

## JOHN TYLER OUR FIRST ACCIDENTAL PRESIDENT<sup>1</sup>

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**A**N ACCIDENTAL PRESIDENT is one who succeeds to that office by reason of the death of an elected president. For fifty-two years there had been a succession of American chief magistrates who survived their elective terms of office and retired to private life. Eight individuals had fulfilled the expectation of the electorate, when the ninth man to have been inaugurated suddenly died after a bare month in office, and for the first time a vice president, John Tyler, acceded to the highest office in the land, on April 4, 1841.

The event was quite unanticipated by the public, and, indeed, it is safe to say that the party leaders would not have put Tyler on the ticket had they considered the likelihood of the death of their chosen leader, William Henry Harrison. Custom—with the exception of 1828—dictated that a presidential and a vice presidential candidate must not be from the same section; a Northerner being chosen as the presidential nominee, a Southerner must be put on as vice presidential nominee. Harrison being a citizen of free soil Ohio, Tyler, a citizen of Virginia, a slave state, was the customary balance.

John Tyler was an odd character, conceited beyond the upper range of public men, narrow and provincial in his outlook, prejudiced and petty in his views. For the greater part of his career he, Bourbon-like, learned nothing from the political developments of his period, and forgot nothing—until the climax of his presidential term.

In a study of his mentality the first element to consider is his paternity. The Tyler family came to Virginia in 1652, so that in length of residence that family ranks with the early settlers. "Head-right" was the rule in Virginia when the Tylers landed and consequently the head of the family received two hundred and fifty acres of land—fifty acres for each immigrant—as a donation. Their grant was located where Williamsburg now stands. This land they afterwards sold and settled elsewhere in the vicinity. They never attained the position of great landowners, like the Fairfaxes, Randolphs, Carters, or

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Byrds, who secured titles to baronies of vast extent. But the Tylers were never grouped with the "poor white trash." Possibly they would have been called "yeomen" had they lived in England.

The Tyler family had its ups and downs; one ancestor, it is unctuously recorded, became a vestryman of Briton Church. John Tyler's grandfather was marshal of the local vice-admiralty court—a sort of marine sheriff, serving papers on vessels libelled for nonpayment of debts and that sort of thing. This does not sound like a very lucrative job in a province where the transmarine shipping was largely in the strong hands of long established shipping firms of London or Bristol. However, the future president's father moved up to a higher status, first as judge of Virginia's principal court, then as governor, and finally as federal district judge until his death in 1813. What sort of judge he was may be gathered from the Virginia Court Reports: Judge Tyler, the reports state, "disliked law books, particularly those of England."<sup>2</sup> As that was before the works of Kent and Story appeared, American law books were about as numerous as hen's teeth.

Disregard of precedents is the prime characteristic of autocrats on or off the bench. "It makes a difference in the judgment of the court, *whose ox was gored*," says the old story. Without the ballast of law books the Virginia judiciary is apt to have leaned heavily to favorites. Autocracy breeds sycophants—men who fawn upon the autocrats and "crook the pregnant hinges of the knee, that thrift may follow fawning." Tyler, Senior, was judge from 1788 to 1808; his son, the future President, was born in 1790 and grew up in this atmosphere of judge-adulation, which inevitably extended to the potentate's son. An exaggerated ego was the result.

John Tyler, Junior, was graduated at William and Mary College in 1807. The high standard set for that institution by Jefferson and his colleagues after American independence was declared had hardly been kept up. Judge Tyler wrote to Jefferson on May 12, 1810, saying: "A young man will leave college with no kind of knowledge of arithmetic, history or geography." The judge knew this from examining A. B.'s for admission to the bar. Perhaps his son was an example of that type of collegian. At any rate the latter studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1810.

It may be convenient here to summarize the future President's

office-holding career. In 1811, he was elected one of Charles City County's two members of the Virginia House of Delegates, and served as such until, on the death of a Congressman in 1816, he was elected to Congress. There he continued until 1821, when he resigned on account of ill health. From 1823 to 1825 he was again a member of the Virginia House of Delegates, and thereafter was twice elected governor by the Virginia legislature. That body then sent him to the United States Senate, and re-elected him in 1833.

