CHARLES SELLERS

James K. Polk, Volume II

Continentalist, 1843-1846

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JAMES K. POLK, CONTINENTALIST

1843-1846
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JAMES K. POLK, *Jacksonian*, 1795-1843
JAMES K. POLK
CONTINENTALIST
1843-1846

CHARLES SELLERS

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY
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I wish to protest in advance. Any new book on Polk seems certain to evoke one overriding question—was he a “great” president, or perhaps merely “near-great,” or only “mediocre”? A concentrated experience of trying to understand a president and his time is prophylactic against any temptation to play carelessly with a category so ambiguous as “greatness.”

The term is an unsatisfactory cover for a number of different kinds of judgments. How ambitious were a president’s goals; how much political skill and personal force did he demonstrate in pursuing them; and how successful was he in achieving them? On all these counts Polk emerges as one of the most remarkable of the men who have occupied the White House.

But this is not enough to satisfy most judges of greatness. In addition, the president’s goals must be qualitatively great, in terms of the values of the judge. In terms of the values of this twentieth-century, California-based historian—an enthusiastic beneficiary of Polk’s continentalism—Polk’s goals represented, on the one hand, a morally admirable agrarian social philosophy that was by his time so anachronistic as to be reactionary, and on the other, an arrogant though innocent racism and national chauvinism that have been the obverse of the finer tendencies of the American experience.

Finally, judgments of greatness commonly include estimates of character and personality. Polk’s reserve and artificiality, his disingenuousness and preference for devious manipulation, kept him from being greatly liked as a person by most of his contemporaries. Yet if one gets some glimpse of the dynamics of his psyche, of the inner tensions to which he had to adjust, of the inadequacies and frustrations with which he had to cope, one may come grudgingly but no less profoundly to admire his life as a triumph in the integration of personality. Lovable, or perhaps even likable, he was not; but his incredible self-sufficiency and drive toward goals both personal and disinterested constitute an impressive monument to the possibilities of the Calvinist, frontier personality. Polk’s narrowness and rigidity were the prices he had to pay for this personal achievement.
PREFACE

One word more to the judges. Historical estimates of Polk are heavily influenced by the unenthusiastic judgments of his contemporaries. These judgments were in turn heavily influenced, it seems to me, not only by his actual qualities and performance, but also by the fact that he came to the White House lacking legitimacy as a figure of presidential stature, and in a period when the terrible tensions just beneath the surface of national life and politics would have made it extremely difficult for any man to command a wide loyalty. These circumstances make his achievements the more remarkable. Polk’s efforts to deal with the sectional tensions that were coming into the open to disrupt political life will be the major theme of the remaining volume required to bring this already greatly elaborated story to a close.

I wish to express my gratitude to my colleague Henry May for his extremely careful and helpful reading of the earlier chapters. I am also grateful for financial support from the Princeton University Research Fund and the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of California, Berkeley; for a Fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation; and for a stimulating year at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences.

CHARLES SELLERS

Berkeley, California
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JAMES K. POLK, CONTINENTALIST

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On August 14, 1843, James K. Polk picked himself up from as thorough and final a defeat as a politician can suffer and embarked on the most astonishing comeback in American political history. Two weeks before, his second successive defeat for the governorship of Tennessee had thrown him into the deepest despair of his career. Defeat was no novelty to the Tennessee Democracy, but never before had its determined leader been demoralized by an electoral reverse. In 1837, in 1840, and again in 1841 Polk had responded to adverse election returns with a barrage of letters rallying the party to "lick the flint and try it again." Organizing meetings, reviving party committees, prodding editors, and whipping dissidents back into line, he had repeatedly cajoled and bullied his defeated party back to the verge of victory in a state that otherwise would have been hopelessly Whig.

This time the twice defeated candidate for governor had again reacted to the bad news by conditioned reflex. "There must be an immediate and a bold rally of our friends," he had instantly written to the party manager at Nashville. "Let a strong rallying article appear in tomorrow's Union."

But this time the momentary reflex was all. The pleasant frame house on its wide, shaded street in the dusty little town of Columbia fell silent. No bundles of urgent, reassuring letters went to the post office; no bundles of condoling letters came home; and the buggy which had so often borne its owner to Nashville on important political business stayed in the carriage house. The Nashville Union emitted only quaverings for the guidance of the Tennessee Democracy, and all over the state the whipped politicians bethought

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1 Polk to Robert Armstrong, 7 Aug. 1843, Jackson Papers. Sources are cited by short title in the footnotes, with full listings being found in the section on sources. When a footnote contains multiple citations, they are arranged in the order of the topics referred to, except that citations for quotations, in the order of their occurrence, are always given first.

2 I have been unable to discover any letters written by Polk, or any record of his activities, between August 7 and August 14. More remarkable, the voluminous Polk Papers contain no letters addressed to him between August 5 and August 31. No remotely comparable gap occurs elsewhere in the collection.
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themselves of more profitable pursuits. Many of them had had enough of defeat and enough of James K. Polk.

Tennessee Democrats had long followed this favorite protégé of their beloved Andrew Jackson. Ten years earlier they had cheered as he helped the Old Hero slay the Monster Bank. When the state refused to endorse Jackson’s choice for the presidential succession in 1836, they had taken solace from Polk’s election to the speakership of the national House of Representatives. Then through four campaigns at home he had led them against the unaccountable ascendency of the bank-ridden Tennessee Whigs, and once, as gubernatorial candidate in 1839, he had led them to victory.

For years now, stubbornly iterating the old-fashioned Republican dogmas in the face of a changing world, he had evoked their utmost political exertions. Every county, almost every neighborhood had seen his slight figure, his energetic stride, had heard his drumming indictments of the “Federal Whigs,” his arrays of facts and figures. Most of all men recalled his anecdotes, a little forced perhaps, but made memorable by the wonderful mobility of his dark, bony, high-browed face and penetrating eyes. Indeed a large proportion of the state’s Democratic voters had felt at close range the sudden cordiality of his smile and the directness of his gaze, with any fleeting impression of an automatic, practiced reaction dissolving in the vigor of his handclasp and the slightly old-fashioned, formal courtesy of his ready conversation.

