Ibid.; Mercury, Aug. 1, 3, 6, 7, 29, 1846.

38Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 272; Mercury, Aug. 7, 1846.
successful strategy of his sometime leader, Calhoun. Pronouncing the Senator's Report as not only sound but also unanswerable, he repeated its reasoning for Mercury readers. Clapp's journal, moreover, favored "a general, against a partial application of one of the great powers expressly conferred on Congress":

The thirteen states which share the valley of the Mississippi, alive with half the commerce of the whole Union, cannot be excluded from the benefits of any general provision of the Constitution.

The converted editor admitted his recent waywardness. He had "partaken of the surprise and dissatisfaction widely felt on the announcement of" the "opinions" of the Memphis convention. Now, taking issue with an article in the Southern Quarterly Review which remained critical of those "opinions," the Mercury sounded the Calhoun call as of yore. Unaware that the opportunity of effecting Calhoun's late strategy had passed, Clapp endorsed the creation of a South-West alliance. Stuart, in the halcyon days before Bluffton, could have been no more loyal to the leader. 39

Surprisingly enough, Robert Barnwell Rhett followed the Mercury this time to repent of his heresy. In October 1846 he published an article in the Southern Quarterly Review which ratified Calhoun's strategy of a South-West alliance and asserted that upon its success depended the future of the Union. Clapp must have breathed more easily; Calhoun and Rhett were standing together once more. 40


40 White, Rhett, 90; Rhett to Burt, Sept. 3, 1846, Burt Papers; Rhett to Hammond, Jan. 12, 1847, Hammond Papers.
During the debates of the recent congressional session, Southerners of the Calhoun persuasion uncovered a signal flaw in their defensive strategy of the past thirteen years. Since 1833 they had labored to restrict the principle of protectionism, creating through a low tariff the outer wall of the slavery bastion. But even as the Walker Tariff of 1846 crowned their effort with success, they made the fateful discovery that their vision had been too limited. Before the outer work was completed, the Abolitionists, in a surprising move, succeeded in outflanking it. Calhoun, Rhett, and the Mercury ultimately united to understand that the new danger transcended differences in the Calhoun camp; the whole southern fortress now stood in deadly peril. So Clapp was relieved of one problem only to be faced with another more ominous. The new danger appeared in the form of the Wilmot Proviso.

On August 8, 1846, the House of Representatives approved President Polk’s request for $2,000,000 to defray the cost of peace negotiations with Mexico. Attached to the appropriation bill, however, was a proposal by David Wilmot, Democrat from Pennsylvania. It provided that "as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico," slavery should be forever excluded. The Senate killed this critical proposal—and the appropriation bill along with it—but Calhoun recognized a disaster

For a discussion of the Proviso that best indicates the divisiveness of its effect upon the national Democracy, see Eric Foner, "The Wilmot Proviso Revisited," JAH, LVI, No. 2 (September, 1969), 262-79. Foner calls the Proviso "a desperate attempt to restore the Democratic Party’s traditional role as a placator of sectional antagonism. . ."
in the making. The vigilant Mercury missed its significance, at least for the time being.\textsuperscript{42}

Clapp's sights were trained elsewhere on August 8. He was preoccupied with the results of the extended congressional session which stood in glaring contrast to those of the frustrating Congress that had produced Bluffton. The Mercury, gleefully greeting the new tariff for revenue only, reflected on the other southern victories as well. Sub-treasury had been re-established, war with England averted, and an Oregon treaty had been ratified. The hateful proposal to plunder the public treasury with appropriations for internal improvements had gone down in defeat. Clapp was also following the course of hostilities with Mexico.

The Mercury's failure to share Calhoun's immediate understanding of Wilmot's menacing move stands in curious contrast to its obvious rapport with the Senator in matters of foreign policy. Throughout the late congressional session, as Calhoun consistently opposed Polk's seemingly uncompromising stand on Oregon, the Mercury echoed the Senator's opinions. Calhoun disapproved of Polk's bluff in asserting America's "clear and unquestionable title" to all of Oregon. The Carolinian held that the United States could not validate its claim beyond 49°N on the grounds of either settlement or discovery. Aware that Polk's resolve to look John Bull "straight in the eye" was only a diplomatic ploy, Calhoun feared that it would miscarry. He frowned upon the President's notice of American intention to terminate the Anglo-American joint-occupation treaty. If the President's policy

\textsuperscript{42}Congressional Globe, 29 Cong., 1 Sess., 1211-18; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 289.
proved to be unsuccessful, tariff reform—dependent as it was upon British concessions to American grain growers—might also fall. Even more to be feared was the risk of war with Great Britain at a time when American relations with Mexico were becoming daily more unsettled. In the event of such a conflict, the United States could lose both Texas and Oregon, Calhoun warned. But when Polk's tactic produced, in the Oregon Treaty, the compromise solution that he had all along intended, Calhoun actively supported the President. Robert Barnwell Rhett followed suit.  

The *Mercury* was effusive throughout in its agreement with Calhoun's policy. The American claim to "fifty-four forty" was absurd, Clapp said; based as it was on "shallow ignorance," it could be supported neither by discovery nor settlement. It was little wonder, the editor continued, that those who advocated so outrageous an extreme would "listen to no proposal of arbitration." They knew "better than to submit such assumptions to the test of any impartial man's scrutiny." There was, the *Mercury* ventured, "not a conscientious man in Christendom who would sanction them." To the *Mercury*, the forty-ninth parallel  

---

4Richardson, *Messages and Papers*, 2223-32; Quaife, ed., *Polk Diary*, I, 62-64, 155; Capers, Calhoun Opportunist, 213-34; Wiltse *Calhoun Sectionalist*, 247-72; White, *Rhett*, 88; John Hope Franklin, "The Southern Expansionists of 1846," *JSH*, XXV, No. 3 (Aug., 1949), 323-38; Edwin A. Miles, "'Fifty Four Forty or Fight'—an American Political Legend," *MVHR*, XLIV, No. 2 (Sept., 1957), 291-309; Calhoun never repudiated his preference for a policy of "wise and masterly inactivity" which he believed would bring the United States all of Oregon. To those who charged him with neglecting the interest of the West in Oregon while he supported those of the South in Texas, Calhoun replied that time was on the side of the United States in Oregon whereas in Texas it was not. So if the West wanted an immediate settlement of the Oregon issue it must be a compromise one (Cralle, *Calhoun Works*, IV, 286, 288).
represented "a very fair division" of Oregon. Echoing Calhoun, the editor predicted that the westward migration of Americans would ultimately acquire the territory for the United States, regardless of any settlement with Great Britain. "Substantially we must have it; and we will have it," the paper smugly predicted.44

War with Great Britain over this absurd dispute would be disastrous, especially for the South, said the Mercury. Yankee manufacturers and western grain farmers might profit; the South would only suffer. War would furnish a pretext for reviving protection; it would seal the South's ports to foreign trade and the South would be the principal battleground. Then there were the benighted Abolitionists. They demanded Oregon in return for Texas and rejoiced that war with Great Britain would "revenge the quarrel of abolition with the South." The editor saw warmongers everywhere: "every element of wickedness and wrong" seemed bent upon destroying the peace. The Abolitionists wanted revenge, the Whigs wanted party advantage, and the Democrats were moved by Clapp knew "not what irresistible charm."45

Clapp applauded every move for peace and exposed every provocative action. Polk's Inaugural was wrong when it spoke of a "clear and unquestionable title" to all Oregon. The editor was no less displeased by the President's termination of joint-occupation than was Calhoun. John Quincy Adams, the vindictive spokesman for the Abolitionists, and Edward A. Hannegan, the representative of western greed

44Mercury, Feb. 8, Mar. 13, Apr. 28, 29, May 8, July 12, Oct. 30, Nov. 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 19, 20, Dec. 10, 16, 1845; Feb. 16, 17, 18, 19, Mar. 4, 11, 12, Apr. 9, 28, June 18, 1846.

and impatience, could both profit by studying the example of those moderate men who followed Calhoun. 46

As the spring of 1846 drew nearer, the Mercury developed hopes for a peaceful resolution of the dispute. The President's notice terminating the joint-occupation treaty was, after all, conciliatory in its tone, and Polk's Washington organ, the Union, was growing steadily more moderate in its view of the situation. "Although not a press that we can remember beside [sic] our own ventured to discuss the title to Oregon, and even the members of Congress . . . seemed to touch it with fear and trembling," the Mercury said in April, "truth by degrees has spread its light." The editor hailed the final settlement as "precisely what we have always maintained ought to be the terms of settlement." Senate ratification of the Oregon treaty ended for the Mercury "the most perplexing and dangerous foreign question of our day . . . ." It probably determined " . . . that for a long time to come the relations of this country with Great Britain shall be those of peace and friendship." 47

The generally parallel course of Calhoun and Rhett and the Mercury with reference to the war with Mexico is further evidence of Clapp's attempts to uphold his journal's traditional allegiance. Although the Mercury devoted less space to Mexican relations than it did to the contemporary dispute with Great Britain over Oregon, when it

46ibid., Mar. 25, Apr. 28, May 2, 8, 9, 14, 24, June 10, July 12, Oct. 30, Nov. 4, 10-13, 17, 19, 20, 21, Dec. 9, 10, 16, 25, 29, 1845; Jan. 3, 8, 9, 15, 24, 28-30, Feb. 3, 11, 1846.

47ibid., Feb. 18, 24, 27, Mar. 16, 20, 26, Apr. 3, 6, 9, 16, 20, 22, 24, 25, 28, June 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, July 24, 1846.
did discuss American policy toward Mexico it was in words that Calhoun himself might have used. This apparent preoccupation with the Anglo-American dispute is in itself further evidence of Calhoun's influence. For without a settlement with Great Britain, there was little likelihood of one with Mexico. Consequently, the greater part of Calhoun's time in the Congress— at least until the ratification of the Oregon Treaty— was devoted to effecting an accommodation with Great Britain.

Calhoun was sympathetic to President Polk's expansionist program but unalterably opposed to its accomplishment at the risk of war. Upon learning that the President had ordered Zachary Taylor to take up a position on the Rio Grande, Calhoun urged care lest war result and the Oregon treaty be jeopardized. He also feared domestic repercussions with respect to the peculiar institution. Polk told the Senator that only a show of force was intended, but Calhoun was not reassured. When hostilities did result and the President asked Congress for authority to prosecute the war that had come "by the act of Mexico herself," Calhoun urged delay. The President, Calhoun said, was not empowered to declare war; only Congress could do that. Robert Barnwell Rhett took the same position in the House.48

Calhoun's call for delay was motivated by the thought that negotiations, through which war could be averted, were still a possibility. When the Senate did not heed his advice, he declined to vote at all on the bill which, in approving Polk's course, amounted

48Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 273-84; Capers, Calhoun Opportunist, 231-34; White, Rhett, 88-89.
to a declaration of war. Once his country was at war, however, the Carolinian supported those measures that he deemed necessary for its prosecution. Not included therein was President Polk's plan to revive the rank of lieutenant-general. Polk did not like General Winfield Scott, the army's senior officer and, consequently, Polk's most direct link with the war. The President, accordingly proposed to elevate Senator Thomas Hart Benton—whom he did like—to the prospective lieutenant-generalcy. This action would reduce Scott to second-in-command. Calhoun, who was not overly fond of Benton, vigorously opposed Polk's intention but for other reasons. The effect on the army would not be good, the Senator said. Career officers were not likely to react kindly to being suddenly superseded by a civilian. When the administration submitted its proposal in the form of a bill to the Senate, that body tabled the measure. Benton had previously gone through the motions of declining the honor but he was still displeased. So was President Polk, but other matters interceded to preclude an open break with Calhoun on the question. Calhoun, it should be remembered, had opposed Polk before.

Rhett, like Calhoun, held the war to be unnecessary and unwise and the manner of its outbreak to be unconstitutional. But also like the Senator, he lent his support to those measures necessary for its prosecution. In December of 1846, by which time he and Calhoun were officially reunited, Rhett altered his stance somewhat to become

49Franklin, "Southern Expansionists," JSH, XXV, No. 3, 323-38; Capers, Calhoun Opportunist, 232-33; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 273-86, 290-93; see below, 220-21.
a strong defender of administration war policy. This appears to have been his only important divergence from Calhoun on the question of the Mexican War. Once again the position of Rhett was not without its effect on the Mercury; Clapp's first strong defense of administration prosecution of the war coincides generally with Rhett's.

The Mercury's greater attention to the situation in Oregon did not prevent its disapproving notice of an "appetite for war" with Mexico during much of 1845. There was no cause for Mexican resentment against the United States, the paper declared, the addition of Texas to this country being perfectly legitimate. When Mexico recalled her envoy to Washington and even when she confiscated American property in Mexico, the editor saw no reason to fear an attack by the Mexicans. It was easy, Clapp said, to suspend diplomatic relations; it was even economical to do so but "a very different thing" it was, indeed, "to raise the support armies." The confident Mercury said that the only war was likely to be one of "sulks." As late as April 1846, Clapp looked to see Mexican-American differences settled by negotiation. When the Oregon question was resolved, a satisfactory settlement with Mexico would probably be forthcoming.

When the war came anyway, Clapp still could find no genuine American grievance against Mexico. The administration had contributed to the conflict by its provocative policies. Clapp saw, in fact,

50White, Rhett, 88-91. White says that Calhoun was not "placated by Rhett's return to the fold in October and implies that this may be why Rhett endorsed Polk's course on the war (ibid., 91).


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
"much in the domestic condition of Mexico that should forbid us to judge her by the severe forms of law." Even if foreign powers did propose to establish a monarchy in Mexico, in accordance with rumors the Mercury had heard but did not credit, there was no reason for the United States to become involved. Clapp felt that "every country has a right to choose its own Government." The real motive for the late American action, his paper alleged, was that some in this country wished to keep Mexico weak in order to despoil her.52

While Clapp approved of the President's initial move in ordering Zachary Taylor to Texas, the Mercury reproved the General for placing himself opposite Metamoras. "This course," Clapp said, "looks like a determination to provoke war with Mexico. But whether this is the intention or not," he continued in alarm, "most clearly this is the tendency." The Mercury had little faith in either the diplomatic ability or the pacific intent of armies. If the "Army on the Rio Grande does not get up a fight with the Mexicans in spite of all pacific instructions," the skeptical paper observed with displeasure, "it will be little short of a miracle."53

On May 8, 1846, one day before the official despatches reached Washington, the Mercury published a report of the attack on Taylor's army under the heading "War!" This state of affairs was the result of nothing but "the blunders of the administration." "No purpose, but . . . party expediency could be served" by the "blind fury" with which

52Ibid., Jan. 31, Feb. 6, Mar. 5, 6, 19, 26, Apr. 4, 1846.

53Ibid., Aug. 4, Sept. 18, 1845; Mar. 20, Apr. 25, May 7, 8, 1846.
Congress responded to the situation by voting for war. This "wholly unnecessary consequence of annexation" would never have occurred, according to the Mercury, but for the administration. South Carolina's Senator Calhoun was right in proposing to limit armaments to defensive purposes until "Congress could decide upon full knowledge and deliberation whether a war was determined on by Mexico, or was necessary to our honor and safety."\(^{54}\)

The United States were historically opposed to war "as a crime against liberty, humanity and civilization," Clapp reminded his readers, and that included war with Mexico. "Public opinion here warmly applauds the course of Mr. Calhoun on the war bill," the Mercury asserted, "and in no sort sympathizes . . . with those who insisted on loading the country with the responsibilities and perils of war without a single day to examine the merits of the controversy." Clapp, in reminding his subscribers that Calhoun urged a delay before the resort to hostilities, thundered that it "would have been but moderate deference to humanity, policy and the spirit of the age to have deferred the decision of so grave a question for a day." The nation had . . . trifled . . . most grievously and most foolishly too. It is impossible to believe that at this moment Congress can look back upon its action without self reproach, if not shame. After treating Mexico as a mass of imbecility and rottenness, at the first symptom of actual fight our Government is taken all aback, Congress is thrown into spasms, the whole country is summoned to arms, and the whole exchequer emptied into the

\(^{54}\)Ibid., May 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 1846.
The Mercury's effort to preserve the peace did not preclude its supporting the war once it came. Still, Clapp hoped for an early end to hostilities. With the war less than two weeks old, the arrival of good news from Taylor's army inspired the editor to think that negotiation might soon be undertaken. "In a few days," he said, "we confidently expect to hear that the Mexicans have been driven pell-mell across the Rio del Norte, and if Congress were not a little daft, that might be the end of the war." If the rumored British efforts to mediate proved to be based on fact, the Mercury favored American acceptance of the offer. Clapp stood strongly opposed to a broad invasion of Mexico. But as summer wore on and turned into autumn, the increasingly ephemeral prospects of peace continued to elude the editor. The "cut throat mood" of the United States in conjunction with Santa Anna's rejection of all peace overtures caused the Mercury to despair of an early ending of the war. "There remains then nothing but a vigorous prosecution of hostilities," Clapp dolefully informed his readers.

55Ibid., May 14, 19, 1846. Franklin says that Calhoun did not speak for his constituents in his opposition to the Mexican war. If this is the case, the Mercury's preachments are even more indicative of its attachment to the Calhoun cause. See Franklin, "Southern Expansionists," JSH, XXV, No. 3, 337-38. The success of Calhoun's drive to impose unity in South Carolina undoubtedly contributed to the absence of any real hostility between newspaper editors on this issue. In Charleston the Patriot tended to support the Mercury's view of the situation while the Courier and the recently founded News emphasized the desirability of a vigorous prosecution of the war. The invective of previous editorial duels was absent, however (Patriot, May 14, 1846; Courier, May 21, 1846; News, May 14, 1846).

The *Mercury's* faded hopes of peace evidently combined with Robert Barnwell Rhett's influence to swing Clapp to a conditional loyalty to the administration in December. When the President, in "a very able paper," addressed the convening Congress, Clapp concluded that Polk deserved "the support of all at least who approved the war." As for the *Mercury*, it was exasperated by Mexico's futile resistance and consistent refusal to countenance peace negotiations. Expressing his confidence in the earnestness and ability of President Polk's efforts, Clapp now urged a strong war effort as the only alternative remaining to the country. The *Mercury*, as she abandoned the administration as a target, commenced anew to heap opprobrium upon the heads of those Congressmen who having "in hot haste precipitated us into this war," were "instead of looking to the honor and interests of the Union" now "looking at home to their popularity." Clapp was referring to those who "held up needed appropriations and taxes" when "American troops" were "deep in hostile territory." Among those now championing administration requests in support of the war effort was Robert Barnwell Rhett.57

The *Mercury's* current allegiance to the administration did not obscure its vision where Calhoun was concerned, however. When Polk proposed to make a lieutenant-general out of Senator Benton, the *Mercury* roundly denounced the whole scheme. The move impressed Clapp as an unworthy effort to "discredit military experience and military service" and at a time when both had "crowned themselves with a distinction

57Ibid., Nov. 3, Dec. 4, 12, 15, 29, 1846; Jan. 7, 12, 14, 16, 26, 27, 1847; White, *Rhett*, 91.
never before enjoyed in this country." Reflecting perhaps Calhoun's preference for a professional military force, the *Mercury* had previously denounced the volunteer system of raising troops as "incompatible with military discipline." Politically-appointed officers, Clapp said, possessed the same drawback. The *Mercury* professed to having no particular objection to Benton but thought he should be "gratefully remembered for declining the command."\(^{58}\)

Throughout his turn at the helm of the *Mercury*, Clapp, the "writer of classical taste and culture," was repeatedly obliged to demonstrate his agility by colliding with neither Rhett nor Calhoun. On the whole the articulate editor stood a successful watch. If Clapp did not appreciate the significance of the Wilmot Proviso as early as he might have—and as early as Calhoun had done—the reason probably lies in the example of Robert Barnwell Rhett. Rhett was as jubilant over the results of the long 1845-1846 Congress as he had been disconsolate over those of the two preceding sessions. Whereas in 1844 his discontent had led him to abandon the party for separate state action, his satisfaction in August of 1846 landed him in the arms of the administration.\(^{59}\) As on previous occasions, he subsequently reconsidered his impetuosity.

Calhoun went to Fort Hill after Congress adjourned in 1846, there to brood over the course of the South's future. In his correspondence he referred to the Wilmot Proviso as "an apple of discord" which would "do much to divide the party." He cautioned an unidentified

\(^{58}\) *Mercury*, June 11, 13, July 13, Aug. 10, 21, Oct. 12, 24, 1846; Jan. 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 19, 29, 1847.

\(^{59}\) *White, Rhett*, 88-89.
associate at the North that the Union would not endure the continuing assault on slavery. By early fall Rhett, renouncing all fears "of the imputation of subserviency to Mr. Calhoun," had come to the same conclusion. Although he would rely on Polk for the present—as Calhoun would do also—the Congressman concluded that a satisfactory future for the South required a defense more permanent than that provided by the administration. He had belatedly realized the menace of the Wilmot Proviso. For this reason Rhett compromised "between theory and expedience" to endorse Calhoun's version of internal improvements.  

Reasoning that the South must align herself with the West or give up the Union, Rhett moved to cement relations between the two sections. He understood that the Wilmot Proviso had passed the House with the aid of western votes. Westerners thereby had exacted their retribution for the South's opposition to internal improvements. Rhett determined to see that such a situation did not recur. Basking in the widespread approval of leaders of the national Democracy who endorsed his course in the late Congress, Calhoun, meanwhile, was planning once more to stand for the presidency. His chances for success would rotate around a prospective South-West axis. Robert Barnwell Rhett would help to build that axis—and so would the Mercury.  

During the waning months of 1846, a year of southern victories deceptive as to their meaning, the Mercury prepared its

---

60 Calhoun to Lewis S. Coryell, Nov. 7, 1846, Calhoun to (illegible), Nov. 7, 1846, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 709-11; Rhett to Elmore, quoted without date in White, Rhett, 90-91; White, Rhett, 90-91.  

61 White, Rhett, 90; Capers, Calhoun Opportunist, 231-34; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 272.
support for Calhoun's last bid to be President. Editor Clapp's contribution was destined to be one of preparation only. For two years he had navigated the tortuous channel required of those who would offend neither Calhoun nor Rhett; he would do so no longer. The Rhett family sold its interest in the Mercury and on February 1, 1847, Clapp put down his pen. "The . . . paper, as property held in trust," he said, "involved so much of difficulty and embarrassment that its sale was in every way desirable."^2

62Mercury, Feb. 1, 1847. Clapp's deft pen concealed an apparent bitterness in its allusion to his "difficulty and embarrassment." It also did not reveal the abruptness of the editor's exit from the Mercury. Shortly afterward, Clapp wrote more frankly to former Governor Hammond, an important business acquaintance who was also a political rival of Rhett. "... At the very moment of receiving your letter, it became very dubious whether I should be the editor of the Mercury, and soon after, very certain I should not be," Clapp confided (Clapp to Hammond, Feb. 17, 1847, Hammond Papers).
CHAPTER VII

THE STATESMAN OF THE AGE

Clapp's successor at the Mercury, John E. Carew, assumed control at a crucial juncture. By February 1847 the acceleration in the dispute over slavery was splitting the Democratic party and casting a dark shadow on the future of the Union itself. Calhoun was unveiling his latest tactic designed to unite the South for her defense. Success in this venture might yet reward him with the presidency. The war with Mexico showed no prospects of ending. The tariff question was far from being finally resolved. Within South Carolina bitterly disputing factions were arraying themselves for battle over the issue of the state bank. Some junior members of the Calhoun camp increasingly showed an unauthorized disposition to rivalry. Both the state and the Mercury would require wise leadership in the uncertain months ahead.

The mood in South Carolina fully reflected the precarious state of the times. On November 18, 1846, George McDuffie had resigned his Senate seat. Surface speculation held that either Franklin H. Elmore, Robert Barnwell Rhett, or James H. Hammond would succeed the retiring Senator. Instead, in a surprisingly quick election, the General Assembly chose Judge Andrew Pickens Butler to replace the ailing McDuffie. Butler was a former Unionist. The same legislative session elevated Judge David Johnson, another "Unionist
of other days," to the governorship. Again it seemed that the deft
hand of Calhoun was moving to maintain state unity.1

Orthodoxy, however, was less than unanimous in its approval of
Butler's election. Prior to the election most observers had assumed
that Elmore would be tapped for the succession. Although Elmore had
many enemies in South Carolina, the banker's intimacy with Calhoun
evidently prevented any strong opposition to his candidacy. Even
Hammond, who was not ordinarily given to praise of Calhoun confidants,
thought Elmore "the most suitable of all the candidates likely to be
in the field..."2 Rhett, "eager" for the office, uncomplainingly
accepted Elmore's advice not to run. But when Elmore belatedly de­
cared his determination to "stay at home and manage his own affairs," neither Hammond nor Rhett was prepared for the result. So evident
was Hammond's bitterness that it elicited a letter from the victorious Butler. "It would be a source of real concern to me," the new

1Paul Quattlebaum to Hammond, Nov. 6, 1846, Hammond to Simms,
Nov. 10, 1846, McDuffie to Hammond, Nov. 11, 1846, Hammond to Simms
Nov. 13, 1846, James J. Wilson to Hammond, Nov. 26, 1846, Hammond
Papers; Rhett to Burt, Sept. 3, 1846, Burt Papers; Rhett to Elmore,
Nov. 19, 1846, Rhett Collection; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 290-91;
Edwin L. Green, George McDuffie (Columbia, 1936), 226-27.

McDuffie's resignation, occasioned by his virtual physical
collapse, touched off a wrangle not evident from the General Assembly's
quick decision to replace him with Butler. The Assembly action was the
result of only four ballots. Elmore declined to run—allegedly because
of business affairs—probably because he knew Calhoun preferred other­
wise. Banker Elmore also advised his friend Rhett not to run unless
he was assured of success. Elmore, "the very man . . . to manage men
for Mr. Calhoun," almost certainly knew that Rhett did not have much
assurance. Rhett accepted the advice but upon the assumption that
he, Rhett, would succeed to "Mr. Calhoun's seat, when he resigned."
(Quattlebaum to Hammond, Nov. 6, 1846, Hammond Papers; Rhett to Elmore,
Nov. 19, 1846, Rhett Collection; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 219;
White, Rhett, 91; Green, McDuffie, 226).

2Hammond to Simms, Nov. 23, 1846, Hammond Papers.
Senator wrote, "if I could suppose that my nomination to the Senate . . ." has been regarded as "personal opposition to yourself." For his part, Rhett concluded that his current term in the House would be his last. "He would serve South Carolina in the Senate or not at all." The experience of both Rhett and Hammond in opposing Calhoun reminded them that an open breach with the leader would result in defeat; it was apparent, nonetheless, that the divisive seeds sown at Bluffton were beginning to sprout.

Carolinians were not fully satisfied with the recent tariff compromise. But their recurrent references to a policy of genuine free trade were lacking in the rancor so characteristic of those days before the Walker Tariff. By 1847 Calhoun had finally succeeded in riveting their attention to the antislavery agitation, a vigorous and clamoring force rapidly turning into a crusade. This new threat was so apparent that it obscured all other issues. The state was united by apprehension--and a determination to maintain its

---

3White, Rhett, 91; Butler to Hammond, Dec. 21, 1846, Hammond Papers. Hammond's reply to Butler was conciliatory (Hammond to Butler, Jan. 1, 1847). Prior to the election Hammond alleged a complete disinterest in the Senate even saying at one point that "I don't want to go." Subsequent to the Assembly's choice, however, Hammond's correspondence reveals an altogether different sentiment (Hammond to Simms, Oct. 15, 1846, Hammond Papers. See also Hammond Papers, Oct. 1846-1847).

4White, Rhett, 91. Rhett was re-elected to Congress in the same year. He was unopposed.

5See, for example, Hammond Papers, Dec. 1846-1847. Wiltse emphasizes the success of Calhoun's policy of unification, making the state thereby into the "sword and buckler of slavery" (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 291). There is no doubt that Carolinians regarded unity as a necessary device to fight the antislavery movement. My own view, however, is that subsurface forces were sufficiently advanced by 1847 to preclude any real agreement on how to meet the crisis (See below, 227-28).
way of life.  

The terms separation and disunion reappeared in the public vocabularies of the state's leaders. Even Calhoun, hitherto the opponent of all who advocated the ultimate resort, was heard to speak of secession as a distinct possibility or even probability. "I desire," he said, "above all things to save the whole; but if that cannot be, to save the portion where Providence has cast my lot." 

Most ominous of all, South Carolina Orthodoxy was privately speculating as to how much time was left to Calhoun and who would succeed him. Rhett had laid his plans in 1846. At the same time no less a figure than Langdon Cheves, himself not far from the grave, was reputed to be reckoning for the day when Calhoun would no longer dominate the state. James H. Hammond doubtless read with approval a letter reminding him that "The Caesar of your Commonwealth must by & bye [sic] number his days as we must. You are evidently to succeed him." 

Indeed, Calhoun was no longer young; furthermore, his health was failing. The choice of a successor for the "Caesar" was certain

---

6See above, VI.

7Calhoun to Anna Calhoun Clemson, Dec. 27, 1846, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence.

8W. E. Hodgson to Hammond, Nov. 20, 1946, Beverly Tucker to Hammond, Feb. 6, 1847, Hammond Papers. McDuffie had advised Hammond that he should await Calhoun's "retirement" before seeking a Senate seat (McDuffie to Hammond, Nov. 11, 1846, Hammond Papers). Another Hammond correspondent forcefully asserted that "South Carolina... would this day be better off if he [Calhoun] had died 10 years ago" (J. S. Clark to Hammond, Apr. 5, 1847, Hammond Papers). Simms longed for "resurrection of independence among our people... His [Calhoun's] shadow falls heavily upon our young men...:" he said. (Simms to Hammond, Apr. 2, 1847, Hammond Papers). For Rhett see above, 222-23.
to produce a turmoil. It would probably determine the future of South Carolina politics, perhaps of South Carolina itself. Who would then plan the strategy for the South? It was too soon to predict the time, let alone the identity of the succession. But those involved were bound to dread or anticipate the day of the old Senator's retirement. That they were planning for a timely reaction is apparent. Thus, at a time when the unity forged by Calhoun in the aftermath of nullification was critical, South Carolina was already advanced on the road to division. New editor Carew, with his paper representing the voice of the leader, would face as many trials as had his predecessor, John Milton Clapp.

Carew's credentials qualified him for the challenge he faced. Reared in Charleston, the incoming editor was educated at Bishop England Academy, South Carolina College and Norwich Military Academy. His attendance at South Carolina College and Norwich was an obvious asset within the state. Prior to the establishment of The South Carolina Corps of Cadets, prominent Carolinians went in large numbers to Norwich. The editor's father, Edward Carew, was successful both as a businessman and a planter. His standing in the community provided his son with valuable local stability. The elder Carew had been born in Ireland, a circumstance that did nothing to dampen the new editor's impact upon Charleston's large Irish population.  

---

9 _Mercury_, Oct. 30, 1824; Aug. 4, 1835; Jan. 1, 1846; Apr. 22, 1850; M. Laborde, _History of the South Carolina College 1801–57_ (Columbia, 1874), 553; C. M. Dodge and W. A. Ellis, _Norwich University, 1819–1911; Her History, Her Graduates, Her Roll of Honor_ (3 vols., Montpelier, 1911), III, 553–68, 616, 713–14. The Norwich geographical index lists South Carolina names like Sinkler, Deas, Marshall, Ball, Waring, Gourdin, Capers, Heriot, Horry, Alston, Wragg, Mikell, Marion,
Editor Carew was a lawyer and was also prominent in Democratic party politics. A friend of both Rhett and Elmore, he was a member of the lower house of the General Assembly and a faithful supporter of Calhoun. Significantly enough, Carew had opposed the Bluffton movement. He had some previous acquaintance with the newspaper world; his father had formerly held a part interest in the City Gazette. The "old gentleman" seemingly understood the importance of the press for he financed his son's purchase of the Mercury.10

Carew represented a new influence at the Mercury. For the first time in almost twenty years, the Mercury editor was financially independent of the Rhett's. And for the first time since Pinckney, the paper boasted of a politician-editor who could appeal to the "mechanics" as well as to their betters. This was no small asset in 1847.

Jenkins, Connor, Broughton, DuBose and Gaillard. One hundred five Carolinians attended Norwich between 1823 and 1841; six were enrolled subsequent to that date. Governor Thomas Bennett's son was graduated in 1827. Carew was enrolled for the year 1826-1827. He was graduated from neither South Carolina College nor Norwich (Laborde, History of South Carolina College, 550, 553; Dodge and Ellis, Norwich, 553, 616, 713-14). The South Carolina Corps of Cadets consisted of those cadets enrolled at The Arsenal in Columbia and the Citadel in Charleston. The first session at each school opened on Mar. 20, 1843, Oliver J. Bond, The Story of the Citadel (Richmond, 1936), 14-19. Colonel Bond views Norwich as the model for the South Carolina schools (ibid., 17-18). See above, 178.