In 1836 he resigned as Senator to avoid obeying the Virginia legislature's "instructions" to vote to "expunge" the resolutions censuring President Jackson. In the same year the opposition to the Jackson regime, in its efforts to throw the presidential election into the House of Representatives (as had been the case in 1824), arranged that Webster, Harrison, and White were to be its candidates in the north-eastern, middle, and southern states respectively, with Granger in the North and Tyler in the South as vice presidential nominees. The scheme failed. Tyler did not carry Virginia, though the Maryland slaveholders gave him that state's vote and South Carolina rewarded him with her suffrage for his opposition to the Force Bill. White, his file leader, won only Tennessee and Georgia, carrying Tyler along with him. Granger received 77 electoral votes, Tyler, 47.

The Whigs—opponents of Jackson and Van Buren—admired Henry Clay, but believing that he could not carry New York and other pivotal states in 1840, they nominated Harrison for President. Tyler is said to have withdrawn from the Virginia senatorial contest on account of a promise of Clay and his lieutenants to support him, Tyler, for vice president—a "deal" which was put through. The Harrison landslide in 1840 carried "Tyler too" along even though he could not get the vote of his home state. Harrison died in April, 1841, and Tyler acceded to the presidential office. He did not run in 1844 and thereafter held no elective office of importance, although elected to the Confederate Congress. He died before the latter met—on January 18, 1862.

Some explanation of the rise of this the most execrated of our Presidents is necessary.

Virginia copied her system of representation from England's of the medieval period. When in 1265 Simon de Montfort introduced representative government in England, directing two knights to be elected

by each shire to facilitate the granting of extra feudal aid for the "defence of the realm," no thought of representation based on population existed; the shire and its county court were long established institutions that were made use of as convenient units; little Rutlandshire had equal representation with huge Yorkshire as late as 1821. Following this example, Virginia's county unit system produced similar inequitable results. The Tidewater section, first to be settled, is traversed by many navigable rivers up to the "Fall line" about a hundred miles from the coast. This section was divided into small counties. Farther inland, where crossing the numerous rivers is less difficult, the counties were organized with larger areas. Until 1830 each county had its two members in the House of Delegates. So the Tidewater, with barely thirty-eight per cent of the white population of the state, elected 71 of the 149 members of that body as well as half of the members of the Senate.<sup>3</sup> As scarcely one-half of the adult male whites had the real estate required for a voter, the number of electors for the House of Delegates was very small. In Tyler's district, Charles City County, there were only 182 electors to choose two delegates, whereas Loudoun County, with 1,746 electors, had only two delegates. In the Charles City district many electors were too old, too poor, too ignorant, too averse to public speaking, or otherwise self-disqualified for representing their home district at Richmond. In 1811 the Federalists were still a respectable minority and they, of course, were caviar to the general. So the judge's son had almost a pre-emptive right to the seat. It was not quite a Rotten Borough like Old Sarum in England, but closely akin to it.

In 1816 when Tyler won a seat in Congress, the conditions were not quite as easy. The population of his district approximated 25,000 whites (plus slaves rated at three-fifths each of a white man). Assuming the adult white males to be one-fifth of the white population and that one-half of these were disqualified non-freeholders, the electors would number 2,500. Of these Tyler had a 182 majority. Through family and personal influence he succeeded in gaining the seat. That seems to measure his appeal to the electorate. When he faced the Piedmont and Western districts in 1836 and 1840 he failed to obtain a majority. The Tidewater politicians were a close corporation; with

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 193 (London, 1787).

some slight assistance from the Piedmont they were able to monopolize for themselves all judicial and executive positions within the gift of the state, as Jefferson's *Notes* indicate.

