

PRESIDENT JAMES BUCHANAN'S BETRAYAL OF
GOVERNOR ROBERT J. WALKER OF KANSAS.

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During the fifties the territorial government of Kansas and the possibility of that territory being admitted into the Union either as a slave or free state, according to the principle of popular sovereignty, attracted wide attention throughout the United States. The excitement grew until the questions concerning Kansas took precedence over all others.

The year 1857 marks a decided change in the affairs of Kansas. Active civil war ceased in the fall of 1856—thanks to Governor Geary's persistent and impartial efforts. On January 12, 1857, the pro-slavery party of the territory held a large political convention in which the leaders confessed that they were in a hopeless minority and that it was useless to try to form a slave state in Kansas. Accordingly, many of the active pro-slavery leaders abandoned the struggle. The Missourians, however, had no idea of surrendering. As they were entrenched in the various territorial and county offices, they held to their positions and designs; and their efforts began to assume a different character. They denounced the Governor in no uncertain terms in resolutions and devised legislation to further their intrigues. In February, a bill passed the territorial legislature which provided for the calling of a convention to frame a state constitution. Governor Geary sent a message to the legislature stating that the Kansas-Nebraska act left the *bona fide* inhabitants of the territory "perfectly free to form and regulate their own domestic institutions

in their own way"; in this message he vetoed the bill because the legislature "failed to make any provision to submit the constitution when framed to the consideration of the people for their ratification or rejection." The act, however, was passed over the Governor's veto. As the foundation of the territorial executive's authority was gradually undermined, Geary, therefore, resigned on the day of the inauguration of President Buchanan. Three successive governors, in less than three years, had been resisted, overthrown, and disgraced. Kansas had truly become the "graveyard of governors."

The Kansas embroglio was tainted with violence and corruption. The Democratic party, as a result of agitation over this issue, was on the verge of disruption. A new party of immense power had risen like magic and almost defeated the Democratic party in the heated campaign of 1856. The slightest mistake on the part of the administration might cause the defeat of the Democratic party in 1860, and, what was really ominous,—if a so-called Black Republican should be elected president, the southern states would doubtless secede. The South naturally desired and sought to retain her former political supremacy. She demanded, at least, political equality. The balance of power in the Senate had already been lost; new slave states must, therefore, be secured. There was much agitation for the annexation of Cuba, Porto Rico, and Northern Mexico.¹ With the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, the Missouri invasion of Kansas, and the Dred Scott decision, the time was apparently opportune for the South to take possession of Kansas. President-elect Buchanan had always contended that the South had been wronged and he was now determined that the southern people should henceforth re-

¹ This was a period when there was considerable demand for expansion northward and southward, not necessarily for slavery.

ceive justice, although he also seemed determined to do justice to the people of Kansas. Apparently, he failed to perceive that a change of attitude had taken place within the South. Up to the time of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise the North was the aggressor, but with the disappearance of the historic line of 36° 30' the South became not only the aggressor, but was militantly so.

With the resignation of Governor Geary, President Buchanan tendered the governorship of Kansas to Robert J. Walker of Mississippi, an intimate personal and political friend. He and the President had served together in Polk's cabinet; the former as Secretary of the Treasury; the latter as Secretary of State. Walker had also served with distinction as United States Senator. Realizing the responsibility and danger of the appointment, Walker declined more than once to accept the proffered governorship. Both the President and Cabinet urged him to consent; the Chief Executive even made a personal visit to Walker's home in order to get Mrs. Walker to withdraw her objection. Walker finally agreed to accept upon two conditions: first, that General Harney should be "put in special command in Kansas with a large body of troops," and retained there subject to his military directions until peace and harmony were restored; second, that he be unopposed by the Buchanan administration in his advocacy of "the submission of the constitution to the vote of the people for ratification."² The President and

² Walker's Testimony, Cavode *Committee Report*, 105-6. On his way West, Walker stopped at Chicago and submitted his inaugural to Stephen A. Douglas who thoroughly endorsed it. The new Governor happily believed that he had removed every obstacle to success, "and every possibility of misunderstanding or disapproved by the administration, such as had befallen his predecessors." He doubtless had; "but President Buchanan either deceived him at the beginning, or betrayed him in the end."

It should also be remembered that Walker was originally from Pennsylvania but emigrated to Mississippi, so it was thought he would please the North and South.

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entire Cabinet acquiesced in the condition without reservation. Before leaving Washington, Walker wrote the larger part of his inaugural address and submitted it to the President for criticism. In this address the Governor said: "I repeat then as my clear conviction that unless the convention submit the constitution to the vote of the actual resident settlers, and the election be fairly and justly conducted, the Constitution will be and ought to be rejected by Congress." The President approved the address and Secretary Cass wrote his official instructions in accordance with it. The question arises, How far did Buchanan act in harmony with his pledge to Walker and this endorsement of the latter's program?

Governor Walker arrived in Kansas late in April. He was soon convinced that any idea of creating a slave state out of that territory was preposterous. Although popular sentiment and climatic conditions favored the cause of freedom, he nevertheless desired to make Kansas safe for the Democratic party; "and the only plan to accomplish this was to unite the free-state Democrats with the pro-slavery party . . . against the more violent portion of the Republicans."³ Walker, therefore, entreated the free-state men to take part

³ Walker's Testimony, *Cavode Committee Report*, 107.

Frederick P. Stanton of Tennessee, formerly a representative in Congress, a man of talent and courage, was made secretary. He preceded Walker to the territory and began his labors at once. The new Governor and Secretary were from slave states, so the South doubtless believed the slavery question was safe in their hands. Walker favored the cause of the South first and the Democratic party second. He believed in the balance of power theory; he preferred Kansas to be admitted as a slave state in order to give the South a majority in the United States Senate, while the North would have a majority in the House. Both Walker and Stanton entered upon their duties with the feelings entertained by President Buchanan, the Cabinet, and a majority of the Democrats themselves, that the free-state men were a mischievous faction, willfully disturbing the peace and defying the laws. Gradually the Governor and Secretary, by personal observation, were convinced of their error.

in the election of delegates to the constitutional convention; he promised them in his inaugural address, which was based upon the President's instructions, that such an election should be free from fraud and violence; the delegates should be protected in their deliberations; and if unsatisfactory, by a subsequent vote, the ratification of the work of the convention could be withheld.⁴

A few days after the inaugural the Governor proceeded to Topeka, where a mass meeting of the free-state men was called to support the "insurrectionary" free-state legislature elected under the Topeka Constitution. After the adjournment of the mass meeting, its members called on Walker; he made a fervent speech to them in which he renewed the recommendations and promises of his inaugural address.⁵ This appeal failed in its main objective: The free-state people remained firm in their resolve to have nothing to do with the proceedings under the bogus laws of the territorial legislature. Nevertheless Walker's promise of a fair vote on the constitution did produce a profound effect: It caused the free soilers "to vote down by a large majority the resolutions prepared by the more violent of their own party in favor of a complete state organization and the adoption of a code of state laws,"—but they did not abandon entirely the Topeka movement.

On the 2nd and 3rd of July, the pro-slavery party of the territory met in convention at Lecompton. They acknowledged the utter hopelessness of making Kansas a slave state, indorsed the Governor's policy, and a resolution "against the submission of the constitution

⁴ Walker's Inaugural, May 27, 1857. *Kansas Historical Collections*, V, 328-29.

