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CANAL COMMISSIONER'S BILL.

Remarks of Mr. Speaker Wright, made in the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania, on the bill relative to a reduction of the expenses of the Board of Canal Commissioners, February 11, 1843.

Mr. WRIGHT (Speaker) said—Sir, I obtained leave a day or two since, to give my views to this House, and perhaps, it is not necessary for me to ask its indulgence again. I stated then, as I state now, that I should not have participated in the debate on the passage of the bill, had I not been called out, specifically called out of the chair, as the presiding officer of the House to embark in this discussion. If it did not amount to language in those words, yet the remarks which I made while I was a member of the legislature in 1841, on the question of submitting this question to a vote of the people, was commented upon, and read at the desk of your Clerk. Sir, I do not know why it was that the allusion was made to me at that time. I do not know how it was that gentlemen upon this floor knew what my views were on the subject; they certainly could not have known them from what I had said here. And as to private conversation in my chamber, that ought not to have been a legitimate subject for remark in this Hall.

But, sir, from some cause or other, I was brought to defend myself a right undoubtedly I had, and I was compelled and forced to make strictures on the Board of Canal Commissioners. Now, I take back nothing I said on a former occasion; and I wish gentlemen to understand that the same position which I occupied in reference to the charges I made against the Canal Commissioners the other day, I occupy now. It is an unaccountable thing to me that all this excitement should have originated on a debate of this character. It is strange to me that gentlemen should make personal reflections calculated to separate the bonds of friendship which have subsisted between them for two or three legislatures; that a difference of opinion should put upon the prescribed list, and that all association between members should be cut off, and dissolved in consequence of a bill reported to remove the Canal Commissioners. Now, sir, I do not understand it, nor can conceive what it means. Sir, how many days is it since we passed a bill which at once swept the Judges of the court of General Sessions in the city of Philadelphia, from their judicial station, and abolished the tenure of their office? How much time was occupied in debate on that occasion? Why, not half an hour. And yet, sir, here were three gentlemen whose honor was as dear to them as the Canal Commissioner's is dear to them, and yet not a voice was raised in this Hall in their behalf, and to sustain the position they occupied in the city and county of Philadelphia. There had been petitions I grant; but nothing was said in favor of the judges. How long is it since the Nicholson Court bill passed, reforming honorable men out of office, and among them; Judge Anthony, as well as the three members of the Board of Commissioners? Why, there were but eleven votes in favor of retaining them. Here then, were these honorable men, in whose behalf no feelings were ex-

pressed, or sympathy evinced by the members of this House, turned out of office, and their commissions taken from them. Why, did not the gentleman from Crawford (Mr. Lowry) rise in his place and protest in the name of his constituents against the measure? Did gentlemen who have spoken from day to day, vie in their place, and protest against the measure? No, they sat in their places silent as mice. The torrent passed over and there was no hand to stay it.

Mr. LOWRY (interrupting) Neither their public nor private characters were assailed.

Mr. WRIGHT: Those gentlemen who are now taking an active part in this debate and who are taking the part of the Canal Commissioners, never rose from their seats to defend those Judges of the General Court of Sessions. No, sir, they were turned out of office without even notice having been sent them that bills were pending before the legislature to deprive them of their places! Now, sir, I ask this House what is it that has given rise to all this excitement—to all this feeling? We say there are charges here which can be proved. We say that we can prove them. We specify them and name them; and because that position is taken personal indignity and abuse are heaped upon us without limit. Sir, I listened to the gentleman from Clearfield, (Mr. Barrett,) the other day with more sorrow than anger, as the gentleman and myself had been on intimate terms the whole of the last session, and I regarded him as my personal friend.

Mr. BARRETT explained. It is true that we have been on terms of personal friendship. During my remarks I made no allusion to the Speaker, except in a political point of view, which seemed to me to be required from the character of the bill under discussion. If the gentleman from Luzerne or the honorable Speaker, thinks proper to allow that discussion to sever the friendly feeling which has existed between us for the two last legislative sessions, why am I not responsible.

Mr. WRIGHT resumed. Sir, I had regarded I was going to say, that intimacy between him and myself as of the most friendly character. And what, sir, did I say in that debate which should bring my private character before this House?

Mr. BARRETT explained. I said nothing in the whole of that discussion of the gentleman's personal character. I would disdain to do so. I disclaim it, and I call upon the House to say whether I uttered one single word or syllable against it. If I had, I would not only in this House, but in the public prints acknowledge it, and do the gentleman justice.