Tyler's professional standing was not high. Upon finishing his law studies at twenty he immediately entered the political arena, and he does not seem to have devoted himself to the learning of the law after that. At the age of twenty-seven he had a professional income of two thousand dollars a year, or more than Daniel Webster was earning at that age, as Lyon G. Tyler, his son, brags. But Webster had no father on the bench for a generation, and the captious do say that having a judge for a father does not harm a youthful practitioner. Doubtless Tyler was an adept at drawing bills of sale for human chattels; at preparing deeds, mortgages, leases, and wills for his kinsfolk and acquaintance. Of course he knew the Rule in Shelley's Case, and the Rule in Spencer's Case. Whether he had mastered Calvin's Case is dubious. Plowing through 1,369 pages of his letters to family and friends, one cannot fail to notice that he never reports professional contacts with the giants of the bar (and there were giants in those days—Webster, Clay, Binney, Wirt, Sergeant, and scores of others), whom to read of would have intrigued the young provincials.

While in the House of Delegates, Tyler seems to have had a considerable criminal practice. The Virginia pardon system was then peculiar. The governor could reprieve, but pardoning was for the House of Delegates. The honorable Tyler as a delegate would not of course vote on a pardon for one of his own clients (if a verdict went wrong), but his fellow delegates of the same profession might look forward to reciprocation if they voted to pardon a client of his.

A factor in Tyler's mental evolution was the decadent condition of the Tidewater section. There, tobacco had first been developed in America as a commercial crop. Like all newly discovered countries, Tidewater's land in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries seemed to be limitless in amount. It was accordingly butchered. Labor was then scarce. Repeated croppings and no fertilization exhausted the soil after a few years and the planter moved farther inland. The Fairfaxes, Carters, and Randolphs had so much land that they could keep up the process for generations. But an end had to come sooner or later. About the time Tyler was born, tobacco growing in the Tidewater had definitely declined. When he attained his

majority, the Tidewater was through as the tobacco growing section. In 1805 Judge Tyler advertised his Charles City property for sale. He dilated on its cereal growing quality but said nothing about tobacco. A generation later, Henry Clay, himself a native of Henrico County, Virginia, sang the swan song of the Tidewater, in the Senate, enumerating the baronial mansions there that had fallen into decay, and describing the plight of the heirs of their builders. Kentucky had replaced the Tidewater in total yield of tobacco, if not in the quality of its leaf.<sup>4</sup>

When such decay is general throughout a district, the effect on the inhabitants is to produce a fatuous conservatism, an innate tendency to hold fast to what has been preserved, in this case particularly to the rights of slave ownership; and on the other hand to oppose additional expenditures, public as well as private, so that the impoverished heir might approximate his ancestors' style of life. Hence we find a recrudescence of States' Rights playing a part much more prominent in the twenties and thirties than Jefferson had assigned to it in the beginning of the century. Tyler was appalled at Adams' suggestion of a federally endowed university and observatory—such extravagance would increase the cost of imported "nigger cloth" for his slaves—a trifle, but execrable.

A side light on Tyler's character is shown by a curious episode. One day James H. Christian, a well-dressed mulatto, arrived in Philadelphia by way of the Underground Railroad. Interrogated by the latter's vigilance committee, James said that he was born the slave of "old Major Christian" of Charles City County, Virginia. The Christians were wealthy and owned many slaves. The fugitive was a son of "Mr. Christian" (probably a grandson of the old major, whose daughter Letitia had married John Tyler). The slave had always been well treated, possibly pampered, having at times borrowed as much as three hundred dollars from his master to loan out to his friends. Upon the major's death, James fell into the hands of Mrs. John Tyler and became a waiter at the White House from 1841 until Mrs. Tyler's death in 1843, when, at his request, he was handed over to William H. Christian, a Richmond merchant. There he fell in love with a

4. Charles H. Ambler, *Sectionalism In Virginia*, 33 ff. (Chicago, 1910).

free Negro woman, whom the law forbade him to marry, and they were now making their way to Canada and wedded bliss. "I didn't like Mr. Tyler much because he was a poor man," James said. "I never did like poor people. I didn't like his marrying into our family, who were considered very far Tyler's superiors . . . . On the plantation Tyler was a very cross man and treated the servants very cruelly; but the house servants were treated much better owing to their having belonged to his wife, who protected them from persecution, as they had been favorite servants in her father's family." James estimated that Tyler got about thirty-five thousand dollars and twenty-nine slaves, young and old, by his wife.<sup>5</sup>

Such was the man stripped of the mask of the conventional politician of those days—very cruel to the field hands—cautious about his wife's house servants for she protected them against persecution—by the future President.

