



Letters from John C. Calhoun to Francis W. Pickens

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LETTERS FROM JOHN C. CALHOUN TO FRANCIS
W. PICKENS.*

[1.]

Fort Hill
1st April 1845

My dear Sir,

I do not think the object of M^r Polk in the formation of his Cabinet was such as you suppose. I am of the impression, that he does not contemplate the adjustment of the Tariff as a part of his system of policy, but on the contrary it is to take, under another name, Gen^l. Jackson's position of a judicious Tariff, as a middle ground between the free trade party and the advocates of the protective system.¹ He intends his administration, as a continuation, if I may so say, of the Jackson dynasty; and has accordingly formed it altogether of individuals, who stuck to Gen^l Jackson to the last. It was formed in Tennessee before he left home; but considerably changed after his arrival at Washington. A highly respectable Senator told me he saw the list, in Gen^l Jackson's hand writing. It consisted of Buchanan for the State Dep^t. one of the for the Treasury, Stevenson of Virginia for the War, Bancroft for the Navy, Johnson for the Post Office & Walker Attorney General. The changes were forced on him. His opponents clearly prove, that he intends to give the influence to the wing of the party, which was defeated at Baltimore.²

There must be some mistake on the part of our Montgomery friends, in saying that I approved of the arrange-

* In the possession of Mrs. John E. Bacon, Tryon, N. C. They were not printed in the volume of Calhoun letters issued by the American Historical Association in 1900.

¹ MARGINAL NOTE: "How little verified by the facts afterwards—"

² MARGINAL NOTE: "How totally at variance with the facts—Marcy Secty of War—a bitter opponent of Van Buren.—"

ment of the Cabinet, on the Authorizing of Lewis & Belcher. I said little on that subject, for reason's which are obvious; and what little I did say, was to intimate friends. Lewis knows I was not, nor is he, or scarcely any other Southern man. The error probably originated in their saying, that as far as I was concerned personally, I was satisfied. I was rather relieved, than otherwise, in not being invited to continue, as I could not have remained, with what I conceived to be the object of Mr Polk's policy, had I been invited. Had I been, I could not have retired without incurring the displeasure of a large portion of my friends, without assigning my reasons, & I could not have done that, without deeply offending the administration. As it is, I retired without giving offence to anyone or incurring any responsibility.

I stopt a day in Richmond, where I saw all our prominent friends, and had much conversation with them & Mr Ritchie. I found things in a very satisfactory state there, especially on the free trade subject. You see their address to the people of Virginia,³ signed by Ritchie, takes sound ground on that vital question. That & the movements in Parliament, will give great prominence to the questions at the next session. It is there the battle will have to be fought. I hope the whole South will back Virginia in her position.

But to drop politicks & return to private matters. I can not but be greatly surprised at what you write, as to the course which Arthur Simkins threatens to take, on the mortgage. Arthur wrote to me on the subject of the instalment during the winter & I informed him, if my memory serves me that Andrew had been at Mobile & found cotton selling as low as 4 1/2 cents, and that he found it impossible to obtain an advance on his cotton, in consequence of the heavy advances, which the factors had made to the planters whose crops had not come down from the low state of the

³ MARGINAL NOTE: "Written by Mr- Calhoun."

river or other causes. I wrote to him, not to sell, unless he could get six cents, until the month of March, as I felt satisfied there would be an advance in the price. I was confident that Great Britain would be compelled to repeal the duty on cotton & hoped, that the March Packet would bring intelligence of the fact. I said in my letter to Arthur, that he must indulge us under such circumstances, until we could sell, which would be in March. I heard nothing from him & concluded, that he had acquiesced in the arrangement. I would have sent for him the day I spent at the Cane Brake; but understood his wife was at the point of death, to converse with him on the subject. Under such circumstances I cannot [rest missing]

[2.]

Addressed: Hon: F. W. Pickens
Edgefield
S. C.

Postmarked: Pendleton S. C.