Mr. WRIGHT: I shall make no reply to the gentleman from Clearfield. The gentleman in the course of the debate referred to my private character, or my personal and political consistency. As to my political consistency, that is a question between myself and my constituents—that is a question to be discussed at the polls in Luzerne and that tribunal I appeal, and to that tribunal alone. I am not answerable to this House, nor to this Commonwealth, but I am answerable only at one bar, and that is the bar of my constituents. Sir, I repeat it, that I feel more sorrow than anger at the attack of the gentleman from Clearfield, because I am sensible that no question could have arisen which would have induced me to have indulged in personal reflections upon him, or held up to this House, and the world, his political character or consistency. I shall, sir, take occasion during this discussion to enter into some remarks upon what fell from the gentleman from Clearfield. I shall not allude to the polluted source from whence the gentleman gathered these foul slanders; and which have been very industriously circulated the last few weeks from one end of the country to the other—false as the "baseless fabric of a vision"—and bring them in here as true. Where, sir, he got his information I know not, nor do I care, nor shall I give it further notice; but I can say that the gentleman is

mistaken in the credibility of the tatters who, fallen on the reputation of honest men. Let me refer again to the subject matter under discussion. Let me call the attention of the House to some of the charges which have been specified against the Canal Commissioners. Sir, I said in my place, a few days since, and I repeat the charge now, that the office—the high and honorable office of the Canal Commissioners of Pennsylvania, had been converted into an engine for political purposes. And sir, I think in the allusions I made on this floor, in debate the other day, I did not go so far as even to intimate who was my candidate for the Presidency. I said that men were removed from office, because they were not of the right political streak, but I gave no intimation how I stood on this subject. If gentlemen do not know from my political acts who is my man for the Presidency, I will tell them openly and publicly. I am in favor of the distinguished senator who now holds a seat in the Senate of the U. States—the honorable JAMES BUCHANAN. He is my candidate. And I say to you, sir, that I have not one word to say against the distinguished man who is the candidate of the gentleman from Crawford, (Mr. Lowry). He is a man I would do honor to as soon as to any man living. I would not pluck one laurel from the wreath that covers his brow. It is enough for me to say that Mr. Buchanan is my choice—and in making this public declaration—in this public place—I would be the last man to traduce the character of the distinguished hero who shed his blood at the Thames in defense of our common country. No! God forbid.

But sir, there is another interest here, and the gentleman from Crawford and his party will be sold to it, so sure as the sun rises to-morrow. [Here Mr. Lowry shook his head.] And if the gentleman from Crawford and his party will not be sold to the powers at Washington, then, sir, I know nothing about the political manoeuvres of the day.

Mr. LOWRY (interrupting) They cannot buy me.

I know they cannot buy that gentleman; but within one month's time, there will be a press established in this town, for the purpose of denouncing him and me. It will advocate the claims of Gen. Cass for the Presidency. Now, sir, I entertain a good opinion of that gentleman. I know well how to appreciate his services rendered the country at the court of France. It was he, sir, who settled the great question of international law as to the right of search on the high seas—and made continental Europe bow with respect to his opinions; but I do say that they are deceiving him—they are making a "cats paw" of him—and it will not be very long before you will see the Tyler colors flying at the mast-head. Yes, sir, it will wheel about and become a Tyler paper. Who is to be the next Secretary of War? Who is to succeed the present Secretary of War?—Every man must presume that he is a Cass man, but must become a Tyler man, and there is to be a Tyler party here. And there is to be an independent press established in Harrisburg and who is the editor, is unnecessary for me to say. I was saying when I was interrupted that the Cass party of to-day, on the 4th of July next, would be the Tyler party of Pennsylvania! Who doubts it?—Now, do not gentlemen know all this? I ask how is James Madison Porter to be made Secretary of War, and by what influence.

Is it to be done by the Democracy of Pennsylvania, I ask? Is it to be by the influence of this House? No, sir, not by a jug full. [Laughter] It will not be by the democratic party, because the democratic party are not to crouch and fawn to the powers at Washington. There is no affinity—no feeling between the democratic party and the Tyler party. And yet, sir, you are surrounded by the man, one of whom is to be the editor of the Tyler paper. Yes, sir, that very man holds office under this administration—James Madison Porter to

be Secretary of War. Now, I caution the gentleman from Crawford, if he is as true an admirer of the war worn veteran of Ken-tucky, who has shed more blood in defense of his country than any man living—I would ask him if he cannot make a better bargain with Mr. Buchanan, than the Tyler men.

In the one case he will be sold body and breeches, [laughter] and in the other he can make an honorable peace. I know the gentleman to be honest; but that he fully understands the undercurrent that is to sweep him and the Johnson party from the political scroll, I very much doubt.

Mr. LOWRY (interrupting) I am not in market—and if the Hon. Speaker thinks he can either buy or sell me, he is mistaken.