10 J. B. O'Neal, Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina (2 vols., Charleston, 1859), II, 606; Mercury, July 25, Aug. 3, 10, 21, Oct. 17, 1844; Oct. 15, 1846; Oct. 12, 1848; King, Newspaper Press, 62; Rhett to Burt, Sept. 3, 1846, Burt Papers, Carew to Calhoun, Mar. 10, Sept. 20, 1846, Calhoun Collection; Carew to Hammond, Nov. 18, 1847; Boyce to Hammond, Jan. 12, 1848, Hammond Papers. The assertion that Carew's father financed the Mercury venture is based upon the opinion of contemporaries—not including Carew—who left no known record of the transaction (in particular see Boyce to Hammond, Jan. 12, 1848).
when "a revolution" seemed to be "going on in S. Ca." One disturbed planter who was also a Mercury subscriber feared that it "only awaits an opportunity to develop the catastrophe which shall make us openly . . . like the other States . . . a mobocracy. . . ." The fearful reader, James Henry Hammond, subsequently analyzed South Carolina society in the following manner:

The planters here are essentially what the nobility are in other countries. They stand at the head of society & politics. Lawyers & professional politicians come next. . . .

It is not unlikely that those who decided to replace Clapp used a similar standard in their search for his successor. They would have ignored, however, Hammond's further assertion that "an Editor . . . ranks with the lowest class . . . in general & in this country I scarcely know one who has . . . been able to lift himself above it." The Mercury's peculiar position as the banner of Orthodoxy required that the senior editor be socially secure before assuming his office. Carew's Irish background was no handicap.

11 Hammond to Simms, Oct. 15, 1846, Hammond Papers. Another Mercury reader was "shocked beyond expression" to learn that "an exceedingly low, drunken, Irish vagabond printer" had challenged and almost defeated Charleston Congressman Holmes for his seat in the House (Colonel Pemberton to Hammond, Oct. 27, 1846, Hammond Papers).

During the fall of 1846 Calhoun was obliged to intervene in order to preserve the traditional compromise between the Lowcountry and Upcountry over representation. The actual issue was the manner of choosing presidential electors. It was proposed to choose them by Congressional districts instead of through the legislature. This would have meant an increase in Upcountry influence (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 280-90; Carew to Calhoun, Sept. 22, 1846, Calhoun Papers; Mercury, Sept. - Nov., 1846).

12 Hammond to Major Hammond, May 19, 1848, Hammond Papers.

13 Ibid. Hammond used "scarcely . . . one" advisedly. He had once edited the Southern Times (Merritt, Hammond, 14).
"South Carolina aristocracy was never so exclusive as not to receive into its ranks young men of merit and promise..." Indeed, it was advisable for the Mercury to appeal to the whole population. Carew, this son of a planter who had been born in Ireland, politician and attorney by profession, a man noted for "the chastened elegance of his pen" was well equipped for the job.

Carew proposed to be independent politically as well as financially. He reportedly announced on his first day as editor that the Mercury was a "Rhett organ" no longer. The new editor likewise objected to being stamped with Calhoun's brand. Such statements were neither new nor surprising to Carew's skeptical readers. Henry Laurens Pinckney, the editor who first aligned the Mercury with Calhoun, made similar protestations of independence. Almost thirty years had gone by since Pinckney's protest and wherever the Mercury was read, it was known to be the Calhoun standard. Perhaps Carew intended to change this image and simply found himself unable to do so. In all probability, however, his assertions were made merely as a matter of form. At any event his course belied his words. Carew's association

14 Green, McDuffie, 161.

15 King, Newspaper Press, 152.

16 White, Rhett, 99. Rhett's influence was negligible during the first part of Carew's proprietorship. This was due, no doubt, to his semi-estrangement from Calhoun.

17 Mercury, Mar. 17, 1847; Feb. 5, 1848. Carew's paper asserted that it was not "Mr. Calhoun's organ." The editor's father allegedly insisted that the paper be politically independent as a condition of his financial backing (Boyce to Hammond, Jan. 12, 1848, Hammond Papers).

18 See above, 19-20.
with Calhoun was the most direct of any editor's since Pinckney.

During Carew's turn at the helm, the Mercury maintained its position as the voice of Calhoun, the official spokesman of the State Rights party. Indeed under Carew's direction—and after Senator Calhoun's death—the paper acquired an even more partisan title, "the political textbook of the South."¹⁹

It was a disconsolate Calhoun who led the Carolina congressional delegation to Washington in 1847. The senior Senator was preoccupied with that "apple of discord," the Wilmot Proviso. Less than a month after the Congress convened, the antislavery group opened its attack. On January 4, 1846, Preston King, Democratic Congressman from New York, reintroduced the proposal to bar slavery from all territory acquired as a result of the Mexican War. Conceding that Congress had no power to abolish slavery existing within a state, he proclaimed that never again would a slave state enter the Union. King was suspected of speaking for a large segment of the northern Democracy, not excluding former President Van Buren. The party of Polk, Hannegan, Woodbury, and Calhoun was splitting apart.²⁰

During the same month another disruptive measure was brought to the attention of the House. It proposed that the antislavery provisions of the Ordinance of 1787 be extended to the developing territory of Oregon. Calhoun informed Congressman Armistead Burt of the course to be taken. Speaking for South Carolina in the House, Burt offered his support for the bill if it were amended to include the phrase

---

¹⁹ *Mercury*, Aug. 1, 1850. The title was bestowed by a correspondent of the Baltimore Sun and reprinted in the *Mercury*.

²⁰ Wiltse, *Calhoun Sectionalist*, 293.
"inasmuch as . . . said territory lies north of . . . the line of the Missouri Compromise." The amendment was rejected on the next day. Upon the rebuff of South Carolina's proffered compromise, Robert Barnwell Rhett was recognized. His speech signalled the end of Carolina-inspired accommodation.21

The Congress, Rhett reminded his bickering colleagues, had no right to ban slavery from any territory. The territories were the common property of states held to be sovereign. That being the case, no state could be excluded from full enjoyment of property held in common by all the states. The majority was unmoved by Rhett's argument; on January 16 the House organized the Oregon territory with slavery excluded.22

Burt's speech had been authorized; Rhett's apparently was not. It was, nonetheless, clear to Burt, Rhett, and Calhoun—and to many other Southerners as well—that the antislavery forces meant to do as they said—to exclude any new slave states. For a time this produced an apparent unity among the southern representatives; Whigs and Democrats acted in concert. Meanwhile, the tone of the debate in Congress became increasingly bitter. Well might President Polk denounce the "mischiefous and wicked agitation" of the slavery issue; it was preventing any consideration of bills in support of the war effort.23


22 Cong. Globe, 29th, 2nd, 187, 188, Appendix, 244-47.

Polk was more fortunate in the Senate, at least for a time. Here administration supporters introduced legislation to enlarge the army. But Calhoun led the Senate into a discussion of war policy. He wished the objective clarified before the Senate acted to strengthen the forces of the Commander-in-Chief. Calhoun feared that a continued offensive strategy on the part of the United States would result in conquest and annexation of all Mexico, "the forbidden fruit." This in turn would intensify the festering issue of slavery in the territories. As an alternative to that dread prospect, the Carolinian proposed a cessation of offensive hostilities. American forces should adopt a defensive posture intended to hold the area north of the Rio Grande in Texas. They should also maintain control north of the line of 30°N., from its junction with the Rio Grande westward to the Pacific. Since the United States was already in possession of the area here described and since this represented her pre-war objective, there was no need for further fighting. The Americans could simply hold what they had until Mexico should sue for peace. Polk was outraged; the President reacted by having Calhoun read out of the party—again.  

---

24 Cong. Globe, 29th, 2nd, 204, 218, 346–349, 356–59, 376–77, Appendix, 323–27, 366–67, 406–17; Cralle, ed., Calhoun Works, IV, 303–27; Quaife, ed., Polk Diary, II, 283–84, 371–73, 375–79; Mercury, Feb. 22, 1847. The initial dispute arose over the administration sponsored "Ten Regiment Bill." This proposal would authorize ten more regiments for the army and empower the President to appoint commissioned officers during congressional recesses. Calhoun's following held the second provision to be unconstitutional and—after some delay—forced a compromise on Polk. Congress was also considering the appropriation of $300,000,000 to underwrite the cost of a peace mission to Mexico. Calhoun was read out of the party on February 8, during the "Ten Regiment Bill" dispute. This was far from the end of the matter. The President spoke through the medium of Thomas Ritchie, editor of the Washington Union. When the Wilmot dispute reached the Senate, Ritchie accused Calhoun of damaging the war effort with his harangues over
Banishment notwithstanding, Calhoun would not be silent. The House adopted the Wilmot Proviso for the second time on February 15, 1847. Included as an amendment to the bill was Polk's request for $3,000,000 to finance peace negotiations. Four days later Calhoun again rose to address the Senate. This time he spoke in the language of Rhett. The issue posed by Wilmot's hateful measure was neither war nor peace, he said, but the safety of the slaveholding states. Those harassed states would accept neither this bill, designed as it was to ensure their permanent inequality within the Union, nor any more compromises. The issue must be settled—finally and justly—or the South must seek redress elsewhere. 25

Calhoun had not abandoned the Union, however. To assure that neither he nor his section would do so, he submitted a set of resolutions designed to guarantee southern equality within the nation. Asserting that the Missouri Compromise could not be justified under the Constitution, Calhoun informed his hearers that the South would, nevertheless, accept an extension of the line of 36°30'N to the Pacific. Thus would the issue of the western territory be settled in an equitable manner. The South would accept nothing less. 26

Congressman Burt had spoken, Calhoun continued, at the Senator's behest. The House had not heeded his words. If the Senate

---


elected to follow the same course. Southerners would look to their own devices. Speaking for "that section of the Union" where were his "family," his "connections," and all his "hopes," the Senator charted his own Rubicon. "I would rather meet any extremity . . . than give up one inch of our equality," he said.  

Slaveholder Polk was unimpressed. The administration, vigorously supported by slaveholders Benton and Houston, denounced Calhoun's resolutions. Then, in what for the Senate was a rapid sequence, Calhoun's resolutions were tabled, the $3,000,000 appropriation requested by the President was approved, the Wilmot Proviso was rejected and the Oregon territorial bill tabled. The "Calhoun clique" voted for Polk's appropriation. Calhoun had made his point; the South would not vote money for the war unless she shared in the spoils. With the session ending, the Carolinian left Washington, his spirits much improved. He had not renounced compromise after all.  

The Mercury supported the Carolina delegation on every issue. As the session progressed, Carew's readers received increasing evidence that the paper had regained the confidence of the leader. On January 13 an alert editor rejoiced at the news that Calhoun's call for southern unity was falling on willing ears:  

The recent movements of the . . . Congress to ostracize the slave-holding states and deprive them by law, of all share in the territory acquired by the 


28 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 307. The Senate Judiciary Committee had deleted the House-inserted slavery restriction from the Oregon bill. Northern votes tabled the measure when it reached the floor (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 307).
war . . . have been met on the part of the Southern members with a firmness deserving of the grateful appreciation of their constituents, and with a harmony of sentiment . . . that augurs well for the cause. The union of the South in this emergency will save the Federal Union from a great danger.

Those "craving and time-serving politicians" who catered to the balance of power at the North would "tremble" at the results of such Unity. No longer would they bow before the Abolitionists; in the face of a united South the thin ranks of antislavery would be inadequate to determine the outcome of an election. The paper understood the issue no less than its leader.\textsuperscript{29}

The \textit{Mercury} published Burt's speech on the Oregon bill even as it endorsed Burt's sentiments. The "canting hypocrisy" of the Abolitionists was behind the Wilmot Proviso; "the evidence of a spirit . . . redolent of evil," it would "carry desolation in its progress . . . ." Rhett's speech was published and commended. The editor dared the Abolitionists to exclude slavery from the western territories. It was "high time," he said, "that the Southern press should speak out and cause itself to be heard on this subject." Calhoun's speech on the "Three Million Bill" was reproduced and endorsed. House passage of the Wilmot Proviso brought forth another call for southern unity; "it is no longer a question," the \textit{Mercury} warned, "of how far the North is to be trusted when either their interests or their inclinations come in conflict with pledges and plighted faith."\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Mercury}, Jan. 13, 14, 1847; Burt to Conner, Feb. 1, 3, 1847; Jan. 20, 1848, Conner Letters.

\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Mercury}, Jan. 19, Feb. 5, 6, 9, 12, 15, 30, 1847. There was no apparent change in tone when Carew relieved Clapp on February 1 (see above, VI).
Carew's paper published Calhoun's resolutions on the territorial settlement along with his remarks in their defense. "That the South is able to protect herself there can be no question; that she is willing to do so, it would be a stigma on her character to doubt," quoted the approving *Mercury*. And again the editor alerted his readers as to the exact nature of the danger they faced in the Wilmot Proviso:

> It is a proclamation to the world that we of the South are not deemed worthy of . . . equality . . . an aspersion and a blot . . . to stigmatize and debase the people of the Slave States.

"No man should be silent now," concluded the *Mercury*. "THE REPUBLIC IS IN DANGER." 31

When Thomas Ritchie, speaking for Polk's administration, attacked Calhoun for agitating the slavery issue, the *Mercury* was outraged. How could a Virginian take so absurd a stand? "The Philistines are upon us and this Delilah would lull us to sleep that our locks might be shaven"! the editor thundered. Ritchie's stand was a "miserable abandonment of the South." And the *Mercury* noted a significant agreement between Ritchie's *Union* and the abolitionist *National Era*. 32

The correspondent "Lang Syne" thought the time was ripe for another experiment in state rights; secession was the course he recommended. Most of the March 4 issue was devoted to Calhoun's reply to

---

31 *Mercury*, Feb. 23, 24, 1847.

32 *Ibid.*, Feb. 25, 1847. The anti-slavery *National Era*, a weekly edited by Gamaliel Bailey, was established at Washington early in 1847 (Wiltse, *Calhoun Sectionalist*, 342). Ritchie, editor of the administration *Union*, was from Richmond. See below, 305, n. 2.
Senator Benton. It was a "triumphant vindication" of the Carolini-
an's course, the Mercury said. Noting that the Senate had finally ap-
proved the "Three Million Bill" without the Wilmot Proviso, the Mercury
approvingly reckoned that the House would now concur with the upper
chamber. "If the bill will aid in the settlement of the war, let it
become a law," the paper had earlier advised.33

The Wilmington packet, with Calhoun aboard, landed at Charles-
ton on Saturday, March 6, two days after the Senator's departure from
Washington. Although it was six A.M., the city's greeting was indica-
tive of the importance of both the man and his mission. The Carolinian
debarked to be met by a large contingent of his Lowcountry liege men
headed by the Mayor. This delegation escorted Calhoun to his hotel
where he and Mrs. Calhoun were to be guests of the city. A formal re-
ception was planned in the City Hall. On the ninth, Senator Calhoun
would make an important public address.34

Noting his "warm and enthusiastic" welcome, Calhoun could only
have been further encouraged by the packed house that awaited his
speech. Hundreds, turned away from the hall itself, filled the street
outside. This eager crowd thundered its approval when the great Caro-
linian appeared on the platform. It was with some difficulty that
John E. Carew, presiding, was able to contain their enthusiasm and

33Mercury, Feb. 10, Mar. 1, 4, 5, 1847.

34Mercury, Mar. 5, 8, 10, 1847; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 308. Calhoun was suffering from a severe cold which caused the re-
ception to be cancelled. His address, originally scheduled for the
eighth, was postponed until the ninth for the same reason (Wiltse,
Calhoun Sectionalist, 308). Coit gives the seventh as the date of
Calhoun's arrival (Coit, Calhoun, 467).
restore order.35

The assembly listened to Calhoun's solemn address with rapt attention. It heard him say that the greater part of the northern wings of both parties were committed to the Wilmot Proviso and that they commanded enough votes to secure its passage. That the resulting exclusion of the South from thousands of miles of the national domain was unlawful, would not restrain them, Calhoun said. The South, then, must provide another restraint.36

Fourteen years before, on November 22, 1833, Calhoun had stood before a similar audience in Charleston. His purpose on that occasion was to identify—for the first time—the Abolitionists as the South's main enemy. He had warned his hearers then that only a course which resulted in southern unity would resolve the situation to their satisfaction. The South must put aside her domestic divisions, he had proclaimed, and stand united in the face of an aggressive, uncompromising enemy. A southern convention could best accomplish this purpose, Calhoun said in 1833.37

Neither the enemy nor the proposed strategy had changed during the intervening years. The Abolitionists counted for only about five per cent of the northern vote, the Senator told his 1847 audience. But that vote was so well organized that in combination with the nearly

[References]

35Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 308-09; Coit, Calhoun, 467; Mercury, Feb. 1, Mar. 5, 8, 10, 1847; Calhoun to Thomas Clemson, Mar. 12, 1847, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 720. Wiltse says that the meeting was thought to be among the largest ever held in Charleston.

36Cralle, ed., Calhoun Works, IV, 382-96; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 309; Coit, Calhoun, 467.

37See above, 79.
even division of parties at the North, it could swing elections. Northern politicians were obliged to take it into consideration. In self-defense, the South must put aside party division and stand together in one southern party. Such a stand would counter the abolitionist bloc and convince northern politicians that if they won abolitionist votes they would lose southern ones.38

Calhoun would go one step further the hushed audience learned. The convention system of nominating presidential candidates militated against the South, he said. With its greater numbers the North could always dominate in convention. According to the Constitution, however, the Electoral College was meant to choose the President; the South should insist that the constitutional procedure be followed and that nominating conventions be eliminated. By acting together Southern Democrats and Whigs could yet preserve their equality within the Union, saving thereby the Union itself. But this solution could only be effected by "taking an early and decided stand, while political ties" were "still strong. . . ." The optimism with which Calhoun had left Washington showed itself in his conclusion, "I have never known truth . . . fail . . . in the end." Registering its exhilarated agreement, the crowd responded with an ovation.39

38 Cralle, ed., Calhoun Works, IV, 382-96.

39 Cralle, ed., Calhoun Works, IV, 382-96; Coit, Calhoun, 407-08; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 309-11; Capers, Calhoun Opportunist, 236-37; Chaplin Morrison, Democratic Politics and Sectionalism the Wilmot Proviso Controversy (Chapel Hill, 1967), 44, hereinafter cited as Morrison, Democratic Politics.
The political relationship between Editor Carew and South Carolina's Senator antedated the recently ended Congressional session. As early as August 9, 1846, Carew had written to Calhoun on behalf of the "Young Mens [sic] Democratic Association of Charleston." In this letter he affirmed the group's allegiance to Calhoun:

> It is perhaps, Sir, not out of place to inform you that [we regard] our . . . motto, 'Free Trade, Low duties--no debt--separation from Banks, Economy--retrenchment--and a strict adherence to the Constitution . . . as the condensed text of your political life . . . which if triumphant, must preserve Liberty and the Union, and carry your already honored name down to . . . posterity.

The Association "respectfully" requested Calhoun to "indicate the course which in your judgment" would be "Expedient for the Democratic party of South Carolina to pursue in reference to the great questions now before the people."40

Calhoun's answer was sufficiently developed by early 1847 for the Mercury to refer to a basic similarity between southern Democrats and Whigs.41 In writing to Calhoun on February 7, James Hamilton, Jr., noted the wisdom of southerners "rallying on yourself,"42 a possibility not yet discussed by the Mercury. (Some critics charged that "the frenzy" of Calhoun's "fixed idea concerning the presidency" was at work again.) By March John Heart, a Washington-based Calhoun editor, was reporting to the Senator on Charleston's favorable reaction to the

40 Carew to Calhoun, Aug. 9, 1846, Calhoun Papers.

41 Mercury, Jan. 16, 21, Feb. 5, 10, 1847.

42 Hamilton to Calhoun, Feb. 7, 1847, Calhoun Papers. Hamilton pledged to urge upon "your devoted friends in the Legislature" of Louisiana a program of support for Calhoun from the South and West.
developing plans. Urging Calhoun to enlarge upon his "remedy" Heart informed him that from "the tone of the Southern press . . . the present moment is especially opportune for the exposition." In the meantime Heart was advising the Charleston press on procedure.43

South Carolina's reaction to the Charleston address was characteristic of the emerging division within the state. There was no forthright opposition to the Senator's proposals. Beneath the surface, however, criticism flew thick and fast. On April 1 Hammond privately "perceive[d]" that "Mr. Calhoun's Charleston Speech" revealed "his true motives for splitting off from the administration. . . ." The "demented" Senator must believe that "his election to the Presidency is so essential to the existence of the Republic that no sacrifices for its accomplishment can be to [sic] great." Although the former governor wished Calhoun well, he expected disaster as usual. William Gilmore Simms heartily agreed:

And to think that we, who have been taught for 20 years that the president's election was of no importance to us are now to be taught that it is of the first importance . . . to which


Hammond and Tucker were unsympathetic in their comments. Tucker referred to Calhoun's "willing ambition to vault at the Presidency" while Hammond pouted at the Senator for "setting his hawk at me for doubting Polk" two years before. Hammond had predicted at that time that "they would all have to wheel to the right about in six months & we should be called upon to denounce Polk through all our borders." Nothing that "the prophecy failed as to time but is verified to the letter,"Hammond cautioned that "it does not become . . . the rejected to speak above a whisper." He would "lie still & see what So Ca other leaders . . . do" (Hammond to Simms, Feb. 23, 1847).

Heart was referring to Calhoun's Charleston address. The Senator left the city shortly after making his speech.
tariff, free trade, Int. Imp. & all things must give place.

South Carolina, doomed as she was to follow Calhoun would spend the "next two years at least . . . where she has really been for 20--no-where--fighting like Ishmael--battling the air,--losing position, dignity & all the advantages that might accrue from . . . connection with the Federal Union." Simms agreed that Calhoun "would make one of the Mightiest" of presidents; he also shared Hammond's conviction that he would fail of election. "... Has he not always committed suicide"? Simms rhetorically asked. But Simms endorsed Hammond's injunction to be silent:

But what is to be done? You see where S. C. is destined to be hurried. The Mercury [sic] declares her course or rather on declaring Mr. C's silences every other man in this state . . . Were you to speak aloud, it would organize against you all . . . who now, not caring for Mr. C. would yet be glad to find a topic upon which to . . . impair your influence.44

Calhoun's secret critics were at least partially misguided in their caustic observations. The Senator undoubtedly considered that a policy of southern unity might make him president. His primary concern, however, was that it assure the election of someone acceptable to the South. By late spring he thought that Zachary Taylor would be next chief executive. The General, Calhoun said, might incline to "our views." He was "a slave holder, a Southern man [and] a cotton planter." "... as little as we are inclined to military chieftains."

44Hammond to Simms, Apr. 1, 1847, Simms to Hammond, Apr. 2, 1847, Hammond Papers. See above, III. "Nothing," wrote Simms, "could be more fatal than that the South should . . . organize a party on the slavery question." The free states would merely do the same thing (Simms to Hammond May 1, 1847). Joshua Giddings, an Ohio Abolitionist, proposed just such a course to the free states shortly afterward (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 311-12).
the Carolinian observed, it might be well to support him. Calhoun—
and thus South Carolina—would watch and wait "for the present,"
however. Meanwhile, there were other matters requiring his atten-
tion.

The cause of southern unity, Calhoun felt, would be furthered
by a pro-slavery paper issued from Washington. By springtime 1847
Franklin H. Elmore was acting as chairman of a committee to raise
$50,000 for this purpose. His committee sought support throughout
the South. It could point to new attacks on the bastions of slavery.

During March the Pennsylvania legislature had effectively
nullified federal regulations designed to ensure the return of fugi-
tive slaves. Slaveholders in Maryland and Virginia were affected
most immediately by their neighbor's action but the whole South was
the ultimate target. If other northern states should follow suit,
slave property everywhere would be jeopardized. The Maryland-based
Baltimore and Ohio Railroad reacted by altering its advancing course

45 Calhoun to H. W. Conner, May 14, 1847, Calhoun Letters.
Washington was alive with rumors that Calhoun would decline to stand
for the presidency in order to swing southern support to Taylor. Polk
thought so himself and denounced the prospective move to his diary as
well as in Ritchie's Union (Quaife, ed., Polk Diary, II, 470-71,
Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 319). Wiltse indicates that Calhoun's
presidential ambitions for 1848 were incidental to his proposal for
southern unity. Coit agrees, saying however, that Calhoun "was will-
ing to take advantage of an existing situation to further his presi-
dential chances." Even Capers—who narrowly views Calhoun's career
as one long effort to reach the presidency—does not attribute this
motive to the Senator's call for southern unity. The Mercury's atti-
dute likewise indicates that the presidency was not Calhoun's primary
motivation (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 310-11; Coit, Calhoun, 468;
Capers, Calhoun Opportunist, 236-37; Mercury, see below, 278).

46 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 313; Calhoun to Conner, May 14,
1847, Calhoun Letters.
to the West. The railway would join the Ohio River at Wheeling—safely inside Virginia—instead of Pittsburgh.47

"... Step by step," the Mercury responsively lamented, "leading northern men are yielding . . . to Abolition, and thereby cutting one by one the ties that united us." The Yankee invasion of the South's political rights was now reinforced with strikes against society; southern churches were already excommunicated, "trade and commerce" now were to feel the attack of the abolition phalanx. The "conflict," Calhoun wrote, "is every day becoming more pointed."48

Then in mid-summer the North countered Calhoun's thwarted effort to unite the South and West during the preceding year at Memphis. At a Chicago internal improvement convention, delegates from the North and Northwest worked to facilitate the development of rapid transport

47 Prigg v. Pennsylvania (1842) held that Congressional power over fugitive slaves excluded state action in their defense. It also stated, however, that state agents were not bound to assist in the enforcement of federal laws and could in fact be forbidden to do so by action of their state legislature. Armed with this "triumph of freedom" as Justice Story called the decision, several northern states passed personal liberty laws which forbade state agents to assist in enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act. Vermont was the first to do so in 1842; Pennsylvania in 1847 was fifth and the first state outside New England to adopt such a law (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 313; Dwight L. Dumond, Antislavery Origins of the Civil War in the United States [Ann Arbor, 1939], 64-65; Dwight L. Dumond, Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America [Ann Arbor, 1961], 307, 406).

For the response of the railroad see Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 313 and Edward Hungerford, The Story of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad 1827-1927 (New York, 1928), 285-95. Hungerford who is primarily an economic historian, does not allude to the Pennsylvania action. The obvious conclusion that the southern line's decision to avoid Pennsylvania soil for the reason stated above is Wiltse's.

48 Mercury, July 27, 1847; Calhoun to Clemson, July 24, 1847, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 735-36.
between those two sections. Abraham Lincoln was there as a delegate. His future Attorney General, Edward Bates of Missouri, was president of the body. The press was there in the persons of Thurlow Weed and Horace Greeley of New York. This convention received letters endorsing its efforts from Silas Wright, Democrat of New York, Thomas Hart Benton, Democrat of Missouri, and those two champions of old line Whiggery, Daniel Webster and Henry Clay.\textsuperscript{49} Carolinians thus received another impetus in their drive for southern unity.

By August Charleston was reporting "the most promising prospects of success" for the newspaper project. South Carolina "subscriptions have been prompt," wrote Henry Conner. "So far as this state is concerned there is no doubt." He was equally optimistic of the response of the South as a whole. "We include all the slave holding States in our design & are in communication with most of them already," Conner reported. There was a disappointing response from some of those states, "but we hope to overcome it," he said. It was "indispensable to the great object however," to form "An organization . . . of the whole South." To Conner Washington seemed the most satisfactory base for such a group.\textsuperscript{50}

Unfortunately for the cause, Conner's optimism was premature. The committee reasoned that $50,000 would be necessary to get a paper going. South Carolina alone pledged $20,000 but

\textsuperscript{49}DeBow's Review, IV, 122-27, 219-96; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 311-12. Lewis Cass also wrote a letter to the convention in which he omitted to state his stand on internal improvements (Wiltse, ibid., 312). He was a contender for the forthcoming Democratic nomination and could not afford to alienate the South.

\textsuperscript{50}Conner to Burt, Aug. 4, 1847, Burt Papers.
subscriptions from outside the state never exceed half the Carolina total. As a result, by late autumn another of Calhoun's projects had aborted.51

The Mercury supported the unification drive with all the vigor at its command. The issue of March 10 reported an enthusiastic reception of Calhoun's speech on the preceding evening. The Mercury's reporter took "copious notes" of the address but "deemed" it "advisable not to publish them until they have the benefit of his [Calhoun's] revision. . . ." For the rest of the month the editor devoted his columns to a denunciation of the Wilmot Proviso. Warning that the issue could not be avoided, Carew asserted that "boldness, at the present moment is prudence." His meaning was clear; the North must be convinced that the South meant to stand united in defense of her equality.52

In an editorial entitled "The Duty of the South," the paper reminded its readers that the behavior of northern congressmen combined with the tone of the northern press to "satisfy us that the war upon us and our institutions . . ." is to be continued. Only a united

51 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 315. There was also the predictable opposition from within the state. Denouncing "the clique and all connected with it," Hammond recounted how he had contributed to such "a Calhoun organ" in 1843 when he "got no thanks from anybody" (Hammond to Simms, Apr. 5, 1847, Hammond Papers). To I. W. Hayne's early request that he "enter zealously into the matter" of promoting the project, Hammond would "shudder at the idea of joining issue with the abolitionists . . . at the Seat of Government" as he did also "at the proposal of organizing a Southern Presidential Party" (I. W. Hayne to Hammond, Mar. 31, May 29, 1847; Hammond to Simms, Nov. 1, 1847, Hammond Papers). Hammond's friends contacted him for advice on how they should respond to the committee's proposals (A. P. Aldrich to Hammond, Aug. 2, 1847).

52 White, Rhett, 92; Mercury, Mar. 10, 13, 1847.
South could see to her proper defense. The *Mercury* assailed Polk's Washington organ, the *Union*, "as great a foe to the South as Joshua Giddings . . . or John Quincy Adams . . . ." Ritchie's paper was indifferent to the "assaults of the enemy," said the *Mercury*, but was quick to characterize southern efforts in self defense as "agitation" damaging to the party.53

The "organ of Calhoun" published the Senator's Charleston speech in the same issue in which it reviled Ritchie for having charged that Calhoun had presidential ambitions. Contemptuously reminding Ritchie that the defense of southern rights was infinitely more important than the presidency, Carew's *Mercury* reminded its readers that an anti-slavery man in the White House could be fatal to their interests. Only a united South would be certain of averting this dangerous prospect.54

Toward the middle of April, Carew wrote to Calhoun. Noting that the *Mercury* had "added nothing" to Ritchie's comfort, Carew said with some satisfaction that "He is very restive under our questions and Says that he will not have his devotion to the South called in question by the *Mercury*."55 Ritchie was a favorite target for the *Mercury*; speaking as he did for Polk, the Washington editor merited careful attention.

Ritchie also received attention from the paper's readers. "An Alabama Democrat" defended Calhoun against political hacks "who

53 *Mercury*, Mr. 17, 1847.
55 Carew to Calhoun, Apr. 14, 1847, Calhoun Papers.
understand nothing of the independence that leads great minds to break through the restraints . . . of party organization. . . ."

Ritchie, the Mercury knew, would get little comfort from that assertion. Senator Benton was no better than Ritchie; this Southern deserter spent too much time casting aspersions on Calhoun.56

But the Wilmot Proviso remained uppermost in the editor's mind. Encouraged by the growing southern reaction to this threat, he saw "daily indications of a firm and settled determination . . . of the South to present an undivided front. . . ." It was "cheering" Carew said, that this unity transcended party labels. Northern party labels also received his attention. On June 24 the Mercury printed extracts of speeches by northern Democrats, the governors of Maine and New Hampshire, to indicate that Abolitionism extended into the northern Democracy. Wilmot, the Mercury reminded its readers, was also "a professing Democrat." Ten northern legislatures had "almost unanimously insulted the South" by adopting the "degrading declaration" by Wilmot.57

The Mercury's faith in the success of Calhoun's call for southern unity grew as the summer progressed. It did not "doubt" "The Whigs of the South." Mercury readers heard again:

Party ties must be swept as cobwebs when the existence of our institutions, and the honor and equality of the Slave States is assailed. This is now the case. . . .

The paper was pleased to print extracts from Georgia indicating that that state was lining up with South Carolina. Virginia, Mississippi, and Alabama showed promise of doing the same thing.58

56Mercury, Mar. 24, 26, Apr. 12, 21, 24, May 3, 19, 1847.
57Ibid., May 31, June 21, 24, 26, 1847.
58Ibid., June 26, 29, July 2, 1847.
On August 2 the Charleston committee charged with responsibility for the establishment of a pro-slavery paper in Washington mailed its requests for subscriptions. These appeals were addressed to prospective supporters throughout the slaveholding states. Accompanying each request was a circular tracing in detail the history of the antislavery agitation. One week later, on August 9, the Mercury loosed an avalanche of editorials doubtless designed to support the campaign. Almost daily during August and September, the paper reminded its readers "that for years past the Southern Social System has been the subject of bitter denunciation and ceaseless attack... but within the last few months the crusade against it has evinced an energy... and purpose, never before possessed... on this side of the Atlantic." Northern politicians rushed to join the cause, "clamorous to be considered its champions...." The Wilmot Proviso was "the Firebrand hurled into the temple...." This sort of development, the Mercury explained, "proves the great danger of concession in a question of constitutional right." Thus, the Missouri Compromise, "once regarded as the basis of perpetual peace," furnished "pregnant evidence that concession may delay but will never disperse the storm." Northern states were by legislation encouraging slave runaways. Pennsylvania's recent action was further proof that the fugitive slave law of 1793 had not worked. The time had come to avoid compromise; the matter must be settled once and for all.  

59Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 314; Hammond Papers; Mercury, Aug. 9, 10, 11, 1847. It seems likely that the Mercury was read widely outside the borders of South Carolina. The paper appointed collecting agents for both Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Iowa, Wisconsin, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York (Mercury, Mar. 23, 1827, Mar. 27, 1848).
The Wilmot Proviso was patently unconstitutional; the "Ruin and Injustice of its Operation" would ruin the South. "What shall be done?" the Mercury asked:

It is not for any man or set of men to determine this. The response to this question must come from the united consultation of the slaveholding States.

Answering its own question the Mercury said, "Whatever we do must be done with perfect concord and unanimity." The editor was as constant in his denunciation of the Wilmot Proviso as he was in his call for southern unity. He was careful, however, not to become too specific in proposals for the latter project. The Calhoun position dictated that South Carolina should not lead in the southern unification movement. The state's reputation for extremism might frighten prospective adherents elsewhere. So when the correspondent "Bluffton" stated that the Mercury was pleading for a southern convention, the paper took issue with him. The Mercury had not taken a position on the manner in which the much desired southern unity could best be accomplished, "Bluffton" was reminded. It had, to be sure, published articles proposing a convention of the sort mentioned by "Bluffton." But those articles were reprints from papers in North Carolina, Alabama, Florida, and elsewhere in South Carolina. The Mercury's cautious policy was to wait for a sign from elsewhere:

While we are most anxious to cooperate in any measures that may be deemed essential to the thorough awakening of the South to the flagrant outrages contemplated upon her rights we have thought it best that the initiative for the attainment of this great object should be taken by others.60

---

60 Mercury, Aug. 12, 14, 16, 17, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27, Sept. 4, 7, 10, 28, 30, 1847.
Throughout the autumn Carew's columns repeated the charge to resist the insulting Wilmot Proviso. By late September the editor was pleased to note some results. The disposition of Democrats to shelve the Proviso in favor of the principles of the Missouri Compromise, in combination with the Whig opposition to any territorial accessions seemed

... the best evidence of the propriety of the course advocated in our columns, and of persevering in it until such a union and organization of the Slave States is effected as will enable them to resist ... any invasion of their rights.61

The impending presidential election would determine the accuracy of his analysis.

Coincidentally with their concern for the approaching election, both South Carolina and Washington were apprehensively viewing the course of the war with Mexico. Victory followed victory for the Americans during 1847 but "no signs of peace ... followed on victory." With unrelieved foreboding, Calhoun saw Polk's administration as "still full of the idea of conquering a peace." Rhett, apparently acting as a contact with the President, informed Calhoun that the notion would "not be dispelled until the City of Mexico is taken." Nor would "anything," he wrote, "be done by the Whigs" to secure an early peace.62

61 Ibid., Sept. 30, Oct. 11, 12, 14, 18, 21, 22, 28, 29, Nov. 8, 24, Dec. 4, 1847. Correspondents like "Turnbull" and "A Waking Man" contributed freely during the same period.

62 Rhett to Calhoun, May 20, June 21, Sept. 8, 1847, Calhoun Papers. The Congressman wrote Calhoun that he had "very little communication with the Cabinet Ministers: but ... friendly relations ... with the President himself. ..." (Rhett to Calhoun, June 21, 1847, Calhoun Papers).
Calhoun was convinced that the ubiquitous issue of slavery in the territories would prevail in the forthcoming Congress even as it had dominated the preceding session. There were reports from the North, however, that a firm stand on the part of a united South could persuade northern politicians to drop the Wilmot Proviso. Thus it was imperative to the Carolinian that "the union and firmness of the South" be achieved. "... If she wavers or divides she is lost," he predicted. Pronouncing that "the acts of the next Congress will be of the last importance" to the South, the Mercury loyally echoed Calhoun:

> It is from the [anti-slavery] organization that we are made to see that our safety in the Slaveholding States consists alone in ... UNION AMONG OURSELVES.63

For reasons of his own Polk also concluded that it would be well to resolve the matter of territorial institutions. Zachary Taylor had been mentioned as a presidential possibility since early in the war. After his victory at Buena Vista, however, his candidacy became a distinct probability. Due largely to the General's reputation as a rugged and unpretentious Democrat—which made him a favorite with his men—he was "personally popular" with those at the North among whom the war was very unpopular indeed. Virginian by birth, Taylor was the master of a Louisiana plantation. His southern supporters were legion, a matter of great irritation to President Polk64

Polk's discomfiture was increased by the posthumous publication of a letter from Silas Wright which endorsed the principle of the

---

63 Calhoun to Duff Green, Nov. 9, 1847, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 740; Conner to Calhoun, Oct. 6, 1847, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, II 402-04; Fisher to Calhoun, Dec. 4, 1847, cited in Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 316; Mercury, Dec. 4, 1847.

64 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 316-17.
Wilmot Proviso. Wright had been the favorite candidate of northern Democrats prior to his sudden death in the late summer of 1847. The President, who preferred James Buchanan for his successor, concluded that the administration must settle the matter of the western territories once and for all; the manner of settlement would have to be Calhoun's. Obviously speaking for Polk, Buchanan proposed that the Missouri Compromise line be extended to the Pacific. The administration organ, the *Union*, was urging the same thing.65

In September, less than a month after Wright's death, the New York Democracy met to determine a course for the state elections coming up in November. Almost a week of bitter debate followed before the state party split over the Wilmot Proviso. Administration forces who had succeeded in nominating their candidates watched the defeated faction secede from the party. On October 26 these rebels met to nominate their own candidate. Van Buren was implicated in the move; David Wilmot was invited by the splinter group to be its principal speaker. There were those who saw in this a drive to make Van Buren president.66

Whig gains in the mid-term November elections added to Polk's worries. So close was the resulting division in the new House that the Speakership would be determined by either Calhoun's southern faction or a small body of "militant abolitionists." Stephen Douglas, Democrat, and Abraham Lincoln, Whig, were among the new members who


witnessed the wrangle in which the Whigs finally triumphed. Polk had good reason for his concern. The quarrel over organization augured ill for the prospects of a harmonious session.\textsuperscript{67}

The President must have prepared his address to this divided Congress with some misgiving. He submitted his speech to leaders in both houses for their comment before transmitting it. Polk asked this new Congress for funds necessary to shatter Mexico's now feeble fighting forces. He also called for the territorial organization of New Mexico and California now securely in American possession. The President made no mention of slavery. Daniel S. Dickinson spoke for the administration on this subject when he subsequently proposed that those settling the area decide the character of their institutions for themselves.\textsuperscript{68} Polk had modified his course once again; the fragile structure of the Democratic Party could not afford championing the Missouri Compromise line.

Calhoun indicated his displeasure with Dickinson's resolution. In consequence the New Yorker agreed to defer consideration of his proposals so that the Senate could hear Calhoun. Dickinson's courteous move saved the administration from what appeared to be an all-out assault from the Carolinians. As the senior Senator from South Carolina rose to speak in opposition he disavowed any purpose to embarrass Polk's administration. But he reminded his colleagues of his own steady position on the administration's war. He had long since prophesied the turmoil produced by this conflict. In addition to the uncertainties of the military situation and the increasing

\textsuperscript{67}ibid., 323-25.

\textsuperscript{68}ibid., 325-26.
bitterness in the slavery agitation, Calhoun declared that the nation was faced with a deteriorating economy. Only by ending the war could the United States hope to solve its own problems. The administration's plans to force peace upon a conquered Mexico had failed, Calhoun said, as he had predicted. Appealing then to both Whigs and Democrats, the Senator from South Carolina urged that they insist upon withdrawal of United States forces from central Mexico. Calhoun asked that they support his plan for a defensive American position as outlined in the preceding Congress. The national response to his speech was favorable.69

The President's response, somewhat different in character, was to prosecute the war despite rising opposition. In addition to a defeated enemy who refused to make peace, a recalcitrant Congress, and a divided party, Polk was confronted with three belligerent general officers whose charges against each other sometimes exceeded their disposition to fight the enemy. Furthermore, the President's own special envoy appointed to draft the elusive peace with Mexico, Nicholas Trist, had bungled the job. Trist was also guilty of insubordination. When Polk, despairing of any constructive results from Trist's mission, ordered him home, the plenipotentiary refused to come. Having finally found a Mexican government willing to negotiate, he determined that his mission was not yet discharged.70

69Ibid., 326-28; Calhoun to Clemson, Feb. 4, 1848, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 742-43; Conner to Burt, Jan. 26, 1848, Burt Papers.

70Quaife, ed., Polk Diary, III, 266 ff.; Wiltse, Calhoun sectionalist, 328-29. General Pillow, Polk's former law partner, preferred charges against General Scott who in turn was reflecting unfavorably on General Worth. While the command fell to General William
When the Senate finally considered Dickinson's resolutions, it was only to table them along with counter proposals to guarantee slavery and others to substitute the Wilmot Proviso. The festering question of slavery in the territories showed no inclination to be resolved. To add to Polk's woes, Senator Benton—a Polk ally of long standing—had parted company with the President. Truly, the administration and the party were in trouble.\textsuperscript{71}

Most ironically, it was the disobedient Trist who at least partially resolved the President's dilemma. The hapless Mexican government finally agreed to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and Trist forwarded the document to his disapproving superior. Polk received it on February 19. Launching another rapid sequence of events, the President reluctantly submitted the treaty to his cabinet for consideration. When the cabinet recommended that the pact be accepted, Polk submitted it to the Senate. That body approved the treaty on March 10, 1848. Calhoun, pleased with the cessation of hostilities, strongly supported ratification.\textsuperscript{72} The war—at least with Mexico—was over.

The Mercury was no less constant in its support of Calhoun's course in Congress than it had been during the summer adjournment. Reminding its readers that "The South and the Slaveholding States will look with interest at the course which may be adopted in

\textsuperscript{71}Wiltse, \textit{Calhoun Sectionalist}, 328–29. Benton was alienated because his son-in-law, John C. Fremont, was being charged by courtmartial with insubordination.

reference to . . . Slavery," the editor titillated that interest with his reports. He was displeased to note that Charleston Congress­man Isaac E. Holmes had failed to vote in the speakership con­test, thereby making possible the election of "Mr. Winthrop," a Whig and a "violent Anti-slavery" man, indeed, a supporter of the Wilmot Provisos. The Mercury was anxious to learn the motive behind Holmes's curious action. This sharp inquiry brought a quick response from Holmes.73 Normally associated with the "Calhoun clique," Holmes was probably astonished to find his conduct questioned by the party organ.

Explaining that Winthrop was the only candidate, not an Ab­olitionist, who had a chance to be elected, Holmes huffily informed the Mercury that his actions conformed with his duty to the South. Carew was not reassured. Winthrop, the associate of "known abol­itionists," was a man whose own anti-slavery inclinations were ob­vious, the Mercury editorialized. Had southern Congressmen stood together without reference to party, they could have secured a suit­able speaker. "We do not approve of the conduct of Mr. Holmes," the editor asserted. The Mercury's instructions called for southern unity and held southern representatives responsible when they failed to achieve it.74

The Mercury disapproved even more heartily of Dickinson's resolutions. "Slavery does not now exist in any department of Mexico," the paper said; thus the area involved was currently free territory. The resolutions did not admit the right of Congress to protect slavery if it were ever established there. This was but

73 Mercury, Dec. 4, 28, 29, 1847.
74 ibid., Dec. 28, 29, 1847; Jan. 11, 12, 24, 27, 1848.
another example of the denial of the equal rights of the South. It was also further evidence of the need for southern unity. The leading presidential candidates from the North, Cass and Buchanan, were as unsound on this matter as was Dickinson. Their stands were equivocal at best.75

The South was faced with the prospect of slavery being forbidden by the laws of Mexico. "Can the Territories Control the States?" the Mercury demanded.

If the people of the Territory do actually exercise the power, so that its exercise becomes offensive to any of the States comprising the Union, in whose hands is, and in what consists, the redress?

The territories were the property of "the Sovereign States of this Union," all of them. Dickinson would do well to remember this circumstance. The Mercury noted with satisfaction that other southern papers were taking up this issue with their readers.76

Carew recounted the damage done the New York Democracy by the Wilmot Proviso. The South would receive little comfort from this split between "Barnburners and . . . Hunkers," however. The Van Buren faction, the Barnburners, actually endorsed the Wilmot Proviso while the Hunkers supported Dickinson's equally dangerous "squatter sovereignty." If the Barnburners are "more manly . . . the Hunkers are more adroit," the Mercury declared. The policy of Dickinson was no less antislavery than that of Wilmot.77

75 Ibid., Dec. 31, 1847; Jan. 6, 1848.
76 Ibid., Jan. 14, 17, 22, Feb. 2, 9, 1848.
77 Ibid., Feb. 15, Mar. 1, 1848.
Carew's course on the war conformed with Calhoun's even as Clapp's had done. Like his senior Senator, the editor was opposed to large acquisitions from Mexico. The Mercury viewed an early peace as the best assurance against such a likelihood. But as the war continued, the paper saw the annexation of all Mexico as a distinct possibility. The Mercury repeated its earlier admonition that the United States would find it difficult to absorb Mexico's mixed population. The stresses of such a venture would damage American political institutions; the country could turn into a military republic, or even a monarchy. The United States should content itself with territory enough to indemnify it for the war.78

Calhoun's speech of January 4, 1848, reasserted that the United States should stand on a defensive line. Such a strategy would provide the country with ample territorial gains. Polk should heed the advice of Carolina's senior Senator to whom the Mercury now paid its highest tribute. Calhoun, was "the STATESMAN OF THE AGE!"79

When the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo virtually enacted Calhoun's proposed accession of territory, the Mercury endorsed its terms as "creditable to our national character and advantageous to the interests of the country." The editor hoped that President Polk would accept it. Supporting ratification with a fervor equal to Calhoun's, the Mercury held that it would improve the chances for a general political settlement within the United States. When the Senate did

78 Ibid., Dec. 30, 1847; Jan. 10, 11, 15, 21, 28, 29, 1848; see above, 257.

79 Mercury, Jan. 28, 1847; Jan. 10, 11, 15, 1848.
ratify the treaty, the *Mercury* saw "better and more prosperous times" ahead. It would not do to become too optimistic, however. "The slave question will now come up & be the subject of deep agitation," Calhoun had told a correspondent in February, 1848. "The South will be in the crisis of its fate. If it yields now, all will be lost."  

The *Mercury*’s campaign for southern unity was more important than ever.

---

80 *Ibid.*, Feb. 24, Mar. 1, 3, 7, 14, June 3, 6, 9, 1848.
CHAPTER VIII
THE REVOLUTION OF 1848

In the midst of the campaign for southern unity, the Revolution of 1848 broke over Europe. Two weeks before Calhoun read of the first outbreaks in France, he wrote to his daughter:

I am not surprised that the powers of Europe . . . dread changes. They are right; because what are called reforms, will lead to anarchy, revolution and finally to a worse state of things than now exists, through the most erroneous opinions now entertained both in Europe and this country by the . . . popular party.¹

The Senator had not always felt this way. Calhoun the young nationalist of 1812 had been fully committed to the optimistic American faith in progress. When others had predicted disaster during the first sectional squabble in 1820, Secretary of War Calhoun remained a firm nationalist, certain of united America's bright future. As the decade of the 1820's wore on, however, both Calhoun and South Carolina decided that the slaveholding South was threatened by America's confident democracy. The state reacted to this new awareness with nullification; Calhoun, renouncing his past role, became her champion. The new champion knew that South Carolina could not stand alone. Her only hope lay in alerting slaveholders throughout the South to their rising danger. Calhoun undertook this task and was soon recognized as chief

¹Calhoun to Anna Calhoun Clemson, Mar. 7, 1848, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 744-45.
spokesman for the whole section. His was not an easy job. It re­
quired that he contradict a basic American faith in democratic prog­
ress and renounce the popular belief in the equality of man.

Little more than half a century before, Thomas Jefferson,
another slaveholder, had proclaimed to the world that all men were
created equal. Although Jefferson lived long enough to disavow some
aspects of this egalitarian code, his countrymen adopted it as their
ideal. A utopian call for equality, its endurance strengthened by
its challenge, this message redeemed the old Puritan vow to light a
beacon in the new world. As Americans demonstrated their faith in
democracy through their performance, the old world would be enlight­
ened.

The fervor of the Revolution briefly obscured slavery's role
as the most blatant inconsistency in the idealistic armor. Northern
states purged themselves by abolishing the institution within their
own borders; yet they sanctioned the more lucrative slave trade. They
also consented to a political union with slaveholders. Jefferson's
Virginians regretted the necessity for slavery and made feeble efforts
to transport the Negro from both bondage and the country. Carolinians
merely regretted the necessity for the institution; while they ques­
tioned the foundation of their society, they neither wished nor hoped
to change it.

As the fluid society of frontiersman and rising industrialists
combined with eighteenth century theory, it compounded the nation's
dilemma. The slaveholder found that in a world where the theoretical
equality of both man and opportunity was fast becoming a gospel, he
was obsolete at best and evil at worst. John Randolph of Roanoke,
among the first to identify this threat to the South's feudal-oriented agrarianism, also pioneered in building a defense against it. The South could entertain no thought of emancipation, Randolph enjoined; she could not even discuss this institution of which she was both master and slave. Insisting that fanatics inevitably rose to command in such debates, Randolph did not have to remind neighbors of the terrors resulting from experiments in abolition. Haiti was virtually next door. Although Randolph did not endorse the principle of slavery, he did condone the fact of slaveholding. And as he did so, this cousin of Jefferson provided fellow Southerners with what must be their new philosophy. "I am an aristocrat!" declared Randolph. "I love liberty. I hate equality." ²

Randolph's injunction to stand firm and remain silent on the question of slavery went partially unheeded. As the nineteenth century advanced, northern consciences rediscovered Jefferson's youthful ideal of the equality of mankind, elevated it to a messianic faith and translated it into an assault on slaveholding. By 1848 the South had responded in a manner equally vocal and determined. Ceasing to regard slavery as an unfortunate necessity, Southerners now maintained that the institution was a positive good. Thus, while they ignored Randolph's admonition to abjure debate, Southerners obeyed his warning to stand firm. Calhoun, adopting Randolph's philosophic defense of his section, succeeded the Virginian as its spokesman.

The Declaration of Independence was a troublesome reminder of the Southerner's dilemma. As long as slavery was kept out of the

²Quoted in Russell Kirk, The Conservative Mind from Burke to Santayana (Chicago, 1953), 130.
picture, none was prouder of the American past as it related to present and future than the South. Calhoun, whose enduring devotion to the Union stemmed partially from his having grown up in the shadow of the Revolutionary legend, was both an example of and exception to this curious predicament. Perceiving the basic contradiction in the Southerner's plight, this champion of slavery formulated a theory of society rooted firmly in the class structure. The average slaveholder did not go so far. He did reject the ideal of the Declaration as it applied to his own peculiar situation, and he replaced it with a precept sanctioned by a source superior to patriotism. For centuries his forebears had interceded with the Almighty "for all sorts and conditions of men"; recognizing, thereby, the basic inequalities of this world. Thus, the Southerner followed Calhoun's rejection of the democratic ideal only so far as it affected slavery. And he justified his action with religion. For this reason, perhaps, his response to Calhoun's call for unity came too late.

The Thirtieth Congress of the United States briefly interrupted its debate on the Mexican War and slavery in the territories to pass resolutions on behalf of the Revolution of 1848. Senator Calhoun was adamant in his opposition to the move. With increasing misgivings he had watched the people's revolt spread through France,
Austria, Germany, and Italy. "... Progress in political science," Calhoun had written earlier, "falls far short of progress in that, which relates to matter, and which may lead to convulsions and revolutions."^4

Only in Germany did Calhoun see a chance for the revolution to succeed. The new government there took the form of a federation which allowed for local restraint on national power. France, on the other hand, established a strong central government, based on a numerical majority. "No one can say where it will stop," Calhoun wrote. "France is not prepared to become a Republick."^5 The Mercury agreed. Denouncing the socialist inspired national workshops as "a seminary of plots and a gulf of expense," the editor predicted that France was "not as yet ... or ever will be, ripe for thoroughgoing Republicanism."^6

The majority of Calhoun's senatorial colleagues did not share his pessimism. The American ideal required that this movement in Europe be vindicated as a triumph for the popular cause. Ohio's William Allen, a champion of popular revolts in the United States, introduced a joint resolution congratulating the French people upon their wisdom. Abolitionist Senator John P. Hale of New Hampshire next submitted an amendment which added congratulations for the

^4Calhoun to Anna Calhoun Clemson, Nov. 21, 1846, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 712.

^5Calhoun to Thomas Clemson, March 22, 1846, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 746-47.

^6Mercury, May 19, June 5, 7, July 17, 21, 1848; Nov. 20, 1849.
revolution's having abolished slavery in France's colonies. Calhoun, pleading for delay, moved to table both proposals. "Whether the result shall prove to be a blessing or a curse in France and the world depends upon what is coming, rather than upon what has been already done," he warned.  

In a move that transcended both party and section, the Senate overwhelmingly voted down Calhoun's objection. Thirty-four year old Stephen Douglas of Illinois, then serving his first term in the Senate, best expressed the mood of the hour. "All republicans throughout the world have their eyes fixed on us," he told the Senate. "Here is their model. Our success is the foundation of all their hopes. . . . Shall we cast a damper on their hopes by expressing a doubt of their success?"

Douglas spoke in the bright language of opportunity that Americans understood as he expressed the sentiment of the Senate and the country. It was for obstructionists like Calhoun to think it "a sad delusion" to suppose that "all people are capable of self

---

7Cong. Globe, 30th, 1st, 549, 568-79. In 1841 the "people" of Rhode Island had assembled in constitutional convention. They intended to replace Rhode Island's colonial charter—which restricted the suffrage to a small body of freeholders—with a more democratic document. The state government opposed their action. Defying the duly constituted state authorities, the "rebels" adopted a "Peoples Constitution" and proposed to validate it by force. They elected a slate of officers to replace the existing state government, with Thomas Dorr heading it as governor. Only Tyler's intervention at the request of the legal government prevented a rebellion. "Dorrism" was widely approved in the Democratic party, especially in New York. William Allen of Ohio was but one of the many who favored the movement elsewhere; so was Andrew Jackson, who congratulated the Dorrists. To Calhoun their action was anathema (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 92-94).

8Cong. Globe, 30th, 1st, 569-570.
government." Calhoun expressed his view to a correspondent:

None but a people advanced to a high state of moral and intellectual excellence are capable in a civilized condition, of forming and maintaining free governments: and among these, few indeed have the good fortunes to form constitutions capable of endurance.9

Again Calhoun's colleagues disregarded his advice. Although Hale's amendment was defeated, Allen's resolutions passed both Houses on April 10. That evening a torchlight procession wound its way through Washington—in tribute to a new republic. Two cabinet secretaries marched with the jubilant Jeffersonians and President Polk greeted them from an upper window of the White House. While the Mercury shared Calhoun's doubts of French republicanism, it still endorsed the spreading revolution; and the editor's spirit was present among the marchers. Carew understood Calhoun when he spoke of the threat to slavery. The Mercury could report "The Effects of Philanthropy" (emancipation) upon Jamaica and the Cape Colony Hottentots with proper indignation. But Carew was still an American who thrilled to "the voice of many nations, in unison demanding liberty, and with a fierce earnestness dictating terms at the gates of king and emperors. . . ." They were sounds "grand beyond all . . . that have yet reached the ear of the earthly listener." But for slavery, the Mercury might have agreed with Lincoln's subsequent assertion that America was the "last best hope of earth."10 It was little wonder that

9 Calhoun to Anna Calhoun Clemson, Mar. 7, 1848, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 744-45.


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
southern unity remained an elusive goal.

Once the Mexican war ended, the Thirtieth Congress became occupied with the issue of slavery in the territories. On June 23, 1848, the Senate again attempted to organize Oregon. The measure before the upper house included an amendment authored by Senator Hale to bar slavery from the area. President Polk, who remembered Dickinson's ill-fated attempt to resolve this question through territorial self determination, consented to the organization of Oregon with slavery excluded. In return for this concession, the President would exact an agreement to remove the issue from politics. The terms would be those of 1820. Serving as Polk's spokesman, Indiana's Senator Jesse D. Bright moved that the Senate prohibit slavery throughout that part of the West lying north of 36°30'N.\(^\text{11}\)

Calhoun objected on his usual constitutional grounds. Congress had no authority for such a move, he said. The Ordinance of 1787, often cited to justify governmental regulation of territorial institutions, was an intersectional compact outside the bounds of the Constitution. Moreover, it was no longer binding; in return for the exclusion of slavery from the Old Northwest, the North had promised to return escaped slaves. And she had not kept her word. Thus the South was relieved of her obligation to respect the agreement. Quoting Jefferson on the Missouri Compromise, Calhoun submitted that it was "a reprieve only" and could not provide a final settlement. Dickinson's efforts to substitute "squatter sovereignty" were deserving

\(^\text{11}\) Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 345-46. Bright's proposed amendment provided for the return of fugitive slaves.
of even less notice. The wildest visionary could not sanction "the first half-dozen squatters" determining institutions for half a nation. Only the sovereign states could resolve this dilemma. Congress, Calhoun proclaimed, should take no action at all. Trusting in the Constitution, the states should respect the institutions of each other and extend that respect to their emerging sisters in the West. If this policy were followed, the line between slaveholding and free states would be somewhere around 36°30'N. In that way both the Constitution and sectional balance would be preserved. To the North, Calhoun said, "All we demand is to stand on the same level with yourselves and to participate equally in what belongs to all." To the South he issued another warning:

The time is at hand . . . when the South must rise up, and bravely defend herself, or sink down into base and acknowledged inferiority; and it is because I clearly perceive that this period is favorable for settling it, if it is ever to be settled, that I am in favor of pressing the question now to a decision. . . .

Polk must have fumed as he read these words of the South Carolina "obstructionist." He undoubtedly remembered that Calhoun himself had proposed to set the limits of slavery at the Missouri Compromise line during the preceding Congress. The Carolinian had warned at that time, however, that rejection of his proposal would cause the South to look elsewhere for future protection. She was now doing so; the Constitution—undiluted by compromise—would furnish that protection.

12 Cong. Globe, 30th, 1st, Appendix, 868-73.

13 Calhoun had insisted in 1847 that the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional. He was prepared to accept it only in the interest of harmony. See above, 235.
By July, after Mexico had ratified the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Polk was intensifying his drive in the Senate. Anxious for a settlement before election time, the President urged "concession, conciliation, and compromise" upon the wrangling Congress. Polk also asked for a quick establishment of representative government in the new territories. Senator John Middleton Clayton, Whig of Delaware, responded by suggesting a committee, equally balanced between sections and parties, to resolve the perplexing issue. The Senate adopted his proposal, despite some strong opposition, especially from New England.14

There were four Whigs and four Democrats on the committee. Two Whigs were Southerners and two were Northerners; the same was true of the Democrats, Calhoun being among their number. Clayton was made chairman. This "Compromise Committee" reported the results of its lengthy deliberations on July 18. Chairman Clayton praised his committee members for their patience and spirit of compromise as he submitted their recommendations to the Senate. Oregon, Clayton said, should be organized immediately without reference to slavery. Interim governments should be established in California and New Mexico, likewise without reference to slavery. Oregon was intended to be free territory; if the question of slavery arose in California or New Mexico, it should be resolved by appeal to the Federal courts. Calhoun supported the measure; so did the Mercury. "We do not propose to go into this question now," Carew's paper said, "but there is this much to be said in favor of the proposition:

14Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 348-49.
its acceptance involves no sacrifice of principle; and . . . is not liable to the objections which have been so justly and forcibly urged against compromises. It does not yield an acknowledged right—it does not give up a part to retain the rest—it does not presume the sovereignty of one portion of the states over another. It involves no insult and probably no injury to the South.\(^\text{15}\)

Carew understood the issue perfectly; Calhoun, himself, could not have put it more clearly.

Despite strong opposition from the Barnburners and assorted other antislavery men, the "Clayton Compromise" passed the Senate on July 27.\(^\text{16}\) But it was summarily discarded in the Whig-controlled House. Alexander H. Stephens, Georgia Whig, who alleged that the bill betrayed the interests of his section, broke the ranks of southern unity to propose tabling the measure. The House approved his motion without debate, eight southern Whigs voting with the majority. They were the only Southerners to do so.\(^\text{17}\)

\(^{15}\text{Ibid., 348-51; Mercury, July 22, 1848. Clayton, a strong advocate of compromise, had helped to resolve the Crisis of 1833. He regarded Calhoun's committee approach as conciliatory. Dickinson was also on the committee.}\)

\(^{16}\text{The vote, 33 to 22, was largely sectional and partisan. Twenty-six Democrats and seven Whigs supported the measure, 23 of them being Southerners. Fourteen Whigs and eight Democrats voted in the negative. Thus, out of a total of 33 affirmative votes, all but 10 were Southerners. Northerners accounted for 19 of the 22 total negative votes.}\)

\(^{17}\text{Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 353; Murray, Whig Party in Georgia, 133-34. The House vote was equally sectional and partisan in its make-up. Only 21 northern Democrats voted against tabling. House Whigs contended that Taylor would lose the North to the emerging anti-slavery party if the Clayton Compromise passed. They could reject the measure, however, without damage to the General's chances in the South. For this reason eight southern Whigs voted to table (Morrison, Democratic Politics, 165-66; see below, 280).}\)
The House then approved another bill to organize Oregon. This measure extended the provisions of the Ordinance of 1787 to Oregon and made no mention of fugitive slaves. The southern ranks stood firm in opposition but the bill passed with bipartisan support from northern Congressmen. And as an outraged Clayton berated his fellow Whigs in the lower house for putting presidential politics above patriotism, the Senate referred the new measure to its Committee on Territories. It was by now August 3 and adjournment was set for the fourteenth. As a result subsequent deliberations were both accelerated and abbreviated.\(^{18}\)

Douglas, chairman of the Committee on Territories, adopted Congressman Burt's proposal of the preceding session, to amend the House bill. The Ordinance of 1787 should apply to Oregon since that region lay north of the Missouri Compromise line. Calhoun, however, would no longer accept the Burt formula. The antislavery forces had become too aggressive; Douglas's bill left California and New Mexico open to their grasp while it closed Oregon to the South's. "Where the stronger party refuses to be explicit . . . the weaker . . . will in the end be deceived and defrauded," the Carolinian said. He would, in the interest of conciliation, however, accept the Missouri Compromise principle as an amendment—if a northern Senator would make the motion. Even so, he would vote against the whole bill.\(^{19}\)

Calhoun retraced for his colleagues the rise of the antislavery movement and its entrance into politics. The argument was

\(^{18}\)Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 354-55.

\(^{19}\)Crale, ed., Calhoun Works, IV, 513-35.
much the same as that heard by the Charleston audience almost a year earlier. As he spoke, a new antislavery party was forming in Buffalo, proving the accuracy of another of Calhoun's doleful predictions. The Senator was not troubled by those who answered his logic by questioning his devotion to the Union. For almost forty years he had served the Union as best he might. "It is not for us who are assailed, but for those who assail us, to count the value of the Union," the Carolinian said.20

Douglas, as anxious to compromise as Clay, Clayton, or Calhoun had ever been, deferred to the Carolinian's wishes. After having arranged the defeat of his original proposal, Douglas moved to substitute the amendment requested by Calhoun. Calhoun and his friends voted for the new Douglas amendment and then against the final bill. The measure passed, nonetheless, only to be rejected by the House one day later. The intransigent Whigs in that body would have Oregon and antislavery or no bill at all. So on the thirteenth, with adjournment only hours away, the Senate simply accepted the House's original measure. In the bitter debate that preceded this action the anti-Calhoun Western duo, Benton and Houston, hurled invective at Calhoun and his cause. The senior Senator from South Carolina responded with another warning:

    Gentlemen may do with this bill as they please. If they will not give now what the South asks as a compromise, she will at the next session, demand all, and will not be satisfied with anything less.21


21Cong. Globe, 1074-78. Wiltse says that many of those on the Washington scene in 1848 felt that this was the last time when

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
The *Mercury* resounded with the same tocsin. When the New York *Globe* decried southern determination to open the West to slavery, Carew reminded his readers that this was the opinion of "a large and influential portion of the Democracy of the non-slaveholding States, while it is openly avowed by the entire Whig party in the North and West." The agitated editor lamented those Southerners who would still "trust everything to party." "The first great requirement is union among ourselves," said the *Mercury*:

Aggressive and fanatic as is the North on the subject of slavery, it is not impossible to bring home the question to their interests. They know very well, though ignorant in other respects of the effect of the Federal Government, in what way and to what extent it ministers to their advantage in a pecuniary point of view.

The North would drop "antislavery fanaticism" the very minute the South resolved to sever commercial connections. The South should "speak in a manner not to be misunderstood, and present such a front as must command . . . respect. . . ."22

Carew devoted two approving editions to Calhoun's speech on the Senate's first Oregon bill. The Clayton committee accounted for much space in the July *Mercury*. The editor commented favorably on Ritchie's analysis of Clayton's proposed compromise. "... It provides simply for carrying out the provisions of the Constitution as contended for by Mr. Calhoun, Mr. Rhett, and others for the South." Although there was "very little of compromise about it," since it merely accorded with the Constitution, Carew held that "the South a settlement might be made (Calhoun Sectionalist, 538, n. 22).