Reverting to his political career—when twenty-two years old, Tyler introduced a resolution in the House of Delegates censuring Virginia's Senators at Washington for favoring the extension of the charter of the First Bank of the United States, then about to expire. He deemed the original charter of that bank an unwarranted exercise of federal power, because the chartering of banks was not specifically mentioned in the Constitution. As planters had owned their workmen and sold their products directly to exporters, they had little need for or knowledge of banks. Senator Richard Brent disregarded the desires of the Richmond solons as to the bank. His range of knowledge was wider than the Charles City solicitor's. Congressmen knew that war with Great Britain was almost inevitable; that seven million dollars of the bank's stock was British-owned; that on the termination of the bank's existence the proceeds of that stock would be transferred to London; and that that was equivalent to a score of British frigates or regiments. Why transfer such resources to a future enemy?<sup>6</sup> Tyler's political god, Jefferson, had in 1802 morally guaranteed the constitutionality of the bank's charter when he sold a great part of its stock to Barings of London at a premium of forty-five per cent above par. Tyler could

<sup>5</sup> William Still, *Underground Railroad*, 69-70 (Philadelphia, 1872).

<sup>6</sup> Henry Adams, *The Formative Years: A History of the United States During the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison*, edited by Herbert S. Agar, 631 (Houghton, 1947).

not profess acumen superior to Jefferson's. Yet at twenty-two he set himself up to censure the wisdom of the graybeards. In Tyler the fixation of superiority induced by constant flattery was irrevocable. He felt that his opinions were sanctified.

Years passed. The War of 1812 nearly wrecked the federal treasury, deprived as it was of the bank's assistance. Monroe's and Tompkins' personal credit alone staved off its bankruptcy. With peace, statesmen like Henry Clay, who had opposed rechartering in 1811, frankly confessed their mistake. President Madison, formerly a States' Rights leader, admitted that a bank was a necessary and proper means for carrying into execution the powers enumerated as vested in the federal government. A second bank was chartered before Tyler entered Congress. Its credit sufficed to bring specie from Europe and to restore the shattered American money system. But the politicians nearly wrecked it. The Jones-Buchanan and Smith speculators centering their power in Baltimore borrowed huge sums from the bank to bull its own stock. Their operations were successful at first, but before the panic of 1819 hit the country the very solvency of the bank was questionable. Congress investigated it through a committee of which Tyler was a member. The business was quite beyond his mental grasp. On December 18, 1818, he wrote home that he had never encountered more labor "to perplex oneself with." Discounts and overdrafts were novelties to him. "The strongest minds become relaxed and the imagination sickens and almost expires." Later he was to state that bills of exchange caused the bank no trouble, only promissory notes played havoc with its balances—the form, that is, not the substance, of the matter focused his attention. He was not able to perceive that lending money in whatever form on the bank's own stock was folly, and that was what the Baltimoreans had brought about to an excessive amount. Tyler did not go to Baltimore to ferret out the steps of the speculation but voyaged to Boston, where irregularities were least likely to have occurred.

The act chartering the bank vested the federal courts with jurisdiction by *scire facias* at the instance of the government to forfeit the charter for malfeasance. Tyler moved in the House of Representatives to order a *scire facias*, not for malfeasance, but because the act itself was unconstitutional. The real lawyers in the House must have smiled at Tyler's move to invoke the jurisdiction granted by the act in order to have the court (which apart from the act had no jurisdiction) declare



that very act a nullity—that is to deny the court's own power to adjudicate the cause.

Congress had too much common sense to cut off the nose of the business community to spite its face. A new bank president was installed and the bank righted itself and sailed on, not, however, without opposition from the state banks. It appealed to the courts, and in the famous case of *McCullough vs. Maryland*,<sup>7</sup> the Supreme Court sustained the constitutionality of the bank's charter. The decision was unanimous, six justices concurring. Two of these were from free states and four from slave states. Also, of the six justices two were appointees of the Federal Adams, two of anti-Federalist Jefferson, and two of anti-Federalist Madison. "This is a constitution we are expounding" was the keynote of the decision—not a personal deed of gift from a king to a courtier.

