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JOHN C. CALHOUN AS A STATESMAN

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JOHN C. CALHOUN AS A STATESMAN

By

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is not to write a biography of John C. Calhoun, nor to enter into an extensive discussion of his position as a nationalist or localist. It is, rather, a study of the place as a statesman of the great Southern leader through an interesting and important period of the history of our country, and of the influence of his views and activities on the political and economic affairs of the nation at that time.

The material was obtained from the library of A. and M. College, Stillwater, Oklahoma, and from the library of the University of Illinois.



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## CHAPTER I

### Early Life

To understand the character, the mental attitudes, and the actuating motives of any man, it is well to know something of his background, his heredity and environment.

The Calhouns were among the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who settled in Pennsylvania about 1733. James Calhoun, with his wife Catherine, four sons and one daughter, migrated southward. With friends and relatives they founded the Calhoun settlement in the uplands of South Carolina. Catherine was killed and two small granddaughters were captured in an Indian massacre. One of the children was recaptured but the other was never heard of again.<sup>1</sup>

The sons continued to live in the settlement, becoming fairly prosperous citizens and steadfast patriots. Patrick especially became quite prominent in his community, serving several terms in the South Carolina legislature.<sup>2</sup> He was a representative of the rugged, individualistic, pioneer farming class rather than the lowland aristocratic class. As time went on the family acquired a few slaves. Like others of their class, they did not scorn manual labor, but often worked in the fields along with their slaves, as would a northern farmer with his "hired hands".

Patrick Calhoun married in early life, but his wife did not live long and left no children. Later he married Martha Caldwell, a daughter of another Scotch-Irish Presbyterian family. Martha was much younger

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<sup>1</sup> Allen Johnson, editor. Dictionary of American Biography, III, 411.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

than her husband and survived him many years. To this union were born four sons and one daughter. The third son, born March 18, 1782, was named John Caldwell for his uncle who had been murdered by Tories.<sup>3</sup> The subject of this sketch was born within a year after the surrender of the British troops at Yorktown, and was a child of six or seven years at the time of the adoption of the Federal Constitution. As a child of unusual mental ability and the son of a legislator, he probably absorbed much on both sides of the question from the discussions of his elders.<sup>4</sup>

Later in life John C. Calhoun was heard to say that:

Among his earliest recollections was one of a conversation when he was nine years of age, in which his father maintained that government to be the best which allowed the largest amount of individual liberty compatible with social order and tranquility.<sup>5</sup>

He naturally led the normal life of the youth of his time and locality in a moderately prosperous family, possessed of a few slaves. His educational advantages were lacking. As he was much alone, he was given to wandering along the streams and through the woods and fields, and thus acquired the habits of meditation and introspection. His later life shows both the defects and advantages of the lack of systematic education in his youth. At the age of fourteen, he was sent to the school conducted by his brother-in-law, the learned Doctor Moses Waddell. He learned rapidly and devoted himself assiduously to his studies. The school was interrupted by the death of Mrs. Waddell. Then Dr. Waddell advised John's

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> J. Franklin Jameson, editor. "Correspondence of John C. Calhoun". House Document 115, in American Historical Association Annual Report, 1899, II, 65-89.

<sup>5</sup> Life of John C. Calhoun, Presenting a Condensed History of Political Events From 1811 to 1843, 5. This is printed anonymously, but by some is considered to be an autobiography.



mother that the boy was devoting himself to his studies to the detriment of his health, and suggested that he return home for a time. About this time his father died. As the older brothers were engaged in employment elsewhere, it was necessary for John to remain on the plantation with his mother.<sup>6</sup>

Being of a meditative turn of mind, the youth learned to think before his memory had become burdened with the thoughts of other people. This defective education in his boyhood made itself felt through his whole life. In spite of the diligence with which he applied himself for some years later, to his books, the stock of positive knowledge which he had to fall back upon was never large, and the peculiar kind of narrowness which is inseparable from one-sidedness was among the most prominent traits in his mental and moral structure. But what he lacked in breadth of view, he fully made up by penetrating intensity, bold independence of thinking, and a keen instinct for the true nature of the things which fell within the limited circle in which his mind moved.<sup>7</sup>

By his devout Presbyterian parents he had been taught to regard the Bible as sacred, to reverence God, to obey his parents, and to do justice to all. It was said of him, that though not deeply religious, he remained profoundly devout all his life, and expressed a firm belief in a Divine Providence.<sup>8</sup> In a letter to Mrs. Floride Calhoun, dated April 13, 1806, he mentions with satisfaction the report of a religious revival in Charleston which he terms a wicked city.<sup>9</sup>

Edward Hooker, a contemporary of Calhoun's in Yale, wrote in his diary September 6, 1806:

I hear a very good account of the Calhoun family generally, as being firm friends to religion and good order. John C. Calhoun is

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<sup>6</sup> Jameson, op. cit., 76.

<sup>7</sup> Herman E. von Holst, John C. Calhoun. Series 8, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Jameson, loc. cit.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 104.

a nephew of this Colonel Calhoun, and a son to old Patrick Calhoun, another Presbyterian elder. The Reverend Mr. Waddell is his brother-in-law.....Indeed he is surrounded by religious relations, who had always calculated him for a minister, and sent him to Yale College with that in view.<sup>10</sup>

At the age of eighteen John C. Calhoun again entered the school of Mr. Waddell to begin his preparation for further education. Though it was a simple backwoods college, many of the students afterwards became famous men. So diligently did young Calhoun apply himself to his studies that in two years he was able to enter the junior class at Yale, absorbing the learning but not the spirit of the North. He was graduated with high honors in 1804, and then entered a law school at Litchfield, Connecticut.<sup>11</sup>

After completing his law studies in New England, he returned to Abbeville, South Carolina, and entered upon the practice of law. Though successful, he did not particularly enjoy his law practice, and settled upon a farm near his old home. In 1807 he was elected to the state legislature.<sup>12</sup> While a valuable experience, it was a field which did not offer sufficient scope for one of his talents.

Even at that early date, British aggressions upon our commerce and the impressment of American seamen were arousing a great deal of indignation. Young Calhoun was publicly active in his opposition to the attitude of Great Britain toward the United States. His popularity and the recognition of his outstanding ability led to his election to Congress in 1810.

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<sup>10</sup> "Diary of Edward Hooker", American Historical Association Annual Report, 1896, I, 893.

<sup>11</sup> Jameson, op. cit., 81.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 85.

In the meantime he had formed a strong friendship for Mrs. Floride Calhoun, the widow of his cousin, John Ewing Calhoun, who had served in the United States Senate from South Carolina. Mrs. Floride Bonneau Calhoun was a member of a wealthy, aristocratic lowland family of French Huguenot ancestry. She usually spent her summers in Newport. John C. Calhoun was often her guest both in her Newport home and in her home in South Carolina. As her daughter Floride, ten years her junior, grew to womanhood, she became the object of her kinsmen's affections. They were married in January, 1811 soon after his election to Congress. Her fortune united to his own modest patrimony and his savings, enabled him to give up the active practice of law, to establish a plantation at Bath, and enter upon an active political life. His married life was a happy one. He reared a large family and no breath of scandal ever touched his name.<sup>13</sup>

We know less of the personal life of John C. Calhoun than the most of men much in public life. It is said that while he cared little for social life, he possessed a genial, attractive personality, was hospitable in his home, a brilliant conversationalist, and devoted to his plantation home life. Throughout his life he seems to have been known as a man of unquestioned integrity and unspotted character.

With this sketch of the ancestry, environment and early life of John C. Calhoun, we believe we will be better able to understand the motives which prompted his activities through forty years of public life.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>14</sup> Von Holst, op. cit., 10.



## CHAPTER II

## House of Representatives

The Annals of Congress show that John C. Calhoun took the oath of office and assumed his seat as a member of Congress on November 6, 1811.<sup>1</sup>

It might be well at this time to review briefly the social, economic, and political conditions of the time. The nation was still young and not well integrated. The bitter controversy over the adoption of the Federal Constitution had not been entirely forgotten. It was a period of transition in political trends. Industrial and economic conditions were undergoing phases of development and change. The new lands west of the Appalachian Highland were being settled rapidly by the small farmer class rather than the large plantation owner class that a little later filled up the Southwest and Gulf states. New England was building up her shipping interests and beginning to develop her industrial interests and to advance rapidly. As manufacturing was still an infant industry, it was necessary to import most of the better class of manufactured articles.