⁵ Walker's address at Topeka, June 6, 1827. *Kansas Historical Collections*, V, 291-97. This speech caused the South to threaten disunion if the President supported Walker.

to a vote of the people was laid on the table as a test vote by forty-two to one."⁶

When the news of the impartial action of Governor Walker reached the South, the Governor was bitterly criticized and his immediate removal was demanded. The Democratic State Convention of Georgia demanded his removal at once. The State Senate of Alabama censured and denounced him; the Democratic State Convention of Mississippi called his inaugural a dictatorial meddling with the duty of the convention. The Richmond *South* accused him of having delivered Kansas into the hands of the abolitionists;⁷ a Charleston paper did not believe that any man seeking the suffrage of southern people would dare to defend the villainy of Walker in Kansas.⁸ In the name of the South, a Vicksburg journal called for his immediate removal.⁹

The South was not aware of Walker's more ambitious plan of keeping an equal number of free and slave states. The latter wrote to the President June 28, " . . . we must have a slave state out of the southwestern Indian Territory, and then a calm will follow; Cuba be acquired with the acquiescence of the North; and your administration, having in reality settled the slavery question, be regarded in all time to come as a re-signing and re-sealing of the Constitution . . . I shall be pleased soon to hear from you. Cuba! Cuba! (and Porto Rico, if possible) should be the countersign of your administration, and it will close in a blaze of glory."

⁶ Walker to Cass, July 15, 1857, *Sen. Ex. Doc.*, No. 8, 1st Sess., 35th Cong. I, 29. Walker wrote to Cass, July 10, that "the only real question" is "whether Kansas shall be a conservative, constitutional, Democratic and ultimately free state, or whether it shall be Republican and abolition state; and the course pursued by me is the only one which will prevent the last most calamitous result . . . *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷ Richmond *South*, quoted from New York *Times*, July 14, 1857.

⁸ Charleston *Mercury*, August 19, 1857.

⁹ Vicksburg *Sentinel*, quoted by New York *Times*, July 14, 1857.

See McMaster, *History of the People of the United States*, VIII, 305.

On June 15, 1857, Judge Thomas of Georgia wrote to Alexander H. Stephens:

"I am in trouble and would give ten dollars for an opportunity of talking to you one hour. My trouble is this—I have just read Walker's inaugural in Kansas and if the document which I have seen is genuine it is clear Buchanan has turned traitor. I have read and re-read, I have thought over and turned the thing in my mind every way, and there is no way to escape the damned spectre. It stands there and glares upon us. *We are betrayed.* . . . If Buchanan retains him thirty days we are ruined, and ought to be if we sustain Buchanan. . . . I see no escape from the conclusion I have come to about this inaugural. He puts himself in thought, feeling and hope with our enemies, and that's the truth. Our victory is turned to ashes on our lips, and before God I will never say well done to the traitor or to his master who lives in the White House."¹⁰

To Judge Thomas there must be no compromise: Kansas must be a slave state; southern rights must be insisted upon, and, if necessary, defended by the sword.

Only two days later, June 17, Howell Cobb, Secretary of the Treasury, wrote to Alexander H. Stephens:

"From what you write and what I see in the papers I fear that Walker's inaugural address is to do us harm in the South. That part that you object to I never saw or heard of until I read it in the papers. It could have been omitted without injuring the object which I think he had in mind. I confess that I did not like the argument or presentation of the question by him. My opinion is he thought at the time he wrote it that Kansas would come in as a slave state and his object was to satisfy the other side that they

¹⁰ Phillips, U. B. (ed.), *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb. Am. Hist. Assoc. Reports*, 1911, II, 400-01.

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would have a fair chance to be heard. This is my reading of it though I never saw anything from him on that point before he left.’”¹¹

In the same letter Secretary Cobb stated that the point made by the constitutionalists against submitting the constitution to the vote of the people was not well taken and pointed out that:

“The true policy is to say nothing about slavery in the Constitution, and let the state be admitted as it is, and the question of slavery can be decided by them afterwards. That is my idea, and I believe the correct one, and will in the end be adopted by the convention if our friends there act wisely. Now the principle of the Kansas bill is fully and thoroughly recognized by the administration, just *as our own people* demanded it, it would be a hard blow to lose the whole benefit of it by having a false issue before the country.”

On the next day, June 18, Cobb received a letter from Alexander H. Stephens strenuously objecting to Walker's action, to which he replied immediately, and it is interesting to note that his letter assumed a less radical tone than the one just cited. He said that the “President desired in good faith to carry out the principle of the Kansas bill” and the “doctrines of the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case. This was entirely acceptable to our people. He (the President) did not wish Governor Walker or any other official of the Government to use his position to affect the decision of the slavery question, one way or the other. He was indifferent to that decision, so it was fairly and honestly made by the people of Kansas, and this was the position of the entire Cabinet.” He said that no mention of Walker's inaugural had been made in the Cabinet since its reception, but he was not inclined to condemn him too harshly for his action, because his

¹¹ Phillips, U. B. (ed.), *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 402. Stephens' letter referred to by Mr. Cobb is apparently lost.

motives were good. He admitted to Stephens, that the propriety of submitting the constitution to the people for ratification had been discussed and approved but with no view to affecting the result. It was believed that without such submission "we could not justify and carry through the admission;" that the President and Cabinet "were not only willing but anxious that this question should be settled without any outside influence from the Government."¹²

On July 11, Robert Toombs of Georgia wrote to the editor of the Baltimore *Patriot*, W. W. Burwell, a letter condemning Walker and Buchanan. He asked, "Was there ever such folly as this Walker has been playing in Kansas?" That Walker wanted the credit for settling a difficult situation which was "rapidly settling itself, raises the devil all over the South. And this is not the worst of it. Buchanan intends to sustain him, and thereby ruin himself and his administration." It is none of Walker's business, Toombs contended, whether the convention submitted the constitution to the people or not and he had no right to say that unless the convention "carried out his will in the premises Congress *ought not, would not* admit the state, and he would join the free soilers," for "his argument (in his position) is a direct government interference, unless he is recalled, and it is this which so much aroused the South. The condemnation of him is universal as just."¹³

Thus, there can be little doubt as to Toombs's position. He opposed Walker's action and made clear that unless the administration recalled him the democracy of the South would bolt the Democratic party and the administration would be powerless to carry out its Kansas policy. In addition, it would mean defeat of the Democratic party in 1860. This fact was staring

¹² Phillips, *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 402-03.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 403-04.

the Buchanan administration in the face. It was no idle threat. Buchanan, though old, had not given up hope of being the standard bearer of his party in the campaign of 1860, although James Slidell advised him not to be a candidate for re-election.

Howell Cobb was warned of the calamity facing the Democratic party and the administration through his brother, Thomas R. Cobb, who said that Judge Thomas was greatly excited and could talk "about nothing except Walker and Kansas;" that Stephens and Toombs would soon denounce the administration "on this Walker business"—Toombs having already done so in a recent speech in Washington; that the inevitable result would be a split in the Democratic party and the fusion of the seceders with the Americans. This letter of Cobb's to his brother was largely a report of a conversation with Judge Thomas. So Thomas was asked how it was possible for the administration to remove Walker. To this the Judge replied that "he *lies* on Mr. Buchanan, alleging instructions which he never had, and that Mr. B. ought to yield to his friends." Then Cobb asked if he thought it would be possible to send Walker on a foreign mission. Judge Thomas replied, "Send him anywhere so he is gotten out of Kansas." The brother of the Secretary of Treasury then continued by saying that "a split in the democracy of Georgia was inevitable and that Walker was the foe of the administration."¹⁴

¹⁴ Phillips, *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 404-05.