While an uppish village attorney might have felt justified, before that decision, in questioning the validity of the bank's charter, no reasoning lawyer could thereafter doubt it. Tyler, however, chose not to be convinced, either by the clarity of the court's reasoning, or by the weight of the great reputations of Marshall, Livingston, Story, and others.

In 1827 Tyler won a seat in the United States Senate by a vote in the Virginia legislature of 115 to 110 over the erratic John Randolph. The Adams and Clay men in the legislature gave Tyler 40 votes and so enabled him to get the better of the man who had insulted nearly everybody he came in contact with. Tyler, of course, ascribed his success to the public's appreciation of his character. Taking his seat in Washington, he found the tide running against the dour Adams and toward the military chief, Jackson. So he abandoned his supporter and endorsed Jackson for president in 1828. Later, when the frontier duellist had been elected and began sniping at the Second Bank of the United States (because it would not favor his friends with positions or loans), he upheld the bank's enemy, voted against the recharter approved by Congress in 1832, and in favor of Jackson's veto of that charter. He sympathized with the Jacksonian charge that the bank "made the rich, richer and the poor, poorer," and joined the Taney, Ellicotts, and other state bank men who were eager to get the government's millions on deposit in the banks they owned stock in. But when Jackson threatened military action against the nullifiers of South Carolina, Tyler's was the

only senatorial vote cast against the Force Bill. When the imperious Jackson in 1833 withdrew the government's deposits from the bank, three years before its charter expired, Tyler joined in the Senate's censure of the President for that lawless action. Jackson's astute "Kitchen Cabinet" prodded him to utilize France's failure to make payments provided for by treaty to create a war-scare and thus arouse the patriotic fervor of the voters just before the congressional elections. He turned the trick and won a majority in the Virginia legislature, which promptly instructed its Senators to vote to "expunge" the resolution censuring Jackson.

Tyler wrote to his son Robert that a public man's acts had to be governed by expediency—that was a private confession. Publicly—after his study of the records convinced him that Senators at Washington who did not obey Richmond's "instructions" suffered for it—he announced that the Constitution required the Senate to "keep" a record of its proceedings; that to "expunge" the resolution of censure would be to violate that constitutional mandate. As he could not in conscience do so, rather than disobey the Virginian instructions, he resigned from the Senate. He was publicly extolled as the soul of honor. His colleague, Benjamin W. Leigh, when elected had been instructed to censure Jackson. He did so, and then refused to stultify himself by expunging that resolution. Never afterward could Leigh obtain Richmond's favor.

#### TYLER AND THE WHIGS

In American politics a party is a historical and not a logical category. In Washington's time, men who had opposed the adoption of the Constitution soon joined hands with its most active proponents, men like Madison. Together they opposed the Hamiltonian trend (as they said) to monarchy. Hamilton and his adherents fellowshipped with former opponents to strengthen the hands of the fledgling government. In Lincoln's day Free-Soil Democrats linked themselves to Anti-Slavery Whigs to form the Republican Party. So with the Jacksonian Opposition in the 1830's. In December, 1838, Henry Clay wrote to Judge Francis Brooke of Virginia: "If we repel the advances of all the former members of the Jackson party to unite with us, under whatever name they may adopt, we must remain in a perpetual and helpless minority."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Carl Schurz, *Henry Clay* (American Statesmen Series), 2:174 Boston, 1887).

In the same period *Niles' Weekly Register* recorded that "as if by universal consent" all opponents of Jacksonian imperialism "joined forces calling themselves Whigs." They included National Republicans of the Adams-Clay school, Anti-Masons, and States' Rights men of 1832. The Clay-Adams group was by far the largest in the opposition merger. But, as Jackson had had 124,205 more votes than his recorded opponents in 1832, it needed a considerable defection from the Jacksonian ranks to oust that party from power. In 1836, Van Buren, Jackson's anointed successor, had only 24,893 more votes than his opponents. The Whig cause was waxing, the Democratic, waning.