In the South, King Cotton was rapidly gaining the supremacy over the tobacco industry, and cotton growing South Carolina was gradually wrestling the leadership in economic and political power over Virginia.

The wars in Europe were interfering with our commerce. The aggressions of England through the Orders in Council and her policy of the impressment of seamen were particularly obnoxious. Popular indignation was increasing and the war spirit was mounting.

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<sup>1</sup> Annals of Congress, 12 Cong., 1 sess., pt. 1, 331.



The ranks of the old Revolutionary leaders who had become conservatives were thinning. Of those remaining, many were gradually retiring from public activity. Young men who had grown up since the Revolution were assuming leadership.

Among the new members of Congress were three young men from South Carolina. William Lowndes, Landon Cheves, and John C. Calhoun were all from the same section of their state, the up-country, and all were Republicans. Their outstanding qualities of leadership were at once recognized. Henry Clay of Kentucky, a representative of the new West, was speaker of the House.<sup>2</sup> It has been said he was somewhat embarrassed by the ability of his friends from South Carolina. Clay named Calhoun as second on the important Committee of Foreign Relations.<sup>3</sup>

The immediate paramount issue of the time was that of the war with England. The West and South were allies; both sections supported the war policy. The young members of Congress who so strongly advocated the War of 1812 came to be known as "War Hawks".<sup>4</sup> As one whose grandmother had been killed by the Indians, whose uncle had been killed by the Tories, who was impatient with a nation which continued to stir up trouble on the border, and to retain on her pension rolls Indian chiefs whose business it was to prevent the growth of the young nation, Calhoun was well suited to become a leader in such a cause.

It has been said that "it was not love of New England shipping that caused Calhoun or the South to demand a war for sailor's rights, but the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>4</sup> Dictionary of American Biography, III, 419.

desire to be rid of the obstacles which New England was constantly putting in the way of building up the west".<sup>5</sup>

When he entered Congress, Calhoun is described as being twenty-nine years of age, tall, gaunt, with deep set, penetrating eyes. He was an elegant speaker, with gestures easy and graceful, manners forcible, language elegant. He confined himself closely to the subject which he always understood, and enlightened everyone within his hearing. He always observed the parliamentary proprieties, and there was never anything personally offensive in what he said of his manner of saying it.<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt of the nationalistic views of Calhoun at this time. On December 5, he made a short speech on the Senate's amendments to the bill for apportionment of representatives in Congress. He said: "I am not here to represent my state alone. I renounce the idea, and I will show by my vote that I contend for the interests of the whole people of this community."<sup>7</sup>

As Calhoun was chosen to preside over the deliberation of the Committee on Foreign Relations, he held from the first, next to the speaker, the most important place in the House of Representatives.<sup>8</sup> On November 29, 1811, the committee submitted its report, supposed to be largely the work of Calhoun. It reported that it had arrived at the opinion "that it is the sacred duty of Congress to call forth the patriotism and the resources of the country".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> William E. Dodd, "John C. Calhoun", Statesmen of the Old South, 99.

<sup>6</sup> Dictionary of American Biography, III, 413.

<sup>7</sup> Annals of Congress, op. cit., 404.

<sup>8</sup> Life of John C. Calhoun, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Annals of Congress, op. cit., 376.

Calhoun delivered his first set speech in Congress on December 12, defending the resolutions and refuting the arguments of John Randolph, who was himself a member of the Committee on Foreign Relations. He began his speech with the open avowal "that the committee recommended the measures now before the House as a preparation for war".<sup>10</sup>

"He was intensely in earnest. That voice so sweet and mellow, ringing out like the music of a deep-toned bell, found its way into the hearts of those who listened".<sup>11</sup>

He scorned the insinuation that, though there was adequate cause for war, the people would not be willing to defray the costs -- an intimation that the people did not consider the rights violated worth defending. He protested that such low and calculating avarice was fit only for the counting house, and should not enter the halls of legislation. After this speech, the war party pushed vigorously toward its goal, the declaration of war.

It is not necessary to dwell upon the incidents of the war save to say that Calhoun continued his role of a devoted adherent of the Union. He energetically promoted armaments, the raising of finances, and everything which might bring about victory.

It was about this time that Calhoun's ability as a leader of men and a political philosopher became widely recognized. The leadership and the initiative of the times was in the House of Representatives, rather than in the President and Cabinet. Calhoun, after Clay, was the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 476.

<sup>11</sup> Henry A. White, "John C. Calhoun", Library of Southern Literature, II, 674.



first man in the House group. After peace he continued to manifest a broad spirit of patriotism with reference to the interests of the entire country. The progress of the war led to financial difficulties, and the government was compelled to establish a national bank. Calhoun supported the measure.<sup>12</sup>

The South and the West had supported the war policy. This alliance now hoped to solve some of the problems before the nation. The question of easy communication and transportation between the seacoast and the western interior was one of the great needs of the time. Calhoun was a leading advocate of internal improvements, of building great roads to the West, of binding the West to the Seaboard Section by means of canals and roads which would make markets for the West through Baltimore, Richmond, and Charleston.

The word "nation" was often upon his lips. He seemed at this time to speak for the nation rather than for a particular state or section of the country.

In a speech on January 31, 1816 on a motion to repeal the direct tax, he set forth his views as to the policy he thought the United States ought to pursue. In this speech he urged preparation for defense against aggressions which might occur in the future. To provide proper protection for the growing nation, he advocated an adequate standing army, and an increase in naval equipment and power as one of the best means of protection. He also advocated a moderate protective tariff to encourage domestic manufactures.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cralle, Works of John C. Calhoun, II, 154.

<sup>13</sup> Annals of Congress, 14 Cong., 1 sess., 1815-16, 837.



The same speech contains his declaration in favor of internal improvements:

Let us make great permanent roads; not like the Romans, with views of subjecting and ruling provinces, but for the more honorable purposes of defense, and of connecting more closely the interests of various sections of this great country.<sup>14</sup>

While his immediate object was preparation to insure the safety of the country, he also was gratified that the building of good roads would tend toward nationalizing the Union. He urged the passage of the measure for that reason. In the same speech, he proceeded to the conclusion that the national government should provide encouragement and protection for the industrial interests of the country. Continuing, he further said:

In regard to the question how far manufactures ought to be fostered, it is the duty of this country, as a means of defense, to encourage the domestic industry of the country; more especially that part of it which provides the necessary materials for clothing and defense.....

The question relating to manufactures must not depend on the abstract principle that industry, left to pursue its own course, will find in its own interests all of the encouragement that is necessary. I lay the claims of the manufactures entirely out of view, but on general principles, without regard to their interests, a certain encouragement should be extended, at least, to our woolen and cotton manufactures.<sup>15</sup>

In commenting on this speech von Holst says:

In the whole speech, there is no mention whatever of the Constitution. The thought does not enter his head that constitutional objections could possibly be raised. The reason is simply that the statesman has not yet been transformed into the attorney of a special cause..... Only when, instead of the national interests, the interests of the slave-holders, had become the glass

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

through which Calhoun viewed everything, he began to search the Constitution for the power to do what he had once recommended as prudent and even necessary, and then he discovered things in it which he had never dreamed of before; nay, its general spirit underwent a radical change.<sup>16</sup>

As chairman of the Committee on National Currency, on January 8, 1816, Calhoun reported a bill to incorporate the subscribers to the Bank of the United States.<sup>17</sup> On February 26, he delivered a speech in support of the bill in which he referred to the constitutional question merely to state that it "had been already so freely and frequently discussed, that all had made up their minds on it".<sup>18</sup> In the same speech he said:

As to the question whether a national bank would be favorable to the administration of the finances of the government, it was one on which there was so little doubt that gentlemen would excuse him if he did not enter into it.

It might be noted that he does not express these views as bearing on a special case, or under the present circumstances, but makes it as a general statement without restrictions or qualifications.

On April 4, 1816, Calhoun made a long speech on the New Tariff Bill.<sup>19</sup> In this speech he embodied the arguments in favor of which the economical platform of the Whig Party always stood. He opened his speech with the statement that:

It was a subject of vital importance, touching as it does, the permanent prosperity of our country.....He was no manufacturer; he was not from that portion of our country supposed to be peculiarly interested. Coming as he did from the South,

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<sup>16</sup> John C. Calhoun, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Annals of Congress, op. cit., 491.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 1059.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 1330-31.

having in common with his immediate constituents, no interest but in the cultivation of the soil, in selling its products high, and buying cheap the wants and conveniences of life. No motive could be attributed to him but such as were disinterested.