Mr. WRIGHT resumed—I know the gentleman is not in market. I know he is an honest supporter of the Hero of the Thames; for that reason I want him to open his eyes. And, sir, there is another paper to be established here. For what purpose I would ask? I repeat it, there is to be a paper established here, to be called the "Independent Press," in order to abuse the members of the legislature. I suppose, forsooth, to abuse the man who has the bravery and fortitude to stand up, and proclaim to the world he is not a minion nor a slave. It is to denounce men, I presume, for speaking here what they think and believe, nay, sir, what they do know—to put the gag upon the mouths of members—to close their lips. Sir, the press—the Tyler press—the Independent Tyler press to be established here has no terrors for me. They may vilify me as much as they please, but while I am an independent member of a free representative body, and while I see fraud here I will point my finger at it without regard to influence from any quarter. Sir, it is my duty, my sworn duty, and what my constituents will demand at my hands. Then I serve and with fidelity, when error is unmasked and corruption exposed to the public eye. To establish an independent press here! I saw the editor talking, not to me, but to another individual, and heard him say—I want to see an independent press here to abuse the members of the legislature. Now, sir, what man on this floor is deserving of abuse? What man here, that has taken his oath to serve his country with fidelity, is deserving of abuse? What man here is deserving of abuse, I repeat, by the public press? This is the political parties stand here—And I tell you that there is no mistake that the democracy of Pennsylvania is for Mr. Buchanan. But if he cannot get the nomination, there is many a worse man than—

Mr. LOWRY (interrupting) The next man is Maitty, the Magician, I suppose.

Mr. WRIGHT: No, sir, not for me; I do not conceal my views—I proclaim them here to the world, that Martin Van Buren is not my candidate, though if nominated I will give him my unyielding support. There is no spot, sir, in Mr. Van Buren's administration that I would see obliterated. His measures will be regarded as the great landmarks of democracy, when he is gone to the tomb of the capulets. And I say, for benefit of the gentleman from Crawford and all others; and I caution him against the Cass movement in Pennsylvania, that it is not, in fact, for General Cass. God forbid that they should impose upon that gentleman; but I say that they are to turn right about face, and wheel into the ranks of John Tyler. Plans are to be sung to the heavens for the political success of John Tyler. Now, sir, if there is a gentleman here listening to my voice, I tell him to mark, that by the 4th of July next, the prediction I now make, will be most fully verified. But, sir, I do not say with what success, nor do I say that James Madison Porter is to be made Secretary at War, to bring the Democracy to the Tyler ranks. I do not know what he is going there for; but this I know, that the democracy of Pennsylvania do not put him there. And

perhaps he is to be the great captain of our party? No, he cannot be, for there is one now, captain *per se*. But he goes there as the Lieutenant of the democracy of Pennsylvania, to drill them into the Tyler ranks. But sir, that day will not come, according to my calculation. Now, I wish the Independent Press was in operation at the present day, that it might abuse me for proclaiming my opinions to the people of Pennsylvania. Sir, I court such abuse as that; I like to be proscribed by my enemies, when I am discharging what I conceive to be my honest duties as a representative, without shackles, and without collar.—For I wear no man's collar, and if ever I did, God forgive me.

Mr. LOWRY, in an under tone, said—

I ask that the gentleman may be forgiven.

Mr. WRIGHT: I hope I may be forgiven if I ever did, but I do not, any rate at the present day. I am no slave—no man's minion.

Now, sir, after having disposed of the political part of the subject, and shown what in my opinion, the Johnson men of Pennsylvania, with their party organization, ought not to strike their colors until they can see first what tune they are to be marched to in the ranks of John Tyler. Something was said here to-day, or the day before, I forget which, with regard to the committee which was appointed to examine into the alleged frauds on the Delaware division of the Pennsylvania canal. Why, it was said that I held the appointment of committee as a rod of terror over the canal commissioners.—I think they could not know what they said if they supposed this were the case. Would they impeach my motives? I will tell the gentleman, for I believe it was the gentleman from Crawford who made the charge, that I had made up my mind and would have forthwith announced the committee, if I had not received a note from one of the heads of department, suggesting the names of certain gentlemen to form the committee. Pack a committee—pack a committee for me, said I! I am the presiding officer of the House, and I will take none of your committees. While I occupy the chair I'll make my own committees. Sir, I have it in my pocket in the gentleman's own hand writing, [holding up.] [Loud cries from every part of the House of "Read it! Read it!"] I do not want to read it; it is calculated to reflect on gentlemen. It is from a member of the cabinet. Sir, I'll not be made the pliant tool of any man in power out of it. This committee arrangement first aroused my suspicions that all was not right, and this was why that committee was delayed a week. I hope the gentleman who now composes it will ferret out the iniquity, if any there be.

Mr. LOWRY explained, I desire the Speaker of the House to state whether he did not say that he would give them just such a committee if they would appoint his friend to office! I ask if he will deny it over his own signature.

Mr. WRIGHT proceeded. Yes, sir—but that is no explanation at all! Why is it, sir, that there is all this feeling on the subject? I will tell you—it is because I did not happen to agree with the gentleman who had signed the paper. The hand writing shows it is. [Still holding the paper in his hand.] [Repeated cries of "Whose is it? Whose is it?"] and I suppose, because I did not agree to it, the independent paper established will frown down every man as well as myself, who has the courage to stand up and declare his independence. I tell them they don't scare me with their independent paper; and if I have any repentance in sack cloth and ashes, sir, repentance in a good cause is more desired than glory in a foul and corrupt one. I will go to my constituents, for I know what their sentiments and feelings are, and carry with me this great question of reform. And there lie some dozen letters on that desk, received this day, from as many of my most distinguished constituents, telling me what course to take; and if I had not obeyed their instructions heretofore, I would not