Yet few if any Tennesseans had penetrated the reserve that lay just behind Polk’s controlled affability; few if any accorded him the personal devotion that enabled politicians like Henry Clay to survive repeated defeats. Secretive his enemies called him, and soon they would be reviling “Polk the mendacious.” Even with such intimate associates as Aaron Brown, his early law partner, and Cave Johnson, companion of all his congressional and Tennessee battles, he kept his own counsel. Their advice he would hear, but his own mind he seldom revealed until it was time to act. And once he had announced his course, no one could change it.

One thing Polk’s friends did know: he was intensely ambitious and none too subtle in using others to further his indistinguishably mixed public and private ends. By the law of attraction of opposites, good old Cave Johnson came closest to real affection for Polk, perceiving in him the same deep commitment to Old Republican ways that made Congressman Johnson the nemesis of free spenders. Un-
ambitious and unpretentious—one of the few balding public men who scorned to camouflage a gleaming pate—the faithful Cave had repeatedly sacrificed his own interests and incurred renewed rheumatic pains in order to serve his friend on the stump and in caucus. Aaron Brown, less saintly, was harnessed with more difficulty, but could usually be counted on for hard service when tangible rewards were in view. The tiny circle of Polk's personal friends was closed by Justice John Catron of the federal Supreme Court, whose wife and Polk's had been close since girlhood.

To these men Polk demonstrated such loyalty and affection as he was capable of; beyond their circle he had learned to manipulate, for ends he deemed worthy, other men's necessities and appetites. Early in his career, for example, he had secured federal mail contracts for his avaricious brother-in-law James Walker, in return for political services and financial support. Later, in 1840, when he was seeking the Democratic vice presidential nomination and needed a less scrupulous promoter than Cave Johnson at Washington, he had conferred a seat in the United States Senate on an opportunistic but undistinguished East Tennessean, Alexander Anderson. Both early and late, one of his most unquestioning lieutenants was Samuel H. Laughlin, a generous, cultivated man with a talent for political management and journalism, whose periodic bouts with the bottle left him in chronic financial distress and thus available to do Polk's bidding as editor, legislative aide, or convention delegate. Polk's feelings varied toward the men he used: with Walker family ties compelled a strained cordiality; Anderson he never respected; but for Laughlin he showed regard and concern.

Democrats less dependent on Polk's favor had sometimes chafed at his tight control of the party, and impatient younger men had sometimes threatened open revolt. Even young Bill Polk had no sooner launched his own political career than he defied his older brother's wishes with regard to some county nominations. "You command him too much," James Walker told Polk, "& have too little patience with him." Many lesser politicians had experienced the qualities of which Walker complained, and many greater ones were to experience them in future.

So far Polk had managed to pacify most such discontent, but the repeated Democratic defeats were weakening his hold on the party;
and in the summer campaign of 1843 his gubernatorial prospects had been endangered by his inability to keep dissident Democrats from running against the regular nominees for the lesser offices. Only as long as the party seemed about to win, or only so long as Polk looked like a good bet for high national office, would the politicians follow his lead.

Both hopes were dashed by the August election; and Polk's second successive defeat at the hands of the clowning "Lean Jimmy" Jones was the signal for disaffected Democrats to rebel. Ostensibly they rebelled against the national leadership of Martin Van Buren, but Polk's leadership in Tennessee was even more directly challenged.

These implications of the election returns—blighting all Polk's prospects in state and national politics—still did not measure the full bitterness of his situation during that August fortnight. Polk was an ideologue. Personal success had been satisfying only as identified with the great cause of Republicanism. Victory had eluded him before, but never before had defeat shaken his faith that the people were essentially virtuous and wise, that they shared his nostalgic moral preference for the simpler agrarian world that was so rapidly vanishing. Although Whig demagogues might for a time delude a majority into tolerating such un-Republican excrescences as banks and tariffs, "the sober second thought of the people" could be trusted to bring them right. By 1843, however, the people of Tennessee had had time for not only a second but a third thought, and they had voted Whig by an increased majority. Not only had Polk's old-fashioned brand of Republicanism lost its appeal—or, more shattering still, its relevance—but the people themselves seemed to have been fatally and perhaps permanently corrupted.

How did he take it? On this point the historical record is almost as inscrutable as the affable mask that Polk continued to present to his fellow townsmen around Columbia's hot, dusty courthouse square. All we know is that for a week or more—as at no other crisis in his career—he apparently did nothing, said nothing, wrote nothing on the subject of politics.

If anyone divined his thoughts, it was Sarah Polk. Sarah was a shrewd woman and an ambitious one. As a girl of nineteen she had pitched upon the serious, hard-driving young legislator from Maury County as a prospective husband, partly, perhaps, because he seemed so certain to go to the top. When he failed to give her
children, she had taken her satisfactions increasingly from his steady political progress and from the ever more distinguished associations his success provided. Sarah’s deepest satisfaction arose, however, from her role as wifely confidante and emotional resource, a role that was more important for her than for most wives because of the absence of children and because her husband was so incapable of other warm relationships.

This crisis, then, they faced together, sitting no doubt through the long, hot August evenings beside Polk’s littered work table, she knitting or mending with matter-of-fact Presbyterian practicality and he searching again and again through the week’s supply of newspapers for answers to the questions “Why?” and “Where now?” Undemonstrative like her husband and even more plain spoken, Sarah would have encouraged no audible despairing, volunteered no effusive sympathy or comforting. She knew as no one else could the currents of unsatisfied desire that coursed through the man beside her, sensed the obscure youthful frustrations that had hardened his disciplined character and impelled him toward political goals, understood above all that only political success gave him a feeling of adequacy and surcease. Add to this the Calvinist imperatives of will and continued striving that were deeply bred into both of them and only one course was really open. No matter how complete the defeat, no matter how hopeless the odds, the now quixotic struggle for the Democratic vice presidential nomination had to be resumed.