The subject before them was well connected with the security of the country.....The security of a country mainly depends upon its spirit, and its means; the latter principally its money resources.

He stated that our wealth now depended largely upon agriculture and commerce.

Neither agriculture, manufactures, nor commerce taken separately is the cause of wealth; it flows from the three combined... Without commerce, industry would have no stimulus; without manufactures, it would be without means of production; and without agriculture, neither of the others can subsist.

He wished to gain the industrial independence of the United States from Europe, and he felt that this could be attained by protective duties to assist our manufactures.

It would produce an interest strictly American.....bind together more closely our widely spread republic, greatly increase our mutual dependence and intercourse, and excite an increased attention to internal improvements, a subject ever so intimately connected with the ultimate attainment of national strength and the perfection of our political institutions.

It would make the parts adhere more closely, form a new and most powerful cement and outweigh any political objections that might be urged against the system.

He argued that we had abundant resources, that commerce has poured an immense amount of capital into our country....."What channel more natural for it to take than manufactures?" At the end he spoke of guarding against a new and terrible danger --- disunion.

On February 4, 1817, he made a speech on a bill to set aside the bank dividends and bonus as a permanent fund for the construction of roads and canals. In this speech, for the first time, he entered upon

an extended argument on the constitutional question with regard to internal improvements. He plainly took the stand that under the Constitution, such an act was within the power of Congress.<sup>20</sup>

How favorable is the present moment, and how confessedly important a good system of roads and canals is to our country..... at peace with all the world; abounding in pecuniary means..... party and sectional feelings merged in a liberal and enlightened regard to the general concern of the country.....What can add more to the wealth, the strength, and the political prosperity of our country? The manner in which facility and cheapness of intercourse contributes to the wealth of a nation has been so often and ably discussed by writers on political economy, that I presume the House to be perfectly acquainted with the subject.... every branch of national industry — agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial — is greatly stimulated by it, and rendered more productive..... it tends to diffuse universal opulence....Let us, then, bind the republic together with a perfect system of roads and canals. Let us conquer space.....By giving a reasonable extent to the money power, it exempts us from the necessity of giving a strained and forced construction to the enumerated powers.<sup>21</sup>

Thus we see that throughout his period of service in the House of Representatives, his opinions were strongly nationalistic. He advocated the War of 1812. Afterward, he supported measures, the attainment of which necessitated a broad interpretation of the Constitution — The Tariff of 1816, the National Bank, and Internal Improvements.

We have here the key to Calhoun's career — he sees clearly what is needed; he is an ardent patriot and his imagination portrays to him a great and expanding country.<sup>22</sup>

It was in a spirit of deep interest in the nation's welfare that he accepted the appointment as Secretary of War in President Monroe's Cabinet in 1817.

<sup>20</sup> Annals of Congress, 14 Cong., 2 sess., 1816-17, 855.

<sup>21</sup> Cralle, op. cit., 186.

<sup>22</sup> Dodd, op. cit., 108.



He believed that he could render more service to the country in reforming the great disbursing department of government, admitted to be in a state of such disorder, than he could possibly do by remaining in Congress, where most of the great questions growing out of a return to a state of peace had been discussed and settled.<sup>23</sup>

## CHAPTER III

## Secretary Of War

While the office of Secretary of War was a field that did not offer exercise for the remarkable powers of mind or the ability as an orator which Calhoun had shown as a legislator, it made him a member of the Cabinet, gave him an opportunity to express himself on national issues and to exercise an influence on the President.

When he assumed the office, there was some question as to his ability as an administrator, but this doubt was soon dispelled. He proved to be an able executive. He found the affairs of the department badly disorganized. To introduce order and system, he organized the department on the bureau principle and succeeded in having capable officials appointed to carry on the work of the bureaus. To obtain uniformity and efficiency, he prepared a code of rules for the department and each of its bureaus. He made many able reports on the subjects of Indian affairs, on the reduction of the army, and on internal improvements. The military academy at West Point was reorganized, and the bureaus of Surgeon General and Quarter Master General were established.<sup>1</sup>

His letters at this period indicate that he not only desired to unite more closely all the various sections already well settled, but he urged extending the borders, establishing new military posts, making preparations for defending our borders, cultivating the goodwill

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<sup>1</sup> Life of John G. Calhoun, 25, 26, 27.

of the Indians and increasing our trade with them.<sup>2</sup>

On January 4, 1819, in response to a request from the House of Representatives, he made a report on a plan for constructing roads and canals for military operations in which he set forth the principle:

A judicious system of roads and canals, constructed for the convenience of commerce and the transportation of the mail only, without any reference to military operations, is itself among the most efficient means for the complete defense of the United States.....by consolidating our Union and increasing our wealth and fiscal capacity, would add greatly to our resources in war.<sup>3</sup>

Again in a report of December 3, 1824, on the condition of the military establishment, he gave emphasis to the same subject.<sup>4</sup>

While Calhoun was performing his duties as Secretary of War, other conditions were developing the nation over which influenced his attitude and opinions of a later date. Though slavery had existed since the early days of the colonies, for a time during and after the American Revolution, some influences were averse to slave labor. This was partly due to the theories of the Revolution which were not favorable to slavery. Many of the great Revolutionary leaders condemned the institution and proposed schemes for the emancipation of slaves, some going so far as voluntarily to free their own slaves. Also, slave labor had not been found favorable either to the climate or the industries of the North.

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<sup>2</sup> Jameson, op. cit., 134, 147, 159. This refers to letters of John C. Calhoun to Thomas A. Smith, March 16, 1818, Jacob Brown, October 18, 1818, and Henry Atkinson, March 27, 1819.

<sup>3</sup> American State Papers, Miscellaneous, II, 53; Cralle, op. cit., v, 41.

<sup>4</sup> American State Papers, Military Affairs, II, 698.

As time went on, other influences began working which fixed the system of slave labor on the South. Among these were the effects of the Industrial Revolution, the inventions which increased the demand for cotton, bringing about the development of the large cotton plantations, and the rapid settlement of the new Southwest. Negro labor was proving particularly suited to the cultivation of tobacco, indigo, rice and cotton. Thus we see slave labor abandoned in the Northeast and Northwest, and increasing in the South and Southwest.

When territories asked for admission to the Union as new states, the question arose as to whether they should be admitted as free or slave states. As the sentiment in the North developed against slavery, the people of the South realized that to retain the institution, which they felt necessary to their civilization, they must maintain a balance of power in Congress.

By the Ordinance of 1787 slavery was prohibited in the Northwest Territory. Hence, states carved from that territory came into the Union as free states. Southern states were admitted as slave states with little question. It was the border states such as Missouri which aroused controversy. After a bitter struggle, Missouri was admitted in 1820 as a slave state, with the provision that slavery should henceforth be prohibited in states formed from the Louisiana Purchase north of 36° 30', the southern boundary of Missouri.<sup>5</sup>

But from that moment may be dated the beginning of Southern sectionalism. It developed at first slowly, but by 1825, it threw off disguise in South Carolina, and by 1830 had acquired considerable solidarity, although not enough to bring the other slaveholding states to the side of South Carolina.

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<sup>5</sup> Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., II, 1820, 2555.



In reality, therefore, the Missouri Compromise of 1820 marked the ending of one epoch in our history and the beginning of another.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile the slavery question was not the only subject of importance before the public mind. The great questions of the tariff and internal improvements were beginning to assume importance in the minds and lives of the people of the different sections, as the population increased and expanded, diversity of industries developed, and differences in ways and manners of life became established when the various sections developed their natural resources.

The Northeastern states previously had been more deeply interested in commerce and shipping than manufactures, but by this time they were beginning to develop their industrial interests. Naturally, the people of that section wanted a tariff to protect their manufactures from the competition of cheap manufactured articles from abroad. The South was essentially a producer and exporter of agricultural staples. Just as naturally, the people of that section wished to sell their raw materials, especially cotton, in the best markets, and purchase their manufactured goods as cheaply as possible.