Political conventions on a nationwide scale had begun with the Anti-Masonic meeting at Baltimore in 1831. To let the southern and western people know what their crusade was about, they issued an "Address to the Public" descriptive of their complaints against Masonry. In 1832 the National Republicans issued a manifesto favoring the re-charter of the Bank of the United States—and possibly at its expense. The Democrats held conventions in 1832 and 1836 to ratify Jackson's choice of a vice president, then of a presidential candidate, but issued no address of any sort. In 1836 the Whigs held no convention, but the leaders recommended the support of Whigs in various parts of the country. As stated before, Tyler, then prominently mentioned because of his resignation from the Senate, was to be the southern vice presidential candidate. In Maryland, the abolitionist leanings of the other principal vice presidential candidate, Francis Granger of New York, induced the slaveowners to put Tyler on the Harrison ticket and the general's popularity there gained Tyler ten electoral votes. Judge Hugh L. White of Tennessee won his home state and Georgia, and carried Tyler along in those states, thus giving the latter 47 votes in the electoral college. But Tyler failed to carry his home state, Virginia, whose 23 votes, had they been taken from Van Buren, would have left the latter exactly one-half of the electoral vote, thus accomplishing the Whig objective of an election by the House. In pivotal Pennsylvania, the Whigs had won the governorship in 1835. Their prospects were injured for the 1836 presidential campaign by the fiasco of the Anti-Masonic investigation and by the clamor raised over the state's grant of a charter to the Bank of the United States. Out of a total vote of 178,386, Van Buren's majority was only 4,364, or less than three per cent.

What should have impressed Tyler on analyzing the vote is that he got only 133,990 popular votes as against Granger's 602,260; in other

words, Tyler's proportion of the Whig vote was only 23½ per cent, indicating that more than three-quarters of the Whig strength lay north of Mason's and Dixon's Line, or was National Republican formerly. The tail should not wag the dog. If Tyler aimed to continue his Whig affiliations he should have been prepared to accept the views of the Clay school of politics.

The period from 1836 to 1841, Van Buren's time, was portentous of political change. Primarily, the panic of 1837, like every panic in this country, meant that the voters would demand a change in the high command. Corruption in the post office and in the land office had run riot, but those items were subordinate to the main issue—that of the currency. "Few greater enormities are chargeable to politicians than the destruction of the Bank of the United States by Jackson and his supporters," says Professor Catterall.<sup>9</sup> The government deposits were distributed among the "Pet Banks" favored by Jackson, Taney, and the ruling clique who had opposed Nicholas Biddle, president of the Bank of the United States, because he would not favor their partisans with jobs or loans. Before the end of Van Buren's administration, Levi Woodbury, the secretary of the treasury, admitted that, although the government had never lost a cent in its dealings with the Second Bank, the state banks had caused it a loss of over fifteen million dollars.

The loss to the people was vastly greater. A state bank located in New York might be of excellent credit there, but its notes would circulate in Boston only at a substantial discount. An incident indicates how the insiders might fleece the ignorant. A company of soldiers was moved from Alexandria, Virginia, to New Orleans by sea. Pay day came on salt water and the men got their wages in notes on the Bank of Alexandria, with which they were familiar. Arrived in New Orleans the best rate they could get in spendable money was 87½¢ on the dollar. An insider had, of course, arranged to get New Orleans notes at a discount in Alexandria, exchange them for the soldiers' Alexandria notes, and take the latter back to their place of issue, thus making a profit both ways and cheating the silly soldier boys out of one-eighth of their pay.<sup>10</sup>

Jackson finally realized the futility of his "Pet Bank" scheme, with its general demoralization of the currency, and stupidly tried to save

9 Ralph C. H. Catterall, *The Second Bank of the United States*, 476 (Chicago, 1903).

10 Catterall, *Second Bank*, 464.

the government's exchequer only. He issued his Specie Circular directing that all payments on the purchase of government lands in the West be made in specie. That helped precipitate the panic. His successor, Van Buren, drove through the subtreasury plan. Under it, treasury officials collected and disbursed taxes due the government in specie only, letting commerce take care of itself. The fallacy, of course, lay in the fact that a dollar of specie held in a central reserve bank will adequately secure ten dollars in paper, that is, avoid demand for the redemption of the paper, while money in a subtreasury has no reserve potentiality—it is sterilized.