22*Mercury*, Apr. 3, July 8, 1848.
cannot object to this course." The bill asked "men of all sections to stand by the Constitution, and suffer to settle the difference by its own tranquil operation." But for southern unity the measure would never have been proposed.23

The Mercury was aware that the action of Congress would affect the forthcoming presidential election. But Calhoun had not yet resolved upon a course relative to the contest so the Mercury held itself "aloof to the presidential question." The word was "Wait and Watch." Prudent counsel required that the matter at hand be settled before South Carolina gave her allegiance to aspirants for the presidency. The Clayton bill provided a sufficient means for settlement. Echoing Calhoun, the editor explained that the Missouri Compromise might have been accepted but would have simply furnished "another mischievous precedent for the unconstitutional . . . action of Congress on a subject where their . . . action is always bad. . . ." A "usurpation," Congressional restriction of slavery was also "prompted by the worse passions, for the accomplishment of the worst conceivable objects."24

Carew had no illusions about the difficulties faced by Clayton's bill. "Abolitionists will oppose vigorously," he conjectured, "fearing their loss of influence & . . . the firmness of parties will yet be put to a severe trial before the seal can be set to this measure." Concerned as he was with the "danger that must follow its

23Ibid., July 17, 18, 22, 24, 1848. Surprisingly enough the Mercury indicated its continued willingness to accept the Missouri Compromise as a settlement.

24Ibid., July 24, 25, 1848.
defeat," the editor could not yet "think of the mere question of the Presidency as worthy of consideration. . . ." The Mercury was dismayed by reports that House Whigs would oppose the measure lest it destroy their presidential prospects. Northern Whigs feared that it would cost them the antislavery vote while the party's southern members thought that closing the question would weaken slaveholding support for Taylor. The Mercury's hopes that the Clayton measure would withdraw slavery as an issue from the presidential contest were being betrayed by "Taylor's friends" who combined "to defeat the South."

The Mercury's readers read the news of Senate passage of Clayton's bill with the gloomy warning that it would meet defeat in the House. The Whigs, north and south, were determined to kill the measure on craven grounds of political expediency. In its outrage over Whiggish perfidy, Carew's paper came perilously close to violating its own maxim by endorsing a presidential candidate:

... And if the Friends of Gen. Cass, North and South, should prove true to the last, and be outvoted by the combination of Whigs and Barnburgers, why, we suppose, then the South, would be urged and warned on the ground of the imminent danger of the slave question, to vote against Gen. Cass, because he is not a slaveholder.

"General Taylor would be judged by the conduct of his friends. . . ." the Mercury thundered! Beyond this outburst, the Mercury dared not go; the command was still "Wait and Watch."26

25Ibid., July 28, 1848.

26Ibid., July 28, 31, 1848.
Carew followed his announcement of the bill's defeat at the hands of the House with a furious attack on southern Whigs. Promising to present a detailed analysis of the vote, the Mercury condemned southern Whigs in both House and Senate. They had destroyed "the moral power of the very Southern union" which could have settled the disruptive issue once and for all. After "such proof of what the Southern Whigs can do," the editor demanded, "with what assurance do they ask the South to vote for . . . a Southern Whig?" 27

On August 5 the Mercury published a statistical analysis of the House vote to table Clayton's bill. It pointed with care to the fact that every southern Democrat and a majority of northern ones had voted against tabling. The monstrous Whig record showed that all but one northern Whig voted to table. Yet they were only able to carry the day because eight southern Whigs voted with them. "Thus upon the paramount question the development in this instance shows a majority of the friends of Cass with the South, and a majority of the friends of Taylor with the North," the Mercury concluded. Still, there was reason for caution; Southerners should watch for further developments. 28

The Senate's attempt to substitute the Missouri Compromise for the defeated Clayton measure received approving notice in the Mercury. Southern Whigs recorded their votes for the South in this case. The paper predicted, however, that the House would also block this second Senate attempt to settle the issue. When the prediction

27 Ibid., Aug. 1, 2, 1848.
28 Ibid., Aug. 5, 1848.
proved to be an accurate one, the *Mercury* gloomily gave up its hopes in the Congress with another Calhoun-inspired prophesy:

... It must ... be evident ... even to those ... most sanguine in the hope of a different result, that this question cannot be settled by Congress except on conditions disgraceful and degrading to the South and that the period is approaching when the Southern States will have to make their election between a determined resistance ... and unconditional surrender ... between maintaining their position as States in the Confederacy or sinking into a condition of vassal provinces....

"The Defeat of the South" described the enactment of the final Oregon bill. Benton and Houston betrayed the South by supporting the measure. The vote was disturbingly sectional, said the *Mercury*, on the part of Democrats as well as Whigs. The South must unite. "Our only reliance is upon ourselves, upon the determination of the Southern States to merge all other questions in the one great absorbing and paramount issue JUSTICE AND EQUALITY TO THE SOUTH." Neither party could be trusted with the section's imperilled interest. Her only hope lay in unity and a faithful adherence to the Constitution.

On August 31 the *Mercury* devoted considerable space to two Georgia Whigs, Senator John M. Berrien and Congressman Alexander H. Stephens. In a speech that was widely regarded as an able defense of southern rights, Berrien had followed Calhoun's lead in supporting the Clayton compromise. Carew reproduced Berrien's address and praised it for its soundness. Stephen's speech defending his House

---


motion to lay the "Compromise Bill" on the table, was also reproduced. The editor condemned it in full measure. Stephen's paramount allegiance was to his party, not his section; for such perfidy there was no defense. Even Polk understood the danger contained in the Oregon bill. The Mercury paid Polk a rare compliment when he criticized the provision excluding slavery from the new territory. A Presidential veto would have furnished greater proof of Polk's awareness of the South's peril. 31

The Mercury's feigned disinterest in the presidential election ended with congressional adjournment. Southern rights in the territories had not been guaranteed and would loom large as an issue in the forthcoming election. Calhoun had been considering this possibility since early 1847. For a time Zachary Taylor figured in the Senator's plan. Rhett, inching his way back into Calhoun's confidence, was commissioned to contact close associates of Taylor for their analysis of the General's views. By June of 1847 the South Carolina Congressman could report that Taylor was "as sound on the Tariff Question as you [Calhoun] are." The planter-general was also "said to be opposed to the U. S. Bank." (His views on slavery were considered sound simply because he was a slaveholder.) Rhett, however, was not enthusiastic about a Taylor candidacy. He thought that South Carolina might "be driven to support Taylor: but for the Whigs,"

31 Ibid., Aug. 19, 28, 29, 31, 1848. Stephen's action in opposing the Clayton compromise stimulated bitter criticism from Georgians, Whig and Democrat. He was denounced as—among other things—a "Traitor to the South." The Congressman maintained the regard of his constituents, however. He assured them that he opposed Clayton's measure because it did not guarantee the right to carry slaves into the Southwest (Murray, Whig Party in Georgia, 134-77).
who would "make it impossible by nominating him." During the early fall Rhett, having "nothing distinct as to his opinions," virtually dismissed General Taylor as a prospective Democratic nominee.  

Supreme Court Justice Levi Woodbury would be chosen by the Democrats, Rhett thought. Buchanan's "career as Secy. of State" and "affinity" for the tariff would prevent his being selected. Cass lacked "the confidence of the South." No less aware than Calhoun of the need to settle the slavery question prior to the election, Rhett wrote that "the administration is doing all it can to settle the matter on the Missouri Compromise line. But if the war and the slavery question are not settled during the next . . . Congress," Rhett predicted, "the Democratic Party will be defeated and new . . . parties will arise."  

Charleston banker Henry Conner corroborated much of what Rhett said. "Next to Mr. Calhoun," Conner held, "Genl Taylor" to be "the strongest man in So Carolina & Genl Cass the weakest." While Woodbury was sound, he inspired "no enthusiasm," would be beaten by Taylor "& in doing so split the Democratic Party here & for the first time in her history, give South Carolina to the opposite party." The state grew impatient as winter came and Calhoun still had not endorsed a prospective candidate. Reporting this restlessness, Conner urged that the Senator either commit himself or

32 Rhett to Calhoun, May 20, 22, Sept. 8, 1847, Calhoun Papers. The information on Taylor's views came from General Jefferson Davis of the Mississippi Militia. Davis's first wife, Sarah Knox Taylor, was Taylor's daughter.

33 Rhett to Calhoun, Sept. 8, 1847, Calhoun Papers.
explain his reasons for not doing so.

With the assurance that at a proper time So. Ca. is to wheel into her place . . . the people will consent to wait for the proper developments before taking ground in favor of any particular candidate at least I think so.  

Conner meant no disrespect, however. Assuring Armistead Burt, Calhoun's kinsman and new liaison, that "In the meantime, we will all here conform to Mr. Calhoun's policy. . . ." Conner acknowledged Burt's "communications" to the Mercury, suggested that they be sent more frequently and assured Burt that the paper would "act promptly & boldly . . . discreetly & wisely"—in accordance with--instructions.  

By March 1848 it was clear that--for the first time--both parties would have strong antislavery delegations present in their nominating conventions. Calhoun had predicted the likelihood of this development in his Charleston speech of the previous year. The situation would become more dangerous in future conventions. Increasing delegations from newly admitted free states would be admitted to the national gatherings. By uniting with the growing antislavery groups in the North, these men could determine convention policy. Perceiving this to be the ultimate result, Calhoun laid down his course. In line with his recommendations outlined in the Charleston speech, neither he nor his state would go to the Democratic convention. Burt was instructed to convey the message to the faithful

34H. W. Conner to Armistead Burt, Jan. 26, Feb. 11, 1848, Burt Papers.

35Conner to Burt, Feb. 11, 1848, Burt Papers.
in South Carolina. He did so on March 29, writing to high priest Conner.

It was immediately obvious that the congregation did not understand the latest recommended tactic. On April 3 a stunned Conner replied to Burt, "I had a little rather no body but Mr Calhoun & yourself Saw this letter but don't care much--who sees it. It is well intended," Conner wrote.

What is the Mercury to Say when attacked as it will be by all the world if we do not go into convention--we are willing & will be glad to fight under our true banner--one that Mr Calhoun will furnish but let us know our order of battle our place in line & the message we are to use.

While the Senator's astonished followers pondered his latest directive, Calhoun acted to clarify its meaning. He informed his "friends" throughout the state that such a move was necessary to put the South on alert to her danger. The Carolina boycott would also warn the North; that region's politicians must contain antislavery or see themselves divested of southern support. As the "order of battle" went out, the Mercury found her predictable "place in line." It was to rouse the faithful.

Carew devoted most of May to this new task. The Mercury minced no words in declaring the forthcoming convention out of bounds. Carolinians could not "go to the Convention without full assurance that they must either quarrel with it, or be bullied by it. . . neither by the one proceeding nor the other can they gain

\[\text{36} \text{ Burt to Conner, Mar. 29, 30, 1848, cited in Wiltse, Calhoun, Sectionalist, 359.}\]

\[\text{37} \text{ Conner to Burt, Apr. 3, 1848, Burt Papers. The letter is quoted in full.}\]
any desirable object." When a Georgetown group chose a delegate to the forbidden convention in defiance of Calhoun's policy, the Mercury thought it "a pity to disturb the State with a matter ... not to its taste." "South Carolina," said the editor, "... holds off from the Convention," but "on to the Constitution--to the principles of Democracy, to the great principles of Southern Equality, Southern Rights and Southern Safety. ..." More than half the twenty-eight states to be represented at Baltimore had officially declared their support of the Wilmot Proviso. South Carolina would have no part in the nomination of "some ... Barnburner" to bear a standard tainted "with Abolition on its folds."38

When the Democrats assembled at Baltimore, the Mercury roundly condemned Georgetown delegate J. M. Commander, the lone Carolinian present. Elected as he was by eight to ten of his neighbors, Commander could not claim to represent the whole state. The disloyal delegate's intention to cast South Carolina's entire slate of nine votes was mere "humbuggery." The Mercury jousted with the Milledgeville (Georgia) Federal Union in defense of South Carolina's absence from the Baltimore convention. Rejection of Barnburners and Abolitionists, devotion to the South, obedience to the Constitution, these were the reasons South Carolina boycotted the convention. The irreverent Federal Union, a regular Democratic sheet, had suggested that South Carolina was pouting because Polk failed to retain Calhoun as Secretary of State.39

---

38Mercury, May 5, 20, 1848; Burt to Conner, Mar. 28, 29, 30, Apr. 8, 1848, Calhoun to Conner, Apr. 4, 6, May 23, 1848, Conner Letters.

39Ibid., May 20, 24, 26, 27, 1848; see below, 286, n. 40.
Carew reported the convention proceedings, if only to denounce them. Berating those who fraternized with Abolitionists and "a very large body of avowed Wilmot Proviso Men," the editor recounted how such behavior subverted "the provisions of the Constitution for the election of the Chief Magistrate." It was the "adroit wire pullers and unscrupulous intriguers" at Baltimore who substituted their interests "for the voice of the people." The whole process was "destructive of all individual independence of opinion ... and dangerous to the Slaveholding States, whose vigilance should never sleep. . . ." Carew was possessed by the "affrontery" of Commander, that "imposter and pretender" whose "preposterous assumption of authority" had "misrepresented" South Carolina's "position before her sister States. . . ." "And," the Mercury raged, "a body thus constituted proposes to make a President. . .! What a commentary . . ." yet nothing better could be expected from the forthcoming Whig assembly.40

The Mercury's initial reaction to the nomination of Cass was restrained. Carew deemed "it advisable to await the final action of the Convention, before . . . further comment. . . ." His indecision abruptly vanished on the next day, however, as the Mercury roundly denounced this advocate of popular sovereignty:

With regard to the nomination of Gen. Cass, we need scarcely say that it is unsatisfactory; and indeed of all names before that body, his was the least acceptable to the Democracy of South Carolina.  

40 Ibid., May 30, 1848. Wiltse says that Commander was chosen "at a local meeting . . . by a handful of voters. . . ." (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 362). Orthodoxy was incensed at this action. In response to Burt's request, Conner promised that Commander would "be duly noticed in the Mercury" (Burt to Conner, May 21, 1848, Conner Letters; Conner to Burt, May 25, 1848, Burt Papers).
Finding "other portions of the . . . Convention . . . as distasteful as the nomination," the editor concluded, nonetheless, to "reserve" any further "remarkes to another occasion." He was waiting for further installments of the message."^41

But Calhoun was having difficulty in formulating the message. With Congress still in session and the territorial question unresolved, he was not ready to endorse a candidate. If adjournment came without a settlement, the Senator proposed to measure both Whigs and Democrats by their position on slavery in the territories. Calhoun's own "restless" state, however, was growing impatient for a decision. Despite his recent declaration that he was a Whig, General Taylor remained South Carolina's first choice. No less a figure than Henry Conner wished to support Taylor on an independent ticket. "I shall certainly go Taylor myself, Whig and all," wrote Ker Boyce, another Calhoun lieutenant.^42

By early summer the Carolina restlessness was taking the form of a mutiny. Having "not consulted Mr. Calhoun about anything" during

^41Mercury, May 29, 30, 1848.

^42Conner to Burt, May 25, 1848, Ker Boyce to Burt May 31, 1848, Burt Papers; Conner to Hammond, Nov. 2, 1848, Hammond Papers. On April 22 Taylor had written to his brother-in-law, Captain John S. Allison. In this letter the General declared himself to be a Whig but said that as President he would "administer the government untrammelled by party schemes." Refusing to make political pledges, Taylor wrote that "One who cannot be trusted without pledges cannot be confided in merely on account of them." If elected, Taylor promised to defer to the wisdom of the electorate on the tariff, currency, and internal improvements. He would veto no measure that did not clearly violate the Constitution. The object of his letter was obviously to please the maximum number of Whigs while alienating the fewest possible Democrats (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 359-60; Morrison, Democratic Politics, 146). Taylor was the first choice of northern as well as southern extremists. The Barnburners wanted to make him their candidate (Morrison, Democratic Politics, 146).
the Congressional session, Rhett maintained his independent position by refusing to endorse the leader's boycott of the Democratic convention. The Congressman assured Woodbury's friends that South Carolina would be in convention, Calhoun's opposition notwithstanding. Rhett did not fulfill his promise, however, and was evidently not connected with the miniature revolt at Georgetown.

"General Commander['s]" brave if futile act of defiance prompted a massive and indignant response from the advocates of Orthodoxy. Their reaction—out of all proportion to the tiny rebellion—was probably prompted by the uncertainty of their political condition. With Calhoun still uncommitted and the Taylor movement growing daily stronger, the emergence of a strong Democratic candidate would divide South Carolina for the first time since nullification. Even Calhoun might be unable to impose unity.43

The Democratic convention was plagued by the same sectional quarrel that divided Congress. After having spent much time in a futile attempt to reunite the New York wing of the party, the convention did succeed in resurrecting the alliance between South and West. This alignment was not based, however, on the formula prescribed by Calhoun at Memphis. Balancing the nomination of Michigan's Cass with a Kentucky slaveholder, General William O. Butler, for Vice President, the party ignored Calhoun's report on internal improvements. The platform provisions on slavery were repeats of the Democratic declarations of 1840 and 1844,

43 Calhoun to Conner, Apr. 4, 6, May 23, July 8, 9, 1848, Burt to Conner, Feb. 4, Mar. 12, 24, 28, 29, 30, Apr. 8, May 21, 23, 1848, Conner Letters; Mercury, May 26, 30, 1848; see above, 286, n. 40.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
That Congress has no power under the Constitution to interfere with or control the domestic institutions of the . . . States, and that such States are the sole and proper judges of everything appertaining to their own affairs, not prohibited by the Constitution; that all efforts of the abolitionists or others made to induce Congress to interfere with slavery, or to take incipient steps in relation thereto, are calculated to lead to the most alarming and dangerous consequences, and that all such efforts have an inevitable tendency to diminish the happiness of the people, and endanger the stability and permanency of the Union, and ought not to be countenanced by any friend of our political institutions.44

Southerners were assured that this declaration was meant to repudiate the Wilmot Proviso. They agreed that it would be inexpedient to become more specific.

Neither northern nor southern extremists were satisfied with the convention, however. The Barnburners, unhappy with Cass and furious at the convention's handling of their fight with the Hunkers, returned home confirmed in revolt. Alabama's William Lowndes Yancey—a onetime Carolinian and one of Calhoun's "friends"—attempted to secure an outright repudiation of the Wilmot Proviso. When he was unsuccessful in this effort, he voted against the platform. Yancey was joined only by the Florida delegation and one other Alabama delegate. He was not discouraged, however, and left the convention determined to organize a southern revolt.45

Returning home by way of Charleston, Yancey stopped to address a meeting of the outraged Carolina Orthodoxy. Convinced from

44Quoted in Morrison, Democratic Politics, 140. The Barnburners were willing to accept this resolution.

45Morrison, Democratic Politics, 141-44, 157-61; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 363-65.
the beginning that no good would come from the recent convention,
Carolina's fury was intensified by the accuracy of her foreboding.
Calhoun had tried unsuccessfully to have this meeting postponed un­til after the Whig Convention. The Whigs might not nominate Taylor. In that case Calhoun hoped that southern Whigs and Democrats would sever party ties to unite behind the General. But Calhoun cautioned the Charleston meeting against endorsing Taylor. If the Whigs did nominate the General, he could not serve the cause of southern unity.46

Yancey and the Charlestonians heeded his warning. The Ala­bama insurgent told his audience, however, that they must plan their campaign; "let us," he said, "call upon the South to rally as one man--to meet in primary assemblies--to meet in Southern Convention--to consult and agree upon a ticket for President and Vice President which should be acceptable to all by reason of its devotion to the Constitu­tion." Pleased by the Charleston reaction to his speech, Yancey went on to Alabama there to find "nearly all ready to award praise" for his course but none "bold enough to face the storm." While South Carolina waited for news of the Whigs, Alabama concluded to support the national ticket.

The Whigs met in Philadelphia on June 7 where, tormented by their own version of sectional animosity, they rejected Clay for the last time. Calhoun also suffered a setback when they nominated General Taylor. Southern Whigs rejoiced at the selection of a Louisiana slaveholder. Although some Northerners of the "Conscience"

46Morrison, Democratic Politics, 157; Wiltse, Calhoun Sec­tionalist, 364.
persuasion bolted the party rather than swallow this symbolic repudiation of antislavery, most northern Whigs confidently expected to re-work Taylor into their image.47

Events moved rapidly that summer. Two weeks after the Whigs met, the Barnburners assembled in Utica, New York. Still smarting over their failure to destroy the Hunkers at Baltimore, the New York rebels had concluded to nominate their own slate. While the Senate debated the future of Oregon and Polk brooded over the Barnburners' treacherous threat "to the Union," an Ohio antislavery convention met at Columbus. This assembly spoke with the voice of the future. It called upon all those who favored free soil to unite and meet in national convention, there to select a candidate for President.48

The Liberty Party had already nominated John P. Hale. Salmon P. Chase, one of their number, persuaded them, however, to merge their cause with the greater force of antislavery. The Barnburners, too, agreed to attend this latest convention. On August 9, 1848, "Conscience" Whigs, Liberty party men, and Barnburners met together at Buffalo in the Free-Soil Convention. They nominated Martin Van Buren for the presidency. Charles Francis Adams, the son of John Quincy Adams, accepted second place on this ticket with his father's old enemy. The new party vowed to leave slavery alone where it existed. But the Free-Soilers would not consent to see it advance into another American territory. This determined group endorsed

47Mercury, June 12, 1848; Yancey to Calhoun, June 14, 1848, Correspondence to Calhoun, 441; Morrison, Democratic Politics, 157-63.

48Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 365-66; Morrison, Democratic Politics, 145-47.
the Wilmot Proviso and denounced the Clayton Compromise. It also approved economy in government, free land for western settlers, internal improvements, and a high tariff. Here was the making of an alliance between North and West, the prelude to Ripon. Hailing the advent of emancipation, William Lloyd Garrison predicted that the Free-Soilers were preparing the way for the party of abolition.49

Rumors flew thick and fast in South Carolina during that summer. Boyce would "go for Taylor . . . Whig and all." Conner inclined toward Taylor. Although Hammond despised the General's "damned rascally set of friends out of S.C. . . .," he, too, would support Taylor. Hammond favored an independent ticket composed of Taylor and Woodbury; it would be approved throughout South Carolina and would "urge on Calhoun" into the Taylor camp. Elmore visited Washington and was thought to favor "holding back." John Heart, now on the staff of the Mercury, also made a significant trip to the capital. As observers waited for the message he would bring back, they labelled the Mercury irrevocably "committed . . . against Cass."50

"The rumour in the Mercury office" was that—excepting Holmes—South Carolina's entire congressional delegation would support Cass. Rhett was said to be a "watch and wait man," regarded as "synonymous with opposition to Taylor." Yet the Congressman had

49 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 367-69; Morrison, Democratic Politics, 151-56. The Barnburners attended the Free-Soil Convention with the understanding that Van Buren would be nominated for the presidency.

50 Hammond to Simms, May 29, June 20, 1848, Simms to Hammond July 20, 1848; Hammond to Major Hammond, June 12, Aug. 18, 1848, Hammond Papers. "Perhaps," Hammond wrote, "it would be best to elect Van Buren & bring on the crisis at once."
greeted Cass's nomination with a vigorous condemnation of the candidate for his espousal of popular sovereignty. Some readers also noticed that on June 8 the Mercury asked for "opinions relative to the best choice for President."\(^{51}\)

The "Town Meeting," held a few days later, exposed the opinions of many. The "assembly was large and the Resolutions passed with great unanimity" as the "Democratic friends of Genl. Taylor in Charleston" nominated him for the presidency. They endorsed Butler, the Democratic candidate for Vice President. James Gadsden, Chairman of the Corresponding Committee set about canvassing the state for Taylor. But Calhoun had not expressed his opinion. "Wait and Watch," cautioned the Mercury.\(^{52}\)

When the congressional session ended, Calhoun, accompanied by Senator Butler and Congressman Burt, again came home by way of Charleston. There, on August 19, he advised his audience to boycott the election even as it had boycotted the convention. Van Buren's candidacy, Calhoun said, proved northern determination "to rally" on the "great question of sectional supremacy." The future of slavery and the South was thus directly threatened. Neither the Whigs nor the Democrats could be trusted in this emergency. In a situation so grave, the South could save herself only by renouncing the national parties. Calhoun summoned his hearers to promote his call for the whole South to assemble in convention; they would

---


\(^{52}\)Gadsden to Hammond, July 28, 1848, Hammond to Simms, July 28, 1848, Hammond Papers; Mercury, July 28, 31, 1848.
thereby accomplish the organization of a southern party. He would fight sectionalism with sectionalism. The call for southern unity was becoming more particularist.  

Calhoun spoke on Saturday; the *Mercury* devoted three columns of its Monday issue to a report of the Senator's address. The editor, of course, praised Calhoun's sentiments. Like Calhoun, the *Mercury* had no faith in national parties. But in the same issue Carew endorsed Cass for the presidency.  

Whether by accident or design, Calhoun spoke too late to convince his audience. For some time the Senator had been aware of the charged political atmosphere within South Carolina. Rhett's independent course throughout the Congress of 1848 strongly suggested the probability of trouble ahead. In the four years since Calhoun suppressed the Bluffton revolt much had changed in the state. As younger politicians grew more ambitious, the senior Senator had grown older. His health became a matter of concern to both himself and his friends. The bank war had broken out; "still raging" it pitted Calhoun intimates like Conner and Elmore against each other and threatened to destroy state unity.  

---


Elmore was president of the state-backed Bank of the State of South Carolina. The bank's charter was up for renewal in 1852. Conner was president of the Bank of South Carolina, a private institution. In an attempt to kill "Elmore's Bank," Hammond, Conner, and others undertook a campaign to prevent its being rechartered. The *Mercury* published "communications" from both sides but was
further, the peril to the South had increased.

The unity that Calhoun once held desirable for the protection of his section was now a matter of grave necessity. Without a firm base in South Carolina, he could never hope for general southern unification. His own approach to the presidential election could disrupt the order so carefully imposed upon the state during the past two decades. Resolving that he must first preserve order at home, Calhoun decided to sit out the election. The stance of the candidates was not without influence, but South Carolina's reaction to his choosing between the two was uppermost in the Senator's mind.

Robert Barnwell Rhett figured prominently in Calhoun's calculations. Although Rhett had wanted South Carolina to attend the Democratic convention, he did nothing to challenge Calhoun's ruling to the contrary. When the convention selected Cass, Rhett categorically renounced any intention of supporting the nominee. Like Calhoun, however, Rhett did not endorse Taylor. South Carolina assumed that the Congressman was following Calhoun's lead and that an endorsement—of Calhoun's choosing—would ultimately be made.56

Antislavery's exit from the Democratic party combined with House rejection of the Clayton compromise to alter Rhett's course abruptly. The South should support the purified Democratic party, generally thought to favor Elmore. The issue was bitterly disputed during 1847 and 1848 and remained a source of discord until the pro-bank men won in 1852 (Hammond Papers, 1847-1852; Mercury, 1847-1848; White, Rhett, 100; Smith, Economic Readjustment, 193-96). Charleston's Taylor Democrats were "mostly against the [Elmore's] bank." (Simms to Hammond, Nov. 11, 1848, Hammond Papers).

he concluded, southern Whigs having proved their duplicity beyond all doubt. Rhett, consequently, announced for Cass. Most of the South Carolina House delegation followed suit.57

When Congress adjourned, Rhett also went to Charleston. He proposed to persuade the city's Democratic executive committee that it should endorse Cass. On August 20, while Calhoun was still in the city, Rhett succeeded in his mission. The committee decided to announce its decision at a public meeting scheduled for the next day. While Calhoun advised against this course, he did not forbid it. Neither did he stay for the meeting.58

If Calhoun expected trouble from this action of the Charleston Democracy, he was not mistaken. "The Democratic meeting last evening," wrote John Heart," was for a great portion of the time a scene of perfect tumult."

At length, while Mr. Hayne was speaking a glass lamp was thrown on the stage, and the indignant and withering rebuke with which he met the outrage seemed to recall [sic] the voters to a sense of propriety, and the proceedings went on to their termination without interruption.

Taylor's Democratic supporters also denounced the "degree of rowdism," but they noted that the "meeting was held against the advice of Mr. Calhoun."59 The campaign would be bitterly fought in South Carolina.

Taylor men attributed the sudden strength of the Cass movement to Rhett. "There is no doubt that Rhett is at the bottom of

57White, Rhett, 96-97; Morrison, Democratic Politics, 166.
58White, Rhett, 97; Morrison, Democratic Politics, 166.
59Heart to Calhoun, Aug. 22, 1848, Calhoun Papers; Walker to Hammond, Aug. 22, 1848, Hammond Papers.
the Cass movement in this State. . ." wrote William Gilmore Simms:

The game played by the Mercury was necessary to convince Cass that Gen Commander's nomination went for nothing. He was as accordingly denounced & Cass denounced & the convention denounced all very bitterly. Elmore at this time goes to Washington, Rhett paves the way to reconciliation in a speech in favour of Polk, which takes the South by surprise. Hart [sic] (of the Mercury office) goes to Washington just after the meeting in June & shortly after the Mercury proceeds to smooth the way by apologetic articles for Cass, & articles against Taylor. . . .60

Simms's analysis was essentially correct.61 He went on to report that Calhoun, Butler, and Burt really "incline to Taylor & go against Cass." Calhoun, however, decreed neutrality for himself, his colleague in the Senate, and his liaison. "Strange," said Simms, "that at the moment when it is important that he should speak he should be silent. Is it possible that he fails to see that a complete division of the State is fatal to his ascendency?"62

Calhoun obviously did not agree. There were no longer any anti-Calhoun politicians in South Carolina. Sometime office-holders who retained political ambitions—like Simm's friend, Hammond—were careful to restrict their criticism of the Senator to private channels. Lest they forfeit future prospects, their public statements must be pro-Calhoun. One could be passively or actively for the Senator; it was not practicable, however, to be a politician and against him. Calhoun was doubtless aware of this situation. It had much influence upon his decision to remain silent on the subject of

60 Simms to Hammond, Aug. 29, 1849, Hammond Papers.
61 Mercury, May 20 – Aug. 21, 1848, see above, 285-88, 292-98.
the election. Both the Cass and Taylor camps included passives and actives among their adherents. Calhoun also knew that he was not strong enough to decree a policy for the election. He could probably secure a majority for one or the other of the candidates; but only by scattering, not crushing, the opposition. Such an action would destroy the political climate of his own creation. So, in this revolution of 1848, Calhoun discreetly chose to remain silent. He preserved his "ascendancy," thereby; in the aftermath of the campaign, Calhoun reasserted his will and unity returned to South Carolina.

The Mercury followed Rhett to support Cass. It must be assumed that Calhoun neither forbade this move nor even expressed any real displeasure with it. Throughout the fall the Mercury was as solicitous as ever of "Mr. Calhoun's" opinions. John Heart, conscious of the "imperfections," in his coverage of Calhoun's "remarks" at the Charleston meeting, urged the Senator to send a complete copy of the speech. The Mercury would "publish it with great pleasure."

"The Presidency—Our Position," explained the Mercury's shift to Cass. Taylor surrendered his claim to independence, the editor said, when he accepted the Whig nomination. Furthermore, the General had declared himself on only one issue, opposition to presidential vetoes. This position alone was reason enough for the South to oppose him; internal improvements, another bank, a higher tariff, and the Wilmot Proviso would become law under such a Whig president. Carew

63 On July 20 Simms complained that "The Mercury is in the hands of the enemy. Rhett has too prevailing an influence" (Simms to Hammond, July 20, 1848, Hammond Papers). Heart to Calhoun, Apr. 22, 1848, Calhoun Papers.
had not forgotten the Whig rejection of the Clayton compromise. That compromise was a Democratic attempt to settle the slavery issue on terms "not dishonorable to the South." Taylor's virtues were limited to his southern birth and the fact of his being a slaveholder.64

When forced "to a choice between the nominees of the Whig party and the nominees of the Democratic party, we declare our paper for the latter," said the Mercury. The "nomination of General Taylor in their midst and the organization of a party to advance his election" threatened Carolinians with the triumph of old line Whiggery. ". . . A position of neutrality in such circumstances would be a position of imbecility. . . ."65

Brave and confident though he sounded, the editor had trouble justification his position. The Mercury remained more anti-Taylor than pro-Cass. Admitting the Democratic candidate to be "very exceptionable," Carew maintained that he was still better than a Whig, hence the Mercury's support. Lest Calhoun take umbrage in his "position of neutrality," Carew explained that he, personally, preferred a timely neutrality, while awaiting developments. In deference to his "friends," however, he had joined the Cass party. The editor longed for the end of the presidential contest, when South Carolina would put division aside and reunite in defense of the South.66

During the first week of the Mercury's campaign it gave over its columns to "communications," news reports, and editorials on the

64Mercury, Aug. 21, 1848.
65Ibid.
66Ibid., Sept. 17, 1848.
contest. Yielding to the "pressure of friends," Carew reconsidered his decision to close Mercury columns to the Taylor men. The "unusual circumstances of the division within the Charleston Democrats" established the wisdom of this policy. Carew's "friends" were right. Many regular subscribers to the Mercury were Taylor Democrats, Henry Conner being one of them. In return for his concession, Carew would require "temperance" of its political correspondents. He would also limit the number of such communications "in order . . . to devote" his "paper principally to higher and more enduring interests. . . ."