The new West of more diversified productions, was desirous of obtaining internal improvements, such as good roads and canals, to further encourage migration to that section, and to provide better transportation and communication with the eastern states and the Atlantic seaboard.

In the discussion of these subjects Calhoun took the broad and patriotic ground. At that time we see no sectional inter-

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<sup>6</sup>

Edward Channing, A History of the United States, V, 329.

ests predominating in his mind. He favored internal improvements, great permanent roads, and even the protection of manufactures, and a National Bank.<sup>7</sup>

One of the important subjects before Congress at the session of 1823-24 was the revision of the tariff with a view to protecting home industries and the establishment of the "American System". About this time war laid the foundation for the heated debates which afterward ripened into serious difficulty between the federal government and some of the Southern states. The middle and western states were the backbone of the protective tariff. Mr. Clay was the champion of the "American System" and a supporter of the proposed revision.<sup>8</sup>

The national election of 1824 was approaching. The names of six candidates were presented to the people for the office of President. They were Adams, Clay, Crawford, General Jackson, Lowndes, and Calhoun. All had previously gained prominence in national affairs.

In the early days of their association in the Cabinet, Adams and Calhoun were warm friends. In the fall of 1821, Adams wrote in his diary:

Mr. Calhoun is a man of fair and candid mind, of honorable principles, of clear and quick understanding, of cool self-possession, of enlarged philosophical views, and of ardent patriotism. He is above all sectional and factious prejudiced more than any other statesman of this Union with whom I have ever acted.<sup>9</sup>

Later differences of opinion and bitterness of feeling arose between them. For some time the relations between Calhoun and Crawford had not been harmonious. But the warmest friendship continued between

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<sup>7</sup> John Lord, "John C. Calhoun", Beacon Lights of History, VII, 604.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas H. Benton, Thirty Years' View, I, 32.

<sup>9</sup> Dictionary of American Biography, III, 413, quoting Adam's Memoirs, V, 361.

Calhoun and Lowndes. Their names were brought forward as candidates about the same time, Mr. Lowndes' name being presented by South Carolina and Mr. Calhoun's by Pennsylvania, each unknown to the other. Mr. Calhoun at once called upon Mr. Lowndes and stated that his nomination had been made without his knowledge or solicitation, and he hoped the position in which they had been placed by their friends would not affect their friendly relations. Mr. Lowndes was heartily in accord with that sentiment.

.....and these two distinguished citizens of the same state, and nearly the same age, set the noble and rare example of being placed by friends as rivals for the highest office in the gift of a great people, without permitting their mutual esteem and friendship to be impaired.<sup>10</sup>

To quote von Holst, "It was an election which turned much less upon principles or great questions of policy than upon personal predilections."<sup>11</sup>

Mr. Lowndes died before the date of the election. With Mr. Calhoun's consent, his friends in Pennsylvania withdrew his name rather than subject the state to a contest between them and the friends of Jackson. The two continued to maintain friendly relations throughout the campaign. On his withdrawal Calhoun was taken up by the friends of both Adams and Jackson for the vice-presidency. He was elected by a large majority. The election for president was thrown to the House of Representatives which chose Adams.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Life of John C. Calhoun, 28.

<sup>11</sup> John C. Calhoun, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Life of John C. Calhoun, 29; Congressional Debates, 18 Cong., 2 sess., I, 527.

## CHAPTER IV

## Vice-President

The office of Vice-President, while a position of dignity, is limited in the scope of its duties. By virtue of his office, The Vice-President becomes the presiding officer of the United States Senate. Calhoun discharged his duties carefully and conscientiously, endeavoring to keep within the positive specifications of the Constitution. He was careful in preserving the dignity of the Senate, and in raising its influence and weight in the action of the government. He changed the form of address from "Gentlemen" to the more simple and dignified address of "Senators".<sup>1</sup>

The very combination vote which elected him put him in an embarrassing position with regard to his future presidential aspirations, for he still held that ambition. The Adams and the Jackson followers had not become reconciled but were bitterly arrayed against each other, making it difficult for Calhoun to remain neutral, and he gradually became alienated from the two opposing parties which had elected him.<sup>2</sup>

Calhoun aroused opposition in the Senate by taking the stand that, as presiding officer, he had no right to call a Senator to order "for words spoken in debate" in a heated discussion, claiming that he had no power but to carry into effect the rules adopted by the body.<sup>3</sup>

The ill feeling between Adams and Calhoun was further intensified

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<sup>1</sup> Life of John C. Calhoun, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Lord, op. cit., 418.

<sup>3</sup> Life of John C. Calhoun, 31.



by Calhoun's opposition to the measures of policy as he expressed it.

".....bold Federal and consolidation doctrines avowed by Mr. Adams in his inaugural address, and by the wild measures of policy which he recommended.....and the project of sending commissioners to the Congress to be convened at Panama of all the states that had grown up on the overthrow of the Spanish Dominions on this continent. This was a favorite measure of the administration. Mr. Calhoun was understood to be decidedly opposed to it, both on the ground of unconstitutionality and inexpediency!"<sup>4</sup>

The question of the tariff was becoming increasingly important, the northern states demanding a protective tariff to protect home industries and increase the development of factories, thus keeping their wealth at home, providing a market for the country's raw materials, furnishing employment, and offering domestic manufactured articles to the public. The agricultural South bitterly opposed the protective tariff, feeling that the burden fell chiefly upon that section, and that the increased profits would enrich only the northern manufacturers.

In 1824 the tariff question was deeply agitating the whole country. The protectionists had carried the day by only a small majority, and the opposition in the plantation states had assumed a threatening aspect. They were beginning to dispute, not only the justice and expediency, but the constitutionality of a protective tariff, and presented a memorial to that effect to Congress on February 9, 1824.<sup>5</sup>

The tariff of 1824 bore heavily on the people of the South. They felt that financial ruin stared them in the face. It seemed to them very unjust that the interests of the planters should be sacrificed to the monopolists of the North. The tariff bill of 1827, known as the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Annals of Congress, 18 Cong., 1 sess., 1824, II, 3075.

"Woolens Bill", which was intended to provide greater protection for the woolen manufacturers, passed the House but was defeated in the Senate by Calhoun's casting vote.<sup>6</sup> In 1828 a still higher tariff, called, because of its inequalities, the "Tariff of Abominations", was passed.<sup>7</sup> These acts were disadvantageous to the agricultural South, and advantageous to the North.

Even after becoming Vice-President, Calhoun had expressed sentiments which show he was still leaning towards nationalism. On April 26, 1825 at a dinner in the Pendleton District, he gave a toast in favor of internal improvements, and again on May 27, 1825 at Abbeville, he stated that he had given his efforts to measures for the protection of manufacturers and internal improvements. In the summer of 1825, at Augusta, Georgia, at a dinner given in his honor, he declared that:

No one would reprobate more pointedly than myself any concerted union between States for interested sectional objects. I would consider all such concert as against the spirit of the Constitution.<sup>8</sup>

But when Mr. Calhoun saw that the protectionist duties were an injury to the slave holding states, he began to reverse his former opinions. Up to the time the agitation of the tariff began, Calhoun had not been a party man, but had been regarded as a statesman rather than a politician. Now his opinions were beginning to shift to the more local and partisan interests of his section.

Calhoun had thought that as the public debt was diminished, the

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<sup>6</sup> Congressional Debates, 20 Cong., 1 sess., IV, pt. 1, 786.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., IV.

<sup>8</sup> Von Holst, op. cit., 67.

tariff would be reduced correspondingly, thus relieving the burdens of the agricultural states. The public debt was nearly extinguished. After its final discharge, nearly one-half of the annual revenue applied to the payment of its principal and interest would be liberated. This would have enabled the government to reduce the duties one half, and still leave a sufficient revenue to provide amply for all the public wants. Instead of that course, the duties were increased. Calhoun feared that this increase in revenue and decrease in expenditures would leave a large surplus in the treasury which might bring about a corrupting influence.<sup>9</sup>

Mr. Calhoun, although not an actor at the time, was not an inattentive observer of what passed. His position as President of the Senate afforded great advantages for observation and reflection, of which he did not fail to avail himself from the time he first took his seat. Questions relating to the protective policy were constantly occurring in one form or another, and especially attracted his attention and excited his reflection.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile the South Carolina legislature had resolved that the Constitution was a compact between independent sovereignties; that in case of any violation of that compact by Congress, it was the right, not only of the people, but the legislatures to remonstrate, and she requested her representatives to oppose every increase of the tariff to protect domestic manufactures, and all appropriations for internal improvements, because such measures would be beyond the constitutional powers of Congress.<sup>11</sup>

In the summer of 1828, Calhoun spent his vacation in South Carolina.