The former president of the Republic of Texas, Lucius Q. Lamar, wrote to Secretary Cobb from Oxford, Mississippi, July 17, that he was writing under considerable embarrassment, owing to the action of Walker. He asked:

"Are we of the South to be made to see California hurried into the Union against all law and all precedent *because she is a free state* and Kansas subjected to the rigors of the inquisition because she has a chance of being a slave state? I do not wish to argue the point because I fear it is too late. Great injustice is done to those of us who *denounced* Walker. They are not enemies of the administration. As God is my witness my main object was to give you and the southern members of the Cabinet my moral support in your effort to have

Indeed, the people of the South were aroused as they had not been since the days of 1849-1850; they loved the Union then and they loved it in 1857, but public sentiment was rapidly drifting toward secession.

If President Buchanan had continued his original Kansas policy, secession might have come in 1858 rather than three years later—but he was destined to make a radical alteration in it. As yet, however, the President still loyally and unequivocally supported Walker. As late as July 12 he wrote to the latter:

“The point on which your and our success depends is the submission of the constitution to the people of Kansas. And by the people I mean and I have no doubt you mean, the actual *bona fide* residents who have been long enough in the territory to identify themselves with its fate.” He suggested that a period of three months’ residence in the Territory should entitle them to a vote, and he expressed himself even further in the strongest possible terms: “On the question of submitting the constitution to the *bona fide* resident settlers of Kansas, I am willing to stand or fall. In sustaining such a principle, we cannot fall. It is the principle of the Kansas-Nebraska bill; the principle of popular sovereignty, and the principle at the foundation of all popular government. The more it is discussed the stronger it will become. Should the convention of Kansas adopt this principle all will be settled harmoniously, and, with the blessing of Providence, you will return triumphantly from your arduous, important, and responsible mission.” The Presi-

Walker repudiated and condemned by the administration; for I felt sure you would make such an effort. It is a great error to think that feeling is confined to a few. It pervades the whole mass of democracy here. You can’t find a man who avows his approval. If the administration adopts Walker’s policy it may cause the Mississippi Democracy to cease their expressions of indignation. For we feel that there is no other party which will do us justice at all. But the enthusiasm of the party will vanish, the energy and momentum of an approving public sentiment will be irretrievably lost to the administration.” *Ibid.*, 405-06.

dent then insisted that the true policy was "to build up a great Democratic party there."¹⁵

This loyal support of Walker by Buchanan was soon to vanish. A majority of the President's cabinet were southerners—four out of seven: Howell Cobb of Georgia, Secretary of the Treasury; John B. Floyd of Virginia, Secretary of War; Jacob Thompson of Mississippi, Secretary of the Interior; Aaron V. Brown of Tennessee, Postmaster General. These men were from states where the agitation and pressure were strong to admit Kansas as a slave state. By July 21, every southern member of the Cabinet plus one northern member had committed himself in favor of this position.¹⁶ Thus, there were five out of seven cabinet members committed to the policy of making Kansas a state with slavery, and the two remaining members had not, as yet, expressed themselves. With his pro-southern sympathies, it is absurd to suppose that a man of Buchanan's temperament, inclined to let matters drift and to follow the line of least resistance, could ever withstand the terrific barrage of southern pressure and agitation, especially when the greater portion of the Democratic party was threatening revolt,—for he had lost the North in 1856 and carried what has become known as the "Solid South" overwhelmingly. If Buchanan had been as weak in the South as he was in the North, he would have been a "poor third." There was no sign of improvement in the Democratic ranks north of the Mason and Dixon's line—in fact it was growing worse: the New York Democracy was demoralized, and in Pennsylvania a division within the Democratic party was imminent. It was, perhaps, only natural, therefore, for the President to cater to southern wishes and demands.

By July 20, southern opposition had become so vio-

¹⁵ See Walker's Testimony, *Carode Committee Report*, No. 28, 102-7.

¹⁶ Phillips, *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens and Cobb*, 407.

lent that Walker wrote to the President on that day as follows:

"If these most unmerited attacks upon me and my policy by the extremists of the South should continue, I cannot speak with entire confidence of the result, although my efforts shall be unrelaxed up to the last moment, inasmuch as I believe the existence of this government may depend upon the peaceful and proper adjustment of this question. It may be necessary for me to answer the southern ultras in a published address; if so, it will be made upon my own responsibility, and the administration will be answerable for it in no respect."¹⁷

The President had not, as yet, opposed Walker, but matters were approaching a climax within the administration. The turning point came during the absence of Buchanan from Washington during the latter part of July and the first of August, when he spent several days recuperating at Bedford Springs, Pennsylvania. While the former was there, Cass received a letter from Governor Walker requesting 2,000 additional troops to prevent a possible attack by General Lane representing the Topeka faction. In this he declared that "General Lane and his staff everywhere deny the authority of the territorial laws, and counsel a total disregard of those enactments."¹⁸

Walker's letter created quite an excitement in Washington. Meetings of the Cabinet were held nearly every day to discuss the action of the Governor of Kansas. Great displeasure and dissatisfaction were shown towards Walker's policy. On July 31, Floyd wrote to Buchanan at Bedford Springs in the following letter:

"In my judgment, a thousand men are fully sufficient to overawe those disposed to rebellion; but should a collision with the troops take place, then a general civil

¹⁷ *Kansas Historical Collections*, V, 359.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, V, 362-63. Cass was still in Washington.

war between the opposing parties will be inevitable. In this event a thousand regular troops under Harney will be much more than enough to turn the scale in favor of law and order. I am afraid that this movement of the troops in such imposing numbers, this most formidable precaution for war, is intended rather to cover his Excellency's retreat from his Topeka speech, than to prevent the town of Lawrence from adopting a charter for its government. It is very obvious from the tone of his last dispatch, that the denunciations of the South have surprised, annoyed, and alarmed him, and that he intends at all hazards to regain his position, or to throw the blame of his failure upon someone else—either the administration, or the War Department. I doubt, now, whether the investment in Governor Walker is going to turn out very profitable, notwithstanding we all thought, and I, in particular, that his mission to Kansas was to prove a perfect political California for the administration. He shall have his forces; you may rely upon that, and then nothing is left for us but prayers for a happy deliverance out of all our troubles! I trust, with the promising union of tenets and faith which so happily blend in your cabinet, your administration may, in this matter, experience the full benefit of the promise given to 'the fervent, effectual prayer of the righteous man.'

We meet in the Cabinet, and 'discuss' very much; but I believe we all feel it to be a sort of game of solitaire,—the play of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet left out. But, certainly, things are moving on in such a way as to give no grounds of solicitude or uneasiness whatever on your part; and we all feel that you are serving the state best, for the present, in laying in a stock of robust health for the winter campaign, which is to be an eventful one.'¹⁹

¹⁹ Floyd to Buchanan, July 31, 1857, Buchanan Manuscripts, Pa. Hist. Soc.

In picturing the cabinet meetings as a "game of solitaire,—the play of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet left out," one is given a perfect description. They were all mourning the action of Walker and the course of events within Kansas. In comparing the President to Hamlet, a better comparison could not have been made. The President said many beautiful things but he lacked decision. If he reached a decision he had not the will to act. He was held between two opposing forces—the North and the South. The crisis demanded a man of quick decision and firmness, but the President possessed neither. A man of greater determination, quicker to arrive at a decision, swifter in action, and more firm in policy, might have been able to steer the ship of state through the political storm and land securely in some harbor of safety and triumph; but the President—a Hamlet, thoroughly conscious of the course of events around him—let the government drift into a catastrophe which was truly a tragedy.