Basic to the subject of bank currency was the fact that the world's production of gold and silver had substantially diminished since the Spanish-American Revolution in 1810. In the Western world specie declined from a total of £380,000,000 in 1808 to a low of £270,000,000 in 1843, the Far East acting as an absorbent of the precious metal.<sup>11</sup> From 1810 to 1840 the population of the United States had increased from 7,215,000 to a little over 17,000,000, and the increase in wealth and business activity had been at a rate at least as great. When Van Buren was inaugurated, it would have been utterly impossible to transact the business of our people by specie payments only—there was not nearly enough in the country to go around. Some form of paper money was necessary. The Jackson "Pet Banks" system was bad. It produced the monthly *Bank Note Detector* to enable business to keep abreast of the discounts applicable to the numerous bank notes in circulation. Even so, the paper money of that day was better than barter. Thinking men realized that a new United States bank was the surest remedy for their financial troubles; it separated "the sword from the purse," reduced defalcations by tax collectors, and above all brought a uniform currency into existence. Against these advantages the demagogues urged that some banker would get rich and possibly corrupt some government officials.

The aftermath of the panic of 1837 dominated men's thoughts when the time came to select presidential candidates for 1840. The Whigs were optimistic—now or never was the cry. One of their managers, Thurlow Weed of New York, was the master-mind of intra-party activities. He believed that the party idol, Henry Clay, could

11 Leland H. Jenks, *The Migration of British Capital to 1875*, 27, 85 (New York, 1927).

not carry the Empire State, with its forty-two electoral votes, against Van Buren intrenched there for a generation and supported by federal patronage. Clay was a Mason and a slave owner, and anti-Masonic feeling was still a factor in New York, where the anti-slavery movement was gaining ground rapidly. Neither of these objections applied to William Henry Harrison of Ohio. In 1832 Clay had been beaten in Ohio, Indiana, and New Jersey, while in 1836 Harrison had carried those states by considerable majorities.<sup>12</sup> The logic of the election returns pointed to Harrison. So when the Whigs met at Harrisburg on December 4, 1839, Clay, although he had a plurality of votes on the first ballot, was short of a majority. The vote for Weed's "stalking horse," Winfield Scott, soon fell off, and Harrison obtained a clear majority. Then the chairman of a committee of three from each state announced that they had finally agreed on John Tyler for the vice presidential nomination, and the convention ratified the committee's selection without deliberation, although many Whigs are said to have opposed it. No platform was adopted. This fact has been animadverted upon by writers who think only of present customs and overlook the fact that in 1839 political platforms had not come into vogue. The Democrats up to that time had had none, and although the Whigs and anti-Masons had issued "addresses" eight years earlier, the latter differed markedly from the present-day platforms of specific pledges.

It would be equally pertinent to disapprove of Sir Robert Peel or Lord John Russell for not at that period issuing party prospectuses. In each country at that time a party's principles were gauged—possibly indefinitely—by the speeches of its leaders.

So little attention was paid to the vice presidential nomination at that time that the Abolition press hailed Clay's defeat as a triumph for their cause. "The rejection of Clay," said the *Oberlin Evangelist*, "shows that a slaveholder can never again expect to be President"—a prediction rivaling the Gallup Poll's forecasts of 1948, as from April 4, 1841, until July 9, 1850, only slaveholders filled the presidential chair.

More efficacious than platforms was the convention's call for a ratification meeting of Young Whigs to be held in Baltimore on May 4, 1840. This prognosticated the nature of the campaign. Argumentation in Congress and the press had exhausted the vital issue; ox roasts rather than syllogisms would get the votes of the prairie plowboys. A Demo-

<sup>12</sup> John B. McMaster, *History of the People of the United States*, 6:554 (1910).

cratic paper unwisely published a slur on Harrison, intimating that he lived in a log cabin and drank only hard cider. Turning this contemptuous remark into political ammunition, the Whigs featured the contest with log cabins and hard cider. Columbus, Baltimore, Harrisburg, and many other cities witnessed huge parades with log cabins on floats and hard cider in barrels. Perhaps Weed's political technique derived some of its inspiration from the practices of revivalists and camp meeting managers. "At all meetings, great or small," says Weed of the 1840 orgy, "singing proved an element of great strength."<sup>13</sup> "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too," with other popular songs, were uniformly part of the programs. The appeal was more to the imagination than to the intellect.