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<sup>9</sup> Life of John C. Calhoun, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>11</sup> American State Papers, Finance, V, 724.

Many friends from over the state came to consult him regarding conditions. He advised against precipitation, or anything that might endanger the election of General Jackson at that time nor afterward until it could be ascertained what measures his administration would take. During the summer Calhoun brought forth his first great manifesto, "The South Carolina Exposition", which was to become the basis of nullification. The "Exposition" took the position that the Federal Constitution is a compact between the sovereign states by which each delegated to the central government certain limited powers:

That the general government is one of specific powers, and it can rightfully exercise only expressly granted, and those that may be necessary and proper to carry them into effect, all others being reserved expressly to the States or the people.....the act of the last session, with the whole system of legislation imposing duties on imports, not for revenue, but the protection of one branch of industry at the expense of others, --- is unconstitutional, unequal and calculated to corrupt the public virtue and destroy the liberty of the country.<sup>12</sup>

He further sets forth the principle that the minority or weaker interests should be protected.

Quoting Mr. Hamilton in the 51st number of the Federalist, he stated as follows:

It is of the greatest importance in a republic, not only to guard society against the oppression of its rulers, but to guard one part of society against the injustice of the other part. Different interests necessarily exist in different classes of citizens. If a majority be united by a common interest, the rights of the minority will be insecure.....

The essence of liberty comprehends the idea of responsible power,--- that those who make and execute the laws should be controlled by those on whom they operate, --- that the governed should govern ---

The abuse of delegated power, and the tyranny of the stronger over the weaker interests, are the two dangers, and the only two

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<sup>12</sup> Cralle, op. cit., VI, 2.



to be guarded against; and if this be done effectually, liberty must be eternal ..... Every circumstance of life teaches us the liability of delegated power to abuse ..... No government based on the naked principle that the majority ought to govern, however true the maxim in its proper sense, and under proper restrictions, can preserve its liberty even for a single generation.

To a certain extent we have a community of interests, which can only be justly and fairly supervised by concentrating the will and authority of the several States in the General Government; while, at the same time, the States have distinct and separate interests, over which no supervision can be exercised by the general power without injustice and oppression.<sup>13</sup>

Calhoun's authorship of the "Exposition" was not known publicly until 1831.

The national election of 1828 brought Andrew Jackson to the White House, and Calhoun was reelected Vice-President, almost without opposition. Jackson was growing old and still suffering from previous wounds. It was thought that if he lived through his term he would not succeed himself. Calhoun had been regarded as his successor. However, conditions arose which brought about enmity between the two former friends. After becoming President, Jackson learned that, contrary to his former opinion, Calhoun as Secretary of War had censured Jackson's actions in Florida in the War of 1819.<sup>14</sup>

The breach was further widened by an event of social significance. Major Eaton, the Secretary of War, had recently married Peggy O'Neal, an attractive woman of doubtful reputation. The other ladies of the Cabinet, including Mrs. Calhoun, refused to grant Mrs. Eaton social recognition. Jackson, doubtless still sensitive to the indignities heaped on his own wife (then dead), considered it his duty to champion

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 30-35.

<sup>14</sup> Claude G. Bowers, Party Battles of the Jackson Period, 104.

the cause of Mrs. Eaton. He insisted that she be granted social recognition. The ladies remained obdurate. As a result, the Cabinet was disrupted and new heads appointed to most of the departments. Mrs. Calhoun, as an aristocratic southern lady, and the wife of the Vice-President, had been looked upon as the leader in the unfortunate affair.<sup>15</sup>

Calhoun had not given up his presidential aspirations. As late as August, 1831, he wrote to Christopher Van Deventer:

If the country wants an individual to carry on the sectional conflict, I am not their man. I would not advance myself by sacrificing their true interests but if they look to the higher considerations of peace, harmony and liberty, it would be the proudest moment of my life to be instrumental in promoting these objects.<sup>16</sup>

It was partly the enmity which developed between him and Jackson which kept Calhoun from attaining the presidency. Furthermore, he could not then count on an alliance of the West and the South since the West had come to support and the South to oppose the "American System".

Though Calhoun was still at heart a nationalist, did not wish to see the Union disrupted, and hoped to see the tariff revised downward, he continued to become more sectional in his views. In July, 1831, he made an address to the people of South Carolina in which he reargued the theory of state sovereignty, setting forth the doctrine that any state could nullify the laws of Congress when it deemed them unconstitutional as he regarded the existing tariff to be.<sup>17</sup>

At a dinner held in Washington in 1830, in honor of Jefferson's

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>16</sup> Jameson, op. cit., 296.

<sup>17</sup> Cralle, op. cit., VI, 124.

birthday, Jackson, when called upon for a toast, responded with the toast, "Our Federal Union. It must be preserved". This was a surprise to the nullifiers as they had hoped to obtain an expression from Jackson and the secretaries that the administration was not opposed to nullification. Calhoun responded with the toast, "The Union, next to our liberties, the most dear. May we all remember that it can only be preserved by respecting the rights of the States and distributing equally the benefits and burdens of the Union."<sup>18</sup>

Up to this time, though arguing the doctrine of states' rights and nullification, Calhoun had been able to hold South Carolina in check, hoping that relief might be obtained through peaceable measures.

In his message to Congress in December, 1831, President Jackson, omitting for the first time allusion to the scheme of distribution, announced the near approach of the period when the public debt would finally be paid, and recommended that provision should be made for the reduction of the duties and the relief of the people from unnecessary taxation, after the extinguishment.<sup>19</sup> This led the southern people to hope that they might be relieved of the burdens of taxation of which they complained without resorting to extreme measures, but they were to be disappointed.

In June, 1832, another tariff bill passed Congress offering some reductions, but still based on the principle of protection.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John Bach McMaster, History of the People of the United States from the Revolution to the Civil War, VI, 31.

<sup>19</sup> Life of John C. Calhoun, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Congressional Debates, 22 Cong., 1 sess., 3913.



On August 28, 1832, Calhoun wrote to Governor Hamilton of South Carolina, a long letter on "State Interposition" in which he held that the relation of the general government to the states is that of agent, and as such, the general government has no right to enforce its construction against the construction of the state as one of the sovereign parties to the Constitution.<sup>21</sup>

Nearly all the old points were reviewed. He not only declared the right of a state to nullify an act of Congress, but explained that nullification was not secession. Nullification presupposes the relation of principal and agent, and is simply a declaration on the part of the principal that an act of the agent transcending his power is null and void.<sup>22</sup> Nullification does not destroy the association or union, but arrests the act of the agent, leaving the association as before. Its object is not to destroy, but to preserve.

Secession is a withdrawal from the Union. It destroys the association or partnership.<sup>23</sup>

In November, 1832, the South Carolina convention passed the Nullification Ordinance, declaring null and void the tariff acts of 1828 and 1832. The enforcement of the payment of custom duties was forbidden. The Ordinance was to go into effect on February 1, 1833.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cralle, op. cit., 144, 152.

<sup>22</sup> Cralle, op. cit., 168.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>24</sup> Congressional Debates, 22 Cong., 2 sess., IX, pt. 2, Appendix, 162.



Calhoun immediately resigned his position as Vice-President, but was soon elected to the United States Senate to fill a vacancy in South Carolina.

## CHAPTER V

United States Senator  
And  
Secretary of State

After the passage of the Nullification Act, President Jackson issued a proclamation calling on the people of South Carolina to revoke their act, and declaring his determination to sustain the laws of the United States, by force, if necessary.<sup>1</sup> He requested Congress to grant additional powers for that purpose, and at the same time he recommended a reduction in the tariff.<sup>2</sup>

The "Force Bill" was introduced into the Senate to enlarge the jurisdiction of the Federal Courts to give the President authority to use the military powers to cope with the situation.<sup>3</sup>

On February 15 and 16, 1833, Calhoun made an able speech in opposition to the "Force Bill", and in defense of his resolutions of January 22. In his resolutions he declared (1) that the Constitution is a compact between the states, and that the Union.....is a Union between the states ratifying the same; (2) that certain definite powers were delegated to the general government by the states, reserving at the same time, each state to itself, the residuary mass of powers, to be exercised by its own separate government; (3) that, therefore, there is no nation with any sovereignty, and that when the general government assumes powers not delegated by the compact, its acts are of no effect.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James D. Richardson, compiler, A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, II, 640.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 610.