In his letter to Walker, Secretary Floyd, led the Governor to believe that he complied with his request for troops gladly. On July 31, he wrote the latter that in the course of a few weeks a force of twenty-one companies, fourteen of which would be cavalry men and one company of light artillery, would be available. "This, you perceive," continued the Secretary of War, "is a very powerful force and I hope will prove sufficient for all purposes; but if the exigencies of the case require a still larger force, you may rest assured all the force necessary for due enforcement of the law shall be promptly furnished."²⁰ Floyd's plan of reinforcing Walker with such a large number of troops was never realized, whether intentional or not, but Walker did receive some additional troops; not as

²⁰ Floyd to Walker, July 31, 1857, Buchanan Manuscripts, Pa. Hist. Soc.

many as were needed, however, to cope with the hostile Cheyenne Indians and the manoeuvrings at Lawrence. Obviously, Floyd was talking one thing to Buchanan and leading Walker to believe another: that the administration was solidly behind the latter, and that he was only too glad to furnish him with the desired troops.

Others than Floyd were actively engaged in undermining Buchanan's confidence in Walker. General Cass sent a condemnatory letter, July 31, to the President saying, among other things:

"We do not like Governor Walker's letter, and I am satisfied this will be your opinion. I cannot believe that he thinks there is real and pressing necessity for the amount of force which he requests, unless he means to attempt to disperse the peaceable assemblings of the people at the point of the bayonet. If this was his intention, he will find his error as soon as he received your last instructions. We all fear that Governor Walker is endeavoring to make a record for the future, but while we hope otherwise, we are satisfied that, in any contingency, your record will be found fully satisfactory. The plan which you have adopted is the only true plan. It is support the Constitution and laws, and take all necessary measures for this purpose.

We all desire sincerely that this matter should give you no uneasiness, but that you should remain at Bedford, and renew your health and strength for your future labors.'"²¹

It is now clear to the reader that a majority of the members of the Cabinet had turned their backs upon the man whom they had begged to go to Kansas to turn civil war into reconciliation and hostility into

²¹ Cass to Buchanan, July 31, 1857, Buchanan Manuscripts, Pa. Hist. Soc.

Cass wrote Walker on July 25 that the President approved his precautionary measures but warned him not to use military force to compel obedience except in case of resistance or attack.

peace and quietude. The excuse which precipitated open opposition,—but opposition had doubtless been secret among the southern members of the Cabinet before,—was the requisition for 2,000 additional troops. The cause, however, was more deeply rooted. In the subsequent meetings of the Cabinet during the absence of the President, the ire of the department heads was expressed in no uncertain terms. If the President believed that the Cabinet was a unit in its support of him and Walker, he now received information to the contrary. It appears that this body was glad of Buchanan's absence, so that the Kansas matter could more readily be taken out of his hands. The Cabinet used no language calling into question the integrity of the President but it did of Walker. This direct opposition to Walker was an indirect stab at the President. The Floyd and Cass letters of the 31st of July left him in no doubt as to their position. The President was facing a dilemma. He must either support Walker and defy the Cabinet or oppose Walker and let the Cabinet direct the Kansas policy. The President chose the latter, but in doing so, he betrayed Walker. In other words, the policy of the President was changed during his absence by the aggressive influence of the Cabinet. There is little doubt that the Cabinet members were eager for Buchanan to remain at Bedford Springs until they could get their plans well formulated. Upon his return he found that his Kansas policy had been changed. Although the new policy was spoken of as the President's own policy his Cabinet had assumed the leadership and he became a puppet. Outwardly, the administration claimed to be consistent in its Kansas policy and Walker was led to believe that he had the entire support of the administration.

On August 2, Secretary Cass forwarded a letter to the President from Toombs of Georgia. The Toombs's

letter was written in good spirit and made evidently clear that he had no intention of withdrawing his support,—provided the administration did not support Walker.²² Toombs implied, however, that if the administration continued to support Walker, he would bolt the party.

On the next day, Governor Walker wrote to Secretary Cass:

“These attacks of the southern ultras, with every possible exaggeration, are circulated with great activity among the people from the insurgent presses, which are very numerous, by their orators in public addresses, and even by messengers throughout the territory, and at points where I have no adequate means of counteracting these calumnies. It is represented that, in consequence of my recommendation of submitting the constitution to a vote of the people, which is but a performance of my duty in carrying out organic law, that the whole South denounces this policy, and that, therefore, it is hopeless to expect any settlement of the Kansas question in this manner. These misrepresentations answer the double purpose of inciting the insurgents to revolution, and withdrawing the free-state Democrats from my support, as my policy, it is urged, has now failed, in consequence of the opposition of the South.”²³

There were some cool heads, however, in the South, such as Governor Wise and Beverly Tucker of Virginia, but they were not able to stay the avalanche of

²² Cass to Buchanan, August 2, 1857, Buchanan Manuscripts, Pa. Hist. Soc.

The Toombs's letter is not within the Buchanan Correspondence, but the above is an interpretation of what Cass wrote to the President. Mr. Cass also enclosed a note from Cobb, in the same letter to Buchanan, in which Cobb made a suggestion which Cass followed. The Cobb note is not in the Correspondence of the President either, but the writer thinks it is safe to assume that it was relating to Kansas.

²³ Walker to Cass, August 3, 1857, *Kansas Historical Collections*, V, 371.

southern opposition. Beverly Tucker wrote a thoughtful and creditable article in support of Governor Walker's policy in Kansas, and submitted it to Roger A. Pryor, editor of the *Richmond South*, for publication. Pryor, a fire-eater, refused to publish it, or, at least, delayed its publication so long that Tucker had it published in the *Richmond Enquirer*.²⁴ He wrote:

"I view the course of Governor Walker in a very different light from you. The South cannot afford to be in the wrong. It is in a minority, and should be triply armed with a just cause—and so it is in fact. I must not be misunderstood by this, that, *because* she is in a *minority*, she must therefore be tame under assault upon her rights. By no means. This very fact would justify a jealous and quick resentment; *but she must preserve the right to her cause as the surest means of protecting herself.*"

"In selecting Governor Walker," continued Tucker, "he was then bound by the organic law of the Territory, enacted by Congress; by the decision of the judicial tribunal;²⁵ the opinion of the Executive, declared to the country on his accession to office; by the unanimous vote of the Cabinet on his letter of instructions; by the great principles of the Democratic party, on which the recent canvass had been conducted; and by the common maxims of republican government—to use every honorable means in his power to secure to the people of that disturbed Territory the free exercise of their elective rights. And what principle of justice, what instinct of free government, what tradition of order in society, has been offended by the Governor in the course he has thought proper to pursue? . . . It is said that it will result in making Kansas a free

²⁴ George S. Sanders to Buchanan, August 1, 1857, enclosing the published article and the reply from the *Richmond South*, Buchanan Manuscripts, Pa. Hist. Soc.

²⁵ Tucker was referring to the Dred Scott decision.

state. If so, it must be by a *fair vote*; and to make it a slave state by any other process would not only disease the cause of the South, but would inevitably, in the end, fail of its purpose."²⁶

This doctrine laid down by Beverly Tucker, though conservative and true, was vehemently denounced by the southern press, especially by the *Richmond South*,²⁷ and other correspondingly radical papers. It seemed to have little, if any effect, upon rallying public opinion in support of Walker and his policy. On the other hand, public opinion seemed to grow more hostile and intolerant toward the latter, because of the violence of southern radicals in reply to the Tucker article.

In addressing the voters of the Eighth Congressional District of the state of Georgia, Alexander Stephens opposed Walker in strong terms. He accused the Governor of violating the principles of the Kansas-Nebraska act and the Cincinnati platform of the Democratic party; his argument, against the possibility of slavery ever going there was intended, the speaker asserted, to influence the public mind against its introduction there. "He threw all the weight of his high official position" against it; he had no right to say that the constitution should be made in a particular way to suit himself, or if it was not made in conformity with his ideas and submitted to the vote of the people in accordance with his views; Kansas ought not and would not be admitted into the Union. Suppose the convention decided not to submit the constitution to the voters. It will be a question of much wider, broader and deeper range than any one heretofore connected with Kansas matters. It strikes at the foundation of our government. It involves everything recognized as State Rights and State Sovereignty. It

²⁶Richmond *Enquirer*, July 24, 1857.