They themselves were probably unaware of the precise moment of decision, but on August 14, two weeks to the day after the disastrous Tennessee election, the inertia that had gripped the Polk household dissolved. The buggy was hitched up, and “his ex-Excellency” set off for Nashville to survey the damage and to begin the slow process of coming back from political oblivion.

II

Back in 1840 Polk’s importunate demands for the Democratic vice presidential nomination had compelled party leaders to hold a national convention that they thought otherwise unnecessary, Van Buren’s candidacy for reelection as president being a foregone conclusion. But even hard on the heels of Polk’s impressive redemption of Tennessee from the Whigs, he had failed to win over a majority
of the delegates. The convention had adjourned without making a nomination, and Polk had been forced out of the race. Nothing daunted by this experience or by his defeat for reelection as governor in 1841, Polk had renewed his campaign for the vice presidential nomination, counting on success in the 1843 gubernatorial election to make his claims on the party irresistible.

Again Van Buren seemed the foreordained Democratic candidate for the presidency, and Polk’s chances for the second-place nomination depended on his ability to line up the Tennessee Democracy solidly behind the ex-president. Therefore whatever feeble claims on the vice presidential nomination Polk still had after the August electoral debacle were apparently doomed by the outburst of anti-Van Burenism that followed it. When the ambitious and often troublesome young Columbia lawyer Alfred O. P. Nicholson had the effrontery to endorse Van Buren’s rival Lewis Cass at a local Democratic meeting shortly after the gubernatorial defeat, he was manifestly consigning his distinguished fellow townsman to the political ash heap.

Nicholson was shrewdly capitalizing on a widespread disposition to blame Van Buren’s unpopularity for the Tennessee defeat. Polk had lost the August election said the Knoxville Argus, leading Democratic paper in East Tennessee, because the Whigs had succeeded in “making Van Burenism (not Democracy) nearly as odious here as black cockade Federalism was in 1800,” whereas “with another—ANY OTHER—new Democratic candidate for the Presidency, Gov. Polk would have carried his election by 10,000 majority with great and entire certainty.” Soon both the Argus and another East Tennessee paper were advocating Cass for the presidential nomination; even the Nashville Union, usually responsive to Polk’s wishes, was printing communications favoring Cass; and there was an organized movement to elect anti-Van Buren delegates to the state convention. Van Buren and his friends were left to choose between two conclusions: either Polk was a traitor to the Van Buren cause, or he could no longer deliver party and state for the New Yorker.6

The anti-Van Buren agitation in Tennessee did not arise wholly or even mainly from hostility to Polk. It was not surprising, for example, that Polk’s money-making brother-in-law James Walker

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6 Nashville Union, 29 Sept. 1843; George W. Rice to Polk, 22 Sept. 1843, Polk Papers; Nashville Republican Banner, 4 Sept. 1843.
should prefer the business-minded Cass to Van Buren, who was identified with the antibanking Loco-Foco wing of the party. It was natural, too, that Congressman Harvey M. Watterson, who had just received a diplomatic appointment from the anti-Van Buren administration of President John Tyler, should lend his aid to the Cass movement. Moreover, many loyal Democrats had never warmed to the reputedly effete New Yorker; and many others, including such faithful Polk men as Congressman Julius W. Blackwell and Congressman Hopkins L. Turney, began shifting toward Cass under a conviction that Van Buren could not carry the state. Such men doubtless felt they were acting in Polk's interest by blaming his defeat on Van Buren and preparing the way for a Cass-Polk ticket.  

The Cass movement got most of its leadership, however, from a rather more sinister group headed surreptitiously by Nicholson. Polk had had his troubles with Nicholson ever since the younger man had first entered politics in 1835 as an originator of the Hugh Lawson White-for-president movement that had carried Tennessee out of the Democratic ranks. Polk had then bought him back for the Democrats with promises of future preferment, but Nicholson had continued to make trouble, shocking orthodox Democrats by pushing through the legislature a scheme for a mammoth state-operated paper-money bank and repeatedly threatening to run with Whig support against the regular party candidates for the Senate. But his undoubted legislative ability and eloquence and his services in the presidential campaign of 1840 had won him a high place in the party; and Polk himself, as governor, had given him an interim appointment to the Senate. This was, Polk now realized, "the capital error of my public life."  

After kicking off the Cass boom in his speech at Columbia following the August defeat, Nicholson had appeared to mend his ways, and took no further open part in the agitation. But Polk was not fooled—"a hypocritical friend in disguise" he had called Nicholson a few years earlier; and he correctly interpreted Nicholson's change of residence about this time from Columbia to the political nerve center at Nashville as another step in the younger

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7 Polk to Silas Wright, 9 Feb. 1844, copy, Polk Papers.  
8 Polk to Sackfield Maclin, 17 Jan. 1842, Johnson Papers.
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man’s underground campaign to supplant him as party leader. The Cass movement was to be the fulcrum of this effort, though Nicholson stayed carefully in the background and operated through a motley collection of men who for one reason or another were disaffected from the regular party leadership.

There was, for instance, that mass of resentment, ambition, and genuine democracy, Andrew Johnson, the Greenville tailor who had just gotten elected to Congress. Johnson’s political stance was determined primarily by his workingman’s hostility toward professional men, slaveholders, and the upper classes generally, and by his East Tennessean’s hostility toward Middle and West Tennessee. He was best known for his campaign in the legislature to cut off East Tennessee as a separate state, but he had also belonged to the little group of Democrats who combined with the Whigs to frustrate Governor Polk’s efforts to reform the Tennessee banks. Similar to Johnson was his close friend George W. Jones, likewise a workingman (a tanner and saddler by trade) become congressman.

As congenital soreheads, resentful of Polk as slaveholder, lawyer, and demanding party leader, both Johnson and Jones had drifted into the Nicholson orbit and were ready to oppose Van Buren, mainly because Polk and the regular party leadership supported him. Polk’s “restless ambition has very much operated against us in Tennessee,” complained Johnson to Nicholson. “Jones and my self look upon you as the only man that can reclaim Tennessee, your move to Nashville is a good one in my opinion, it is the right point to operate at. . . . You must expect to run for Gov the next canvass.”