Five days later "Cato" assailed Cass; but regardless of Carew's declaration, the Mercury published few communications in favor of Taylor.

"Rank and File" wondered if the Independent Taylor Democrats had thrown in permanently with the Whigs. "Sumter" was certain that Calhoun opposed Taylor. Many of the Mercury's readers were of the same opinion. On September 5 they discovered that the Senator was no less opposed to Cass. In writing to Carew, Calhoun reasserted that he stood "on independent grounds . . . I see much to condemn and little to approve in either candidate." The Mercury published Calhoun's letter in full and approved his opinion as "the one of all others which we prefer to see him occupy." "Common Sense" was quite right in assuring Carolinians that Calhoun had never meant to endorse Taylor.

67 Ibid., Aug. 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, Sept. 1, 2, 4, 5, 1848.

68 Ibid., Aug. 28, Sept. 4, 5, 14, 1848. Calhoun's letter was written on Sept. 1 and published on the fifth. In it the Senator approved of Heart's coverage of his "remarks" delivered earlier in Charleston. Hammond was "startled" by Calhoun's letter and believed him to be "furiously opposed to Cass." When Burt endorsed Cass Hammond changed his mind (Hammond to Simms, Sept. 12, 1848, Hammond to Major Hammond, Sept. 12, 1848, Hammond Papers).
The *Mercury's* September issues repeatedly detailed Taylor's drawbacks. Carew observed that South Carolina was the only state in the Union with a party of Democrats for Taylor. "Excommunicated and forgotten" by the Whigs, "that select body" named "Taylor Democrats, or some such rigamarole," abides, the editor teased, "in the flesh and about the City of Charleston." The *Mercury* urged that local candidates committed to Cass be supported. Christopher Memminger was such a candidate for the General Assembly; so was Carew.69

With Calhoun out of the campaign, the *Mercury* looked to Rhett, "a true man of the South," for leadership. Readers were reminded that on September 21 Rhett would address a meeting of Cass Democrats in Hibernian Hall. The crowd was "the largest . . . held since the organization of the . . . parties in the present political contest," said the *Mercury* on the next day. It was also the "most enthusiastic." The editor applauded Rhett for having emphasized the true interests of the South above the presidency. Calhoun might well have said the same thing.70

When Rhett spoke again on the twenty-third, the *Mercury* reported the results with enthusiasm. This speech would do much to weaken the Taylor Democrats, said the editor. Touching as it did "upon nearly all the leading questions," Carew determined to publish the speech in its entirety. Rhett had cautioned all voters against trusting to "a vague, delusive hope, founded upon the personal popularity and . . . birth-place of the Whig candidate. . . ."

69 *Mercury*, Sept. 15, 16, 18, 19, 1848.

More importantly, the Congressman exposed "the utter hopelessness of uniting the South for . . . resistance and defence, under the administration of a Southern Whig President." Carolinians should remember this and support Cass. 71

"Communications," reports of meetings, and more editorials carried the message into October. As Charleston voters went to the polls on October 9, the Mercury reminded them that "the presidential issue is the leading issue." Since the General Assembly chose South Carolina's presidential electors, Charleston voters must send only Cass men to Columbia. Cass, they should remember, did not believe that Congress could interfere with slavery. The states exercised sole jurisdiction of this institution. And he was opposed to the Wilmot Proviso. Taylor, on the other hand, had shrugged off his Democratic supporters. Avowing himself to be a genuine Whig, the General had expressed his pleasure at sharing the ticket with Millard Fillmore, an antislavery man. Three significant Carolinians, A. P. Butler, Armistead Burt, and Franklin H. Elmore, now agreed with the Mercury's position. The optimistic paper expected the Democrats to carry South Carolina. Taylor, Carew predicted, would receive no more than 30 votes in the legislature.

With some satisfaction the Mercury soon recorded the vote; South Carolina went for Cass 129 to 27. Carew, having been reelected, was among those voting for Cass. 72

71 Ibid., Sept. 23, 25, 29, 1848.

72 Ibid., Sept. 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 20, Oct. 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 14, 21, 23, Nov. 7, 1848; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 370. Taylor's declaration came in a second letter to Captain Allison, dated Sept. 4, 1848 (Hammond to Major Hammond, Sept. 10, 12, 1848, Hammond Papers).

Carew ran for Speaker in the new House. Unable to muster
The *Mercury* could not forecast the same result outside South Carolina; nationally, the trend was to Taylor. On November 13 the editor conceded the certainty of a Taylor victory. Carew admired the General personally but feared him as the representative of the Whig party. Despite the fact that Taylor was himself a slaveholder, northern Whigs had repeatedly asserted their confidence in him as an antislavery candidate. His support was heavily northern; still, it was hard to believe that Taylor would betray the South. By failing to cooperate with antislavery, however, General Taylor would destroy his party:

... Thus ... if Gen Taylor shall fulfill the hopes of his Southern friends, it seems almost inevitable that his administration will witness the division of the United States into two great sectional parties, animated against each other by a feeling that threatens nothing less than the dissolution of the Union. If, on the other hand, he shall fulfill the hopes ... of his Northern supporters ... with anti-slavery as its guiding spirit, and prostration and ruin of the South as its object ... the administration ... presents a subject of speculation full of perplexity, and one cannot look forward to it but as a theatre of great events and possibly of a fatal catastrophe.

The *Mercury's* venture into clairvoyance concluded with an admonition. "In such an exigency ... the safety of our country demands that we shall judge ... the coming Administration, not by preconceived opinions, but by its acts, its fruits." Calhoun could not have asked for more; it was still "Wait and Watch."  

The editor's subsequent comments belied his awesome appeal for cautious detachment. Alternating briefly between optimism and sufficient support, he withdrew from the contest at the end of the third ballot.

73 *Mercury*, Nov. 13, 1848.
pessimism, the *Mercury* speculated that Taylor's victory did not depict true Whig strength. The General was personally popular but his platform had been vague. Consequently, many Taylor supporters had not made a party commitment. Then, too, the Senate would be controlled by Democrats who could resist Whig measures. The Whigs, on the other hand, were confidently united while the Democrats were despondent, divided, and defeated.\(^4\)

There were many dangers inherent in all this. "The real basis, substance, and life of the Whig party" was a "system of taxation by duties on imports..." High tariff advocates had concluded in 1833 that either the South must be subjugated or the tariff abandoned, hence the attack on slavery. "... If," said the *Mercury*, "tomorrow the South would submit to be the humble dependent of New England, through the instrumentality of a high Protective Tariff, abolition would be struck dumb by the patent magic of gold." Meanwhile, northern Whigs were threatening to block all government appropriations until protection was re-established.\(^5\)

In addition to the prospect of tariff revision, Carew feared possible Whig control of the Senate by 1850. The Wilmot Proviso would then become law and "... sectional oppression ... be met by sectional resistance..." Had Cass only been elected, the Democrats would have extended the Missouri Compromise line. Instead, many northern Democrats had been irritated by the

\(^4\)Ibid., Nov. 23, 24, 1848.
\(^5\)Ibid., Dec. 4, 5, 1848.
defection of their southern associates to Taylor. As a result, much of the northern Democracy would vote with the Whigs to force the issue in "unequivocal form." Since General Taylor would not veto the Proviso, "... conflict between the free and slave States," the Mercury warned, "cannot be evaded." Things could not remain as they were.76

The Mercury's preoccupation with the issue of slavery in the territories was shared by both Calhoun and Rhett. During the late summer, Senator and Congressmen each outlined a program designed to secure equality for the South. Calhoun called as before for southern unity, the goal to be achieved through a southwide convention. Rhett had no faith in this method. In the event of slavery's exclusion from the territories, he proposed that South Carolina's delegation withdraw from Congress. The state could thus "force every State in the Union to take sides, for or against her" and establish finally "that the rights of the South be respected or the Union be dissolved."77

Carew, wholly convinced of the need for southern unity and prepared to welcome its accomplishment by whatever means, inclined toward Rhett's plan:

... We are in favor of any form of action that can secure our object. If a Southern Convention can be assembled, we approve of that: if not, then of any other expedient. We will support the first, the second, the last--any and every form of action that promises deliverance and security to the South--and

76 Ibid., Dec. 7, 8, 1848.

77 Ibid., Sept. 21, 29, 1848. Their respective proposals were outlined in their Charleston speeches and reported in the Mercury.
will support them singly or all together. . . .

The *Mercury* reported the "almost entire unanimity of sentiment that pervades the press as to the propriety . . . of action. . . ." Proceeding with care, it predicted "that when the time comes for action, there will be a corresponding unanimity on the part of the State."78

The editor's distrust of southern Whigs, reflective of Rhett's reduced his hopes for a southern convention. Even if Taylor approved the Wilmot Proviso, the *Mercury* saw little chance of his southern supporters cooperating with a sectional convention. The parties were "almost balanced" in Virginia, Alabama, and Mississippi. In Arkansas, Texas, and Missouri there were "powerful [Whig] minorities" which might "swell to majorities by any new issue that secures to them the support of all who shrink from a bold measure." There was no hope "of gaining the support of these States for a proposition that will be denounced as tending to revolution or disunion." But "South Carolina could" act,"and act effectually in forcing all the States to take into consideration the value of the Union, and weigh it against abolition. . . ." The *Mercury* commended Taylor Democrats for their willingness to cooperate.79

When the question of promoting southern unity came before


79 *Mercury*, Nov. 2, Dec. 11, 14, 1848.
the General Assembly, Calhoun's prudent approach to the presidential election paid handsome dividends. Taylor Democrats and Cass Democrats were equally devoted to the principle of southern rights. They had only quarreled over how best to reach their goal. And through his neutrality, Calhoun still chief among the orthodox, had assured that the breach should be only temporary.

In December the Senator moved to heal it. Urging his friends in the General Assembly to declare for a southern convention, Calhoun again warned against separate state action. With the exception of the recent presidential election, Rhett's following had never been strong outside his congressional district. So, as Taylor men united with Cass men to honor Calhoun's wishes, the revolution of 1848 came to an end. There were no reprisals this time. Time was running out for the South, and her cause needed all those who were well disposed, separate state actionists among them. Rhett and the Mercury followed the state in bowing to the wishes of its leader. Carew, however, did not repent of his initial preference. He was still "decidedly favorable to the action of" South Carolina "alone if no other" state could "be brought to cooperate."

---

80 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 374-75; White, Rhett, 99; Gadsden to Hammond, Aug. 19, 1848, Conner to Hammond, Nov. 2, 1848, Hammond Papers; Carew to Calhoun, Jan. 2, 1849, Calhoun Papers.
CHAPTER IX

A GREAT CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT

Free-Soil leadership viewed the results of the election of 1848 with extreme satisfaction. On November 30, as Calhoun was moving to reunite the ranks of his South Carolina followers, Francis Preston Blair wrote to Van Buren. "Our forlorn hope has accomplished all that was wished & more than we had any right to expect..." Blair asserted. Every Taylor and Cass man in the North had been forced to endorse "the principle of no new Territory to be annexed to our Africa." Politicians who might equivocate "in giving effect to this absolute interdict" would soon be shaken from their lofty pedestals. ..." Determined to contain slavery within its present limits, Free-Soilers would tolerate none whose "hollow professions" might blunt the force of their drive.\(^1\)

Van Buren's reply would have chilled the heart of the most hopeful southern Union-lover. Of the 121,000 votes that Free-Soil received in New York, "more than 100,000 were those of ... incorruptible Radical Democrats, who [could] neither be bought, forced or driven by any power on earth."\(^2\) Calhoun had spoken with the voice

\(^1\)Blair to Van Buren, Nov. 30, 1848, quoted in Avery Craven, The Coming of the Civil War (New York, 1942), 240.

\(^2\)Van Buren to Blair, Dec. 11, 1848, quoted in ibid.

Blair, Van Buren and Thomas Hart Benton had all gravitated toward Free-Soil as a result of Polk's nomination in 1844. Aware

308

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
of a prophet. Northerners were re-deploying their political parties on sectional lines. The South must do likewise.

The second session of the Thirtieth Congress supported the Blair-Calhoun-Van Buren analysis. Less than two weeks after the legislators convened, Congress plunged into an especially bitter dispute over slavery in the territories. Hinging on the organization of California, this quarrel clearly demonstrated the rising intransigence of both North and South.

Following the discovery of gold in California, the population of the region had greatly increased. As a result, Congress viewed statehood for the area as both inevitable and desirable. The question of whether the new state should be organized with or without slavery, however, set off a dispute that threatened not only the

of the rising antislavery feeling at the North, these three charter members of Jackson's retinue viewed the selection of Polk over Van Buren as a triumph for slavery and a setback for the Democratic party. Their suspicions were strengthened when Polk took Rhett's advice to replace Blair as editorial spokesman for the party. Thomas Ritchie was brought up from Richmond and installed as editor of the newly founded Union which became the administrative organ.

Blair, Van Buren, and Benton united to blame Calhoun for their estrangement from the Democracy. Charging that Calhoun had designed the strategy, Van Buren joined Blair in believing that Polk's nomination was part and parcel of the "war waged for the acknowledged . . . purpose of extending or perpetuating slavery." As Senator from a border state, Benton angered his constituents when he deserted "the sage politicians and statesmen, Calhoun, Walker, Polk, and Ritchie." Denounced for his unnatural alliance with Van Buren, Benton learned that he would "not be permitted to stand in the way of the onward and upward march of [the] country. . . ." By 1849 his prospects for reelection were unpromising. Smarting under the charge that he was motivated by a "contemptible jealousy of Calhoun," Benton accused "Every Calhoun man and . . . newspaper in the State and in the United States" of working for his defeat. "Calhoun started it all," he declared. Awaiting the "day of reckoning. . . when all such apostates and traitors" would be remembered with "detestation and execration," the Mercury lent substance to Benton's charge (Cong. Globe, 28th, 1st, Appx. 568,607; Thomas Hart Benton, Thirty Years View [2 vols.; New York, 1854-56], II, 614-15, 647; Craven, Coming of the Civil War, 201-10; Mercury, June 27,28, July 17, 18, 1849.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
future of California but also of the Union itself.

Throughout this contest the increasing strength of Free-Soil became daily more apparent. When on December 21 the House actually adopted the proposal of Daniel Gott, Whig of New York, to abolish slave trading in the District of Columbia, one slaveholding Congressman decided to retaliate. Repenting, perhaps, of his recent support for Zachary Taylor, Charleston Representative Isaac Holmes invited southern members of the House to follow him as he withdrew from the chamber.

Meanwhile, Senators from ten of the fifteen slave states had already caucused. Alarmed by the proceedings in the lower house, the caucus named a committee of five and directed it to determine who among the southern members of Congress would unite to oppose the Wilmot Proviso. Three Democrats and two Whigs made up the committee. The thrust of Free-Soil was aiding Calhoun's campaign for southern unity.

Prodded by this committee, sixty-nine Senators and Representatives—Whigs and Democrats—from every southern state except Delaware met together on December 22. Upon the motion of Georgia Whig Alexander H. Stephens, this assembly appointed another committee and charged it with drafting an "address to the People of the Southern States." The address "should be [as] temperate [and] mild [as it was] decided," said Calhoun, and should underscore the need for immediate action. Once it was circulated among the electorate, the

3Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 378-79; Murray, Whig Party in Georgia, 140, Ambler, ed., Hunter Correspondence, II, 104.
South would be bound by the reaction it provoked.  

Consisting of one member from every slaveholding state—nine Democrats and six Whigs—the new committee met on the next day. Stephens was made chairman and Calhoun was among the members. His long-sought goal of southern unity seemingly within reach, the Carolinian was appointed to write the proposed address. He had it ready for committee approval by January 10, 1849.  

The Charleston Mercury followed developments at the capital with a growing impatience. Ridding itself of all moderation, the editor's tone increased in sharpness, at times becoming almost peremptory. Carew was weary of antislavery's constant stream of invective. Evincing less and less of a disposition to assert his love for the Union, he thundered that the South must act, immediately and decisively. The Mercury was absorbed in the sectional battle; local news accounted for less of the agitated journal's attention. And every report of national affairs seemed to bear in some way on the growing hostility between North and South.  

In a long editorial on December 14 Carew presented his summation of the South's plight. He still felt that South Carolina could act alone to relieve the rising peril; indeed, she could "effectually" force "all the States to take into consideration the value of the Union." The patriot's love of the Union must be weighed "against  

---

4 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 379-80; Murray, Whig Party in Georgia, 140; Craven, Coming of the Civil War, 243; Mercury, Dec. 20, 1848.  

5 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 480-82; Murray, Whig Party in Georgia, 140; White, Rhett, 99.  

abolition," Carew advised. With the object of averting abolition and restoring domestic peace ever before her, South Carolina must overcome her fears that she lay "... under suspicion of disaffection to the Union." The South would either kill abolition or be killed by it; the Yankee crusade would not die a natural death. Northern Democrats and others among the South's friends at the North had repeatedly asserted that abolition endangered the Union. Yet their courageous efforts were rewarded with no more than "the entire passiveness of the Southern States. . . ."

The South owed strong support to her northern allies; acting with conviction, any one southern state could convince "the Northern people" of "the moral certainty that they" would "be compelled to choose" between the Union and abolition. "... The Northern patriot" could "then plead with sincerity and power for the Union . . . and denounce with some hope of effect, the fanatic traitors who are harrying it to destruction." Because southern response to the "insolent and ruinous aggressions" of abolitionism had so far been limited to strong language, the northern electorate had simply dismissed this indignant southern "bluster." Calhoun ended with a grim warning: "... it will [now] require stronger measures than might formerly have sufficed" to resolve the crisis.

"Of all others" South Carolina was "the very State . . . that should throw down the gauntlet of resistance." If the true and Constitutional "Union" were "not already corrupted and disjointed beyond all hope of restoration, then it" would "be preserved." And if abolition had "already waxed too strong in Congress, and among the Northern people, for the issue of the Union
itself to suppress it, this will be proof conclusive that it" could not "be arrested at all in the Union. . . ."

The Mercury had no patience at all with those who said that other states were jealous of South Carolina and would not follow her into resistance. South Carolina was regarded by the southern people as "the natural leader on this question." As "a border state" she was appointed to lead the lower South. White men could not survive as tillers of the soil in regions south of Virginia and North Carolina. Only the African could stand the broiling sun of the Deep South; there it was "slavery or depopulation." If the politicians would only cooperate, nine-tenths of the southern people would applaud a resistance led by South Carolina.

Carew neglected no argument in his appeal for action. Even if the South did not follow and his state were left to stand alone, there would still be nothing to fear; South Carolina could not be coerced. "... Does any man believe," asked the Mercury, "that a Northern army can march through Virginia and North Carolina, on the errand of forcing South Carolina to submit to the measures of abolitionism?" Such an army could not be raised. If the abolitionists succeeded in abolishing slavery in the District, restricting the interstate slave trade, or applying the Wilmot Proviso anywhere in the West, South Carolina's delegation at Washington should immediately return home. The governor could then call the General Assembly into session where it could adopt "... such other measures as will lead to the complete protection of the South from the machinations and aggressions" of her "enemies." The state's seats in the national Congress, eloquent in their emptiness, would

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
serve as an impressive and final appeal to those who loved the Union more than abolition. This course "... is the true course, and the only one that we think will be effectual," insisted the Mercury. As he had said before, however, editor Carew was willing to support any move designed to bring about southern unity:

But in the love of our Country, and all that we hold dear, let us no longer trifle with this great question. Let us no longer amuse each other with the emulation of fine professions while the consuming fire is eating out the foundations of our social institutions.

On the second day of the new year, Carew wrote to "Mr. Calhoun." The Mercury approved the "meeting of southern members of Congress" and the editor thanked Calhoun for his present account of that meeting. Carew had, predictably, published Calhoun's "Communication" in the Mercury. The editor hoped that Calhoun's "expectations of a happy result" from the movement might be realized. With "such a man as Stephens at the head of the Committee," however, Carew was constrained to doubt the outcome of its deliberations. Still, he "conceived it prudent for the present, when Virginia and N Carolina" were "exhibiting symptoms of vitality on this Subject, that the Mercury should be comparatively quiet." And he still favored action by South Carolina alone if "no other" state could "be brought to cooperate" with her. But, as usual, the Mercury still acted at Calhoun's command. Carew "would esteem it a great favor" if the Senator would transmit his "views on all questions bearing on the ... all important issue" to the Mercury. In consequence, the paper "might render efficient

---

7Mercury, Dec. 14, 1848.
service to the South."^8

On the evening of January 10, the Committee of Fifteen met to consider Calhoun's address; Carew's reservations concerning the outcome of this venture proved to have been well advised. During the nineteen-day interval, Calhoun wrote, the capital pondered, and Congress did virtually nothing. That morning the House again took up Gott's resolution to abolish the slave trade in the District. A freshman Whig member from Illinois named Abraham Lincoln moved to amend the motion before the House with a more practical version of an earlier proposal. Lincoln would also abolish slavery in the capital, but over a period of years and only if a majority of the white males resident there approved. He also suggested a strong provision for the return of escaped slaves. As the House voted by a decided majority to reconsider Gott's motion, southern Congressmen reacted with characteristic and voluble indignation. The chamber followed its vote, however, with immediate adjournment. Thus Gott's motion had been approved but not drafted as a bill while Lincoln's proposal was not even called up. Southerners interpreted this move as a victory for their side; it was an avoiding action brought on by the South's concerted resistance.^9

Curiously enough, this apparent victory combined with the everyday pressures of politics to undermine further resistance. With the immediate danger past, southern Whigs resolved to reassert

^8Ibid., Dec. 1848, Carew to Calhoun, Jan. 2, 1849, Calhoun Papers.

^9Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 381-82.
their party distinctness; in so doing they would protect the interest of incoming President Taylor. Polk, for his part, recovering from the apparent surprise with which he had regarded the strength of the southern movement, directed administration Democrats to do what they could to stall its drive. So when Calhoun confronted the Committee of Fifteen with his finished product, he found their willingness to act together already partially defused.\textsuperscript{10}

On the tenth the address was read to the committee and discussed at length. The body decided to defer a decision on its suitability until a second meeting scheduled for the thirteenth. By that date the Whigs were clearly settled upon their new tack. The committee entertained the motion of John G. Chapman, Whig of Maryland, to postpone indefinitely any address at all. It was rejected eight to seven, all six Whig members and Democrat Thomas J. Rusk of Texas voting in the affirmative. Two days later, on January 15, eighty-eight southern members of Congress reassembled to consider the address as approved by close vote of the Committee of Fifteen.\textsuperscript{11}

Calhoun's address was both an appeal to the past and a warning for the future. It faithfully adhered to his initial advice to that first meeting of uneasy Southerners and was "temperate, mild and decided." The aging South Carolinian recounted the problems faced by slaveholders since the Revolution. Slavery was a divisive issue at the Constitutional Convention, he said, but this first confrontation was resolved by compromise. Without such a compromise, the South would never have ratified the Constitution.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{10}Ibid., 382-83.
  \item \textsuperscript{11}Ibid.; Murray, Whig Party in Georgia, 141.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The North, Calhoun contended, had broken virtually every pledge made in the Constitutional Convention. The Constitution's provision for the security of slaveholding states was now "almost perfectly nugatory." The fugitive slave law was little more than a dead letter; indeed, organized northern groups now enticed slaves to flee their masters. Constant agitation of the slavery question was designed to ensure manumission at the South. The issue of slavery in the territories furnished an even more graphic example of northern faithlessness. The North had almost unanimously supported the Missouri Compromise. But the annexation of Texas and the Mexican Cession had caused that section to repudiate the solemn agreement of 1820. Charging unjustly that the South was bent upon extending the peculiar institution, Northerners had chosen to violate their word. Calhoun pointedly denounced their reasoning as he challenged their decision:

What . . . we do insist on, is, not to extend slavery, but that we shall not be prohibited from migrating with our property, into the Territories of the United States, because we are slaveholders.

Recent deliberations in the House indicated that—under current conditions—emancipation would soon take place. Slavery could not survive in a society where the provision of asylum for runaways was made a condition of one's liberality. The Abolitionists already controlled the House, Calhoun said; their intended course was laid out for even the blindest of optimists to see. Undeterred by the object lessons lying off the Gulf coast of the United States, these righteous and determined men proposed to inflict emancipation upon half of the country.

The massacre in St. Dominique, a product of alien idealism,
still preyed upon the South Carolina mind. Jamaica, Antigua, Barbados, and St. Kitts, once rich lands closely associated with colonial South Carolina, now lay prostrate because of emancipation. The abolition of slavery in a plantation society automatically doomed white men either to flight or extinction. Finally, the vigilant South Carolinian reissued his oft repeated call for southern unity:

If you become united, and prove yourselves in earnest, the North will be brought to a pause, and to a calculation of consequences; and that may lead to a change of measures and . . . may quietly terminate this long conflict between the sections. If it should not, nothing would remain for you but to stand up immovably in defense of your rights, involving your all. . . . We hope, if you should unite with anything like unanimity, it may of itself apply a remedy to this deep-seated and dangerous disease; but, if such should not be the case the time will then have come for you to decide what course to adopt.12

The eighty-eight Democrats and Whigs listened closely as Congressman Abraham W. Venable, Democrat of North Carolina, read Calhoun's address. In the debate that followed, a Whig motion to defer any action at all was defeated. Senator Berrien succeeded, however, in having the speech remanded to committee for modification. Calhoun agreed to any alteration that did not materially alter the content of his address and with several important changes in membership, the Committee of Fifteen was reconstituted. (Stephens, who resigned, was replaced by Berrien.) Like its predecessor, the

12Cralle, ed., Calhoun Works, VI, 290-313; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 383-85.
new committee had eight Democrats and seven Whig members.\textsuperscript{13}

As the outcome of this Whig ploy, two speeches were submitted to the last general meeting of Southerners on January 22. Berrien had drafted an address intended to displace Calhoun's but the committee skirted a decision by submitting both proposals to the greater committee of the whole. Berrien read his projected substitute to the meeting. Calhoun's address was not read since those present had already heard it. Stephens's followed Berrien's performance with a motion to issue no address at all; it was tabled, fifty-nine to eighteen. In a closer vote, Berrien's offering was then rejected and Calhoun's address—as modified by the Committee of Fifteen was ratified. After those present at the meeting had sufficient time to reflect upon its contents, the Carolinian would offer them the opportunity of signing the document.\textsuperscript{14}

Forty-eight of the slavocracy's one hundred twenty-one representatives at Washington signed Calhoun's address. If the chief advocate of southern unity was not pleased by this result, he was satisfied. More than half of the southern Democracy had signed, in spite of administration opposition. Should the Whigs be able to assure him that Taylor's administration would adopt a State Rights stance, Calhoun offered to support the General. In return he would expect southern Whigs to sign his address. The Whigs did not give

\textsuperscript{13}Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 385-86. Coit says only eighty were present for the meeting (Colt, Calhoun, 476).

\textsuperscript{14}Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 386-87; Murray, Whig Party in Georgia, 141. There were no important alterations in Calhoun's address other than a change of title; it became "An Address to the People of the United States" rather than to the South alone.
the necessary assurance and they did not sign the address. Instead, Robert Toombs, Whig Congressman of Georgia, exulted in the revolt:

We have . . . foiled Calhoun in his miserable attempt to form a southern party. . . . I told him that the Union of the South was neither possible nor desirable until we were ready to dissolve the Union. . . .

Whigs like Toombs "did not intend to advise the people . . . to look anywhere else than their own government for the prevention of anticipated evils. . . ." Moreover, they "did not expect an administration which [they] . . . had brought into power" to commit "any act or permit any act to be done [as a result of which] it would become necessary for [the South's] safety to rebel at. . . ."

Finally, the Whigs "intended to stand by the government until it committed an overt act of aggression upon [southern] rights." On the day after his address was signed, Calhoun called upon President Polk. The Senator found Polk "distinctly" opposed to sectional addresses, inclined as they were to "inflame the country."

Congress, said the President, was the place to settle national problems but without southern cooperation no settlement was possible. Calhoun was not only preventing a resolution of the sectional issue, he did not "desire that Congress . . . settle the question."

In a sense Polk was right. The Senator from South Carolina

---


certainly felt that "no Congressional settlement was possible" in the current political atmosphere. The North, inflamed by the Puritan zealot's appeal to contain and destroy iniquity, and possessed of all mankind's disposition to discern evil most easily in others, would not permit it. Crusaders did not respect evil pacts, however solemn their drafting; the northern reformer would upst any new accommodation with the same ease that he had renounced the Missouri Compromise. Calhoun's only hope for continuing the Union lay in thoroughly arousing the South to this fact. In the face of southern firmness, the North might discipline antislavery and permit a settlement.

The remaining proceedings of the congressional session bore out Calhoun's analysis. All efforts to resolve the territorial dispute ended in failure. As usual, the Senate was willing to settle the question on the basis of the Missouri Compromise but the House remained committed to the Ordinance of 1787. For a time, it appeared that this disreputable performance might deprive the government of operating funds for the coming year. The session ended as it had begun—in a frenzy of acrimony. When Congress adjourned in early March, California was still under military government.

The Mercury dealt harshly with those involved in the congressional drama. Denouncing those Southerners who bowed supinely before antislavery's potent drive, Carew warned of the "alarming

18 Coit, Calhoun, 477.

19 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 388-93. After the inauguration of Taylor, the Senate met in a brief extra session in order to act on presidential appointments (ibid., 395-96).
progress" being made by the merciless Abolitionists. In a long editorial entitled "The Southern Movement," the Mercury reasserted its admiration for the goal of southern unity. The editor remained convinced, however, that it could only be realized by separate action of the states. Daily reports from the Mercury's correspondent at Washington indicated that southern members of Congress were still motivated primarily by party ties. This circumstance went far to explain the "deplorable and not less discreditable" results of the present move for unity.

If the Southern people see this conclusion as we do they will be forced to give up all hope of self-defence, either as a thing impossible to effect, or not worth the cost; or to fix their attention upon the action of the States as affording the only solid foundation . . . whereon to commence a resistance to this mischievous warfare upon their dignity, . . . peace and . . . prosperity. 20

Carew's outlook was more encouraged when, two days later, he reported the ratification of Calhoun's address. As he eagerly awaited his copy of the speech, Carew commended Calhoun's opinion to the southern people. The editor's faint optimism blossomed when he remembered that the Virginia legislature had denounced the Wilmot Proviso and determined to meet in special session should it be passed. In line with his pledge to encourage "symptoms of vitality" outside South Carolina, Carew hailed "with enthusiasm this unfolded banner of the Old Dominion. . . ." In Virginia, the South had "a champion worthy of her cause." The editor joined with "the Southern people" to "welcome their leader as truly the gift of God in the day of

20Mercury, Jan. 22, 1849.
their necessity."21

Standing "in noble and brilliant contrast with the abortive tempest at Washington," Virginia's move had given "new spirit to the Southern people." A similar action on the part of the Florida legislature bore out the editor's assertion and also reinforced his belief in the virtue of separate state action. The Mercury published Calhoun's "Address" on January 31. Calling it "... one of the most important documents that has ever appeared in our columns," Carew praised its "power ... dignity, and appeals to the Southern people on questions that touch not only their independence as Sovereign states, but their safety as organized communities." The editor noted that the National Whig had also endorsed Calhoun's address; he wished that all Whigs were wise enough to share the journal's opinion.22

Carew continued to condemn southern politicians for sacrificing their sectional independence to party rivalry. The Mercury listed the names of those Southerners at Washington who had signed Calhoun's address. The list was too short, said Carew; it indicated a disturbing want of sectional loyalty on the part of too many Southerners. There were still those in the ranks of slaveholders who sought prominence through the Speakership, committee chairmanships, and the patronage. The South could no longer allow her representatives to place personal and party advantage in front of the defense of their section. The Southern people must take matters into their own hands. They must sound assembly and turn the recreants

21 Ibid., Jan. 24, 25, 1849.

out:

Let them . . . close hands one with another, and standing up for their institutions, present such a front as corrupt and truckling politicians will cower under, and flee from with fear and trembling. Let them do this, and our enemies, throughout the length and breadth of the Free States, will feel and know that the spell of party and the fear of consequences no longer paralyze the South in her . . . determination to enforce her own protection . . . . With such manifestation of their will, there is no power on earth that can prevent that will from proving omnipotent.23

Shortly after the inauguration Calhoun called upon President Taylor. Finding the new Chief Executive "well disposed to settle" the dispute over slavery in the territories, Calhoun assured Taylor of his own willingness to cooperate. The Senator could not agree, however, to compromise the interests of the South in the process. The visit was a friendly one but convinced Calhoun that there was little chance for agreement between his section and this Whig administration. Pulled between northern Free-Soilers and southern slaveholders, Whiggery had no common policy on the territories.24

Calhoun doubtless reflected upon the probable challenges ahead as in late March he left Washington for Fort Hill. Taylor's experience as a "military chieftain" had done little to prepare him for the responsibilities of the presidency. Already there were indications that the General had fallen under the pervading influence of William H. Seward, a Free-Soil Senator from New York whose commitment to cause was not exceeded by Calhoun's own. While the Democrats would still control the Senate in the next session of Congress, their margin would be slimmer than before. Brighter Free-Soil

23ibid., Feb. 6, 7, 1849.

24Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 396.
prospects in the House completed the national picture. As viewed by Calhoun and his growing band of followers, it was a bleak scene, indeed.25

The precarious state of Calhoun's health was also probably preying upon the Senator's mind. He had collapsed on three separate occasions during the recent session; for a time he was actually confined to his room. To the public—and to his family—Calhoun maintained that he suffered from only a temporary indisposition. Robert Barnwell Rhett, however, was privileged to hear the Senator speak with greater frankness. "Ah! Mr. Rhett, my career is nearly done," Calhoun sighed as he recovered from one bit of faintness. "The great battle must be fought by you younger men." When Rhett responded that it must not be so, that never had Calhoun's "counsels been more needed for the guidance and salvation of the South," the weary Senator agreed. "... There indeed is my only regret at going—the South—the poor South!" And the Senator's eyes, said Rhett, "filled with tears."

Behind this moving scene lay another urgent reason to press on with the drive for southern unity. Both Calhoun and his followers now tended to regard the movement and the Senator as, like Siamese twins, bound irretrievably together; thus the faltering one would kill the other.26

25Ibid., 395-36. Calhoun had remained in Washington for the extra session of the Senate.

26Calhoun to Anna Calhoun Clemson, Jan. 24, 1829, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, 761; J. P. Thomas, ed., The Carolina Tribute to Calhoun (Columbia, 1857), 369, hereinafter referred to as Thomas, ed., Carolina Tribute; Coit, Calhoun, 477-78; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 386-87; Capers, Calhoun Opportunist, 240, 248. Capers assumes that upon "occasion both his [Calhoun's] emotions and the clarity of his thinking were affected by his illness (ibid., 241).
And for once it seemed that the South was responding to Calhoun's importuning. South Carolinians had begun to assemble in local planning meetings almost as soon as the Southern Address became public. These assemblies approved the Address, denounced the Wilmot Proviso, denied the power of Congress to regulate slavery, condemned the North's failure to enforce the fugitive slave law, and offered to cooperate with other slaveholding states in the interests of self-defense. Committees of "Vigilance and Safety" sprang up throughout South Carolina. Plans for a statewide convention were well advanced before Calhoun reached Fort Hill; on May 1 former Nullifiers and Unionists united in just such a convention at Columbia. And as other states moved in a direction very like that of South Carolina's those "corrupt and truckling politicians" cited by the Mercury did indeed begin to reconsider their course.

The Mercury had vigorously applauded the meetings of the local assemblies to consider the Address. "This is as it should be," it said. "Let the people take into their own hands the maintenance of their rights; and politicians will soon cease to trade upon them as so much capital, to be used for their own selfish ends and purposes." The editor indignantly rejected the charges of disunion being leveled by northern papers at South Carolina. Invoking the Revolutionary legend, Carew compared the Yankee journalists to the "croaking of the Tories" who denounced patriots for combining to resist British aggression. "... Their descendants of the South would be unworthy of their inheritance if they did not maintain

\[27\] Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 398.
at every hazard, the guarantees of the Constitution." Without the guarantees there would be no Union. "... These guarantees "which originated the Union," now "constitute the Union," Carew declared. "It is the Constitution," rather than some mystic concept of the Union, "which is sacred."  

The Mercury's concern for southern unity did not preclude its defending the institution that made unity so desirable. Weary of the "trash" whose banal cries against slaveholders haunted every Congress, Carew charged his tormenters with carping hypocrisy:

Slavery is not half so much an evil taking their own account of it, as poverty or distress, or a thousand other things that stalk abroad unrelieved, under the very noses of those pining sentimentalists, yet we hear no crusade got up for the benefit of the sufferers.

The correspondent "Sumter" agreed with the editor. The Union was meaningless without the equality for which it was formed, "Sumter" wrote. And Abolitionists who constantly promoted discord with their insults, were ill-equipped to give instruction on the ties that held the Union together.  

The broad base of the May 1849 convention emphasizes the acute concern with which South Carolina viewed her future. Traditional Calhoun allies Elmore, Gadsden, and Huger sat as delegates...

---

28Mercury, Feb. 10, 17, 20, 21, 26, 27, 28, Mar. 2, 8, 10, 12, 16, 17, 20, 22, 26, Apr. 10, 11, 13, 14, May 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 1849. The Mercury reported the proceedings of meetings held throughout South Carolina. Calhoun confidant Franklin H. Elmore, was appointed Chairman of the Charleston's meeting's Committee on Resolutions. Editor Carew served on Elmore's Committee; it adopted resolutions urging resistance "at all hazards" as the only alternative to "abject submission" (ibid., Feb. 28, 1849).

29Mercury, Feb. 20, 27, 1849.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
with Unionist R. F. W. Allston. Richardson, a late comer to Calhoun's camp was also there. Wade Hampton, friend of South Carolina's last national Whig office-holder, William Campbell Preston, and bitter enemy of James H. Hammond was present along with D. J. McCord, Hammond's friend. Pickens emerged from Calhoun-decreed disfavor to attend the convention. Even Benjamin F. Perry of Greenville, prince of South Carolina Unionists, attended as a delegate.\textsuperscript{30}

At the suggestion of Calhoun, the convention appointed a standing State Executive Committee, which in cooperation with the Committee of Twenty-one planned South Carolina's response to the pressure of abolition. Elmore, Hampton, McCord, Gadsden, and Pickens made up the standing committee; Elmore, Richardson, Allston, and Perry were among those serving on the Committee of Twenty-one. Indicating Calhoun's controlling influence, Elmore served as chairman of both groups.\textsuperscript{31}

Although Calhoun did not attend the Columbia meeting, he was its guiding force. When asked for his "opinion as to the course the Meeting should take," the Senator solemnly replied:

\textit{... I deem it due to candour and the occasion to State, that I am of the impression that the time is near at hand when the South will have to choose between disunion, and submission. ... I see little prospect of arresting the aggression of the North. [But] If anything can do it, it would be for the South to present an unbroken front to the North the alternative of dissolving the partnership or}

\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 398-99. Carew was also a delegate (Mercury, May 7, 1849).}

\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 399.}
ceasing on their part to violate our rights and to disregard the stipulations of the Constitution in our favour; and that without delay.

Calhoun recommended a southern convention as the method most likely to convince the North of the depth of the present crisis. He advised the Columbia "Meeting" "to adopt measures to prepare the way" for a general southern convention. Even so, Calhoun feared that "the alienation between the two sections [had] . . . already gone too far to save the Union. . . ."32

The delegates at Columbia proceeded in essential conformity with Calhoun's wishes; they adopted a set of resolutions similar to those already enblazoned on "the unfolded banner of" Virginia. Governor Seabrook was enjoined to summon the General Assembly in the event that Congress should pass the Wilmot Proviso, abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, or do away with the slave trade in the District. Seabrook had already begun a correspondence with other southern governors on this subject; the standing committee followed his example to communicate with similar committees in other slave-holding states. The drive for southern unity was gaining momentum.33

The beginnings of an organized southern defense against the thrust of Free-Soil first appeared outside South Carolina. In the hope that a state not directly associated with nullification and Blufftonism would lead the way, Calhoun had delayed the action of his own state. The Senator's strategy produced its greatest dividend

---


33Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 400; Mercury, Jan. 24, 25, 1849; see also Mercury, May 14, 15, 16, 1849.
when, in December, 1848, the governor of Virginia took an uncompromising stand against the Wilmot Proviso. In his address to the General Assembly, he predicted that passage of this antislavery measure would end "the day of compromise" and render "the dissolution of our great and glorious union" both "necessary and inevitable." The Assembly reacted by authorizing the governor to call it into special session if Congress should pass the proviso.34

The legislatures of Florida, Missouri, and North Carolina followed Virginia's lead and passed resolutions asserting their defiance of the Wilmot Proviso. In Alabama and Tennessee, the proceedings of meetings pointed to the likelihood of a similar course for these states. Even in Georgia, where the Whigs were hostile to Calhoun and the Democrats held themselves at a distance from him, there was good news. The Whigs lost control of the legislature; indeed, many of their number moved with the repentant Democrats to support Calhoun's call for a southern convention.35

Support for the Calhoun-Carew strategy appeared even in the western South. As part of its anti-proviso resolution, the Missouri legislature had instructed the state's senators to vote with the pro-slavery bloc at Washington. Benton ignored the legislative injunction and by late spring of 1849 was back in Missouri to defend

34 Craven, Coming of the Civil War, 243; Coit, Calhoun, 491; Mercury, Jan. 24, 25, 1849; see above, 322. The Mercury hailed Virginia's action as "the gift of God in the day of necessity."

35 Craven, Coming of the Civil War, 243; Coit, Calhoun, 481; Murray, Whig Party in Georgia, 141-44. Murray emphasizes that both Democrats and Whigs in Georgia were basically Unionists; that the state's Democrats ultimately defended Calhoun's plan as a Union-saving measure.
his course. Cautioning his constituents that they were falling into a Calhoun-inspired trap, Benton predicted that disunion would be the result. The electorate in this southern salient did not seem to be convinced. It was obvious that most Missouri voters approved of Calhoun's views. Benton began to worry that his own seat might be in danger.36

President Taylor, however, seemed heedless of the churning anger in the South. In his effort to resolve the territorial dilemma, Taylor cooperated to set up the machinery for a state government in California and to organize New Mexico as a territory. The fact that slavery was to be excluded from both areas implied that the President himself was adopting the tenets of Free-Soil.37

Soon the South had additional evidence of slaveholder Taylor's apostasy. In August the President forbade Narciso Lopez, a Cuban exile, to seek recruits in the United States for an army designed to "liberate" his homeland. Southerners, sensitive to the

36Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 400-04. Benton's performance in Missouri received national attention and provoked a reply from Calhoun. Editor James Gordon Bennet of the New York Herald published Calhoun's reply in full and commended the Carolinian for his efforts in behalf of the Union. (Bennet had begun his journalistic career on the staff of the Charleston Courier.) When Benton came up for re-election in 1850, he was defeated. Indicating a growing Free-Soil presence in Missouri, however, the District of St. Louis immediately sent Benton to the House of Representatives (Benjamin F. Perry, Reminiscences of Public Men with Speeches and Addresses [Greenville, 1889], 20).

37Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 405. Sufficient evidence of a southern revolt against national parties had developed by May to cause James Gordon Bennett to send a reporter to cover the scene at the South. The reporter, Joseph A. Scoville, had covered Calhoun's campaign in 1844. He admired Calhoun and spent much time at Fort Hill during the summer of 1849.
winds of emancipation that had already swept across most of the West Indies, had a special interest in Cuba. Spanish power was rapidly declining in the Caribbean; if the abolition-minded British managed—as seemed likely—to displace the Spanish in Cuba, the American slaveocracy would be confronted by still another aggressive enemy. Lopez promised the alternative of an independent, slaveholding Cuba. Now Taylor had dashed that hope.38

Then in September the Free-Soilers executed a move that ranked with Calhoun's earlier triumph in Virginia. Putting aside their local differences, Barnburners and Hunkers agreed to reunite the Democracy of New York state. In the vigilant eye of the slaveholder, this development served notice that the northeastern Democrat could no longer be trusted. Northern Whigs having already surrendered to Free-Soil, the South had no allies left in those parts.39

At this juncture Mississippi decided she would have to act in self-defense. The state's Whigs and Democrats jointly supported a call for representative Mississippians to assemble in October convention. Throughout the summer bi-partisan groups worked to prepare a plan for the convention to act upon. When state leaders sought the views of the great Carolinian, his predictable response was direct and to the point. "There is but one thing that holds out the promise of

38 Ibid., 405-06. Lopez was convinced that the South would back his venture; Calhoun, Jefferson Davis, and Mississippi Senator Henry S. Foote did express their sympathy for Cuban independence.

39 Ibid., 405. Polk's death during the early summer deprived the Hunkers of a powerful party ally and helped pave the way for reunion of the Democracy within New York.
saving both ourselves and the Union; and that is a Southern Conven-
tion. . . " said Calhoun. He felt that every southern state "ought
to be organized" in the interest of looking to that result." The
South should be asked to meet in a general convention:

The call should be addressed to all those who are
desirous to save the Union and our institutions,
and who, in the alternative . . . of submission or
dissolving the partnership, would prefer the latter.

Calhoun expected that when presented with such a choice, the South,
in "a great conservative movement," would have to respond.40

The Mississippi convention, when it met, spoke with a strong
voice. Reasserting Mississippi's "devoted and cherished attachment
to the Union," the convention also affirmed its absolute belief in
state sovereignty. In the event that Congress should pass the Wilmot
Proviso or provide for either emancipation or abolition of the slave
trade in the District of Columbia, Mississippi would be required to
assert that sovereignty. The legislature was requested to instruct
the governor that his response to any such move on the part of Con-
gress should be the calling of another state convention.41

This body, if it assembled, would be the sovereign will of
the state; just as a previous convention had provided for the state's
allegiance to the federal compact, another convention could revoke
that allegiance. The final step might have to be taken. As a last

40 Calhoun to Collins S. Tarpley, July 9, 1849, in Cong. Globe,
32nd, 1st, Appendix 52. Foote read this letter into the record in De-
cember of 1851. By that time Foote had split with Calhoun's follow-
ers and was trying to establish that Calhoun was a secessionist
(Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 545).

41 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 406-08; Coit, Calhoun, 480-
82.
action, the Mississippi Convention asked representatives from all the
slaveholding states to meet in convention at Nashville. The date set
for this General Convention of the South, the first Monday of June,
1850, would follow the first session of the Thirty-first Congress.42

The wisdom of Calhoun’s strategy was proving itself. In def­
erence to the Senator’s wishes, South Carolina had restrained her
eagerness to lead a southern response to the rising pressure of abo­
lition. Those who would have charged extremism had South Carolina
led, were disarmed when Virginia led off the opposition to the Wilmot
Proviso and was followed by Georgia, Alabama, and North Carolina.43

Encouraged by the broad southern response to his convention
plan, Calhoun agreed that South Carolina no longer hold back her en­
thusiasm. Governor Seabrook accordingly commended the Nashville Con­
vention to his General Assembly. He also requested authority to sum­
mon the Assembly into special session in accordance with the circum­
stances outlined by Virginia, Mississippi, and other southern states.
The legislature complied with his request and—as it had done in 1832
and 1844—it also voted to strengthen the state’s military defenses.
Finally, it chose four delegates—at-large to represent South Carolina
at the Nashville Convention: Langdon Cheves, Franklin H. Elmore, Robert

42Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 406–08; Coit, Calhoun, 480–82.

43Calhoun to J. R. Mathews, Oct. 20, 1849, quoted in Wiltse,
Calhoun Sectionalist, 408. The letter is erroneously dated June 20,
1849, says Wiltse. Explaining that Calhoun was doubtless preoccupied
with the "June next" date of the Nashville Convention, Wiltse assigns
October 20 as the true date. The convention is one subject covered
by the letter (Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 545).
W. Barnwell, and James H. Hammond. They all favored a general southern response over separate state action.44

Langdon Cheves, once President of the United States Bank, headed the delegation in distinction. Like his friend Calhoun, Cheves had started political life as a confident young Upcountry nationalist. Subsequently removing to Charleston, Cheves had preceded Calhoun in giving up his hopes for the Union. In the wake of the Bluffton movement, Cheves asserted that the South must choose between secession and abolition. He was not enthusiastic about either alternative but of the two, Cheves preferred secession. Abjuring the folly of separate state action, Cheves had called for Southerners to unite and plan for a separate nation. He was an ideal selection.45

Franklin H. Elmore, whose Federalist father had been defeated by Calhoun in the future "Caesar's" very first campaign for national office, was also a disillusioned nationalist. Notwithstanding his close friendship with Robert Barnwell Rhett, Elmore followed Calhoun to renounce separate state action in favor of a united southern resistance. Along with Henry Conner, Elmore was Calhoun's most trusted Charleston associate; he could be relied upon to carry the orthodox message to Nashville.

Robert W. Barnwell's selection as a delegate brought him back into everyday politics for the first time since nullification. The veteran of one term in the General Assembly, two terms in the national House of Representatives and the Nullification Convention,

44Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 409.

45See above, 173-74.
Barnwell was a graduate of Harvard College and a Beaufort rice planter. In 1835 he had succeeded Thomas Cooper as President of South Carolina College. Barnwell's term in this office was singularly successful; college enrollment increased from twenty to two hundred, the faculty was improved, appropriations increased, and an ambitious program launched. The college was both an object of concern and a source of pride to South Carolina politicians; Barnwell's success as her chief administrator was not without effect on his political future.

A southern nationalist, Barnwell was also opposed to separate state action.\(^4^6\)

Despite his private carpings aimed at Calhoun, James Henry Hammond agreed with the Senator on the subject of a southern convention; "it is my favourite measure. . . ." said Hammond. Calhoun urged Hammond to add his "influence to induce the members of our Legislature to appoint delegates" to Nashville. Hammond could "do much" to "induce [Georgia] . . . to be represented at Nashville," Calhoun wrote. "Without flatter[ing]" the ex-governor, Calhoun knew "no one better informed than [Hammond] . . . on the great subject that now agitates the country, or more capable of deciding what should be done. . . ." Hammond's impatience to seek action, once

\(^4^6\)Daniel Walker Hollis, "Robert W. Barnwell," SCHM, LVI, No. 3, (July, 1955), 131-34. Barnwell was a classmate and lifelong friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson. The South Carolinian was also valedictorian of his class at Harvard.

In the early years of the century South Carolina College was intended to superimpose the cultural ideals of Charleston upon the unpolished Upcountry. With the onslaught of the abolitionists, however, the College became a haven for young Carolinians in search of an education free from the antislavery slant.
an obstacle in the path of southern unity, had become a virtue. His selection as a delegate to the Nashville Convention would strengthen the hand of those who agreed with Calhoun.⁴⁷

CHAPTER X

BADGE OF ORTHODOXY

The cherished goal of southern unity now in sight, Calhoun could view the progress of his design with some satisfaction. Although the northern press was already dismissing southern moves as mere bluff, even it could not charge the actors in this tragic drama with Carolina-inspired extremism. The originator of the "great conservative movement" had not been "extremist" and "caste-ridden" South Carolina. To all appearances the call for the South to assemble in convention had come from a newer state lying almost a thousand miles to the west of Fort Hill. Boasting an expanding economy, possessing a fluid social order and having a growing population spiced with northern settlers and two political parties that proceeded independently of Calhoun's "wishes," Mississippi exhibited all the attributes of an American-styled democracy. Her action could not expose the movement to charges of extremism. But lest she be accused, Mississippi had incorporated a delay into her call for the convention. She did not ask Southerners to meet together until the forthcoming Congress had been given one more chance to prove itself a national rather than a sectional body. Calhoun wishfully saw some indications of a proper Congressional response to this gesture. "... It may still be hoped that the Union will be saved,
he wrote.¹

Ridding itself of former doubts, the Mercury emerged to play an important role in the tactical deployment of Calhoun's forces. During the spring of 1849, Carew's earlier preference for a resistance movement led by South Carolina disappeared from the pages of his paper. By May, when resolute Carolinians met in their convention at Columbia, the Mercury gave no sign of having once endorsed separate state action. Instead, it asserted its own firm support of Calhoun's plan for the South to set in concert. This partial reversal in position was the product of one of those political thunderstorms that only Robert Barnwell Rhett could cause in South Carolina.

During the fall of 1848 Rhett had openly challenged Calhoun for the first time since the failure of the Bluffton Movement. In the absence of any strong remonstrance from other southern states, this Congressman had urged the General Assembly to inaugurate an independent South Carolina revolt. If anything would induce the South to resist abolitionist pillage, it was separate state action, Rhett contended. He expected that other southern states, encouraged by the action of South Carolina, would follow in her footsteps. Their enterprise might be delayed but South Carolina could stand alone for the moment. In time, at least the lower South would join her, either to impose a reformation upon the Union or to organize a new, southern

¹Calhoun to J. R. Mathews, Oct. 20, 1849, quoted in Coit, Calhoun, 481; see above, 322-33.

Coit says that Foote actually thought he had originated the idea of a southern convention. Others were not so gullible. Sam Houston, an unfriendly critic of the movement, later observed that if "South Carolina had never existed, Mississippi would never have thought of it (Coit, Calhoun, 480-81).
Confederacy.

The *Mercury* urged support for Rhett's proposal. Senator Calhoun, insisted, however, upon his own twenty-year old plan for a cooperative, southwide resistance. As usual, the Assembly deferred to Calhoun's "wishes" and confronted by the unpromising alternative of open revolt, both Rhett and the *Mercury* proceeded to do likewise.

Along with Congressman Rhett, Editor Carew remained pessimistic as to the chances of success from Calhoun's policy. In the early weeks of the Thirtieth Congress, Carew did not conceal his doubts from either the Senator or the public. Nevertheless, the editor urged support for any move designed to bring about southern unity. The action of Virginia in damning the Wilmot Proviso brought about the first signs of a change in Carew's thinking. By early January he was echoing Calhoun in feeling that South Carolina would do well to be "comparatively quiet." The "exhibitions of symptoms of vitality" elsewhere had inspired the *Mercury* to look upon Calhoun's plan with less skepticism.²

Surprised by the swift and promising reaction to the Southern Address, Carew apparently shed his remaining doubts of Calhoun's program in the months that followed. The process of the editor's conversion may have been influenced by the course of Rhett. The Congressman's term in the House of Representatives expired with the end of the Thirtieth Congress. In line with his previously stated resolve, Rhett declined to seek re-election. The champion of the separate state actionists had already met with defeat in pursuing

²Carew to Calhoun, Jan. 2, 1849, Calhoun Papers; see above, 322.
Rhett did not intend to remain permanently in this position. Throughout 1849 he explored the uncertainties developing in South Carolina politics. Surprised, like Carew, with the mounting response to Calhoun's call for southern unity, Rhett supported this development whenever the opportunity presented itself. His role in the movement was generally that of a friendly but skeptical spectator; while he hoped for its success he still doubted the soundness of its prospects. The former Congressman did not believe the South to be sufficiently aware of her danger.3

Without abandoning his own position, Rhett maintained friendly relations with Calhoun and continued to acknowledge the Senator's primacy. As he congratulated Calhoun for having vanquished the "traitor" Benton, Rhett's skepticism glared in contrast to the Senator's hopes for the forthcoming Congress. That Congress, said Rhett, without ceasing its "anti-slavery aggressions" would approve neither the Wilmot Proviso nor the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. In prophetic language—unusually strong for this devout churchman—Rhett wrote:

I would to God, they would do both, and let us have the contest . . . at once. It would then accomplish our emancipation, instead of that of our slaves. But the Northern Statesmen will commit I am satisfied no such blunder. We are put off to another and more formidable contest.4

For some time Rhett had aspired to serve South Carolina in

3White, Rhett, 99-103.

4Rhett to Calhoun, July 19, 1849, Calhoun Papers.
the United States Senate. Because of Calhoun, Rhett's two attempts at realizing this ambition had both ended in failure. His future prospects would also be influenced by the senior Senator. It was apparent by 1849 that Calhoun's health was rapidly failing; an opinion common among Carolinians held that but for the South's imperiled position, Calhoun would already have resigned his seat in the Senate. Even the Senator's resolute will to protect his section could not long postpone just such a development. For three years Rhett had shared this conviction; during the critical summer of 1849 he moved to strengthen his chances for the succession. Franklin H. Elmore, Rhett's friend, and James H. Hammond figured prominently in the maneuvers that ensued.

Aging and in declining health, Elmore neither desired nor sought service in the Senate. Hammond's intentions, obscured by his self-imposed isolation and professed disinterest in public service, were unknown to Rhett. In a probable attempt to uncover Hammond's position, Rhett wrote to a friend of the enigmatic planter. The letter was passed to A. P. Aldrich, Hammond's political lieutenant, who quickly alerted the subject of the inquiry:

---

^Calhoun had resigned from the Senate in 1842 so as to free himself to campaign for the presidency. He intended that Rhett succeed to the resulting vacancy. The Assembly misinterpreted Calhoun's move as a Rhett-inspired means of gratifying the Congressman's ambition. As a result, it selected Huger rather than Rhett to replace Calhoun (White, Rhett, 57). Rhett's second opportunity occurred in 1846 when McDuffie resigned due to ill health. By this time Calhoun no longer trusted Rhett sufficiently to support him for the post.

^Elmore and Hammond were the two most likely rivals for the forthcoming vacancy.
Mr. Rhett writes that it is . . . rumored in . . . Charleston, Mr. Calhoun will, at the opening of the next . . . Legislature, send in his letter of resignation in consequence of ill health, and asks what is the probability of his receiving the support of the Barnwell delegation.

Aldrich had already advised "Owens," the recipient of Rhett's message, to answer in noncommittal terms. Deriding Rhett's "impatient" ambition, Aldrich advised Hammond to maintain his current detachment. The former governor had not yet been damaged by the charges of "Taylorism" then being hurled about in South Carolina. But it would be unwise for the state's most important Taylor Democrat to invite attack.7 The advice accorded with Hammond's own view and he remained silent.

Rhett was not misled by this artful performance. The subtlety of the former governor's position had been no less pronounced during the Senatorial campaign of 1846. Although defeated in that attempt to succeed McDuffie, Hammond had come closer to success than had Rhett. In an attempt to assess their comparative strength, Rhett probably explored the reasons for Hammond's defeat. Weighing the planter's prospects against his own, Rhett considered that they both had organized enemies in South Carolina. Pursued by the implacable hostility of his powerful brother-in-law, Wade Hampton, Hammond could attribute much political misfortune to that source. Rhett, for his part, was saddled with the reputation of being "a rash and ultra man in . . . politics, excitable, . . . unstable and intolerant. . . ." He was considered arrogant by the "great majority" of Charleston

political leaders, men whose opinions were shared elsewhere in the state.⁸

In the process of comparing his own political drawbacks with those of Hammond, Rhett could dismiss some of these charges as mere political verbiage. If through his firm and aggressive stands he had incurred the wrath—and, perhaps, the envy—of many Carolinians, Hammond had not profited thereby. Moreover, the sometime governor had led the assault on the state's bank. Hammond, himself, viewed this performance as a political liability; from his splendid isolation on the banks of the Savannah River, he had attempted to conceal his role in the bank war.⁹

As with everything else in South Carolina politics, however, Calhoun's opinion would be the critical factor in the selection of the state's new Senator. Although both Hammond and Rhett had records of insubordination, their past performance would not sway Calhoun. His principal concern was the defense of the South. The section's rapidly deteriorating position in the Union did not allow for personal vendettas; Calhoun banished only those who willfully opposed his strategic approach to the cause of southern unity. With the impatience of younger men who did not understand the dichotomy of their Senator's love for both the South and the Union, Hammond and Rhett had sometimes acted in a manner not countenanced by Orthodoxy. They always responded positively, however, when the time for debate


⁹ Hammond Papers, 1847-1849, passim.
ended and Calhoun's "wishes" became policy. It was safe to predict that some day the "Old Senator" would choose one of them for his successor; the choice would depend upon who could best serve the South.  

Despite his retirement from Congress, Rhett maintained an active enlistment in the southern service. During the summer of 1848 his influence had reappeared at the Mercury. Rhett probably regarded the reconciliation as a move which would aid his prospective campaign for the Senate. In any event, the Mercury was instrumental in making Rhett's views known during the time that he was out of Congress, no little asset to this politician without portfolio.

Evidently possessed of an acute political acumen, Editor Carew preserved the reputation of his paper with both Calhoun and Rhett. For some time Calhoun's "friends" had contributed editorials to the Mercury. Carew's assertions of independence, notwithstanding; by mid-summer 1849 Rhett was included in this array of authors. The printed page combined with the determined Lowcountryman's ambition for a seat in the Senate to produce a sense of discretion uncharacteristic of Rhett; when his views ran counter to the course approved by Calhoun, they did not appear in the Mercury. In the unanimity of the editorial page Carew's subscribers could once again read the undisputed signals of Orthodoxy. As in days gone by, 

---

Henry Conner reminded Calhoun of the letter's political importance when, in 1847, he wrote, "I distrust Mr. Rhett's friendship to yourself, not but that I believe he respects and admires you greatly, but his ambition is of so exceedingly selfish a character . . . that he would without hesitation sacrifice you . . . if in the least way to his own advancement" (Conner to Calhoun, May 7, 1847, quoted in White, Rhett, 100-01).
the Mercury proudly waved Calhoun's banner.

Another Calhoun associate of long standing joined the Mercury staff in September; on the first, John Heart became joint editor with Carew. Born in Philadelphia, Heart had first risen in the world of journalism as a printer. By 1844 he was co-proprietor of the Spectator, Calhoun's organ founded for the presidential campaign of that year. When the Spectator was replaced by the Constitution, Heart also served as "one of the gentlemanly . . . proprietors and editors" of that sheet. During 1847 he removed to Charleston, presumably for the purpose of joining forces with Carew; before the year ended Heart became an influential member of the orthodox coterie who determined Mercury policy.

Although Heart was still known primarily for his mastery of the mechanics of printing a paper, his activities at the Mercury included news gathering and editorial writing. The new editor took an "honest pride" in his ability "to enter any department . . . and discharge any duty from writing an editorial to filling a paste pot." As the customary Mercury editor was likely to know more about politics than journalism, Heart's technical proficiency as a newsgatherer made quite an impression on the Charleston press. Since Carew, an especially active politician, was frequently away from his editorial office, the Mercury doubtless benefited from Heart's on-the-scene management.

John Milton Clapp also returned to the Mercury payroll in 1849. Including the proprietors, the anonymous editorialists of Orthodoxy and ex-editor Clapp, the new firm of Carew and Heart was well-equipped to interpret Calhoun's latest moves. Subscribers
might wonder at the authorship of a given editorial but they would not question its sentiments.\textsuperscript{11}

Fortified by its restored faith in the wisdom of the leader, the Mercury applauded the delegations which assembled at Columbia on May 14, 1849. In an editorial remarkable for its moderation, Carew\textsuperscript{12} praised the politic awareness of South Carolinians:

\ldots We are united as to the grievances and the danger of the South; the people need neither to be enlightened nor aroused on the subject. They know full well that a vast power, sleepless in activity and remorseless in purpose, is organized and moving against them. They know that the time has come when they must defend their country, or betray it, and that to defend it successfully, they must be resolute, united and active.

Carolinians knew that they could betray their country "by devoting themselves to that moderation which never finds a time for action, as [readily as] by joining the ranks of the enemy.\ldots."

\textsuperscript{11}Clapp to Hammond, Feb. 17, 1847, Hammond to Simms, Apr. 1, 1847, Carew to Hammond, Nov. 18, 1847, Heart to Hammond, Dec. 9, 1847, Ker Boyce to Hammond, Jan. 12, 1848, S. W. Trotti to Hammond, June 12, July 15, 1848, Hammond to Simms, July 8, 1848, Simms to Hammond, July 20, 1848, Hammond Papers; Conner to Armistead Burt, Apr. 3, 1848, Burt Collection; Rhett to Calhoun, July 19, 1848, Calhoun Papers; King, \textit{Newspaper Press}, 152; A. S. Salley, Jr., "A Century of the Courier," \textit{Centennial Edition of the News and Courier} (Charleston, 1904), 7. The practice of editorials being written by other than members of the Mercury's staff antedated Carew's term as editor (see above 190-91).


\textsuperscript{12}Except in rare cases the practice of signing editorials was discontinued by the Mercury before Carew became editor. Thus, it is no longer possible to identify positively the editorial writer. In general, I have automatically assigned the authorship to the editor; as the official policy-maker for the paper, he must be presumed at least to have endorsed the contents of Mercury editorials.
Explaining the relative absence of editorials on this subject, the editor noted that these "things" were "generally understood and appreciated by the people of South Carolina." He "felt that anything approaching to a blind fury" would not only be unworthy of the "character" of the state; it would also "be mischievous to the cause. . . ." As a result, the Mercury had "forborne the discussion of the question." The "real problem to be solved," was not the "nature and designs of abolition, or what the consequences of its triumph," but the "effective means of repelling its aggressions, and saving the South. . . ." Carew was following Calhoun's plan; by adopting an unaccustomed reserve, the Mercury would not frighten away prospective allies in other southern states.

The editor understood that the Columbia meeting was only "the first step towards securing a union that shall have a definite practical object to accomplish." The object could neither be "fully shaped" or "agreed upon" without "a wider consultation, and a maturer comparison of the thoughts of all the best men of the South. . . ." In time, such a process would develop and produce a "clearly-defined course. . . ." 13

The Mercury, keeping a close eye on developments, vowed to recount them to its subscribers. True to his resolve to avoid anything "approaching . . . a blind fury," the editor wrote quiet reports of the proceedings at Columbia. The paper merely outlined the resolutions adopted by the convention and expressed its approval. 14

13 Mercury, May 14, 1849.

14 Ibid., May 15, 16, 17, 1849; see above, 326.
The vigilant editor also detailed every advance of the Free-Soilers. Reminding his readers of a speech that William H. Seward had made almost a year earlier, Carew underscored the need for united action by the South. The New Yorker had declared that those provisions of the Constitution that protected southern rights were in violation of "Divine Law." Here was further proof that there could be "... no middle ground on this question," said the Mercury. When the harassed Benton hurled "calumnies" at Calhoun, the Mercury longed for the day that "all such apostates and traitors" would be gibbeted and their memories execrated. Extolling Calhoun as the defender of the South, Carew devoted a large part of two issues to Calhoun's speech made in reply to Benton.15

"Old Musket," a correspondent worried by the decreasing number of slaveholders in the country, did not observe Carew's declaration of restraint. "The battle must be fought" and now, said "Old Musket."