²⁷Richmond *South*, July 28, 1857.

is of higher import than anything connected with the position of any man, party or administration. "If the present administration takes sides with Governor Walker on it, he and they will share the same fate. I cannot, however, permit myself to believe for a moment that they will in that contingency take such grounds. The doctrine is too outrageous and monstrous to allow any such interference."²⁸

Through the month of August there was great excitement in the South. On August 5, Mr. F. W. Pickens, while traveling through the southern states wrote to the President from White Sulphur Springs, Virginia, the following letter:

"Since my arrival here I have seen and conversed with gentlemen from all parts of the South and West, not politicians only but planters and private gentlemen, and I find there is a universal condemnation of Governor Walker's extra-official conduct and speeches. I thought at first some weeks ago the extreme feeling against him was perhaps more stimulated by the partisan press than otherwise, but I now think there is a settled and deep feeling of disappointment and distress. It is a great mistake to suppose that the democracy of Virginia ever sustains him, and the feeling in Georgia and Mississippi is warming into excitement against the administration too. I write you freely and truthfully because I sincerely desire the success of your administration, and I am sure no moderation or conciliation on your part will ever appease your opponents of the free soil party of Black Republicans of the non-slave-holding states. However, much they may appear to acquiesce in your course, whatever it may be, they in reality intend ever to war to the knife. With the loss of sympathy in the South your administration would lose half its moral power to resist them and mould conservative measures, so essential to save

²⁸ Phillips Correspondence of *Toombs, Stephens, Cobb*, 416-18.

the constitution and preserve the real power and integrity of the Democratic party for the future. One of two things is absolutely necessary, either that our friends, the pro-slavery men so called, in Kansas be prevailed on to sign . . . a circular addressed to the South setting forth the *facts in truth* that exists in that Territory, that they themselves had given up making it a slave state (if that is so) before Walker went there, and that the real question was to preserve it from falling into the hands of the Black Republicans, and that it was better to make it a Constitutional Democratic state than to let it be Black Republican, and therefore they joined Democrats from the free states to acquiesce in that policy—etc., etc.

Or, Mr. Walker will have to be transferred or withdrawn before the meeting of the convention or it must be distinctly understood that your administration does not sanction the extreme and unnecessary views of his trusting speeches and pledges, that the constitution shall be defeated unless the convention *complies* with the course he prescribed in advance with such authoritative air. Without this, the public mind of the whole South will believe that he was sent out there expressly to overcome the convention and dictate to it as Taylor's administration did by sending King from Georgia and others to mould and form the California Convention.'"²⁹

Pickens concluded by asking the President if he had read the letter of Judge Thomas of Georgia who was chairman of the convention which reported the resolutions against Walker in the Georgia State Convention. Mr. Pickens then stated:

"If I am correctly informed it is a true exponent, of the feelings and views of the Democratic party in

²⁹ This was doubtless what Floyd had in mind when he said that he thought Walker's appointment would be "a perfect political California for the Administration."

that state now engaged in active canvass for Congress and Governor. And I am told that the same feeling prevailed in Mississippi and Louisiana amongst our friends, and Governor Brown who is now canvassing the state of Mississippi, for re-election as Senator has taken the most extreme grounds, and I hear it said from pretty good authority that Senator Davis drew the Mississippi resolutions passed in that state convention . . .'³⁰

The remarks of Mr. Pickens were very true. The stronghold of the Democratic party in 1857 was in the South. The hopes of Mr. Buchanan and others that the Republican party would die overnight were not realized and there was no likelihood of it dying. It was growing in strength, and the Democratic party was weakening. The Democrats carried the state of Pennsylvania in 1856 by a very narrow margin and now the democracy within that state was on the verge of disruption. If Buchanan lost the support of the South it was preposterous to suppose that he could win back the North. If he lost the support of the South he would be left without a party, his ambitious foreign and domestic policy would collapse,³¹ and the Democratic party would be defeated in 1860, by the Black Republicans. To oppose the wishes of the South would possibly cause secession during his own administration—a catastrophe he hoped that he would never see. If he decided with the South the President would have almost the entire democracy behind him.

On August 5, the Cabinet received a letter from President Buchanan, which unfortunately has been lost. However, it was of sufficient importance to bring about a meeting to discuss the Kansas situation. The result was that John Appleton, Assistant Secretary of State, drafted a letter to Walker. This letter

³⁰ Pickens to Buchanan August 5, Buchanan Manuscripts, Pa. Hist. Soc.

³¹ Buchanan was eager to purchase Cuba and northern Mexico.

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also seems to have disappeared. The Cabinet agreed, however, that no new instructions were needed; that the Governor was not to use the troops unless actually attacked. Secretary Cobb suggested that he specifically be requested to explain what use he "intended to make of the required troops. . . ." Pending the discussion, according to Appleton, Secretary Floyd read a letter just received from General Harney, and a letter from Captain Pleasanton sent by Mr. Henry, was also read; both of these letters were sent to the President. These letters have been lost, but the Cabinet interpreted them as clearly indicating a situation quite inconsistent with Governor Walker's military ideas. This body, therefore, decided to delay any further instructions to Walker until the President was heard from again. To this conclusion the Cabinet came, partly from a belief that the existing instructions were sufficient, and partly from an idea that, in the changed aspect of affairs, the President might prefer to write the Governor an unofficial letter. The Cabinet agreed that there was no possibility of a collision in Kansas, and the great difficulty was how Governor Walker could gracefully release himself from an awkward situation.³²

The Appleton comments to Buchanan of August 6, was the last letter portraying the inner workings of the Cabinet during the absence of the President at Bedford Springs. From this and other letters it is not difficult to see the drift of the administration. Whatever were Buchanan's views of the Kansas matter things began to assume a more definite and decided anti-Walker attitude within the Cabinet. Buchanan was aware of the change. Inwardly, the President doubtless decided with Walker and outwardly he voiced the opinion of Floyd, Cobb, and Thompson.

³² Appleton to Buchanan, August 6, 1857, Buchanan Manuscripts, Pa. Hist. Soc.

But the President was made to feel not only the force of pressure of southern men but leaders in the Democratic party in the North. George N. Sanders of New York wrote to his father from White Sulphur Springs, Virginia, on August 16 and this letter was transmitted to Buchanan.

"I have conversed with some of the leading politicians and statesmen of the South and they all agree that Governor Walker is irretrievably ruined in this section of the country—even those who approve of his course. But the most eminent of them say there is still hope left, if it is true, as has been stated by his friends, that his course is approved of by the pro-slavery leaders in the territory and if this can be made evident to the southern people in a manner that cannot be doubted. They also say that the whole of the states of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana together with a large party in South Carolina and Virginia are in open arms against Governor Walker. That they (the South) believe him to be sent out there for the purpose of making Kansas a free state and that he has urged the power of the government to obtain that object. They do not know that any portion of the pro-slavery party sustain him, and that the canvass is now going on the issue upon the election in four states, as to whether the Governor ought to be disgraced and recalled."