<sup>3</sup> Congressional Debates, op. cit., 174.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 187.

In his speech he questioned the constitutionality of the bill as well as the right to levy protective tariffs. He admitted the right of the general government to levy duties for revenue, but denied the right to assess taxes for protection which favored one industry or one section of the country to the injury of others.

Referring to the "ForceBill" he said:

We are told the Union must be preserved, without regard to the means. And how is it proposed to preserve the Union? By Force? Does any man believe that this beautiful structure --- this harmonious aggregate of states, produced by the joint consent of all --- can be preserved by force?..... No, no. You cannot keep the states united in their constitutional and federal bonds by force.<sup>5</sup>

In this famous debate, Daniel Webster assumed the opposite side, sustaining the doctrine of Federal Supremacy.<sup>6</sup> Webster took the stand that (1) the Constitution of the United States is not a league, confederacy, or compact between the people of the several states, but a government proper founded on the adoption of the people: (2) that no state has authority to dissolve these relations, that nothing can dissolve them but revolution, that there can be no such thing as secession without revolution: (3) that there is a supreme law, consisting of the Constitution of the United States, and acts of Congress passed in pursuance of it: (4) that an attempt by a state to abrogate, annul, or nullify any act of Congress.....is a direct usurpation on the just powers of the general government, and.....a plain violation of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 539.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 774.

Constitution.<sup>7</sup>

While these resolutions were never voted upon, they are important in the history of our country as it was upon the principles of the resolutions that the South took its stand; and it was upon the principles of Webster's answers that the North later fought the Civil War.<sup>8</sup>

To ease the situation, Senator Clay came forward with a compromise tariff bill which was passed by Congress and finally accepted by both sides. The bill provided for a gradual reduction of duties to an ultimate revenue basis.<sup>9</sup> South Carolina was appeased and repealed the Nullification Act. Thus a serious clash between the state and federal powers was for the time averted.

Mr. Calhoun claimed that so far from hostility to the Union, one of the leading objects was its preservation.

The Union may be destroyed as well by consolidation as by dissolution -- by the centripetal as well as the centrifugal tendency of the bodies of which it is composed. It is the duty of the patriot to resist both, and to hold the government firmly to its allotted sphere. Against the former, state interposition is an all-sufficient remedy, and it remains to be seen whether experience will not prove that it is an indispensable one.<sup>10</sup>

Soon after the close of the controversy over the subject of nullification, another arose. This controversy was brought about by the withholding of the deposits of the public money from the Bank of the United States, and their transfer by the authority of the President, to

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> French E. Chadwick, Causes of the Civil War in Albert B. Hart, editor, The American Nation Series: A History, XIX, 43-46.

<sup>9</sup> Congressional Debates, op. cit., 809.

<sup>10</sup> Life of John C. Calhoun, 48.



certain state banks selected for that purpose. The subject gave rise to animated discussions between the two great parties, as to the right and expediency of the measure.

As Mr. Calhoun was not regarded as attached to either, much interest was felt in the course he might take. When he spoke on the subject, he denied, not only the right of the secretary to withhold the deposits so long as the funds were safe and the bank performed faithfully its duties as a fiscal agent, but the expediency of the act.

Though he had favored the establishment of the United States Bank, he now felt it no longer necessary, and expressed himself as being in favor of divorcing the government entirely from the banking system.<sup>11</sup>

Calhoun remained in the Senate from 1832 to 1843. During these years, the tariff and the slavery question continued to be the paramount issues — and they were closely connected. From this time on, Calhoun continued to devote himself and his powers largely to the interests of the South, and particularly his own state. His deepest concern was upholding the rights of the Southern people against the aggressions of the abolitionists, and denouncing as false the charges they made against the institution of slavery as maintained by the South.

"Calhoun was the impersonation of Southern feelings as well as the representative of Southern interests".<sup>12</sup>

The South upheld the system of slavery as a social and economic

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<sup>11</sup> Life of John C. Calhoun, 49-51.

<sup>12</sup> Lord, op. cit., 424.

necessity for their section of the country and their type of industry, and favored, if possible, its extension.

Sentiment against the extension of slavery, and even in favor of abolition, was increasing in the North, particularly among religious bodies. Anti-slavery societies were formed in the North to agitate against the system of slavery, and these organizations tried to circulate their documents in the South. In turn, the South denied the right of outsiders to interfere with the institution of slavery in the slave states under their doctrine of states' rights.

As their leader, Calhoun began to declare that "slavery was neither an evil nor a sin, but a positive good and a blessing, supported by the Bible, as well as the Constitution".<sup>13</sup>

The abolitionists began to concentrate their efforts upon attempts to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia and other places under the control of Congress. Petitions to that effect poured into Congress from the North and West. On January 19, 1836, Calhoun denied the right of petition by a motion not to receive two petitions for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia.<sup>14</sup> In a speech on March 9, 1836 on abolition petitions, he took the ground "that Congress had no legitimate jurisdiction on the subject of slavery here or elsewhere."<sup>15</sup>

On December 27, 1837, Calhoun introduced into the Senate his famous resolutions defending states' rights and the institution of slavery. He

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<sup>13</sup> Cralle, op. cit., II, 630.

<sup>14</sup> Congressional Debates, 24 Cong., 1 sess., pt. 1, 201.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 774.

spoke of the "peculiar" institution of the South:

--that, on the maintenance of which the very existence of the slave-holding states depends.....The subject is beyond jurisdiction of Congress -- they have no right to touch it in any shape or form, or to make it the subject of deliberation or discussion.....It is impossible under the deadly hatred which must spring up between the two great sections, if the present causes are permitted to operate unchecked, that we should continue under the same political system. The conflicting elements would burst the Union asunder, powerful as are the links which hold it together. Abolition and the Union cannot co-exist. As the friend of the Union, I openly proclaim it, -- and the sooner it is known the better....We of the South will nit, cannot, surrender our institutions".<sup>16</sup>

He denied that the institution of slavery as it existed among them was immoral, sinful, or obnoxious, but that both races had prospered; the black race had been advanced, while the white race had not degenerated. A long debate on these resolutions followed. In the end, Calhoun secured the adoption of nearly every proposition introduced.

Calhoun supported the administration of Van Buren and advocated his reelection. He opposed the removal of deposits from the United States Bank, yet opposed the renewal of the charter as tending towards too much centralization of power. He favored the sub-treasury because it had no such tendency.<sup>17</sup>

Calhoun also aided in securing the Webster-Ashburton treaty settling the dispute regarding the northern boundary of Maine.<sup>18</sup> He made a speech in the Senate on the provisions of the treaty on August 28, 1842. In this speech he said that the question, according to his con-

<sup>16</sup> Congressional Globe, 25 Cong., 2 sess., VI, 55; Cralle, op. cit., 625.

<sup>17</sup> A. R. Spofford, "John C. Calhoun", Historic Characters and Famous Events, VII, 378-86.

<sup>18</sup> Congressional Globe, 27 Cong., 3 sess., XII, 335.

ception, was not whether it was all we could desire, but whether it was such as would be most advisable to adopt or reject. He then spoke in favor of ratification. Again he set forth his theory of the states' rights' doctrine by saying that the question of the boundary was one belonging much more to the State of Maine than to the Union and that it was a part of the boundary of the United States only by being the exterior boundary of one of the states of our Federal Union.<sup>19</sup>

In 1843, Calhoun declined reelection to the United States Senate and retired to his plantation home in South Carolina.

It was largely through the influence of Henry A. Wise of Virginia that President Tyler was persuaded to appoint Calhoun as Secretary of State to complete the term of A. P. Upshur who had been accidentally killed by an explosion on the battleship "Princeton". When the news of the appointment was noised abroad, the newspaper contained many editorials which voiced approval of the selection. James K. Polk wrote favorably of the appointment, and Calhoun received many enthusiastic letters from his friends.<sup>20</sup>

Calhoun entered upon his duties as Secretary of State in March, 1844. While he had been the leading advocate of nullification, his appointment would promote the annexation of Texas which had been earnestly desired by the South. Texas had gained her independence from Mexico in 1836, and had several times asked for annexation to the United States. For some time the United States hesitated, endeavoring

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<sup>19</sup> O'Callie, op. cit., IV, 212.