The South is now as strong, the North as weak as they will ever be. Whether the Union be dissolved or not, let the Southern States take possession of their territory, "peaceably if they can, forcibly if they must."

The Mercury shared this concern for the territories. Its editor was encouraged by a letter from Cass, lately the Democratic candidate for President, which proved him to be sound on the subject of the Wilmot

15Mercury, May 17, June 27, 28, July 17, 18, 1849. Rhett wrote the principal editorial in defense of Calhoun's reply to Benton (Rhett to Calhoun, July 19, 1849). The Mercury also published Senator Foote's Washington speech which was a defense of Calhoun against Benton's attack.
Proviso. The *Mercury* confessed to having had reservations about his reliability. But Cass's letter furnished further proof that the Democracy was still sounder on the territorial issue than were the Whigs. Southerners, then, ought to vote only for Democrats.¹⁶

In what was probably a reflection of the influence of Robert Barnwell Rhett, the *Mercury* eloquently declaimed against Whiggery all summer; there were virtually no questions on which the Whigs were sound. The *Republic*, Washington organ of the new administration, daily gave evidence of Taylor's shortcomings. Local Democrats who had held office under the previous administration could attest to the vindictive purges being launched by Taylor. The spoils seeking Whigs were bent upon depriving every Democrat of a government job. This reprehensible practice extended even into international affairs. "A Democrat" attributed the removal of the American Consul in Tuscany to the fact that he was the husband of the granddaughter of General Sumter, who had been a Democrat. While Free-Soil agents—in collusion with the administration—moved through California and New Mexico, the *Mercury* urged southern Whigs to unite with Democrats to fight "these base conspirators against the peace and safety of the Union. . . ."¹⁷

¹⁶*Mercury*, July 12, 26, 1849. Since 1848 the *Mercury* had reported on the settlement of California. It described the ships that left Charleston for the developing country and painted an exciting picture of life there (*ibid.*, Dec. 13, 16, 18, 22, 1848; Jan. 1849 – Jan. 1840, passim. The gold mines of California were "among the subjects of greatest interest at the moment," said the editor).

¹⁷*Ibid.*, June 18, 20, 21, July 2, 28, Aug. 9, 1949. Clapp was one of those purged by the Whigs; he was removed as an inspector for the port of Charleston.
Carew's pledge of restraint did not apply to the subject of Whiggery. In an editorial entitled "Who has betrayed the South?" the Mercury condemned Whigs for advancing the cause of abolitionism. In spite of this odious record, southern Democrats in Louisiana, Georgia, Tennessee, and Florida had carried their states for Taylor. The South could not permit such behavior; her very survival was at stake. "The North is united against her: SHE MUST BE UNITED AGAINST THE NORTH," the editor proclaimed. Since southern Whigs were a weak minority who could never hope to control their party, the South must make her stand in Democratic ranks.

In line with their "ancient principles," southern Democrats had always maintained their loyalty to the South. Their resolute defense of her institutions yielded nothing to party:

... If it deserts its principles, they act for themselves, irrespective of party. They have never, in a single instance, been driven by their Northern associates from their principles; nor have they yielded one jot of the rights of the South to any party influences.

Those "few unfaithful in their ranks, like Benton ... are soon lopped off" only to be "taken up by the Whigs, who support and vindicate them," Carew concluded. The South "will only be safe when she has but one party in her limits and will send to the Councils of the Union Representatives who will fear nothing and dare everything in defense of her rights and interests."\(^{18}\)

The Mercury longed for a Democratic majority in the next House of Representatives. With this in mind the editor regularly

\(^{18}\text{Ibid.}, \text{July 16, 1849.}\)
reported out-of-state election returns. He followed the Virginia election with especial interest and by May 5 could rejoice at the "overwhelming" Democratic victory in that state; fourteen of Virginia's fifteen Congressmen would be Democrats. The lesson was not lost on the lone Whig victor in the Old Dominion; he took pains to describe himself as an "Independent."

Subsequent returns from Alabama, North Carolina, Indiana, Tennessee, and Kentucky indicated that further Democratic gains could be expected. The Mercury denounced Judge Edward Y. Hill, Whig candidate for governor of Georgia, who claimed to be a "friend" of Calhoun. He could not be Calhoun's friend because he was supported by Toombs and Stephens, said the Mercury; all the faithful knew that Toombs and Stephens had voted against the Southern Address.

Carew greeted the victory of George Washington Bonaparte Towns, the Democratic candidate, as a great triumph for those southern Democrats who had maintained their loyalty to the South. Since Georgia had supported Taylor for president, this election should be taken as a rebuke to the administration, said the Mercury.\(^\text{19}\)

Despite an occasional loss of reserve when discussing Whiggery, the firm of Carew and Heart carefully maintained its composure on the subject of who should lead in organizing a southern defense.

\(^{19}\text{Ibid., May 5, Aug. 10, 13, 14, 18, Sept. 1, 8, 15, Oct. 5, 1849. The Mercury's comments on the Georgia election stirred quite a response from Whig papers in that state. Accusing the Charleston paper of "interference" they received only ridicule in return for their charge. The Whigs had only themselves to blame, said the Mercury. They had deserted the cause of state rights and abandoned principle for party. Lest he alienate Georgia Whigs by angering them, however, Carew did promise to make no more remarks about the Georgia election.}\)
In November, the editor took the Columbia South Carolinian to task for adopting a position which verged on rashness. The Mercury had not planned to discuss the subject "for the present." "Hardly indifferent" to the issue and in line with approved policy, Carew preferred to let others take the lead. He could best serve the cause with quiet support for their stand. The Mercury desired this to be the position of all South Carolina; indeed, it believed that this cautious approach represented the true sentiments of her people.

Carolinians had too often been "... accused of a love of agitation, of disaffection to the Union, of restless ambition, of the desire to lead a new Confederacy." Warning the Columbia paper, which had itself once spoken for Calhoun, the Mercury insisted:

It is sufficient to say that the conviction that she was an object of distrust to her sister States and that any movement in which she stood conspicuous, was liable to be misrepresented and denounced as mischievous agitation, has been forced upon South Carolina, and has convinced the body of her people that even for the sake of the cause to which she is devoted, her position henceforth must be that of a faithful and zealous follower under the leadership of other States. ... 20

The South Carolinian was marching too far forward in the southern rank. Believing that South Carolina should take a "prominent part" in the movement, the Columbia paper proposed to make the actions of the southern convention a subject of popular discussion. It also urged that Southerners unite to form a Presidential party. The forthcoming convention could then nominate a candidate for President; and the obvious choice would be Calhoun.

Carew or Heart or Rhett or whoever among the faithful answered

20Ibid., Nov. 14, 1849.
the Carolinian agreed that Calhoun would make the best candidate for President. But it would be unwise to insert the issue of presidential politics into the unification movement. The Mississippi Convention owed its harmony to the exclusion of that subject. Neither was there any reason to engage in too much preliminary discussion of the convention agenda. Tending to rouse the passion of popular parties, such action could lead only to discord and confusion. And the South Carolinian must understand that its state was not to lead the movement.

South Carolina had "no need to advance; she" was already "on the ground, ready to join, heart and hand, the other States." To assert her primacy would simply revive "all the old clamor of her ambition, restlessness and disaffection to the Union, and to awaken the suspicions and jealousies that have heretofore deprived the South of strength by an everlasting sense of discord within herself." As the South Carolinian should have known, the firm of Carew and Heart understood the course required of the orthodox.

Faithfully adhering to its own advice, the Mercury editorially applauded the advance on unity being made by other southern states. This course met with approval from outside South Carolina; a letter from Mecklenburg, Tennessee, commended the editor for his attitude. The Mercury noted other dividends from the policy when Georgia and Alabama both endorsed the "Mississippi Movement." Their action encouraged the editor once more to emphasize the urgency of the situation.

—

Ibid., Nov. 15, 1849. Calhoun regretted the "course of the Carolinian" and would not accept the office "if tendered . . . under existing circumstances (Calhoun to Hammond, Dec. 17, 1849, Hammond Papers).
in which the South found herself. Exposing the designs of abolitionism on an almost daily basis, he saw in them urgent and enduring proof that only by standing together could the southern states protect themselves.22

With editorial contributions from so many of the faithful, it is hardly surprising that the Mercury made not a single misstep in representing Calhoun's view of the legislative session of 1849. Expressing its "hearty concurrence" with Governor Seabrook's message to the General Assembly, the Mercury proceeded to commend the Carolina representatives for their response. Although Calhoun ruled out any role of leadership for South Carolina, he favored a prompt endorsement of Mississippi's convention proposal. Other states must not mistake South Carolina caution for reticence lest they be "backward to move." "The Movement is critical," wrote Calhoun. Editor-Assemblyman Carew agreed and voted for quick approval of the "Mississippi Movement."23

Assured by the situation in South Carolina and encouraged at the overall southern response to his plan, Calhoun returned to Washington on November 30, 1849, three days before Congress convened. Determined upon one more attempt to bring about an acceptable Congressional settlement of the war between the sections, Calhoun knew that this move, too, would be "critical." Should the Thirty-First Congress follow the example of its recent predecessors and commit itself to antislavery, the South would have exhausted all means of

22Mercury, Nov. 26, 27, 1849.

23Ibid., Nov. 29, Dec. 1, 5, 6, 1849; Calhoun to Hammond, Dec. 7, 1849, Hammond Papers.
redress available within the Union.

The Mercury's hopes for the fall elections were only partially realized. Although the Democrats gained seats in the House, the Whigs held their majority. The reverse was true of the Senate where Democratic control was maintained by a smaller margin. The situation in the lower chamber remained uppermost in southern minds. Due to the growth of antislavery in the northern wings of both parties, the near-even division of the new House would throw the balance of power to Free-Soilers. As both parties caucused on December first, southern hopes for the Congress began to fade.

The Democrats, strongly opposed by Calhoun's followers, agreed to support Howell Cobb of Georgia as their candidate for Speaker.24 The Whigs fell into an almost immediate dispute, however. Aware of a rising anger among their constituents, Toombs and Stephens urged that the party oppose the Wilmot Proviso and renounce any intention of interfering with slavery in the District of Columbia. Northern Whigs accompanied their prompt rejection of the Georgia proposal, with a declaration that no more slaveholders would be appointed to federal office. Toombs and Stephens, now fully aroused, reacted by withdrawing from the caucus. Several other Southerners

24 Howell Cobb, leader of Georgia Democrats in the House, had refused to sign Calhoun's Southern Address. He emphasized that northern Democrats had consistently proved their friendship to the South and looked forward to the day when "our Heavenly Father [would] . . . take [both] Calhoun and Benton home. . . ." Along with Berrien Cobb had issued a minority address to his constituents. Cobb's course was popular in his District. To Calhoun, Cobb was the most unreliable of southern Democrats present in Washington. (Murray, Whig Party in Georgia, 140-42; Cobb to Mrs. Cobb, Feb. 8, 1849, quoted in Craven, Coming of the Civil War, 244, Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 452).
joined the Georgian walkout and those who remained refused to support the northern candidate for speaker.25

Inspired by the intransigence of their northern associates and the example of the furious Georgians, most other southern Whigs soon combined with Toombs and Stephens to threaten the party with a major bolt. The Whigs were polarizing; as both sides stood firm, this party was unable to agree upon a candidate for Speaker. On December 3 the Senate and the House convened; in accordance with custom, however, the former soon adjourned to await the organization of the latter. The lower chamber took seventeen bitter days and sixty-seven ballots to accomplish this task. Northern Congressmen seemed determined that the new Speaker should defer to the Wilmot Proviso; southern Representatives, equally adamant, asserted that he should not. In the acrid days that preceded a choice, charges and counter charges flew across the chamber. Members accompanied their invective with hateful glares indicative of a new intensity in political hostility. Upon the occasion of a New Yorker's calling a Virginian a disunionist and a liar, the Virginian, bent upon combat, lunged toward his verbal assassin. As friends interceded to prevent yet another stain upon the House record, "Indescribable confusion followed—threats, violent gesticulations, calls to order, and demands for adjournment ... mingled together." When the "heaving billow subsided," Robert Toombs seized the floor.

Less than a year before, Toombs had led in blocking Whig support of Calhoun's address. Repenting of the faith he had placed in

25Murray, Whig Party in Georgia, 148.
Taylor, he now bluntly warned his northern colleagues in language reminiscent of the Mercury. Railing at the "discreditable trick" by which Free-Soilers intended to elect a Speaker who would assure their control of critical committees, the Georgian proclaimed that he would not permit it. The purse strings of the Union should not be used to defraud his constituents, Toombs raged. Avowing his strong "attachment to the Union . . . under the Constitution," Toombs proceeded to define this qualification of his allegiance. "... If by your legislation you seek to drive us from the territories . . . purchased by the common blood and treasure . . . and to abolish slavery in the District . . . I am for disunion!" he thundered. The outraged Congressman would have no part of a scheme "to fix a national degradation upon half the States of this Confederacy. . . ." Toombs did not go unanswered; another week of virulence followed his polemic.26

By this time fifty-nine separate futile ballots bore eloquent witness to the uncompromising stance being adopted by both northern and southern Congressmen; as a result the House was unable to organize itself. In an attempt to break the deadlock, both parties retired to caucus. This move resulted in the appointment of a joint committee which was directed to solve the chamber's dilemma. The committee suggested that three more votes be taken; in the event that a majority could not be obtained on the third vote, the House would elect its Speaker by plurality. The suggestion was adopted,

26Cong. Globe, 31st, 1st, 27-28; Craven, Coming of the Civil War, 247-48; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 449-51. Toombs was especially antagonized by the Free-Soil attempt to secure control of the Committees on Territories, the Judiciary, and the District of Columbia.
and Howell Cobb was elected by plurality on the sixty-third ballot. Cobb's victory ended a battle that had done more to unify the South than all of Calhoun's speeches since 1832.27

President Taylor's annual message contributed nothing to allay the growing unease among southerners, Whig and Democrat. The President not only endorsed protection but also recommended that the tariff be increased. He questioned the sub-treasury system and called for a broad program of internal improvements. Intending, perhaps, to blunt southern objections to the latter proposal, Taylor urged the Congress to provide aid to agriculturists.

California, said the President, should become a state without delay; New Mexico was deserving of similar status as soon as her people followed the example of Californians in drafting a constitution. Taylor deprecated any further discussion of slavery and vowed to maintain the integrity of the Union "to the full extent of the [constitutional] obligations imposed and the powers conferred" upon him.28 Northern Whigs and southern Democrats at last had something on which they could agree; the message was "a good Whig document."29

Noting his "dishonest obfuscation" of the California question, the Mercury reproduced Taylor's "unexpectedly . . . short" message. The editor objected to the President's concealment of the fact that

27Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 451-52.
28Richardson, ed., Messages and Papers, 2547-62; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 453.
29Daniel Webster to F. Haven, Dec. 25, 1849, quoted in Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 453; Mercury, Dec. 27, 28, 1849.
executive agents had been responsible for the organization of California. Carew was no less displeased by the message's support of greater protection and internal improvements. Finally, the President's opposition to sub-treasury combined with his misuse of executive power to remind the *Mercury* of how Taylor Democrats had misplaced their loyalties in the late election. "Truly, 'he is a Whig but not an ultra Whig'" said the satirical editor.\(^30\)

Carew and Heart had little time to waste upon the message of the apostate Taylor, however. Doubting that the General had even written the annual address, the *Mercury* was more concerned by immediate dangers posed by extravagant, professional Whig politicians. "A Merchant" reminded subscribers that the real danger to the South lay neither in the Wilmot Proviso nor the moves against slavery in the District. The true danger lay in the pending admission of California to the Union; her constitution had been drafted by Whig-appointed antislavery agents. Duping Taylor in the process, these clever men had taken care to spread California's boundaries over territory that could have sustained slaveholding institutions. Armed with such a precedent, the Abolitionists would find new strength with which to fight the South.\(^31\)

The editor was horrified at the list of appropriations scheduled for river and harbor improvement by the Whig House of

\(^30\) *Mercury*, Dec. 27, 28, 1849; Jan. 23, 25, 1840; Prior to his nomination by the Whigs, Taylor had identified himself as "a Whig but not an ultra Whig." This move was designed to secure maximum support from southern Democrats (Morrison, Democratic Politics, 146; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 360).

\(^31\) *Mercury*, Dec. 24, 27, 28, 29, 1849.
 Representatives. Three-fourths of the government monies would be channelled by this list into the North, he said. Mercury readers were alerted to expect a fleecing if the current northern drive to organize the House should succeed. Urging southern Congressmen not to yield before the Yankee pressure, Carew asserted that the rights and safety of the South could not survive northern control of the appropriations.

This economic threat reinvigorated the Mercury's attack on Whiggery. Noting that southern Whig politicians were now admitting the treachery of their party, the editor explained that they had little choice; their constituents had discovered the matter. Georgia, long a Whig stronghold, was demonstrating a growing awareness of the need for Southerners to discard party labels and stand together. The Richmond Whig, a "vehement party paper," had belatedly recognized the danger inherent in antislavery and now called for determined resistance to it. The position of the Whig was, indeed, indicative of a healthy reaction among southern Whigs:

It is one of the most striking proofs that the times have produced, of the strength and all pervading character of the conviction among the Southern people that they cannot, without utter disregard of their safety and honor, allow the aggression to go farther—that the necessity has come upon them and they must act decisively and together or sink into hopeless subjection.

Carew had not forgotten the Whig's earlier blasts at his paper; the Mercury had been accused of agitating when there was no danger. This was no time to remind one's allies of past errors, however. Other than to commend the wisdom of meeting any danger "in its inception . . ." the editor did not press this subject. " . . .
We have no complaint, and in the presence of the union of all Southern men for the defense and security of their country, we put forward no claim... to the distinction of superior patriotism," he said.

As Calhoun wished the Mercury spared no energy in its promotion of southern unity—a drive designed primarily to save the Union, but, failing in that, to save the South.

Let us only do what now presses upon us with irresistible necessity—if we would save ourselves, if we would save the Union... For we revere the Union and as long as the South can stand by it without dishonor, let its bonds be sacred.

His section had suffered economic losses from the Union, said the editor. "She would have been far richer without it." But as "the work of our fathers—it is our common inheritance..." he continued. "... While their work is not defaced we hold it in reverence."32

Throughout January 1850 the Congress thrashed in hopeless dispute over the admission of California in particular and the institution of slavery in general. Hostilities over the peculiar institution seemed to touch upon every issue that arose. Attempts at compromise served only to irritate the rawness of members' feelings. "The Southern members," said Calhoun, "are more determined and bold than I ever saw them." Even those who were not avowing "themselves to be disunionists" could see "little hope of any remedy short of it." Salmon P. Chase's subsequent remark confirmed a similar intransigency for the forces of antislavery. "... No menace of disunion...[or]

32Ibid., Dec. 21, 24, 1849, Jan. 17, 1850.
intimations of the probability of disunion, in any form, will move us from the path. . . ." he declared.33

During session after session Calhoun had warned his colleagues of the inevitability of just such a confrontation. To the northern representatives he had directed an appeal that they retreat from the abolition-inspired onslaught; to the southern ones he had extolled the virtues of unity as the means most certain to effect a northern retreat. With the South now finally responding, the Nashville Convention daily loomed more important. "I would regard the failure of the Convention . . . to meet from want of endorsement by the other Southern States, to be a great if not fatal misfortune," Calhoun had written in December:

It would be difficult to make another effort to rally, and the North would consider it conclusive evidence of our . . . indifference to our fate. The movement is critical.

"Events may now be controlled; but it will be difficult, if not impossible to control their course, hereafter," he concluded.34

By early January the Senator thought that "the Convention at Nashville will be well attended." Confidently expecting Virginia, North Carolina, Alabama, Florida, Arkansas, and Tennessee to "be represented," Calhoun was uninformed about the reaction of Louisiana and Missouri. If the others responded as he expected, however, 

33Calhoun to Andrew Pickens Calhoun, Jan. 12, 1859, Jameson, ed., Calhoun Correspondence, II, 780; Cong. Globe, 31st, 2nd, 133.

it was "not improbable" that Louisiana and Missouri would be moved to do likewise. "Even Maryland begins to wake up," he wrote.35

By early 1850 Henry Clay had come to share Calhoun's fears for the future of their country. The bitterness of the sectional array exceeded that caused either by nullification or the entrance of Missouri into the Union. But upon each of those occasions a congressional compromise had reconciled the warring parties to the fact of their common nationality; Clay determined to try for a like result in 1850.

On January 21, against the grim background of a harshly divided Congress, Clay called upon Daniel Webster. The Kentuckian and the New Engander had their differences but they shared a love for the Union common to their generation; both men recognized, furthermore, that the Union was faced by a mortal crisis. Clay laid his proposal for easing the situation before Webster and the latter agreed to support it.36

Eight days later the Kentuckian outlined his plan to the Senate. Despite the extra-legal manner in which California had been organized, she had, nonetheless, become a state, said Clay. He proposed that Congress formally recognize the fait accompli and thus remove the matter from contention. The rest of the Mexican Cession should be organized without reference to slavery. Climate and geography in the Southwest were hostile to the institution and

35Calhoun to Hammond, Jan. 4, 1850, Hammond Papers.

36Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 454-55; Craven, Coming of the Civil War, 250-51.
would doubtless prevent its establishment there without any assistance from Congress. This natural prohibition should satisfy North and South; as antislavery consciences were eased by the action of their ally, nature, Southerners could also accept the design of the Creator. The result would be identical with that envisioned by the Wilmot Proviso but without the congressional censure of southern society. And again the issue would be removed from politics.

Even the boundary between Texas and New Mexico had become a matter for sectional contention; slaveholders staunchly supported the Texan claim while Free-Soilers just as firmly maintained the pretensions of New Mexico. With several million acres at stake, Clay quickly disposed of the case of Texas; the disputed territory should go to New Mexico, he declared. Texans would be compensated by the general government's assuming the outstanding state debt, a holdover from the late Republic of Texas.

Where the seat of government was concerned, Clay called for concessions from both sides. Congress should bind itself to respect slavery in the District unless the voters there and in the adjoining state of Maryland should declare for emancipation, said Clay. On the other hand, the slave trade could be banished forthwith from the capital. Finally, the Senator from Kentucky called upon Congress to enact a stringent fugitive slave law and to declare the inability of the national legislature to interfere with the slave trade. 37

37 Cong. Globe, 31st, 1st, 244-52. Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 455. Clay's Congressional pledge on slavery in the District of Columbia included the assurance that slaveholders would be compensated in the event of emancipation.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
The senior Senator from South Carolina was present neither for Clay's speeches on February 5 and 6 nor for the debate that both preceded and followed them. On January 18 Calhoun had come down with pneumonia, a disease often if not usually fatal in 1850. His recovery was seemingly assured as January ended, however, and on February 18 the Carolinian resumed his seat in the Senate.

During Calhoun's absence a number of southern Senators had indicated their willingness to support much of Clay's proposal. In return for concessions from the North, they were even prepared to abolish the slave trade in the District of Columbia. But Clay's plan offered no such concessions; it only called upon the South to compromise, they said. Even so, it promised a long-awaited political settlement to the dispute over slavery. If the South could maintain her current unity, perhaps the North, by muzzling the Free-Soilers, would also consent to compromise.\(^38\)

Although Calhoun had yet to be heard on the subject of Clay's resolutions, those who followed Mercury editorials doubtless knew his position. The paper's initial remarks on the proposed compromise were limited to a description of proposals and a report on the senatorial debate that followed their introduction.\(^39\) The editor declined to commit himself until he saw "an authentic statement" of

\(^{38}\)Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 455-58. Salmon P. Chase viewed Clay's measures from exactly the opposite slant, "sentiment for the North substance for the south—just like the Missouri Compromise. . . ." (quoted in ibid., 551, n. 12).

\(^{39}\)Clay introduced his resolutions into the Senate on January thirtieth and did not speak in their defense until February fifth and sixth (Mercury, Jan. 31, Feb. 11, 1850).
Clay's propositions. When the Kentuckian first addressed the Senate on this subject, the Mercury's position began to unfold. The editor pronounced Clay's position on the fugitive slave law and the interstate slave trade "... in all respects excellent, and such as might be expected from a wise and patriotic Southern Senator." However, Carew was less pleased by Clay's willingness to permit congressional regulation of slavery in the District. The editor was not inclined to grant either to Congress or the people of the District the right to rob southerners of their property in "servant[s]."40

The Mercury paid homage to Clay's long career in the service of his country. Taking note of the "age and feebleness" "of the great Kentuckian [of] ... his renown ... [and] isolation from the party which he had so long ruled with the authority of a King, his supposed relinquishment of all hope of the glittering honor which had been the alluring and deceitful mirage of his life's journey," the Mercury praised "this effort, probably his last, to play a master part in the affairs of men. Add the imposing greatness and imminent danger of the questions involved ... and surely no man could ever hope for a grander occasion ... of meeting and mastering it," said the editor.

"Mr. Clay," however, had "not equalled his opportunity, much less overpowered the difficulties of his subject." The Senator did "not fasten deeply upon the vitals of the question itself, but" evaded "the facts" or gave "merely a specious array of such as suited his purpose. ..." The Mercury dealt harshly with Clay's "absurd"
and "cheap" assertions that he had spent much time in prayer as he surveyed the wrath of his countryman; the Senator's lifelong habits would not bear out such a statement, said the editor. Clay's disavowal of personal motives in making this speech impressed Carew even less; the Kentuckian was still ambitious for the presidency, the Mercury suggested.

Having run the spectrum of analysis from sympathetic praise to vicious ridicule, the editor proceeded to dispose of Clay's California proposition. The Senator argued for the admission of California with "suitable boundaries" without saying what they should be, said the Mercury. His assertion that the people of California wished to exclude slavery palpably ignored the facts of the case. The free-state constitution of California had not been drafted by the "people" of the territory, according to the Mercury; this illegal document was the product of unwarranted action by "... a quasi-civil community." Organized without authority of law by an army officer and cajoled into submission by "executive agents," this group had presumed to act in place of the people of the "community."

Clay's argument on New Mexico made even less sense to the editor. Although the Senator proposed that Congress organize the territory without reference to slavery, he maintained, nonetheless, that the national government was entitled either to establish or ban the institution there. Congress was a landholder, said Clay. Possessing the power to dispose of public lands to the best advantage and knowing that slavery would affect the value of those lands, the general government could obviously rule on the status of the institution.
The Mercury did not deal lengthily with this statement germane as it was to the old argument over broad and strict construction. Carew was more interested in the Kentuckian's declaration that the United States had also inherited the right to regulate slavery in the Southwest, the power having been transferred along with the territory from Mexico. This being the case, the United States might well acquire some territory from Russia, said the Mercury. Since the Czar was empowered to banish political offenders to Siberia, the President would automatically gain the right to exile certain Taylor and Fillmore men to the North Pole.

Throughout his speech "Mr. Clay" exhibited a most cavalier disregard for the Constitution, said the editor.

Why the very essence of the whole dispute, is the Constitutional power of Congress to legislate on the question of slavery. And on this seems to hang the decision of . . . whether the Mexican law abrogating slavery is of any force now.

In that "all laws in a ceded district, which" go "beyond the competency of the government taking the cession, to enact, must be considered abrogated by the very fact of cession," the situation was crystal clear to the Mercury. "Mr. Clay," however, "elude[d]" any mention of this point.41

Finally, Clay's proposal "to dismember a State of this Confederacy" appealed not at all to the editor. The outcome of the war with Mexico having clearly established the boundaries of Texas, the Senator's arguments were not only absurd but also presaged a scheme to rob the South. The paper's sentiments evoked approval from its

41 Ibid., Feb. 12, 18, 1850.
correspondents. Criticizing the "various mongrel propositions," "A Southern Man" associated them with three disloyal representatives of his section, Clay, Benton, and Houston. Another writer, "Rice Planter," abjuring "those prophets who cry peace! peace! when there is no peace," damned the moves of the odious threesome.  

The ephemeral "communications" served to enlighten liegemen in search of the truth; they spoke in the language of the leader. From his sickbed Calhoun commended the "increasing disposition to resist all compromise . . . and to agree to nothing, that will not settle the entire issue . . . on the grounds for which we contend."

Approaching climax, the drive for unity ruled that southern solidarity must take precedence over ambition, personal rivalries, party allegiance and even old fashioned unionism. "The tone of the Southern Senators, with the exception of Clay, Benton, Houston and a few others is high," wrote Calhoun.

Calhoun's apparent recovery proved to be an illusion. He had returned to the Senate chamber on February 18, but two days later he suffered a relapse and was once again confined to his rooms. As the rising sectional tension persistently shadowed Clay's effort for a compromise settlement, Calhoun defined his position in letters, conversations with colleagues and—through the efforts of the anonymous faithful—in the press.

The South cannot with safety remain in the Union as things now stand & there is little or no prospect of any change for the better. . . . The impression is

---

42Ibid., Feb. 13, 26, 1850.

43Calhoun to Hammond, Feb. 16, 1850, Hammond Papers.
now very general, & is on the increase, that disunion is the only alternative that is left to us. \(^{44}\)

Senator Calhoun had not become a disunionist. His anxiety for the "stability of the Union," no less pronounced than Clay's, drove the Carolinian in a final effort to save the work of his fathers, this product of the Revolution. Where the Carolina slaveholder differed from the Kentuckian was in the concept of the Union.

For Calhoun, the nation was created to preserve the peace and tranquility even as it allowed for the progress of its citizens. During the early years of nationality the Federal Compact served this purpose. But as geography in combination with economy and religion produced a dichotomy within the nation, the South discovered her distinctness. This disclosure brought along a parallel awareness that southern society could not conform to the rules of majority-based democracy; the former was, therefore, threatened by the latter.

Caught by a complex heritage of being both southerner and American, Calhoun led in trying to reconcile the implied conflict between the two. In the event that this, the central theme of his political career, proved impossible of accomplishment, the Carolinian's primary allegiance to the South would assert itself.

His birthplace, occupation, and home, notwithstanding, Henry Clay escaped Calhoun's dilemma. Clay remained first a national politician who believed in a strong central government. While that government could afford to be magnanimous to a section under siege, \(^{44}\)Ibid.; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 458-59.
it could not surrender its prerogative to be otherwise. The *Mercury*
clearly understood and strongly condemned this position:

Mr. Clay announces that he owes no allegiance to
the South, but only to the Union. If he owes mere
justice and fair dealing to the South he owes more
than he pays.45

So while one slaveholder sought sectional peace through com-
promise, the other extolled southern intransigence as the only means
of achieving harmony from within the Union. They moved against a
steadily tumultuous background that ranged in intensity from simple
commotion to rage and frenzy. By late February North and South ap-
peared bound for collision.

As Southerners openly threatened secession, northerners im-
plied the improbability of peaceful separation. Noting the ex-
changes, Whig Congressman and one-time Unionist Alexander H. Stephens
advised his legislator brother to offer bills "for reorganizing the
[Georgia] militia, for the establishment of military schools, . . .
the formation of volunteer companies, the creation of arsenals, of
an armory, and an establishment for making gunpowder. . . ." "My
mind is made up," said he. "I am for the fight, if the country will
back me." This reaction from a Georgia Whig must have strengthened
Calhoun's steady faith in southern unity. "Never before has the South
beer placed in so trying a situation, nor can it ever be placed in one
more so," Calhoun wrote. "Her all is at stake."46

45 *Mercury*, Feb. 19, 1850.

46 Stephens to Linton Stephens, Jan. 21, 1850, quoted in Murray,
*Whig Party in Georgia*, 148; Calhoun to Hammond, Feb. 16, 1850, Hammond
Papers.
Mounting evidence of the worsening situation appeared regularly in *Mercury* reports. Holding "the causes that produced the Revolution" to be "trifling in comparison" with the present crisis, the editor warned:

... We can live with the North contented, if they will allow us the benefit of the compact of the Union. We can live perfectly well without them, whenever they resolve to turn that compact into an instrument of tyranny.

The governor of Vermont was doubtless among those considered by Carew to be subverting the "compact." He had recently sent copies of the antislavery resolutions adopted by his legislature to the southern states. Noting with approval the dignified action of Maryland, Virginia, and Georgia when they rejected and returned the intruding Yankee instruments, the *Mercury* advised other southern assemblies to behave accordingly.47

Whig Congressman Thomas L. Clingman, representing a North Carolina mountain district, earned *Mercury* plaudits for warning the North against trifling with southern loyalty to the Union. Clingman, who had often resisted Calhoun's drive to weld the South into a single political unit, now stood firmly with the Carolinian. The South "revered" the Union, said Clingman, but would not countenance the use of its bonds to forge a revolution within southern borders. Reminding readers that the Congressman represented a district where there were, perhaps, fewer slaves than anywhere else in North Carolina, the *Mercury* cited proof of "how baseless [were] the calculations of those who suppose only the large slaveholders care to resist aggressions of


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
the Abolitionists."