Mr. Sanders continued: "... the most distinguished and liberal man in the South has urged me to write to you to inform you of these things and to tell you that the only way to put an end to this southern opposition is to get up a circular letter in Kansas signed by all the leading members of the pro-slavery party stating (*if it is true*) that the question is not and has not been, whether Kansas should be a slave or free state but another issue, viz., whether it should be a natural Democratic state or an ultra Black Republican state, and that they fully endorse Governor Walker's

course in this view of the case, and have entirely given up the idea of making it a slave state; then he says the mouths of these fire-eaters would be immediately closed and the document circulated throughout the slave states would have a most wonderful effect in calming the troubled waters in that section. Moreover this circular letter must not appear to emanate from the Federal Government and must come out before the assembling of the convention in order that they may not seem to have been over-awed by Mr. Walker. He says that this question is of vital importance to the administration and the country; that if it is established beyond a doubt that Governor Walker is sustained by the pro-slavery" people, "Governor Wise and Colonel Pickens of South Carolina will be elected to the Senate and no one can say a word against *the Governor*. That the thing must be done immediately and if necessary Colonel S. J. Johnson must be sent on to start the movement. . . . I have seen no southerner yet who does not either violently condemn Mr. Walker or give him at best a mere quasi support. Now my dear father act immediately and I would not doubt your course if the matter had been stated to you as it has been to me."³³

Such reports coming to the President from all parts of the Union, doubtless had tremendous weight upon the administration. The Sanders, father and son, were loyal supporters of the Buchanan administration and the discord within the Democratic party in New York City probably influenced them to endeavor to keep the Democratic party in the South intact. As was suggested, Reid Sanders, the father, forwarded his son's letter immediately to the President.

President Buchanan received considerable praise in the South, at this juncture of affairs, for his ener-

³³ George N. Sanders to his father, Reid Sanders, Sunday, August 16, 1857. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pa. Hist. Soc.

getic reply to "the New England Clergymen," August 15.³⁴ This was in answer to an attack upon the President's Kansas policy by the New England clergymen. Indeed, there were many radicals in the North who were just as active as most radical southerners; and in general the northern press was very active. This reply of the President to the New Englanders was a masterpiece: He declared that at the time of the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act slavery existed, "and still exists in Kansas under the Constitution of the United States. This point has at last been finally decided by the highest tribunal known to our laws. How it could ever have been seriously doubted is a mystery. If a confederation of sovereign states acquire new territory at the expense of their own common blood and treasury, surely one set of the partners can have no right to exclude the other from its enjoyment by prohibiting them from taking into it whatever is recognized to be property by the common constitution." This was in substance the Calhoun doctrine; therefore the reply met with the approval of the great majority of southern people. It did not, however, silence all opposition. Matters had gone too far to still the mouths of the fire-eaters of the South so easily. In their praise of the President on the one hand, they condemned Walker on the other.

During the months of September and October, Secretary Cobb communicated often with Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia. By October 9, the two had agreed that the surest way of making Kansas a slave state was to draft a constitution which was silent on the question of slavery and submit it to the people for ratification; then Kansas would be safe for slavery. The former wrote to Stephens on October 9, that he had heard nothing from the election in Kansas. He

³⁴ Buchanan's reply to New England Clergy August 15. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pa. Hist. Soc.

hoped that the pro-slavery friends had been successful, but he was doubtful.⁸⁵

It was Stephens and Cobb, therefore, who concocted the scheme of giving the people the right to vote for or against a constitution which would make Kansas a slave state no matter which way the people voted and it would appear that the latter wrote to Batt Jones, a delegate to the convention, outlining the plan. They wanted the constitution to be silent on the question of slavery. It made little difference, therefore, which way the people voted. The convention did not adopt the exact method outlined by Stephens and Cobb but it acquiesced in the fundamental principle. The influence brought to bear upon the members of the convention by the Cabinet and other southern leaders was doubtless enormous, as we shall see later.

The delegates to the Kansas constitutional convention, chosen in June, met at Lecompton, September 7. At the close of the fifth day the convention adjourned to meet again, October 19. When the news reached Washington, the administration was puzzled as to the object of adjournment. The object of the recess was to await the result of the general election of October 5, at which a full Territorial Legislature, a delegate to Congress, and various county officers were to be chosen. The election, however, did not improve the situation, but complicated it. The free state men participated and they scored a victory at the polls. Thus, they would control the next legislature, whereas the pro-slavery group controlled the convention. The election made the pro-slavery people realize the overwhelming strength of the free state men. The fate of the territory seemed to rest in the hands of the convention. If the pro-southern sympathizers failed to make Kansas a slave state while they controlled the

⁸⁵ Phillips, *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 424.

convention, they might never have another opportunity.

Another occurrence made the slavery people more bitter. This was the failure of Governor Walker to recognize the returns from Oxford and McGee counties. If the returns from these two counties had been accepted, the pro-slavery party would have controlled the legislature. But Walker refused to issue certificates of election to the Democratic candidates, because of the existence of fraud, and declared the free-soilers elected. This, Walker knew, would split the Democratic party in twain, but he was committed to the policy of justice and fair elections; he was determined to stand or fall upon that issue.

On October 19, the constitutional convention re-assembled. It was completely a pro-slavery convention. John Calhoun was elected presiding officer. In less than three weeks the work of the convention was completed. Its proceedings violated nearly every democratic precedent. "Sessions were held when no quorum was present. Again and again but thirty of the sixty elected delegates attended, and it was by twenty-eight of these that the pro-slavery, or free state question, was decided."³⁶ By a majority of two votes it was decided that the constitution should not be submitted to the vote of the people.³⁷ Before the election it was generally believed that the constitution would be submitted. Calhoun, the president of the convention, had solemnly pledged himself to submission. But the triumph of the anti-slavery party in the general election, and the activity of Secretaries Cobb, Floyd, and Thompson from Washington brought about a complete change of procedure. For, under pretense of official business, a clerk named H. L. Martin was sent to

³⁶ McMaster, J. B., *History of the People of the United States*, VIII, 306.

³⁷ *House Reports, 35th Cong. 1st Sess. III, Report No. 377, Minority of Select Committee.*

Kansas by Thompson, but his real mission was to convey to Calhoun the wishes of the pro-slavery leaders in Washington. Martin sat in the convention nearly every day and often conversed with the delegates on the pertinent questions of the moment and it was he who had certain provisions incorporated within the constitution. The convention as a result was led in the direction of a pro-slavery constitution. In the eyes of Cobb, Thompson, and Floyd its submission to the people was all right, if it could be adopted by a popular vote; but for fear it would not be adopted, they wanted it understood that they would not oppose the admission of Kansas if a pro-slavery constitution were framed "and sent directly to Congress" without the sanction of the people.³⁸ In addition to southern representatives within the convention, letters had been written to members of the convention by Secretary Cobb and by others connected with the administration.³⁹

The convention accordingly drafted and, one may also say, adopted a pro-slavery constitution. The people were indeed called upon to vote, December 21, but it was for the "constitution with slavery" or for "the constitution with no slavery," which meant that the constitution would be adopted in any event. If "the constitution with no slavery," were adopted then the slavery provision was to be dropped from the constitution, and slavery would no longer exist, except that the right of property in slaves then in the territory was in no manner to be interfered with, which was equivalent to saying that all such slaves and their progeny could be held as slaves forever, for to set them free would be a direct interference with the rights of property.

While the constitution was thus being debated, Cal-

³⁸ Testimony of Martin, *Cavode Committee Report*, 170.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

houn called on Walker and presented the situation to him. He said that the administration had changed its policy, asked Walker to support the plan of not submitting the entire constitution to popular vote; and, intimated that if he did so, the presidency would be his reward. Walker naturally inquired if he had a letter from Buchanan. Calhoun replied that he had no letter but that "the assurance came to him in such a manner as to be entirely reliable; that this particular program was the program of the administration."⁴⁰ Governor Walker replied, "I consider such a submission of the question a vile fraud, a base counterfeit, and a wretched device to prevent the people from voting," even on the issue of slavery. The Governor declared that he would not support it, and that he would "denounce it no matter whether the administration sustains it or not." In fact, Walker did not believe the report. If the administration had changed its policy, why was he, the Governor of the Territory, not informed? Nevertheless, Calhoun had first hand information. Some one connected with the administration had informed Calhoun of its desire and wish. Evidently, Calhoun was instructed to impart the news to Walker in as diplomatic a way as possible by appealing to his vanity and ambition in offering him the presidency as his reward if he would comply. Walker was too shrewd a politician to accept such a doubtful bribe. The presidency was not in the hands of any one man or the administration to give. The political trend was toward a Republican victory in 1860. Besides, Walker was too honest to sacrifice principle when he had made public his stand on the Kansas question; there was no retreat; he was determined to stand by his cause regardless of the consequences. This must have been a severe shock to Calhoun and the administration when the Governor

⁴⁰ Testimony of Martin, *Cavode Committee Report*, 110.