In addition to Johnson and Jones, Nicholson could count on several friends among the politicians at Nashville; on Hopkins Turney’s brother Sam, a maverick state senator from the Cumberland Plateau; and in East Tennessee on the Anderson brothers, Alexander and Pearce. Alexander, who had served Polk slavishly in return for an interim appointment to the Senate, was now begging an office from the Tyler administration; while Pearce, a “Democrat by trade,” in politics for what it could yield in the way of government contracts, bank charters, and railroad subsidies, had never worked comfortably with “Democrats in principle” like Polk. The

9 Johnson to Nicholson, 12 Feb. 1844, de Coppel Collection.
Andersons were really for Calhoun; but since he had no chance in Tennessee, they joined heartily in the Cass movement.\textsuperscript{10}

It was to counter this dangerous combination that Polk hastened to Nashville two weeks after the August election. But the politicians at the state capital were too discouraged to renew the vice presidential agitation. Not until September did the Nashville \textit{Union} again suggest Polk for the nation’s second office, and only in Cave Johnson's congressional district was a Democratic meeting assembled to endorse a Van Buren-Polk ticket.\textsuperscript{11}

Despite the refusal of his vice presidential balloon to rise in Tennessee, Polk insisted in a letter to Van Buren that he was still in the race. Manfully he tried to dispel the idea that Tennessee was hopelessly Whig, in which case the vice presidential nomination might better be used to help the national ticket elsewhere. The recent defeat had been due to purely local issues, said Polk, while on national issues “the Democracy are now in a clear and decided majority in the State.” The manifest implication was that Polk would have to be on the ticket if Tennessee were to be redeemed.\textsuperscript{12}

Nor did Polk neglect the legendary old man at the Hermitage, now holding on to life by sheer will as his body painfully wasted away. Polk knew that Jackson’s friendship was his greatest political asset, and he had frequently exploited it in a rather calculated way. Deeply wounded by his state’s desertion of his party, Old Hickory had been writing to prominent Democrats all over the country that Tennessee could be redeemed only if Polk were on the national ticket. But even the indomitable Jackson was so discouraged by Polk’s August defeat that references to the vice presidency disappeared from his voluminous correspondence. Not until September 20—doubtless under some direct or indirect prodding by Polk—did he return to the subject. “Tennessee will support Van Buren,” he wrote to Amos Kendall, “& if Polk is selected for Vice President, he will carry the State most assuredly.” This message he repeated more emphatically to Van Buren two days later.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} David Craighead to Polk, 3 Oct. [Nov.] 1843, Polk Papers; Cave Johnson to Polk, 10 Nov. 1843, \textit{ibid.}; Francis Pickens to Calhoun, 14 Nov. 1843, Calhoun Papers; Calhoun to J. E. Calhoun, 19 Nov. 1843, \textit{Calhoun Correspondence}, 551-52.

\textsuperscript{11} Nashville \textit{Union}, 5, 12 Sept. 1843.

\textsuperscript{12} 18 Aug. 1843, Van Buren Papers. It is this letter that reveals Polk’s trip to Nashville two weeks after the August election.

\textsuperscript{13} Jackson to Kendall, 20 Sept. 1843, newspaper clipping, Jackson Papers; Jackson to Van Buren, 22 Sept. 1843, Van Buren Papers. Jackson’s letter to Moses Dawson, 12 Aug. 1843, Dawson Papers, did not mention the vice presidency, though both be-
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The decisive test of Polk’s control over the Tennessee Democracy came several weeks later when the politicians began to gather for the meeting of the legislature. Hastening to Nashville, Polk spent a week closeted in his hotel room with party leaders from every section of the state, cajoling, bargaining, and playing upon the habits of loyalty established by his long party leadership. Only the out-and-out rebels could openly resist him at close range; and as the regulars gave in their adhesion, he set them to writing letters to their Democratic friends in other states about the vice presidency, and to laying plans for the forthcoming state convention.

The strategy that Polk laid down at this time called for Tennessee to recommend Polk for vice president but to express no preference among the aspirants for the presidency. Later Polk and his friends would tell the Van Burenites that Tennessee had failed to endorse the New Yorker only because, in view of the strong Cass sentiment, this would have created a dangerous split in the Tennessee Democracy. Party harmony was certainly a consideration in the adoption of this strategy, but not the only one. Polk feared that Van Buren would finally take Richard M. (“Old Dick”) Johnson of Kentucky as his running mate; and the failure to endorse Van Buren was a threat, intended to force the New Yorker’s hand. Aaron Brown was typically tactless, but not inaccurate, when he interpreted the policy as meaning that “if V. Buren, or his folks intend to give Polk the go by and deceive him, that we must then . . . just let them know, that if they will take Polk for Vice President, we will take Van Buren; if not, and they go for Col. Johnson, that then we will go for Cass.” Cave Johnson, who was as loyal to Van Buren at the national level as he was to Polk in the state, demurred a bit at this questionable maneuver; but even he finally acquiesced.14

Before leaving Nashville Polk constituted a little caucus of his most loyal friends and charged them with several tasks: preparing an address to be issued by the state convention, selecting delegates from the various districts to go to the national convention at Baltimore, and writing letters to Democrats far and near urging Polk’s claims and reinforcing the threat implied by the plan to make no

14 “Laughlin Diaries,” 60-73. Polk’s responsibility for the strategy decided upon is indicated also in J. G. M. Ramsey to Polk, 12 Oct. 1843, Polk Papers, and S. H. Laughlin to Polk, 12, 20 Oct. 1843, ibid.
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presidential nomination. From Columbia Polk continued to bombard his Nashville friends with suggestions and exhortations until, toward the end of October, he had to leave on his semiannual three-week visit of inspection to his cotton plantation in Mississippi.\textsuperscript{15}

Polk was no sooner beyond reach than the Nicholson forces sought to take over the Nashville Democratic Association and use it as a base for demanding the endorsement of Cass by the forthcoming state party convention. Polk's friends managed to stave off his assault by a pretended compromise, actually the strategy they had already decided on for reasons of their own: that the convention should make no endorsement for the presidential nomination.\textsuperscript{16}