Certain Pittsburghers wrote to Tyler asking for his views on the bank subject. He wrote a reply expressing his opposition to another national bank. But on second thought he sent the letter to Washington, D. C., to get political advice on transmitting it to the inquirers, and was told *not* to send it to Pittsburgh.<sup>14</sup> Tyler followed that advice and so escaped committing himself. He kept silent when it was his duty to speak, and therefore should not have been *allowed* to speak when it was his duty to be silent.

On September 10, 1840, he was present at the great rally of Pittsburgh Whigs held in what is now West Park on the North Side. William G. Johnston says in his *Reminiscences* that one of the speakers was one "who ought not to have been there, and would not had he been an honest man—John Tyler. It is immaterial whether he deceived the Whigs, or they were self-deceived; in either case in accepting the nomination he was party to a deception. And there can be no doubt that his betrayal of the party to which he professed allegiance was premeditated. Whilst speaking at the convention, someone interrogated him as to his political faith, and his reply, 'I am what I am,' indicated that he was not where he rightly belonged. But that mattered not to him, for like a tramp who steals a ride on a railway train, he was not troubled, provided he could reach his destination, whether the means were foul or fair."

"Weasel-words" played a prominent part in Tyler's career. He wrote to his son that he gave enigmatical answers to inquirers when he chose to be noncommittal. That helped him in his first senatorial election; in securing acclaim when he finally resigned as Senator; and was

<sup>13</sup> Thurlow Weed, *Autobiography*, 1:491 (Boston, 1884).

<sup>14</sup> Barton H. Wise, *Life of Henry A. Wise*, 177 (1894). Congressman Richard Biddle of Pittsburgh seems to have been the sole adviser.

important in getting the support of Clay's friends for the vice-presidential nomination. Later, his enigmatical replies concerning the Whig bank bills produced the cabinet resignations that started the ruin of his reputation.

All accounts of the 1840 campaign relate to *Whig* rallies, parades, etc., and no reference is made to Democratic activities of that sort. However, there was no Hatch Act then in force. Van Buren's appointees were very offensively partisan, we may well believe. Postmasters, marshals, and customs officers as a matter of course busied themselves getting out the vote, and Democratic state and local officials followed suit. They were working for their bread and butter.

The result was a thumping victory for Harrison. He got 234 electoral votes against Van Buren's meager 60. The Whigs won every northern state except New Hampshire and Illinois. In the former, Secretary Woodbury's well-oiled machine got Van Buren a 6,598 majority. In the latter, the southern settlers seemed to be firmly in control. Besides the border states, Harrison carried North Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee, with a total of 50 electoral votes. Delaware, Maryland, and Kentucky gave him 28, making a total of 78 electoral votes from slave states. However, he could have given Van Buren those 78 votes and still have had a majority. It was clearly a victory for the National Republican wing of the Whig party. The States' Rights wing was not needed to beat Van Buren.

Between 1828 and 1832, the total popular vote for president increased 94,471, or a trifle more than 8%. Between 1832 and 1836, the increase was 247,406, or about 19%. Between 1836 and 1840, the increase was 1,012,575, or nearly 70%. Assuming that the population eligible to vote increased at the same rate as the total population, that is, at the rate of about 3.3% per annum, the campaigning efforts of both Whigs and Democrats in 1840 produced a very striking result in adding to the total number of votes cast. The defeated candidate, Van Buren, got 367,153 more votes in 1840 than he had received in 1836, or about a 48% increase, as against the general increase in population in that quadrennium of about 13.4%. The successful candidate, Harrison, polled 538,361 more votes in 1840 than the three opposition candidates had received in 1836, or nearly a 74% increase.<sup>16</sup>

(To be Concluded.)

16 See Alexander Johnston, *History of American Politics*, 115-132 (New York, 1880), and Josephus N. Larned, *History for Ready Reference* (Springfield, Mass., 1894-1910) at dates mentioned. The votes of Michigan citizens seem to have been included in the 1836 total, although the official admission of that state is given as January 26, 1837.