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expressed himself in such strong language. Nevertheless, Walker was defeated on the issue and the people were only allowed to vote on the issue of the Lecompton Constitution with or without slavery. Moreover there were other articles added to this instrument to the effect that the constitution could not be amended or annulled before 1864, and that the detested territorial laws should remain in effect till repealed by a state legislature.

From Kansas to Maine and from Maine to the Mason and Dixon line, the Democrats joined with the Republicans in condemning the action of the convention. Out of twenty newspapers in the territory of Kansas, only one was in favor of the Lecompton Constitution. The Lecompton *National Democrat* held that the slavery issue at least should have been fully and fairly submitted to the people for their decision. As it was put, no matter how the people voted Kansas would be a slave state. The Louisville *Democrat* stated that no other reason could possibly be given for refusing to submit the entire constitution to popular vote save the fear that it would be defeated, and that it was sure that failure to do so would prevent its acceptance by Congress.⁴¹

In Kansas tremendous pressure was brought to bear upon the territorial administration for a special session of the newly elected legislature in which the free-soilers had a majority. Walker had already gone to Washington on a leave of absence, but Secretary Frederick P. Stanton, the Acting Governor, yielded to the demand. The legislature ordered an investigation of the Oxford and McGee frauds and fixed the 4th of January, 1858, as a day whereon the people should vote for, or against the Lecompton Constitution as a whole. The free-soilers refused to participate in the constitutional referendum of December 21 as

⁴¹ Louisville *Democrat*, November 21, 1857.

provided for by the convention; therefore, the constitution "with slavery" was adopted by a vote of 6,143 to 489. Now, as the pro-slavery people refused to vote in the second referendum which was taken January 4th, the constitution was defeated by a vote of 10,226 against and 138 for the Constitution. Evidently, a majority of the voters opposed the constitution as adopted by the convention and sanctioned by the administration. Because Secretary Stanton yielded to pressure in calling the territorial legislature, Buchanan recalled him.

The entire procedure in Kansas was filled with fraud and debauchery from the beginning to the end. President Buchanan was made the mouthpiece of the administration but the Kansas policy as carried out by the administration was the policy of Cobb, Thompson, and Floyd in the Cabinet and Toombs, Stephens, and other prominent southerners who were intimate with the administration. Buchanan was in the grip of southern leaders and he did not possess sufficient courage to stand out against them; they were his intellectual superiors.

Governor Walker could get little or no support from the Democratic newspapers. Even the *Washington Union*, the administration organ, for one reason or another, occasionally held up valuable news which Walker was eager to get before the public. Early in October, Walker wrote to President Buchanan that "Dr. Tebbs and General Whitefield a month since left very strong letters for publication with the editor of the 'Union' which he promised to publish. His breach of this promise is a gross outrage. If not published immediately our success in convention materially depends on my getting an immediate copy at Le-compton. My friends here all regard now the 'Union' as an enemy and encouraging by its neutrality the fire-eaters not to submit the constitution. Very well,

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the facts are so clear that I can get along without the 'Union,' but he had no right to suppress Dr. Tebb's letter. I shall in due time expose that transaction."⁴² If Walker had only known it, the entire administration was his enemy.

In reply to this letter, President Buchanan had the audacity to say that he heartily approved of Governor Walker's Kansas policy.

"I am persuaded," said the President, "that with every passing day the public are more and more disposed to do you justice. You certainly do injustice to Harris, the editor of the 'Union.' In the beginning I paid some attention to the course of the paper in regard to yourself, and I think it was unexceptional: I know he stood firm amidst a shower of abuse from the extremists. I never saw nor did I ever hear of the communication published in the 'Union' to which you refer, and Harris had no recollection of it. . . . He is not responsible in any way for the non-publication of the letters to which you refer. I knew nothing of them until after the receipt of yours; and upon inquiry I found their publication had been prevented by Mr. Cobb under a firm conviction that they would injure both yourself and the administration. Whether he judged wisely or not I cannot say, for I never saw them. That he acted in fairness and friendship I cannot doubt. . . . Beyond all question, the motives of Mr. Cobb were proper."⁴³

The question has been raised by students of this period, Why this secret suppression by Secretary Cobb? Nicolay and Hay says: "There is but one plausible explanation of this whole chain of contra-

⁴² Walker to Buchanan, dated October, 1857. Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, A History*, II, footnote, III.

⁴³ Buchanan to Walker, October 22, 1857, *Ibid.*, 110-12.

The letters to which Walker referred were letters in which some of the Kansas pro-slavery leaders repeated the utter uselessness of trying to make Kansas a slave state.

dictions. The conclusion is almost forced upon us that a Cabinet intrigue, of which the President was kept in ignorance, was being carried on, under the very eye of Mr. Buchanan, by those whom he himself significantly called 'the extremists'—a plot to supersede his own declarations. As in the case of similar intrigues by the same agents a few years later, he had neither the wit to perceive nor the will to resist."⁴⁴

Buchanan, however, was not betrayed by his Cabinet. The President was fully aware of what was going on in regard to Kansas and Walker. There were doubtless many manoeuvres carried on by Cobb, Thompson, and Floyd which were gradually revealed to him. They were shrewd men and the President had entirely too much confidence in them, but it seems to be true that he was willing to be led and that the Cabinet was eager to pilot the ship of state through this perilous political storm, so he followed along on the wave of Cabinet leadership, speaking the thoughts of others. When matters were thrust upon him rather suddenly he would excuse his ignorance and then defend the person who acted for him. Knowing that the Kansas policy had been changed by his own Cabinet, he did not have the will to defy them nor the stability of character to inform Walker of the change. When the Lecompton constitution was drafted, he did not state his opposition. In his message to Congress and later messages he approved it in rather flattering terms. Walker was the man who was betrayed and not Buchanan. This seems to be incontrovertible in the light of the following evidence:

On September 22, President Buchanan received two or three letters from southern leaders denouncing Walker. By November 16, Robert Tyler of Philadelphia, a son of former President Tyler, began to throw his influence against the Kansas Governor. Tyler kept

⁴⁴ Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, A History*, II, 113.

in close touch with the President and he advised Buchanan not to give his support to Walker till after Congress met. "The more I reflect on the subject," said Tyler, "the stronger my impression becomes against the good faith of Governor Walker to his cause and his friend. At any rate it seems he has chosen a line of action that may make a great man of him, and this outside of the Democratic party perhaps, while it could not be for the advantage of anybody else." Mr. Tyler was very eager to remove him if it could be done without suspicion. He proposed that Walker be nominated for senator and be confirmed in order that he might be got out of Kansas.⁴⁵ A southern man by birth and in sympathy, Tyler was one of the leading democratic politicians and newspaper men in Philadelphia. Ex-President Tyler likewise sympathized with the pro-slavery leaders in Kansas. The Ex-President, however, was physically unable to take an active part in the campaign. Mr. J. C. Van Dyke of Philadelphia was also very intimate with both Mr. Tyler and the President. The two former made frequent visits to the White House; and these men doubtless exercised considerable influence upon Buchanan. On November 27, Mr. Tyler assured the President that the people would support him in his Kansas policy in preference to Walker.⁴⁶ On the next day Governor Bigler of Pennsylvania wrote President Buchanan that it was of the "utmost importance to the administration that the people of Kansas should vote on the slavery clause. Every proper effort should be directed to this end. If the impression can be made on their minds, that the whole power of the administration is to be wielded in favor of the admission of the state on the proceedings of the late convention,