Still, the ebullitions of Cassism continued, and Polk's lieutenants greeted him on his return from Mississippi in mid-November with urgent appeals to come up to Nashville and "spur our friends to action." Polk promptly complied, getting to Nashville three days before the convention met and spending the evening going over the final plans in detail with Postmaster Robert Armstrong, Laughlin, and other confidential friends. This accomplished, he and Sarah went on the next morning to visit her relations at Murfreesboro, lest, being in Nashville, he be charged with dictating the convention's actions.\textsuperscript{17}

The convention came off almost exactly as Polk had planned it. The resolutions recommended Polk strongly for the vice presidential nomination; but with regard to the presidency declared only that the Tennessee Democracy would support zealously whomever the national convention nominated. The two statewide delegates chosen to attend the national convention were the men Polk had selected beforehand, and so were most of the eleven chosen by congressional districts. Alexander Anderson got on to the delegation from the Knoxville district, but ten and probably twelve of the thirteen delegates could be counted on to do Polk's bidding at Bal-


\textsuperscript{16} "Laughlin Diaries," 78-79, 82; David Craighead to Polk, 3 Oct. [4 Nov.] 1843, Polk Papers; Laughlin to Cave Johnson, 28 Nov. 1843, Blair-Lee Papers; Polk to Van Buren, 30 Nov. 1843, Van Buren Papers; L. P. Cheatham to Van Buren, 22 Dec. 1843, \textit{ibid.} Cass had furnished his supporters in Tennessee with a declaration of his opinions on current public questions that was designed to be popular in that quarter. This letter, addressed to Nicholson's confederate John H. Dew of Columbia, was apparently suppressed as a part of the intraparty "compromise"; a draft dated 10 Oct. 1843 is in the Cass Papers.

\textsuperscript{17} W. H. Polk to Polk, 16 Nov. 1843, Polk Papers; Laughlin to Polk, 17 Nov. 1843, \textit{ibid.}; Polk to Laughlin, 17 Nov. 1843, Washburn Collection.
timore. The Cass feeling was strong enough, however, to defeat Laughlin’s motion instructing the delegation to vote by the unit rule.18

The Tennessee convention brought to a successful conclusion the first and perhaps the most difficult phase of Polk’s campaign for the vice presidential nomination. As far as any outsider could tell, Polk was in full command of the party in his state, and the Tennes­see Democracy was wholeheartedly committed to his vice presidential aspirations. Only now could he turn hopefully to the second phase of his campaign, the preconvention drive to win nationwide support from various party leaders and factions. And if and when the third phase came, the climactic struggle at Baltimore, he had a loyal and able delegation to whom he could entrust his cause.

III

If the Democratic party was disorganized in Tennessee, it was chaotic at the national level. The formerly invincible political army of Andrew Jackson had emerged from the defeat of 1840 leaderless and mutinous. Its egalitarian insigniae appropriated by the foe, the Democracy’s war aims had become sadly ambiguous.

Old Hickory’s party appealed to a popular mood that was both egalitarian and conservative. Along with democracy, the major issue of the 1830’s had involved adjustment to a newly dynamic economy, stimulated and governed by the mysterious workings of money and credit. Some—the entrepreneurially inclined or those whose advantages enabled them to perceive and exploit the new opportunities—accepted wholeheartedly the new gospel of entrepre­neurial progress and insisted on public policies that would foster economic growth. The Whig party became the great political in­strument of such men and such attitudes.

Others, however, felt their old independence and security threatened by impersonal mechanisms of money and market, seemingly manipulated by a privileged elite. As on previous occasions, the democratic masses turned out to be the real conservatives; and the Jacksonian Democratic party succeeded the Jeffersonian Repub­lican party as the political instrument of both their democratic and their conservative inclinations. Farmers and workingmen responded warmly to the Jacksonian promise that they would remain the

central figures of the republic, the peculiar repositories of civic virtue; that wealth would be accumulated only out of honest toil and not filched away by dishonest speculators manipulating the artificial mechanisms of credit; that government would, in the words of Jackson’s Bank Veto, “confine itself to equal protection, and, as Heaven does its rains, shower its favors alike on the high and the low, the rich and the poor.”

Yet Jacksonian conservatism was ambiguous. For many Jacksonians hostility to the speculative system masked an envious resentment at not sharing its largesse; and the Jacksonian “hard-money” program of stifling the speculative spirit by destroying the paper-money banking system that sustained it had produced results widely different from its avowed aims. By calling state banking interests to their aid in the war on the national bank, the Jacksonians not only heightened the speculative fever but nurtured within their own ranks a discordant speculative-minded element.

This cleavage in the party had been deepened by the Panic of 1837 and the long depression that followed it. On the one hand, a sharpened consciousness of the evils of speculative banking pushed the party leadership toward a more uncompromising hard-money position. The Van Buren administration insisted that the government deal only in gold and silver coin, segregated in its own independent treasury system; while in the state legislatures hard-money Democrats sought either to destroy the banking system or to surround it with stringent safeguards against overissue, excessive profits, and exclusive privileges.

At the same time, however, the depression had prompted a louder outcry for an expansion of credit from those who wanted the interrupted march of enterprise to resume. At first the two impulses fought to a stalemate. But as Americans gradually effected their psychological adjustment to the new economic order, the hard-money mood was bound to give way. If farmers and workingmen could not avoid the perils of the engrossing money-market nexus, neither in a fluid society could they long resist its allurements. As prosperity slowly returned in the early 1840’s, the gospel of entrepreneurial progress won more and more Jacksonian farmers and workingmen, converted by rising money values of land and crops, by rising wages, by rising appetites for newly available conveniences and luxuries that only money could buy, and by opportunities for petty entrepreneurship or speculation.
By this time the protracted debate over banking had pretty well burned out the fires of conviction that had blazed so high in the Jacksonian years. A limited victory here and a compromise there had gradually produced a pragmatic consensus that the country, out of the exhaustion of its political emotions, was willing to accept. The national bank was not to be revived; and the federal funds were to be deposited either in the state banks or in an independent treasury—many people no longer much cared—depending on which party was in power. The struggle over state banking was only reaching its climax in a few states like Ohio and Missouri; but in most of the country it had been pretty well decided that paper-money banking was to continue under various safeguards—free banking systems, specie reserve requirements, small note restrictions, extended liability of bank stockholders, or a state monopoly of the banking business. The great Whig victory of 1840 was not so much a mandate for orthodox Whig policies as it was a political binge that could be enjoyed because the serious issues were well on their way to settlement; and Henry Clay's unsuccessful efforts to revive the national bank during the Tyler administration were a reflection more of Whig habit than of real demand from any major group in the country.