<sup>20</sup> A. R. Spofford, loc. cit.



to respect the neutrality laws. The South favored annexation, feeling that it would increase the slave territory. Many people in the North objected for the same reason. The independence of Texas was finally recognized by the United States. Calhoun and other leaders feared the interference of British abolitionists in Texas, and desired to hasten annexation.<sup>21</sup>

A treaty was concluded with the government of Texas in April, 1844, providing for the annexation, but it was rejected by the Senate vote.<sup>22</sup> However, before the close of Tyler's term, a joint resolution for annexation was passed by both houses of Congress, with a proviso extending the Missouri Compromise line through the new territory and prohibiting slavery north of that line.<sup>23</sup>

Calhoun's appointment as Secretary of State expired in March, 1845, and the appointment was not continued under President Polk.

In the short time he was in the office of Secretary of State, his work was as much political as diplomatic, and the annexation of Texas has given ample proof. Calhoun strove after the failure of the treaty, for annexation by joint resolution, supported by Polk in his campaign, but repressed the extreme sentiment in South Carolina.

The significant thing is that Calhoun, so far from conspiring against the United States, took the nationalist stand when he endeavored to place behind the protection of property in slaves the power of the government of the United States.<sup>24</sup>

On retiring from the Cabinet, Calhoun spent a year endeavoring to promote a system of railroads to link the South and the West. In 1845,

<sup>21</sup> Thomas A. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People, 250-58.

<sup>22</sup> Congressional Globe, 28 Cong., 1 sess., XIII, 652.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 28 Cong., 2 sess., 368.

<sup>24</sup> St. George L. Sioussat, "John Caldwell Calhoun", in Samuel F. Bemis, editor, American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy, V, 231-32.

he attended a convention held at Memphis for the purpose of discussing transportation facilities. He not only promoted his plans for building railroads but discussed water transportation. He advanced the theory that Congress had the power to improve the navigation of the Mississippi River and that such improvements would not come within internal improvements, as the river should be considered a great inland sea, not within the states, but merely bathing their shores.<sup>25</sup>

But the people of South Carolina felt that their great leader was again needed in the United States Senate. In the year 1846 he was returned to the Senate to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Senator Huger, who, it was thought, resigned in favor of Calhoun.

Although the annexation of Texas had been accomplished, the disputes over the boundary lines of Texas and the Oregon territory had not been settled when Calhoun returned to the United States Senate. He advocated a peaceful settlement of these controversies.

During his previous term in the Senate, Calhoun made a speech on January 24, 1843, on the conflicting claims of the United States and Britain in the Oregon country. He expressed himself as feeling that the time had not yet arrived for the United States to assert her exclusive claims to the territory, that England was in a much better position to defend her claims than the United States -- that his object was to preserve, not to lose the territory. There was only one means by which it could be preserved -- time.

He said "Time is acting for us; .... There is often in the affairs of government more efficiency and wisdom in non-action than in action.

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<sup>25</sup> McMaster, op. cit., VI, 176.

All we want to effect our object in this case, is 'a wise and masterly inactivity'".

He advocated the policy of a peaceful penetration, or waiting patiently, until the westward migration of population established a sufficient number of Americans in the territory to justify our claim to exclusive rights.<sup>26</sup>

On March 16, 1846, he made a speech on the resolutions giving notice to Great Britain of the abrogation of the treaty of joint occupation. This speech has been considered one of his best, and probably averted a war with Great Britain.<sup>27</sup>

He said in part:

They (the conventions of 1818 and 1827) were entered into for two-fold objects, -- as substitutes for war, and as the means of preserving our rights to the territory, as they then stood.

It is but too common, of late, to condemn the acts of our predecessors, and to pronounce them unwise, or unpatriotic, from not adverting to the circumstances under which they acted. Thus to judge, is to do great injustice to the wise and patriotic men who preceded us.

It is this great change in favor of the prospect of settling the controversy in reference to Oregon honorably, by negotiation and compromise, which has occurred since the commencement of the session, that has made the great difference in the importance of the bearing of notice on the question of peace and war.

War may make us great; but let it never be forgotten that peace only can make us both great and free.<sup>28</sup>

The organization of territories and the admission of states to be carved from the lands acquired from Mexico again brought up the question of the extension of slavery. It was claimed by some that as

<sup>26</sup> Cralle, op. cit., IV, 238-58.

<sup>27</sup> Congressional Globe, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 502.

<sup>28</sup> Cralle, op. cit., IV, 259-90.



slavery did not exist in these lands, it could not be extended to the new territories. The Southern states protested. The Wilmot Proviso,<sup>29</sup> to prohibit the extension of slavery into the territory acquired from Mexico, was defeated under the leadership of Calhoun. He took the position that it was the duty of the United States Government under the Constitution to prevent any interference with slavery in the territories.

In support of his theory of states' rights, he presented to the Senate a set of resolutions embodying the following principles:

(1) That the territories were the joint and common property of the states of the Union, (2) that Congress, as an agent of the States, had no right to enact legislation to deprive any state of its full and equal rights in the territories, (3) that the enactment of legislation to prevent citizens of any state from emigrating with their property to any of the territories, would be a violation of the Constitution and the rights of the states, (4) that a people in forming a constitution have the right to form and adopt the government which they think best suited to their interests, and Congress could impose on a state, when admitted, no other condition except that the constitution be republican.<sup>30</sup>

Reasoning on these promises, he assumed that no slaveholder could be prevented from taking slaves into the territories and continuing to hold them as any other property.

In a speech on February 20, he further elaborated his views. He stated that ours is a federal constitution of which the states, not the people, are its constituents. He spoke of the Union as the "States United". He defended the rights of the minority, saying, "I hold that, whenever the idea becomes fixed, that the mere numerical majority have an inherent and infeasible right to govern, constitutional liberty must

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<sup>29</sup> Congressional Globe, 29 Cong., 2 sess., XVI, 303.

<sup>30</sup> Cralle, op. cit., IV, 348.



cease."<sup>31</sup>

The adjournment of Congress left the question of slavery in the territories still unsettled, to be taken up at the next session.

It is thought that Calhoun spent the interval before the next session of Congress in writing his two great treatises, "A Disquisition on Government" and "A Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States", which are considered remarkable discussions of constitutional questions.

The first is an extensive treatment of government in which he discussed the origin of government, and the necessity of some form of government in the associations of mankind. He approved a constitutional form of government in which the power to govern is vested in the representatives of the people through suffrage, and in which must be a system of checks and balances, or restrictions, to protect the minority interests from the aggressions of a dominant majority.<sup>32</sup>

The second treatise deals with the organization of the government of the United States, and is largely a discussion and a defense of the States' Rights' doctrine. In this discussion he proposed a plan for the reorganization of the executive department to allow for two presidents, one from the North, the other from the South; requiring each to approve all acts of Congress before they could become laws.<sup>33</sup>

The editor says that these treatises were not printed until after the death of the author, and that due to his ill health, little revis-

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 349-57.

<sup>32</sup> Cralle, op. cit., I, 1-107.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 111-406.

ion had been made, that with few exceptions the work is as it came from the hands of the author, and is given to the public with no other comment than that made by himself in a letter dated November 4, 1849:

I wish my errors to be pointed out. I have set down only what I believe to be true; without yielding an inch to popular opinions and prejudices of the day. I have not dilated -- but left truth, plainly announced, to battle its own way".<sup>34</sup>

In the months preceding the convening of Congress in December, 1849, many changes had taken place in the territories acquired from Mexico. The discovery of gold in California in 1848, had brought a rapid immigration to that territory. With more than sufficient population for admission as a state, California did not wait for an enabling act from Congress, but held a constitutional convention, formed a constitution prohibiting slavery, and applied for admission to the Union as a free state. This action alarmed the pro-slavery advocates, as it would disturb the equilibrium between the slave and free sections.

Calhoun fought the bill on the grounds that the manner of application was irregular. During the agitation over the question, Clay introduced eight resolutions which might effect a compromise. This series of resolutions became known as the "Compromise of 1850". Under the bill, California was to be admitted as a free state, and the remainder of the Mexican cession to be organized into territories without restrictions as to slavery.<sup>35</sup>

The debate on these resolutions was memorable. It was the last meeting in forensic debate of the three great intellectual giants, Calhoun, Clay, and Webster, who had entered Congress practically to-

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<sup>34</sup> Cralle, op. cit., I, vi, vii.