⁴⁵ Robert Tyler to President Buchanan, November 16, 1857—Buchanan Manuscripts, Pa. Hist. Soc.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, November 27, 1857.

my word for it they will go to the polls and vote for or against slavery. It seems to me your views should be sent there in some official or semi-official form so direct, that they could not be misunderstood.”⁴⁷ On the same day, November 28, Robert Tyler wrote the President that the people were all with him in his Kansas policy. Evidently Tyler knew what the President’s policy was, for outwardly the President had thus far supported Walker. Mr. Tyler said, “If you can possibly get Governor Walker to agree with your views in three days’ time it would be best. If not, I trust you will remove him without hesitation. It is absurd to talk of Governor Walker heading any party in the Democratic ranks against you. The only danger, and that not a very great one is, in leaving the question an open one. . . . You can address the country in your message and stifle ‘out’ factions in the North as you did with your Silliman letter.”⁴⁸ On the next day, J. C. Van Dyke wrote: “If it be, as I suppose, you are determined to maintain the action of the Kansas convention. I heartily rejoice. I am satisfied it is the true policy to stand by that body as the tribunal legally constituted for the purpose of preparing the preliminaries of the admission of the territory. This being so, had they the power to act? and having acted what right have we out of the Territory to complain? I feel a great desire that all things should come right and believe you by *your firmness* will make them so.” Then Mr. Van Dyke concluded with a postscript: “Every day’s observation convinces me that those of the Democratic party who shed such large crocodile tears over ‘poor Kansas’ are deep in the

⁴⁷ George Wm. Bigler to Buchanan, November 28, 1857. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pa. Hist. Soc.

⁴⁸ Tyler to Buchanan, November 28, 1857, Buchanan Manuscripts. He has reference to the letter written to the New England Clergy of August 15, 1857.

presidential intrigue for the northern sentiment. But so sure as any man starts on that idea so sure is he to be defeated. The press cannot save him. I hope Douglas will not make a fool of himself.”⁴⁹

The administration policy had long since been decided upon and pursued secretly. The counselling of Robert Tyler and J. C. Van Dyke, the Philadelphia politicians, doubtless did much to strengthen the position of the hypocritical administration—made them more resolute in their determination.

All of the hypocrisy of the period was not committed by southerners but it was largely through the advice of Cobb, Floyd, and Thompson that the Kansas Convention launched such an intrigue against the Governor and the people of the territory. Thus Walker was betrayed. As the Democratic machine ruined the political life and career of one of its most promising and deserving supporters, Robert J. Walker, just so the Kansas question devoured the Democratic party in 1860. Congress had met and debated the question before Buchanan's famous message of December 8. Upon reaching Washington early in December, Stephen A. Douglas visited the President and urged him to oppose the Kansas Constitution. This the President, despite his many pledges to Walker, flatly refused to do. Douglas replied that he would denounce the presidential message as soon as read if it supported the constitution. President Buchanan bade him “remember that no Democrat ever yet differed from the administration of his own choice without being crushed. Beware of Tallmadge and Rives.” Douglas replied, “Mr. President, General Jackson is dead.”⁵⁰ Each kept his promise. In his message of December 8, the President said that the constitution

⁴⁹ Van Dyke to Buchanan, November 29, 1857, Buchanan Manuscripts, Pa. Hist. Soc.

⁵⁰ Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, A History*, II, 120.

was not bound to be submitted to the people for their approval. That "Kansas is, therefore at this moment as much a slave state as Georgia or South Carolina." No sooner had the message been read than Douglas rose and attacked the President's stand on the Kansas question in a vigorous speech. He was now considered as having broken with his party and all the influence of the office-holding Democrats, all the power of the administration, and all the weight of the administration press was used against him in violence and derision. But Douglas was too powerful to be defeated. He was again reelected senator from Illinois over Abraham Lincoln in the famous senatorial contest of 1858, in spite of the opposition of the entire administration. The Little Giant was at the apex of his power and influence. When Buchanan recommended in a special message to Congress, February 2, the admission of Kansas under the Lecompton Constitution, he disregarded the desire of the majority of the people of Kansas; he disregarded the Kansas-Nebraska act; he disregarded his many promises to Walker; he had at last made known his betrayal of Walker who was at one time his personal and political friend. Douglas, in the height of his power, was able to defeat the acceptance of the constitution, much to the chagrin of the administration. President Buchanan later confessed the truth of the whole matter to Mr. Forney: That "he changed his course because certain Southern states had threatened that if he did not abandon Walker and Stanton they would be compelled either to secede from the Union or take up arms against him."⁵¹ With such strong protests and threats from certain southern states Buchanan was forced to go against his better judgment.

⁵¹ Testimony of Forney, *Cavode Committee Report*, 296. The threatening states were Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. Forney's vindication, *Philadelphia Press*, September 30, 1858.

Tyler, Van Dyke, and other political bosses in Philadelphia, called a public meeting of the citizens of the city to sustain the President in his Kansas policy and to prevent a serious split in the Democratic party. The meeting was held but the leaders were not able to avoid a division. The knell of defeat for the Democrats in the presidential election of 1860 had already been sounded.

In conclusion, it may be said, the President was doubtless sincere in his support of Walker until the latter part of July, 1857. During the absence of the President from the White House, the administration policy was changed by the Cabinet. The chief Executive ceased to be the leader of his Cabinet and was made the political tool of southern leaders. He did not have sufficient courage to defy them and refused to take the sane advice of George Bancroft, the historian, who wrote:

"I entreat you . . . not to endorse the Lecompton Constitution. The democracy regards that usurpation as a stab at their principles; and convention began without an enabling act from Congress and ended by a sequestration of the rights of the people of Kansas. The constitution is not submitted to the people because it is well ascertained the people would reject it. We here think with Mr. George Mason of Virginia, that 'all power is vested in the people,' that their servants 'are at all times amenable to them.' An enabling Act by Congress is open to no one solid objection. It furnishes a ground to stand on at Mobile and Chicago; it may lose you Mississippi, and would give you New York, Ohio, Connecticut, Maine and New Hampshire. It is in itself right; while the fire-eaters who demand, that Congress shall ratify the most arrogant usurpation ever made among us, have not a foot of ground to stand upon.

An enabling Act will give peace to Kansas and to

the country. All are committed to the principle, that the people of Kansas are to decide on their institutions for themselves. Refer the matter back to them; and leave them the responsibility. That solves every difficulty. Justice, the peace of the country, the present strength of your administration, its standing with posterity, all point to the same policy. Jackson resisted the nullifiers where they had a real ground of grievance . . . the excessive tariff of the day. Now the nullifiers rally on a ground which, will sink under them, and compel them to fly to you for shelter.”⁵²

Walker resigned in disgust on December 15, 1857. He had been betrayed. “A more craven deed was never committed by a chief magistrate of the United States.”⁵³

Kansas was finally admitted as a free state during the closing days of the Buchanan administration, after the withdrawal of the southern states from the Union and after the southern representatives in Congress and in the Cabinet had returned to their native states.

⁵² George Bancroft to Buchanan, December 5, 1857, Buchanan Manuscripts, Pa. Hist. Soc.

⁵³ Muzzey, D. S., *The United States of America*, I, 506.