Yet the consensus on banking in the country at large had been made possible by the retreat of many Democrats from the hard-money standard, and this in turn had deepened the schism in the Democratic party. The hard-money policy embodied the genuine, if quixotic, idealism of the party; and the faster the tide of Jacksonian idealism ran out, the more manfully Van Buren and the ideological wing of the party struggled to stem its ebbing. "What has democracy to do with compromise, with conciliation?" exclaimed a Van Buren partisan. "I say damn the idea of compromise."19 The line between the hard-money mood and the entrepreneurial mood was to the Van Burenites a moral line, and any Democrat who drifted across it was not just politically but also morally suspect.

Such suspicions had fallen even on a man like Polk, whose realism had tempered his ideological preference for hard money into a middle-of-the-road position. As governor he had prevented a split in the Tennessee party by admitting that banks had become "so interwoven and intimately connected with all our extensive commercial operations" that "their employment to a reasonable extent,

19 Schlesinger, Age of Jackson, 258.
in conducting our trade,” had become “conducive to our prosperity”; and in the campaign of 1843 he had endorsed a mixed currency of paper money and specie. At the same time, however, he had insisted that suspending banks should be liquidated, that notes under ten and eventually twenty dollars should be outlawed, that a bank’s issues should not exceed twice its specie on hand, and that a bank’s stockholders should be individually liable for its obligations. Despite this relatively radical position, his Democratic rivals were quick to explain his defeat in 1843 on the ground that he had become “the apologist of the State bank system, and their defender in his own State.” Van Buren himself, as Cave Johnson told Polk, complained that “we did not take sufficiently strong ground in opposition to the Banks.”

The more entrepreneurial or pragmatic Democrats were just as irritated at the “undiscriminating radicals.” “Our party was united & strong,” complained Governor Enos T. Throop of New York, until the Van Buren radicals took up from “the tag rags of the party”—men full of “hostility to the people of better condition”—“the idea that all banks were evils.” Actually, said Throop, the banks were “operating very advantageously in the interests of industry & commerce, and our respectable & intelligent political friends were enjoying the benefits of them both as Stockholders and business men.” Throop and men like him were baffled by the radicals’ indifference to the interests of business and Democratic businessmen, irritated by their tone of moral superiority, and infuriated by their willingness to divide the party and court defeat in pursuit of an impracticable and an incomprehensible ideal.

The desertion of some of these “Conservative” Democrats had frustrated Van Buren’s efforts to get the independent treasury enacted until his last year in office; and the desertion or lukewarmness of many more had contributed to his ignominious defeat in the disgraceful “log cabin and hard cider” campaign of 1840. The embittered Van Burenites emerged from defeat resolved to purge the party of its corrupt and traitorous elements and to vindicate their leader by triumphantly renominating and reelecting him in 1844.

20 Sellers, Polk, 1, 387-388, 491; Johnson to Polk, 28 Nov. 1843, Polk Papers.
21 Throop to Montgomery H. Throop, 29 May 1868, Van Buren-Throop Letters. It is striking how much irritation Throop still felt when he wrote this reminiscent letter to his son a generation after the events he describes.
The Conservatives were no less determined to eliminate once and for all Van Buren and his "impracticables."

IV

In the contest that ensued Van Buren had certain great advantages. The hard-money mood had a considerable residual appeal to the whole generation of Democrats whose political attitudes had crystallized in the Jacksonian years of intense ideological commitment. Having once tasted the heady brew of ideological fervor, many were reluctant to shift to the flatter beverage of political practicality that was appropriate to a period of national consensus and relative placidity. Moreover, as president, Van Buren had been able to make the independent treasury and the hard-money mood it symbolized the official policy of the party and to commit the more zealous rank-and-file Democrats to it. Also, as president, Van Buren had used the extensive federal patronage to strengthen the politicians and newspapers that shared his views in the Democratic organizations of their respective states. "The old office holders who expect to be restored with Mr. Van Buren & the old editors who were liberally patronised by his Administration," observed James Buchanan, "are the regular troops in political warfare."22

The regular troops got their marching orders from the national party organ, Francis P. Blair's Washington Globe. Frank Blair and his business partner John C. Rives had grown wealthy from government printing contracts during the Jackson and Van Buren administrations. Fanatically loyal to the two ex-presidents, they made their slashing editorial columns a powerful weapon for Van Buren while claiming a purely technical neutrality that fooled no one. Also for Van Buren were such diverse but influential newspapers as William Cullen Bryant's Evening Post in New York, Samuel Medary's Ohio Statesman at Columbus, and that oracle of traditional Virginia Republicanism, the Richmond Enquirer, whose editor, Thomas Ritchie, doubled as party boss in the Old Dominion.

The old regulars supporting Van Buren included, too, a large share of the most prominent Democratic leaders, especially those distinguished for their ideological orientation toward politics and for their "republican" simplicity of style. The archetype was Van Buren's bosom friend Silas Wright, Democratic leader of the Senate.

22 Buchanan to John Miller, 21 July 1843, Dreer Collection.
Able, self-effacing, and excruciatingly conscientious, Wright commanded from the most hostile a respect that enabled him to keep the rival Democratic prima donnas of the Senate working together. "It was not an easy task," said one observer, "for Calhoun would bolt, and Benton would bully, and Buchanan sneak; but he was the superior of all three." When Congress was not in session, visitors could find him working alongside the hired hands on his farm in upstate New York. The puzzled Conservatives blamed Wright's influence for Van Buren's unaccountable lapse from his former pragmatic shrewdness, but a larger segment of the party would have agreed with the Van Burenite who called Wright "the Model Democrat of all men I have ever seen."