Fort Hill
21st Aug^t 1845

Dear Sir,

There will probably be no war with Mexico, or if one, of little consequence, unless there should be a prospect of a rupture between us & England in reference to Oregon. She is averse to war with us; but I do not see how war can be avoid, in reference to it, unless the administration should back out from the grounds taken in the Inaugural, so & so improperly. The west & the middle states seem determined that Mr Polk should not back out, and I am sorry to see, some of our papers, & especially the Carolinian, chiming in with them. The question was in our hands and under our entire control, until the Inaugural appeared. It threw away, to use a gambler's phrase, our trump card; & gave England the control. I saw my way clearly & had the

whole in the fairest train and informed Mr Polk & Buchanan how to manage it to ensure success; and the danger of taking any other course. The whole territory, or at least all drained by the Columbia river⁴ might have been had. They have acted directly opposite to the course I was pursuing; and I hazard nothing in saying, that it must end⁵ in backing out, or a most disastrous & disreputable conflict to us.

It still remains very dry in this region generally. I have not had any ground wet 2 inches in six weeks. My cotton crop which was very promising a month ago, will fall short a third at least. I shall make bread, although my upland, which is more than half my corn crop, will not make more than a third of a crop.

M^{rs} Calhoun is at Glenn Springs. She writes that her health is rapidly improving. James accompanied her.

The rest of the family join their love to you all.

Truly

J. C. Calhoun.

Hon: F. W. Pickens.

Endorsed: Mr Calhoun—

on

Oregon & war

Polk &c—1845

⁴ MARGINAL NOTE: "This is exactly what the Adm^r—did gain and the treaty was made exactly on that basis. That was all Polk ever contended for, as he offered those *precise terms* and the British Minister rejected them with these remarkable words—until terms more reasonable are offered no further proposition could be considered, & then, in less than 6 months accepted the identical proposition. This proposition was then pending shewing beyond controversy what Mr—Polk was for—at the same time the Adm^r—Press & some imprudent Senators assumed The whole of Oregon or more; but Mr Polk did not—and when he said the just & entire rights of the country should be maintained fully we know what he meant—that was the country drained by the waters of the Oregon (never Frazier's river) and this is exactly what he did gain & assert & no more."

⁵ MARGINAL NOTE: "There was no backing out & there was no war, & the truth is the only danger of war was from pursuing the course

[3.]

Addressed: Hon: F. W. Pickens
Edgefield
S. Caro.

Postmarked: Pendleton S. C.

Fort Hill
23^d Sepr 1845

My dear Sir,

I do not think, if war should grow out of the Oregon question, that it will be only the pretext on the part of England, and that her real object will be the gulf of Mexico, Cuba, Florida & Texas. I do not doubt, that England feels an intense jealousy towards us; but I believe, & think I cannot be mistaken, she is exceedingly averse to a war with us at this time. If there be war about Oregon, she may certainly aim to strike blows at all the points, which you designate; but they will not be the object. The war, if it should come, and there is great danger it will, will be forced on her by the most besotted folly on our part, that a people & a government ever committed. The whole territory would have fallen into our hands, if we had only had the sense to stand still, & adhered to the convention for its joint occupancy.⁶ The greatest simple- ought to have

of Mr-Calhoun—as he would have left it to time & emigration to settle up the disputed territory & the British Hudson Bay company would have brought on war, & we would have been dragged into it by reckless adventurers whose interest in it would have been to produce war.”

⁶MARGINAL NOTE: “If the joint occupancy treaty had remained our frontier adventurers would have constantly been brought into conflict with the British subjects in the employment of the Hudson Bay company, as there were no ascertained boundaries between us & the frontier population would in fact have dragged us into a war as they were interested for one to forage an army with its disbursements.”

MARGINAL NOTE: “The only way to prevent certain conflict was to give notice to terminate the joint occupancy treaty & fix the boundaries which we had an express right to do by the terms of the treaty