<sup>35</sup> Congressional Globe, 31 Cong., 1 sess., XXI, 244.

gether fourth years before. Clay and Webster argued for the adoption of the resolution, and Calhoun opposed them.

Calhoun still cherished hopes of effecting a reconciliation between the two sections and saving the Union, on his terms, but his health was failing. Weak and ill, he was led to his place in the Senate on March 4, 1850, where he listened while Senator Mason of Virginia read his carefully prepared address on the subject, "How Can the Union be Saved?" It contained no words of anger or censure. He pleaded for justice towards the Southern people whom he felt had been greatly wronged. He opened his address with the words:

I have, Senators, believed from the first that the agitation of the subject of slavery would, if not prevented by some timely and effective measure, end in disunion. Entertaining this opinion, I have on all proper occasions, endeavored to call the attention of both the two great parties which divide the country to adopt some measure to prevent so great a disaster, but without success. The agitation has been permitted to proceed, with almost no attempt to resist it, until it has reached a point when it can no longer be disguised or denied that the Union is in danger. You have thus had forced upon you the greatest and gravest question that can ever come under your consideration -- How can the Union be Preserved?<sup>36</sup>

The first question he presented for the investigation he proposed to make, was --- "What is it that has endangered the Union?" He then said that to this question there can be but one answer..... "that the immediate cause is the almost universal discontent which pervades the states composing the Southern section of the Union".

As to the cause of this discontent, he said:

It will be found in the belief of the people of the southern states.....that they cannot remain, as things now are, consistently with honor and safety, in the Union.....one of the causes of this discontent is to be traced to the long continued

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<sup>36</sup> Cralle, op. cit., IV, 542.

agitation of the slave question on the part of the North, and the many aggressions which they have made on the rights of the South during that time.<sup>37</sup>

He further stated that the primary cause was to be found in the fact that the equilibrium of the two sections had been destroyed, leaving one section with the exclusive power of controlling the government, and the other without any adequate means of protecting itself against encroachment and oppression.

After showing that the slavery question was the first cause that had disturbed the equilibrium of the two sections, he turned to the system of revenue and disbursements as being the next cause of discontent, --- that as the government derived its revenue mainly from duties on imports, such duties must fall mainly on the exporting states, and that the South, as the great exporting states, had in reality paid castly more than her due portion of the revenue.

He continued that the government claimed the right to decide, in the last resort, as to the extent of its power, even to resort to force to maintain whatever power it claims.

"Now", he asked, "What limitations can possibly be placed upon the powers of a government claiming and exercising such rights?"<sup>38</sup>

Speaking of the agitation against slavery by the abolitionists, and the abolition petitions, he said:

It is, then not certain, that if something is not done to arrest it, the South will be forced to choose between abolition and secession.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 542-44.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 550-51.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 556.



If the agitation goes on, the same force, acting with increased intensity, as has been shown, will finally snap every cord, when nothing will be left to hold the States together except force. But, surely, that can, with no propriety of language, be called a Union, when the only means by which the weaker is held connected with the stronger portion is force.<sup>40</sup>

Having explained what endangered the Union, he turned again to the question -- "How can the Union Be Saved?" This question he answered by saying there was but one way --- by adopting such measures as will satisfy the states belonging to the Southern section, that they can remain in the Union consistently with their honor and safety ..... and only one way by which that could be effected --- removing the causes by which this belief has been produced.<sup>41</sup>

Speaking of the irregular application of California for admission to the Union, he said:

It was the United States who conquered California and acquired it by treaty. The sovereignty, of course, is vested in them, and not in the individuals who have attempted to form a constitution and a state without their consent.....

Nor is it less clear, that the power of legislating over acquired territory is vested in Congress, and not, as is assumed, in the inhabitants of the territories.<sup>42</sup>

Asking for the insertion of a provision in the constitution, by amendment, to restore to the South the power she formerly held of protecting herself, he said:

The South asks for justice, simple justice, and less she ought not to take. She has no compromise to offer, but the constitution; and no concession or surrender to make. She has already surrendered so much that she has little left to surrender.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 558.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 559.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 564.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 573.

In closing, he said:

Having faithfully done my duty to the best of my ability, both to the Union and my section, throughout this agitation, I shall have the consolation, let what will come, that I am free from all responsibility.<sup>44</sup>

It was the great leader's last great effort. He was led from the Senate Chamber, and in less than a month was dead. His body was borne in state to Charleston, South Carolina, and laid to rest in the land to which he had devoted so much of his public life, among the people who loved and revered him.

In bringing this paper to a close, the writer considers it appropriate to add the comments of some of the men who had known and associated with the subject of the sketch through the years of his public life:

He was the ablest executive of his day; his forte was in the Cabinet, not in the Senate.<sup>45</sup>

Eloquent and vigorous as a speaker, he did not, like many others, make his points by personal attacks on his opponents. He was a gentleman in the warmest of his contacts, and though he cut his way sharply and fiercely through the arguments of his opponents, dealing them stunning blows, he did not attack the men themselves. A trenchant reasoner, it was always what his opponent said that he assailed - not what he was. He could see no merit or force in angry and rude personal abuse.<sup>46</sup>

He had the basis, the indispensable basis of all high character, and that was unspotted integrity -- unimpeached honor and character. If he had aspirations, they were high and honorable and noble.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 573.

<sup>45</sup> Henry Wise, "How Calhoun Was Made Secretary of State" in J. P. Lamberton and others, editors. Historic Characters and Famous Events, XI, 326.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Morris, "John C. Calhoun, the Champion of Southern Institutions", Heroes of Progress in America, 140.

There was nothing groveling, or low, or meanly selfish, that came near the head or the heart of Mr. Calhoun.<sup>47</sup>

Calhoun died a broken-hearted man. His life is the tragedy of a mighty man and noble character, constrained by the circumstances of his residence and his time into the service of a cause against which civilization and the forces of history set with resistless power.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Henry Alexander White, quoting Daniel Webster, "John Caldwell Calhoun", in Edwin A. Alderman and others, editors. Library of Southern Literature, II, 679.

<sup>48</sup> David D. Wallace, "The History of South Carolina" in The South in the Building of a Nation, Julian A. C. Chandler and others, editors, II, 64.



## CONCLUSION

John Caldwell Calhoun was prominent in national life for forty years. Usually he is thought of as the Great Nullifier, the defender of the institution of slavery, and the advocate of the states' rights doctrine. Too often the many other services he rendered the country are overlooked.

Through the long course of his public service, he held the offices of Member of Congress, Secretary of War, Vice-President, United States Senator, and Secretary of State. He cherished the ambition to become President of the United States, but he never attained that goal.

When he entered Congress, the country was just entering upon the period of nationalism which extended to the 1830's. During the early part of that period, he was an ardent nationalist, supporting the national bank and a protective tariff, and advocating internal improvements. All were measures which tended to unite more closely the different sections of the country, and to strengthen the national government.

As Secretary of War, and during his short term as Secretary of State, he proved to be an able administrator. He always advocated a peaceable settlement of controversies whenever possible.

From youth until death, he was in public service. His great intellect, his magnetic personality, his unusual talents, and his earnestness of purpose were such that he could never sink to a mediocre station, nor fade from the public mind. Throughout all his career, he was known as a man of unimpeachable character and integrity.



He was honest and sincere in supporting what he thought to be right and for the good of the country, especially for his section and his state. He was a clear thinker and a keen analytical reasoner. On many subjects he possessed clear, far-sighted vision. He could see that to allow for time in which to accomplish a peaceful penetration of population was the wise policy to pursue in handling the Oregon boundary question. He could see that it would be wiser to make some concessions in the disputes over the boundary lines of Maine and Texas than to resort to war. He could see that the slavery question might eventually disrupt the nation.

It seemed that he could not see that he was supporting a cause which, in its very nature, was doomed to failure in the light of a wide-spread awakening social conscience, and under the influence of an advancing civilization.

Acknowledging his faults and admitting his weaknesses, we must recognize his great qualities, pay due tribute to the services he rendered the country, and place his name among those of the greatest statesmen of his time.

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