New England was particularly rich in Democratic leaders cast in the Wright mold. Wrinkled, slovenly Senator John M. Niles—"Father" Niles, his unruly red hair silvered and his gait slowed but his spirit reviving from a stroke and nervous breakdown—stood uncompromisingly for Van Buren against strong Conservative opposition in the Connecticut Democracy. Equally plain, equally principled, Marcus Morton and John Fairfield did the same in Massachusetts and Maine. Elsewhere there were variations on the Wright type: an intellectual and foppish variant in Morton's lieutenant, the historian George Bancroft; a strident variant in ambitious young Senator William Allen of Ohio; an alcoholic variant in the courageous George C. Dromgoole of Virginia, party leader in the House of Representatives; a ponderous and indolent variant in James J. McKay of North Carolina, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee; and an inordinately handsome and stately variant in the six-foot, silver-toned Senator Arthur P. Bagby of Alabama. Wright's faithful ally, the conceited, bombastic Thomas Hart Benton—"Old Bullion," the father of the new gold coins known as "Benton's mint drops," the very embodiment of the hard-money idea—could hardly be called a variant of anybody; nor, of course, could the foremost of all the old regulars, Van Buren's weightiest champion, Old Hickory himself.

For all Van Buren's strong support, however, the fact remained that he simply was not very popular beyond the intransigent hard-money men. "He wont do at all," declared the shrewd and relatively disinterested Judge Catron, being "unpopular with all classes—essentially so with the people at large... and what is more clearly

23 Kane, Autobiography, 34.
so, with the rank & file of our political friends.” Arkansas Democrats were reported to think Van Buren “rather cold blooded”; a Mississippian asserted that “the campaign of 1840 was so disastrous that our friends dread to fight another battle under his lead”; in Ohio it was said that “apart from party and political considerations Mr. Van Buren neither has or ever did have the feelings and sympathies of the western people”; and no less an authority than James Buchanan claimed that “he is not popular in Pennsylvania & never has been.”

This conviction of the New Yorker’s unavailability was not confined to Conservative Democrats. Many others, heretofore faithful to Van Buren but interested above all in winning elections, were sufficiently apprehensive about a Van Buren ticket to be susceptible to any anti-Van Buren movement that seemed to have a chance of success. Such a movement would not lack for leaders. Calhoun, Buchanan, Richard M. Johnson, and Cass all saw that their chances for the presidency might be blocked indefinitely if Van Buren were nominated a third time—and especially if he were elected and designated Benton or Wright as his successor. Nor would these older leaders lack for lieutenants. A whole new generation of Democratic politicians had come forward since the thirties. Immune to the ideological viruses of the Jacksonian years, this pragmatic, ambitious “Young Democracy” of Nicholsons and Andrew Johnsons chafed under the leadership of the old-regular Polks. “Let the old dynasty be restored,” complained one of these new men, and “the superannuated and broken down politicians will have full swing & we modern men must step into the rear rank of the political cohorts.”

Fishing in these troubled waters was the hapless administration of President John Tyler. Repudiated by the regular Whigs, Tyler had turned the federal patronage over to Conservative Democrats in an effort to build a third party that might reelect him in 1844. Blinded by the sycophantic schemers who swarmed like flies around the federal honey pot he opened to them, and by a naive conviction that the public must recognize and reward the rectitude of his policies, poor Tyler never realized how futile his effort was and how

24 John Catron to Mrs. Sarah Polk, 7 Jan. 1842 [misfiled 1840], Polk Papers; Archibald Yell to Polk, 6 Mar. 1842, ibid.; W. M. Gwin to Jackson, 16 Feb. 1842, Jackson Papers; D. T. Disney to Richard Rush, 15 July 1843, Rush Papers; Buchanan to John Miller, 21 July 1843, Dreer Collection.

25 H. B. Wright to Buchanan, 29 Jan. 1844, Buchanan Papers.
ridiculous he seemed. Actually his appointees were smearing the federal honey about to catch flies not for Tyler but for Calhoun, Cass, or some other anti-Van Buren Democrat. One Indiana Democrat, after buzzing around the honey at Washington, warned his brother back home against coming out for Van Buren—and in his very next letter announced exultantly that he had received an Indian removal contract from which "I will make at least ten thousand dollars."

While Tyler's activity swelled the anti-Van Buren forces, it only accentuated their basic weakness, their inability to rally behind a single leader. James Buchanan had volunteered early for the command, only to have his rivals at home, in characteristic Pennsylvania fashion, cripple his campaign by getting up a movement for another aspirant, Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky.

"Old Dick," still capitalizing on his fame as reputed slayer of Tecumseh at the battle of the Thames forty years before and on the popularity he had acquired with eastern workingmen's groups nearly twenty years before by his opposition to imprisonment for debt and his championing of church-state separation, really believed himself the people's choice. With an exhibitionist egotism that was so transparent and innocent as to be almost attractive, "the Tecumseh-killer" defied the convention that forbade presidential candidates to campaign. Traveling up and down the country, from New England to Missouri, in his old-fashioned brass-buttoned blue coat and waistcoat "of most 'unmitigated red,' " he visited churches, schools, and colleges, paraded the streets, made speeches, and rode in militia reviews "with hat off, and a very fierce look on." At an Irish Repeal meeting in Cincinnati, he expressed the wish that he "could speak only three minutes and fight the rest of the time," but only at the conclusion of a long speech in which "the never to be ended tale of the Battle of the Thames was once more repeated, the mutilated fingers exhibited and the most violent love for Ireland and the Irish expressed in the most pathetic terms." Johnson's personal warmth convinced many ordinary Democrats that "his kind heart sympathizes deeply in the suffering interests of labor"; but the old regulars were disgusted and exasperated by his activities. "He has no fixed opinions; & he has not mind enough to frame fixed opinions," sneered George Bancroft; while Benton called Johnson "the damndest

political wh—re in the country.” These charges were given considerable substance by the welcome and support Johnson received from Conservative Democrats everywhere.27