seen, that, if we made it a question of force (as the wording of the Convention would) that we would lose the security, & that, if it was settled by negotiation, we could not get the whole; and that the only possible mode by which we could get the whole, was to leave it to time. But folly, instead of the last, resorted to the two first, & Mr Polk by the crowning folly of alluding to it, as he did in his inaugural, has made them the only alternate, and has benefited England, & Russia & France against us in reference to the territory. There are no alternatives left us but to back out, & settle it by negotiation, or refer it, & fare worse, or to settle it by force. It is, as it now stands, both a question of pride & policy on the part of England to resist our claim. He who commands the North West coast of this Continent, including California, commands the Pacific. I do not think the administration will have the courage or patriotism to back out, & that whether we shall have war, or not, must depend on Congress, & especially the Senate; & let me add, the Southern Senators. In my opinion the fate of the country, on this & on other questions is in their hands. If war comes, it will begin with Mexico. If England concludes, that she will be forced into war about Oregon, we shall have war in due time with Mexico, & if not we shall not. The latter acts under her advice & will be ready to do whatever she bids her to do. The state of Mr McDuffie's & Genl Huger's health & their total want of experience & great liability, in consequence of both, of being acted on by the cowering & designing, is deeply to be lamented. It causes great uneasiness with our friends every where, & greatly distresses me. I know the

itself. This notice was what compelled a settlement which the British desired to avoid, because with no fixed boundaries, their people had a right to trap for furs over the whole territory, whereas when fixed they would be restricted to the line. It was therefore a peace movement & not war as Mr— Calhoun supposed, and as after facts proved for it settled the question & saved us from a war forced on us by an aggressive frontier population. This was the real object of Mr— Polk —& he was wise in it as events prove.

F. W. Pickens''

extent of their uneasiness better, perhaps, than any other, as I receive letters by almost every mail from all sections, praying my return to the Senate. I mention, in strict confidence, what I have to no other individual, but one, that he, (Gen^l Huger) written to me, that he would resign, if I thought my services would be required in the Senate at this time. I received his letter some time since, & in acknowledging its receipt, I made no allusion to that part as I did not know what might occur, and thought it prudent to keep my answer under my control, until events should more fully develop themselves. It has been a question of deep solicitude and much reflection with me to determine, what answer to give. I am exceedingly adverse to returning again to public life; and yet when I look at the momentous character of the present juncture, the great strength of our friends in Congress, if it could be brought to act in concert, the good it may possibly secure, & the calamities it might advert, & the utter *incompetency* of our two Senators, from the causes mentioned, to take the lead & give unit to the action of our friends, I feel, that there is a heavy responsibility on me, in determining the course I ought to take. I hold it certain, that as things now stand, the administration will fall, almost by necessity, under the control of Col Benton & his partisans, who will give it a direction most fatal to us & our principles & policy. Indeed, that is one of the strong reasons urged by many of my friends out of the State, why I should return to the Senate. Looking at the whole, as dispassionately as I can, with a strong desire to remain at home for many reasons, I do not see under all the circumstances, how I could decline the duty, if it shall be the desire of the Legislature & the State, that I shall again serve them in the Senate, until the country has passed through the present difficulties, which I hope might be by the next session. Write me & let me know your opinion, & what answer you think, I ought to make to Judge Huger.

I would be glad to hear from you by the return of the mail, or before the 1st of next month, when I expect to leave

on a visit to Andrew, as I wish to answer his letter before I go. If you find, that your letter cannot reach me before the 2^d or 3^d Oct^r., address me at Faunsdale, Marengo County, Alabama. M^{rs} Calhoun & John will accompany me.

I am glad to learn that your corn crop is doing so well. I shall make enough & to spare. Between corn, wheat, rye & oats, I expect to be able to spare between 1500 & 2000 bushels & 5 or 6 thousand pounds of Pork. My cotton like yours, will fall short. It was, with the exception of a field of 20 acres, growing until the middle of August. I shall make round between 450 & 500 pounds per acre, which is more than a third less than the average of the last 3 years.

Andrew has made a fine crop of cotton & corn. He estimates his cotton at the lowest at 600 Alabama bales, say 320,000 pounds of clean cotton. He had out at the date of his last letter (21st Aug^t.) 70 bales & was arranging on picking out 10,000 pounds of seed cotton daily.

Yours truly & sincerely

J. C. Calhoun.

Hon. F. W. Pickens.

M^{rs} Calhoun & family join their love to you M^{rs} P & family.

Endorsed: J. C. Calhoun's
 Sept: 23. 1845—his
 return to the Senate &
 his reasons—
 My answer