The editor also complimented Clingman for having demonstrated the great strength of southern unionism. Southerners had a respect for the Union that stemmed from the example set by their ancestors, and they would defer to none in devotion to that example. Both Carew and Clingman were speaking of the Union as ordained by the Constitution. Their allegiance would not survive a change in the nature of the Federal Compact:

... This sentiment of love and reverence for the Union as an inheritance from our fathers, is daily weakening and fading before the wicked assaults of those who are bent on compelling us to think of it only as an engine with which they can insult and injure us.

Flinging his warning in the face of the North, the agitated editor asked, "How long do they suppose a mere idolatry of the past can make us callous to 'the whips and scorns' of the present...?"48

February issues indicated an increasing awareness on the part of the North that the nation was endangered. Northern voters assembling in public meetings declared their loyalty to the Union and denounced the debilitating influence of radical antislavery men. The Mercury reported that one such meeting of Tammany Hall "friends of the Union" was broken up by abolitionist "ruffians"; irritated by the assembly's opposition to the Wilmot Proviso. Subscribers need not be surprised at this development; such behavior was commonplace at the North, said the editor.49

48ibid., Feb. 6, 1850.

49ibid., Feb. 20, 23, 1850.
The Mercury still feared that "no large portion of the North" was "sensible of the danger in which they" had "involved the Union." Carew was unimpressed by an article in the Democratic Review which tried to blame the nation's troubles on the desire of Great Britain to encourage free trade areas. He agreed, nevertheless, that disunion would result in great loss to northern commerce. Southern markets, conversely, would gain thereby. The editor's own attitude reflected the bitterness of the times; "If it were only a question of gain to the South, and great gain, we should desire [disunion], . . ." he declared. "As it is, we only expect it."

Occasional reports drifting in from the North suggested that disunion would result in war. Stating that "the South is nearly equal in numbers to the North, and vastly stronger in position," the Mercury attempted to explain to the Yankees "with what scorn the threats of subjugating us by force are received." A "hostile hand" put upon the South would affect "the vital interests of England, France and Germany. . . . No people could shut us up without coming into collision with the whole weight of modern civilization," said the editor.50

There were among Mercury readers those who did not share the editor's confidence. Shortly before this editorial was published, Charleston politician James M. Walker wrote to Hammond. "... War must follow disunion," Walker predicted:

... Keep in mind, that the persons having command of the sea, will if not prevented secure our ports

---

50Ibid., Feb. 21, 22, 1850.
... cutting off our cotton trade ... [and]
leaving us at the mercy of any foreign nation
from whom ... we might hope to gain relief.

Remembering President Taylor's recent message to the Congress, Walker
assumed "that Taylor will not suck his thumbs. In his place, the day
that the convention meets I would have Every Southern port, under lock
& key." Little more than a decade later, Carolinians would have
reason to remember Walker's keen understanding.

Calhoun's second siege of illness kept him only from physical
involvement in the Congressional battle and the parallel southern re-
action to the "Mississippi Movement." Keeping abreast of matters from
his sickbed, he relied on letters, newspapers, and accounts from his
colleagues. Orders continued to go out to the faithful; and the Mer-
curry, now the very badge and ensign of Orthodoxy, trumpeted the steady
course of his movement for southern unity.

During February James J. Hamilton, Jr., leader of the last
great effort for separate state action, came to Washington where he
remained for six weeks. His daily visits with Calhoun produced long
and learned conversations on the future of the South; they also
assisted in keeping Calhoun posted on current events. Toward the
end of February, the Senator apparently decided that he would not
recover in time to speak on Clay's resolutions still pending before
the Senate. Consequently, another one-time Carolinian, James Gordon
Bennett, now a New York publisher, requested to send his veteran


52 Paul Quattlebaum to Hammond, Dec. 18, 1849, Beverly Tucker
to Hammond, Jan. 27, 1850, Hammond to Simms, Feb. 13, 1850, Hammond
Papers.
reporter Joseph Scoville to see the Senator. Scoville had served before in the cause of Calhoun, most recently during the preceding summer. He arrived on February 26 and consented to Calhoun's request that he act as his secretary. The Carolinian would be heard in the Senate debates—present or not. Calhoun dictated to Scoville what many in Washington predicted would be his last speech.  

53 Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 459; Glenn, "James Hamilton, Jr.,"399-400, Calhoun to Hammond, Feb. 16, 1850, Hammond Papers.
CHAPTER XI

THE VOICE OF THE LEADER

While Scoville recorded the Carolinian's valedictory, "South Carolina's other Senator" made arrangements for it to be heard in the Senate. As Calhoun had feared, he remained too weak to deliver the speech himself. So with the "hearty concurrence" of his colleagues, Andrew P. Butler arranged for the young Virginian, James M. Mason, to read the address. Butler, who would normally have read for his fellow Carolinian, pled that his eyes were too weak for the task.¹

Shortly after noon on the fourth day of March 1850, Senator John C. Calhoun leaned on the arm of General James J. Hamilton, Jr., and moved slowly into the Senate chamber. Although the body would not be called to order for almost an hour, "the galleries and even the floor of the Senate" were already crowded with "a brilliant and expectant audience." Americans of Calhoun's day regularly turned out to observe the drama often characteristic of proceedings in the upper house. Present in this solemn audience of March 4 were some who remembered a young and optimistic Calhoun deliver his very first speech in Congress. They had come to watch— in the language of Calhoun's biographer— "the final effort of a dying man to serve his country."

¹Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 459.
For many the view of this fateful scene was blurred by tears.

When the appointed hour sounded, the chamber came to order and "Mr. Calhoun" was recognized. Thanking his colleagues for "the courteous way" in which they were permitting him to be heard through the voice of another Senator, the Carolinian passed his speech to Mason. As he sank into his seat next to Jefferson Davis, Calhoun doubtless reflected upon the forty-year struggle that had led to this moment.2

"I have, Senators, believed from the first that the agitation of the subject of slavery would," if not contained, "end in disunion . . .," read Mason. That dire eventuality now loomed nearer; "every portion of the North entertains views and feelings more or less hostile to [slavery]." Proclaiming the Union to be in jeopardy, Calhoun's address urged the Congress to disarm the anti-slavery arsenal—once and for all, otherwise, the South must form a separate nation.

This somber speech traced the process by which the bonds of nationality had been steadily weakened. From the beginning the government had worked to exclude plantation agriculture from the territories. The Ordinance of 1787 and the Missouri Compromise laid the foundation upon which the Wilmot Proviso had been built. A selfish sectionalism on the part of industrialists had fastened the protective tariff upon the country. Confronted thus by an attack both ideological and economic, the South had suffered a steady series of

---

2New York Tribune, quoted in Coit, Calhoun, 490; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 460-61; Glenn, "James J. Hamilton, Jr.," 399.
reverses as the price of her devotion to the Union.

During the third decade of the nineteenth century the character of the government had changed, Calhoun contended. With the triumph of the principle of popular democracy the Union was transformed from a confederation of sovereign states into a centralized nation dominated by the general government. This government was limited only by the will of a numerical majority; it could virtually determine its own powers. As a result, the interest of the minority plantation section had been repeatedly sacrificed.

Calhoun cited the growth of the abolition movement and its entrance into politics as the most direct threat to national unity. Repeating that the antislavery movement would ultimately destroy the Union, he reminded his colleagues that "Disunion" would be "the work of time." "It is a great mistake to suppose that [disunion] . . . can be effected at a single blow. The cords which bound these states together, are . . . too numerous and powerful for that."

But the process of separation was already well advanced, Calhoun warned. The churches were splitting even as party ties were giving way. In the absence of political, spiritual, and social bonds, "the only means by which the" Union could be held together would be to tie the weaker to "the stronger portion" with "force." The South would never accept such naked "subjugation," said Calhoun.

It was apparent to the Carolinian, then, that the solution could not lie in another compromise. Transient in nature as they were, political compromises lent themselves to distortion by the stronger power, the North, to the disadvantage of the weaker, the South. If the Union were to be saved, Calhoun asserted, the
equilibrium which prevailed between the sections in 1789 must be restored. This balance between North and South could not be reconstituted so long as a numerical majority determined government policy. The South was already outnumbered in the House, and the admission of California would produce a like situation in the Senate. Since the North was the dominant force in the government, her consent would be necessary for any change in the system. Calhoun's logical conclusion was that only the North could decide the future of the Union.

Declaring that it was time for "an open and manly avowal on all sides," the Senator became specific. The North must cease to agitate the slavery issue. She must also consent to amend the Constitution in such a way that the South would have the means of protecting herself; Calhoun proposed to substitute a concurrent majority for the prevailing numerical one. Only in this manner could the balance between the sections be restored.

Should the North be unwilling to assent to these changes in principle and practice, the South would leave the Union, Calhoun warned. Even in the event of separation, however, the course of the future must still be determined by the North. If she is "unwilling [that] we should part in peace, [she should] tell us so, and we shall know what to do"; the question was now reduced "to submission or resistance."

Unless there was a declaration to the contrary from the North, the South must assume that the stronger section intended to maintain her present policy, the Carolinian continued. In that case, California would become "the test question." Her admission
would "infer" that the South would be excluded "from the whole of the acquired territories" and the "equilibrium between the two sections" would be destroyed irrevocably. "We would," the address ominously concluded, "be blind not to perceive . . . that your real objects are power and aggrandizement, and infatuated not to act accordingly."\(^3\)

The Senate had listened with rapt attention to Calhoun's foreboding farewell. There were no replies to his declaration, but when Mason sat down Webster took the floor to voice his pleasure at seeing "the honorable member from Carolina able to be in his place today. . . ." After agreeing that Webster should speak on March 7, the Senate adjourned. And as Calhoun was assisted from the chamber, the entire assembly--Senators and spectators--rose in tribute.\(^4\)

Upon returning to his rooms at Hill's boarding house, Calhoun wrote to Henry Conner:

My speech . . . was read today . . . . My friends think it among my most successful. . . . I have [defined] the issue between North and South. If we flinch, we are gone; but if we stand fast . . . we shall triumph. . . .

If not overly optimistic of a favorable reaction from the North, the Carolinian was confident, indeed, of the healthy state of southern unity. The "triumph" he envisioned would result from either "compelling the North to yield to our terms, or declaring our Independence of them." Once more, however, his confidence in the ability of his section to maintain a united front had been misplaced.\(^5\)

\(^3\)Cong. Globe, 31st, 1st, 451-55.
\(^4\)Coit, Calhoun, 495.
\(^5\)Calhoun to Conner, Mar. 4, 1850, quoted in Coit, Calhoun, 497.
While Washington digested the speeches of Clay and Calhoun and awaited the forthcoming effort of Webster, the influence of personal ambition merged with the pressure of politics to produce yet another gap in southern ranks. On March 5 Henry Foote of Mississippi announced to the Senate that Calhoun's view of current conditions was not representative of southern thinking. Calhoun had magnified the menace of antislavery; it was not necessary to amend the Constitution in order to save the Union, said Foote. In addition, Foote accused the Carolinian of maligning the North with his charges that that section stood opposed to southern institutions. In the bitter exchange that followed this assertion, even Calhoun's enemy, Benton, objected to Foote's manner of challenging the dying Carolinian. And although the capital remained preoccupied with its anticipation of the speech of the third member of the passing triumvirate, the significance of this quarrel was clearly apparent. "[E]maciated to the last degree, his eyes burning with fever," the spiritual father and guiding force of the Mississippi Movement had clased with its titular head. Once again the goal of southern unity would not be reached.\(^6\)

The packed house which heard Webster's Address of the Seventh

\(^6\)Coit, Calhoun, 497; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 466-67; Craven, Coming of the Civil War, 258; Varina Howell Davis, Jefferson Davis Ex-President of the Confederate States (2 vols., New York, 1890), I, 458. While the motive behind Foote's revolt has never been clearly established, it is clear that the Mississippian was not satisfied with his place in the Calhoun camp. Craven implies that Foote's conduct was affected by an old quarrel with Jefferson Davis. Coit, in turn, says that by this time Calhoun had picked Davis to be his successor. Foote, remembering his early prominence in the Mississippi Movement, may well have been influenced by the intimacy between Davis and Calhoun (Craven, Coming of the Civil War, 258; Coit, Calhoun, 488).
of March was the epitome of a nation in the grip of crisis. This excited audience knew that Henry Clay had proposed to ease the rising tension with another quick compromise. Many of those present had heard Calhoun reject Clay's overture. The Carolinian had presented the country with an ultimatum—barring a final solution to the issue of antislavery within the Union, the South would seek one outside it. Webster, seeking to avoid the disruption of the nationality that he shared and loved with both Clay and Calhoun, offered a third alternative. Reminding his countrymen of their proud past, he called for their patriotism to sustain them in the present crisis. In this way they could maintain the Union through a policy of gradual negotiation.

The South must accept the fact that the North despised slavery, Webster continued. In turn, the North must agree that the institution existed, was guaranteed by the Constitution, and must be protected. Holding the Wilmot Proviso to be unnecessary, Webster agreed that it was designed as a calculated insult to plantation institutions. It should be repudiated, he maintained; California and New Mexico would become free states without its aid.

The South could be reinforced by new slave states carved from that part of Texas lying south of 36°30' N., Webster asserted reassuringly. Southerners should remember, however, that the North was not without justification in her determination to rid the land of slavery. When the Union was formed, both sections had viewed slavery as an evil and existing institution, he said. The South must understand, furthermore, that the Union was meant to be permanent and could only be broken by revolution. Webster insisted that this dread
prospect could be avoided through a policy of responsible negotiation between the sections.  

The remainder of the session did little to justify Webster's hope for a statesmanlike reaction from all sides. Maintaining his gloomy view of the situation, Calhoun heard and scorned William H. Seward's dictum that a "higher power" than the Constitution prohibited the entrance of any more slaveholding states into the American Union. Two days later, on the thirteenth, the Senator from South Carolina made his last appearance in the chamber of the Senate. As he entered the hall, Calhoun heard himself referred to as a "disunionist" by Foote. Another heated exchange followed this encounter, and the cause of southern unity was damaged further in the process.

In a condition bordering dangerously on collapse, Calhoun retired from this affray to spend the last two weeks of his life in Hill's boarding house. Watched over by his son, Dr. John Caldwell Calhoun, Jr., and attended by a steady stream of visitors, the Senator read and talked, prophesied, and reminisced. Beverly Tucker heard the Carolinian interpret the future with "Dark forebodings." "The Union is doomed to dissolution . . . within twelve years," Mason was informed. "The probability is that it will explode in a presidential election." And as the unfavorable reaction to Webster's speech began to pour in from the North, Calhoun wrote a final letter

---

7Cong. Globe, 31st, 1st, 476-83.

8Coit, Calhoun, 501-02; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 471-72.

9Calhoun to Conner, Mar. 18, 1850, Conner Letters.
to Henry Conner:

Can anything more clearly evince the utter hopelessness of looking to the North for support, when their strongest man finds himself incapable of maintaining himself on the smallest amount possible of concession to the South—and on points too clear to admit of Constitutional doubts?¹⁰

As James Gordon Bennet's paper, the New York Herald, kept a mournful watch on "the sad news concerning Mr. Calhoun's health," Richard Cralle and Joseph Scoville joined Mr. and Mrs. Duff Green to assist the doctor in attending his father. On March 17 the Herald concluded that Calhoun's hours were "numbered." The Carolinian began a steady decline on the twenty-second and on April 1 The Charleston Mercury appeared with heavy black borders between all its columns. "Mr. Calhoun [had] expired" on Sunday, March 31 "at 15 minutes past 7 o'clock."¹¹

Most Mercury readers were probably unprepared for this startling development. In striking contrast to the course followed by the Herald, the Mercury had hardly mentioned the subject of Calhoun's health. A recent Mercury dispatch, moreover, had quoted the Washington correspondent of the Columbia Telegraph to the effect that the Senator was improving:

He now attends the Senate regularly and seems to be regaining his vigor of body rapidly. . . . All apprehensions in relation to his malady, may . . . now be allayed for . . . his restoration cannot be doubted.

¹⁰Calhoun to Conner, March 18, 1850, Conner Letters.

¹¹Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 474-75; Herald, quoted in Coit, Calhoun, 503, 505; Mercury, Apr. 1, 1850.
The absence of any subsequent reports to the contrary could hardly have prepared Carew's subscribers for the tolling bells to which they had awakened on that Sunday.\footnote{Mercury, Mar. 14, 1850; Wiltse, Calhoun Sectionalist, 475; Thomas, Carolina Tribute, 65. Charleston received the news of Calhoun's death by telegraph on Sunday, March 31.} This curious silence on a subject with which all South Carolina was concerned must be presumed to have been an official stance. Orthodoxy-in-Council, uncertain itself of Calhoun's condition and troubled over who should succeed him, had apparently ruled out any discussion of the Senator's prospects.\footnote{Calhoun himself forbade that his family be notified. Joseph Scoville says that the Senator "had no idea of dying from his sickness unless it was after he became speechless" (Coit, Calhoun, 507-08; Scoville to Hammond, Apr. 18, 1850, Hammond Papers).}

It is certain that the Mercury's failure to comment regularly on Calhoun's illness did not reflect a decline in its loyalty either to the Carolinian himself or to his long term political goal. Throughout the last month of the leader's life, Carew's paper worked ceaselessly to preserve the drive and force of the twenty-year-old "great cause," southern unity. Taking note of the congressional excitement over the question of California, the editor cautioned his readers to expect violence before the issue was settled. He warned them of the futility of hoping for another compromise peace. Abolitionists would violate any agreement designed to protect southern interests! thundered "South." Voicing his hearty agreement with this communication, Carew asked "... What thanks do they get for" efforts at compromise?

The North replies to every offer, by assenting to so much as is favorable to itself. We would...
[not] risk a dollar, that the North would regard as binding any compromise that might be assented to by its Representatives. Let them offer compromises then. They profess to love the Union above all things—let them reach forth a hand to save it.  

A thoroughly aroused Mercury charged that "As yet the only mode of keeping the States together which has received any interest... among them is the employment of the Army and Navy to put down disunion." The "communications" agreed, asserting that "Declamation and disquisition have had their day," "Naked Truth" proclaimed that "the argument is exhausted" and urged that the South send her best men to Nashville.

The editor reported that Calhoun was in his seat on March 4 and devoted most of one news page to the Senator's address. "... [It] was listened to with the deepest attention," said the Mercury. "Mr. Calhoun has probed the question to its depths," and analyzed the character of existing politics with a truthfulness and power of which he alone seems capable."

The Mercury had no patience with those who accused Calhoun of trying to modify the Constitution. The Senator wanted only to amend the document in such a way as to give explicit form to some of its provisions, to place them "beyond cavil and evasion." That "debate of interesting character" which "sprang up" around Foote's charge that Calhoun believed all the people of the North to be hostile to

---

14Mercury, Mar. 1, 2, 4, 1850.
15Ibid., Mar. 4, 6, 1850.
16Ibid., Mar. 5, 7, 9, 1850.
southern institutions vindicated Calhoun's penetrating insight. Re­
proving the Mississippian for straying into independence, Carew ob­
served:

... Mr. Foote seems to have made up his mind that there is some radical impropriety in agreeing with Mr. Calhoun. ... We are sorry that so sensible a man should be infected with so unphilosophical a notion.17

The editor would not condemn all northern leaders, however. He trusted Woodbury, Dallas, Cass, and Buchanan. The Mercury even exonerated Van Buren of any "feeling of hostility" toward Southerners. But all northern politicians were prisoners of their con­stituents, Carew warned. His subscribers need only consult any school book to uncover the Yankee "prejudice" against slavery. Finally, there was little comfort to be derived from the knowledge that the northern attack was directed at slavery rather than the southern people.18

"Mr. Webster's speech ... noble in language, generous and conciliatory in tone, and ... having one general, broad and power­ful tendency towards the peaceable and honorable adjustment of the existing controversy," brought a new tone of optimism into the editor­ial column. Carew greeted Webster's "discussion of a great ques­tion ... with ... admiration and delight." Even though the Mercury "might disagree" with Webster's interpretation of the Con­stitution, the paper could still endorse his loyalty to the docu­ment:

17 Ibid., Mar. 9, 1850.
18 Ibid.
... With such a spirit as Mr. Webster has shown, it no longer seems impossible to bring this sectional contest to a close, and we feel now, for the first time since Congress met, a hope that it may be so adjusted.

The Mercury's extravagant praise of Webster's speech was designed to emphasize the continuing need for southern unity. No such speech could have been made "until the question of Union" was boldly raised & joined in the "consideration of public men," said the editor. Webster could "speak with hope of being listened to with respect..." only because "Massachusetts, so dependent for prosperity on the Union must give heed." Predicting that the New Engander would still "be denounced by factionists and abolitionists," Carew endorsed the "solid ground for his propositions."

The orthodox editor did not lose sight of the fact that Webster had conferred with Calhoun in the process of drafting his address. "These last speeches of Mr. Calhoun and Mr. Webster, are destined to a great fame, and to produce lasting effects," he said. In what was virtually his only allusion to the seriousness of Calhoun's illness, Carew concluded:

Perhaps they are, either of them, the greatest effort of its author, and if they were to be the last they would each form a fitting keystone to the arch of a fame won by forty years of distinguished public service. It is noble to think that such minds should so preserve their powers that at a time when they had almost reached the term of human life, they can meet an exigency more trying than they have ever yet encountered, and make it the scene of their most triumphant intellectual display. The occasion is not greater than the men who have coped with it. If evil spirits do not mar their work, we may yet look to them as having given a new vitality to the Union.19

19 Ibid., Mar. 11, 1850.
Those "evil spirits" reminded the Mercury of one critical area in which Webster's support for the Constitution transcended his understanding of the instrument. The Massachusetts Senator had roundly declared that the Union could not be dissolved. "Cannot!" the Mercury roared in disagreement. "It only requires that the Government and the Northern People keep doing a little longer what they have been doing, and it cannot be saved from dissolution." The steadiness of the northern course must be apparent even to the most optimistic of southern Union-lovers. William H. Seward's speech, citing a higher authority than the Constitution as the source of his inspiration to wage war on slavery, furnished eloquent evidence of this alarming situation.20

The Nashville Convention remained uppermost in Carew's mind throughout the progress of the congressional debate. Designed as the crowning glory of Calhoun's effort to solidify the South, the convention took precedence over all else in the Mercury. The "Spirit of the Southern Press" reproduced periodic extracts from other regional journals to prove "that the movement of the people [was] resolutely onward." The governor of Louisiana received Mercury plaudits for his proclamation that "Submission to incipient oppression prepares men for the yoke, and compromises on this question are nothing less than antislavery victories." Cheered by the appointment of George M. Troup to represent Georgia at the forthcoming convention, the Mercury chided Clay for his charge that all those supporters of southern unity were "ultraists" who marched in advance of

20 Ibid., Mar. 14, 22, 1850.
their constituents.21

Precisely the reverse was true, said the *Mercury*; many southern leaders were actually trying to catch up with their electorate. Clay's analysis of the motive behind the movement to unify the South was also wrong, the editor continued. Far from having disunion as the object of her convention, the South was seeking only "justice and the Constitution." And once more Carew reminded his readers that South Carolina was not leading the journey to Nashville. The Palmetto State only followed the lead of "another and distant State" and supported the convention because of her desire to "save the Union if possible" and if not, "to save the South."22

Thus it was with genuine alarm that the *Mercury* had reported on the clash between Calhoun and Foote. Deprecating all symptoms of division among southern Senators, Carew dismissed Foote's objections to Calhoun's proposals as nothing more than the faulty product of a growing jealousy. The Mississippian wished to replace Calhoun as the philosopher of southern unity, the editor charged. This ambitious Mississippian was also guilty of impertinence. Foote's alleged authorship of the "Mississippi Movement" hardly authorized him to require that Calhoun call "a council" before deciding "what opinions he is to


22 *Ibid.*, Feb. 19, 25, 28, Mar. 1, 6, 16, 21, 25, 1850. The *Mercury* was encouraged by Texas's decision to send delegates to Nashville. How different was the scene in Austin, said the editor, from the one in Washington where Sam Houston betrayed the South with "the gales from the White House fanning his cheeks" (*Ibid.*, Mar. 6, 1850).
avow." The *Mercury* tartly reminded Foote that "Mr. Calhoun" was not accustomed to operating in such a manner.

But Carew was disturbed most of all by Foote's misplaced faith in the possibility of another compromise. The dangers in following the path of political adjustment as blazed by Clay were legion, and could result in spreading confusion within southern ranks. By the end of March, however, the *Mercury* was confident that this danger had been averted. "The Southern resistance, which had begun to relax, again rises in tone and strength," Carew wrote reassuringly.²³

Three days later, the editor coupled his announcement of Calhoun's death with a comforting eulogy of the fallen leader. "... [His] presence only is gone—the mortal only ... dead," was the theme for the *Mercury's* message to the faithful. "Not only ... his fame ... but his thoughts live, and will flourish and spread with an ever increasing authority through ages to come." The movement to unify Calhoun's South would triumph as "The people of South Carolina gathered spontaneously around the goal of her illustrious son. ..."²⁴

While the *Mercury* printed "funeral obsequies" between its black-bordered columns, a public meeting was called to render Charleston's tribute to the lost leader. The reverent audience heard Franklin H. Elmore speak of the "irreparable misfortune" that had befallen South Carolina. Calhoun had given "the unlimited devotion of his

²³*Mercury*, Mar. 14, 29, 1850. Prior to Calhoun's speech of March fourth the *Mercury* had agreed with Foote's proposal to form a compromise committee (*ibid.*, Mar. 1, 1850).

²⁴*Mercury*, Apr. 1, 1850.
pure heart" to the state, Elmore asserted. In response, the assembly petitioned Governor Whitmarsh B. Seabrook to appoint a committee-of-Twenty-Five "to proceed to Washington to receive and bring home the mortal remains of the Hon. J. C. Calhoun." At the same time the City Council, convening in special session, requested of both the governor and the Calhoun family that Charleston be accorded "the distinction of being selected as the final resting place of the illustrious CALHOUN."

Quickly acceding to the request of the meeting, Governor Seabrook faithfully followed the Calhoun formula in selecting members for the committee. Orthodox Nullifiers John E. Carew and Henry W. Conner were appointed to sit with former Unionist Christopher Memminger. (Prominent by his absence from this committee was Robert Barnwell Rhett.) Both the family and the governor also agreed that Calhoun should be buried in Charleston. As part of its preparation for a proper reception of the body in the city, the Council appointed a committee of its own. Again the membership consisted of both Nullifiers and Unionists; included among the latter was no less a figure than James L. Petigru, archpriest of South Carolina Unionism. Even in death Calhoun would maintain his emphasis on the need for unity within the state.25

Calhoun was buried with all the solemnity reserved at that time for the death of a ruler of a country. In Washington memorial services were held in both the Senate and House chambers. Then his body was placed on board the crepe-draped steamer Baltimore for a last journey South. As the vessel warped her way into the stream--

25Ibid., Apr. 2, 5, 6, 10; Thomas, Carolina Tribute to Calhoun, 39–72.
away from the dock and its silent crowd—the muted notes of martial music mingled with the sound of Washington's tolling church bells. Accompanied by the Committee-of-Twenty-Five and a committee of six Senators appointed for the same purpose, "the mortal remains" of South Carolina's greatest son began its water-borne passage past Alexandria and Mount Vernon to Acquia Creek. There the "remains were landed on the shores of Virginia," for the trip by rail to Fredericksburg, Richmond, Petersburg, and Wilmington.

Flags flew at half mast, business was suspended, guns boomed and church bells tolled while the body of the late Senator was "received with honors" at each place. In a solemn procession the governor of Virginia escorted Calhoun's body through Richmond streets before it lay in state in Jefferson's capitol. Another procession led the bier through Petersburg for a memorial service in St. Paul's church. Forty miles from Wilmington the Calhoun party was met by a delegation which conducted it into that city for further honors. After the citizens of Wilmington had registered "their respect to the memory of the dead," the body was put on board the steamer Nina for the final leg of its return to Charleston.

The progress to the South ended at twelve o'clock noon on April 25 when the Nina docked at the foot of Boundary Street. This thoroughfare, soon to be renamed in Calhoun's honor, was crowded with mourners, many of whom had come by way of the free passage given on the Washington and Wilmington Railroad. Silent but for her tolling bells, the city wore heavy mourning as twelve ex-governors and the lieutenant governor met Calhoun's body and escorted it to the Citadel Square.
There the governor waited with the General Assembly and the officials, clergy, students, and fraternal organization of the city. Behind the governor stood the heavily-draped battlements of the Citadel, a fortress erected when Calhoun was a young Secretary of War. After Governor Seabrook had received the body from James M. Mason, Chairman of the Senate Committee of Escort, and the solemn ceremony of another memorial service, the "precious remains" were committed to the care of the Mayor. The procession then reformed and moved south into King Street. It wound its way past draped and closed houses, stores and churches, down King Street into Hassel, on to Meeting and finally by way of South and East Battery to Broad Street. The cortege stopped at the City Hall where the Guard of Honor was posted and the body lay in state for the rest of the day.

At ten o'clock on April 26, a final procession was formed. Carried by the Guard of Honor, the dead leader moved again through Charleston's streets, this time to St. Phillip's church. "After an anthem sung by a full choir," the Right Reverend Christopher Gadsden, Bishop of South Carolina, read the Order for the Burial of the Dead. "[A]n eloquent funeral discourse" followed this rite, and the body was removed to the west churchyard. There the last prayers were said and—under the watchful eyes of the Guard of Honor—"Mr. Calhoun" was buried. In thus surrendering his charge, the Mayor noticed that "Nearby pendent from the tall spar that supported it, drooped the flag of the Union, its folds mournfully sweeping the verge of the tomb."

The Mercury had suspended publication for the day. But on the following day, April 27, it recorded the event in words that
revealed the emotions of its staff, and their special sense of loss:

Our city has passed through a scene that will never be forgotten by those who witnessed it... it absorbed the whole thought, and soul and presence of the city. All shared in it and Charleston was one house of mourning.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{25}Thomas, Carolina Tribute to Calhoun, 1-16; 24-91; Mercury Apr. 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 16, 22, 24, 25, 27, 1850.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Manuscripts


Calhoun (John C.) Letters, 1841-1849. South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.


Hamilton (James J., Jr.) Papers, 1840-1844. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.


Hammond (James H.) Collection, 1840. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

Preston (William C.) Papers, 1837-1838. South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Rhett (Robert Barnwell) Collection, 1841-1866. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

Rhett (Robert Barnwell) Papers, 1838. South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Published Collections and Monographs


398


DeBow, James B.D. DeBow's Review, I, IV. Charleston: 1846.


"Hamilton." Review of A Late Pamphlet Under the Signature of "Brutus." Charleston: 1828.


Speech of Mr. Hamilton of S. Carolina, on Mr. Randolph's Motion Indefinitely to Postpone the Tariff Bill: Delivered in The House of Representatives of the United States 19th April, 1828. Washington: 1828.


Pinckney, H. L. An Oration Delivered At the Cathedral of St. Finbar Before the St. Patrick Benevolent Society And The Irish Volunteers on the 17th March, 1832. Charleston: 1832.

Oration Delivered in the Chapel of South Carolina College Before the Clariosophic Society Incorporate and the Inhabitants of Columbia, at the Anniversary Meeting of the Society, December 25, 1825. Charleston: 1825.


Pinckney, Maria Henrietta. The Quintessence of Long Speeches Arranged as a Political Cathecism By A Lady For Her God-Daughter. Charleston: 1830.


Official Records

Annals of Congress, 18 Cong., 1 sess.

Register of Debates, 19 Cong., 1 sess., 23 Cong., 2 sess., 24 Cong., 1 sess.


Newspapers

Charleston Courier, 1803-1846.

City Gazette and Daily Advertiser, 1822-1833.

Charleston Mercury, 1822-1852.

Southern Patriot and Commercial Advertiser, 1819-1846.

State Rights and Free Trade Evening Post, 1831-1832.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Unpublished Dissertations


Books


Green, Edwin L. A History of the University of South Carolina, Columbia: 1916.


Stuart, B.R. *Magnolia Cemetery, an Interpretation of Some of Its Monuments and Inscriptions, With a Reminiscence of Captain James Stuart, a Notice of John Allen Stuart and a Tribute to the People of Beaufort.* Charleston: 1896.


**Articles**


VITA

The author was born in Minden, Louisiana on January 13, 1931. He attended the public schools of Dubberly, Louisiana and was graduated from the Dubberly High School in May, 1948. Entering Louisiana College during the following month, he was graduated with the Bachelor of Arts on June 1, 1951. One week later he began graduate study in the Department of History at the Louisiana State University. After a year in graduate school, he entered the Navy where he served as a line officer on a destroyer. Upon his separation from the service in October 1955, he taught in the Midway Junior High School, Shreveport, Louisiana. He re-entered the graduate school at the Louisiana State University in June, 1956, and received the degree of Master of Arts in August, 1958. In September he became an Assistant Professor of History at The Citadel: The Military College of South Carolina, Charleston. Subsequently promoted to Associate Professor, the author is a Commander in the Naval Reserve and a candidate for the Ph.D. degree in August, 1971.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: John Stanford Coussons

Major Field: History

Title of Thesis: Thirty Years With Calhoun, Rhett, and the Charleston Mercury: A Chapter in South Carolina Politics

Approved:

[Signature]
Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

June 25, 1971