When “Old Tecumseh’s” candidacy failed to catch on as widely as his Conservative backers hoped it might, many of them shifted their efforts to promoting the late-blooming candidacy of Michigan’s Lewis Cass, who had won a sudden éclat by his anti-British demonstrations while American minister to France. Through a long public life this massive, dignified, stolid figure had carefully avoided or straddled every controversial issue. Now, it was observed, “He wraps himself in vague declarations of ‘Jeffersonian Democracy,’ ” inducing his admirers to regard him as “the bow which spans and soothes the storms.” “Perfectly free from the embittered associations of the last five years,” Cass seemed the most available of all the Conservative possibilities;28 and it was the effort to rally all anti-Van Buren opinion on him in the late summer and fall of 1843 that had given Polk such trouble in Tennessee.

Yet one segment of the Democratic opposition—the one most feared and most hated by the Van Burentes—could never be rallied on Cass. It took its rise from other than “Conservative” grounds and would follow no other leader than John C. Calhoun.

V

Let it be recognized at once that Calhoun was a man of extraordinary ability and magnetism. Otherwise he could never have exerted such a portentous force within the American political system while standing out so intransigently against the pragmatic, compromising mode that has ever been its genius. His great appeal was as a political thinker, but not in the sense commonly supposed. Calhoun’s claim to distinction as a political philosopher is vitiated by the unreality of his much vaunted “realism,” by his inexorable pushing of “realistic” premises to conclusions having no possible realistic application. Yet his very devotion to formal logic regardless of practical consequences was powerfully attractive to one group of Americans, who were coming to feel themselves trapped in a situ-

ation that threatened their sense of security and moral worth and from which there seemed to be no practical escape. Calhoun would have been potentially disruptive of the American political process anywhere or any time; but a perverse fate had set him down at the very place where Americans have been under the severest social strain—not just in the South, but in that hotbed of southern sensitivity, South Carolina—and at the very time when the South’s morbid sensitivity over its peculiar institution of human slavery was driving it toward irrationality.29

For all the precision of movement and chiseled, emphatic speech through which Calhoun projected his own image of himself as a disinterested servant of great principles, the burning eyes set deep in his gaunt face told another story. The man seethed with a self-righteousness that was incredible and an egotism that made his principles and his personal fortunes indistinguishable. “The great ‘I am,’” John Tyler called him after some intimate dealings; and even his admirers admitted that “He liked very much to talk of himself, and he always had the good fortune to make the subject exceedingly interesting and captivating to his hearers.”330

For years Calhoun had yearned for the presidency, and his principles had shown a remarkable tendency to veer in whatever direction might advance his chances. In the early twenties he had been the most conspicuous nationalist in the country; later he supported Jackson, expecting to be his successor; in the early thirties he had broken with Jackson to become the prophet of nullification in South Carolina; a little later he had aspired to lead the great Whig coalition against Jacksonian tyranny. All these failing, Calhoun had at length embarked on his great crusade to persuade the South that slavery was a positive good and to unite all southerners in its defense—under the leadership of John C. Calhoun. Forgetting his former approval of the national bank, and coming out vociferously for hard money, he had finally returned to the Democratic party, determined to win the Democratic presidential nomination with solid support from southern Democrats.

Most southerners remained suspicious of their self-appointed leader, and for a long time Calhoun’s support was confined to a

29 On Calhoun as a political philosopher see Louis Hartz’s essay on “South Carolina vs. the United States” and Hartz, Liberal Tradition, 145-167. On the factors that made southerners susceptible to Calhoun’s leadership see my essay on “The Travail of Slavery.”
30 Tyler, The Tylers, ii, 420; Perry, Reminiscences, 1, 47.
devoted little band of those whose chivalric hauteur or extreme sensi-
tivity about slavery inclined them toward the doctrinaire intransi-
gence that he preached. In South Carolina such men were dominant,
and here Calhoun’s will was absolute. “All who sought promotion
in the State had to follow and swear by him,” complained Benjamin
F. Perry. “He thought for the State and crushed out all independ-
ence of thought in those below him.”

By the 1840’s, however, Calhoun’s support had begun to widen.
Steady agitation by his fire-eating followers gradually heightened
southern irritability over slavery, making southerners more sus-
ceptible to his preaching. By 1842 even Jackson’s old crony, Wil-
liam M. Gwin of Mississippi, was ready to declare, “I want a slave-
holder for President next time regardless of the man believing as I
solemnly do that in the next Presidential term the Abolitionists must
be put down or blood will be spilt.” Meanwhile Calhoun had been
allaying distrust by his conciliatory behavior in the Senate, and his
friends had begun constructing a conventional political organization
which they thought extremely formidable.

It is instructive to note that the sordidness and crudities of prac-
tical politics were most apparent in the campaigns of the very candi-
dates who thought themselves farthest above such things. Just as
the high-minded Tyler, out of political innocence, surrounded him-
sell with one of the most mercenary bands ever assembled in the
history of American politics, so Calhoun, out of contempt for demo-
ocratic politics, presided over a campaign that was as notable for its
cynicism as it was for its futility. In the South the Calhounites
operated on their principle of Greek democracy, relying on the lead-
ership of high-minded gentlemen whom the people would be glad to
follow. Outside the South they resolved to fight fire with fire and—
no sacrifice is too great for principle—to practice the political
mendacity which they supposed to be characteristic of a democratic
society. South Carolinians viewed the world through a prism that
distorted North and South alike, a refraction that would be fateful
indeed if ever imposed on the vision of other southerners.

Even in South Carolina the ideal of political leadership by high-
minded gentlemen did not hold up without a little practical rein-
forcement. The state’s politics were adroitly managed for Calhoun
by Franklin H. Elmore, president of that efficient Calhounite polit-

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31 Perry, Reminiscences, 1, 49.
32 Gwin to Jackson, 14 Mar. 1842, Jackson Papers.
ical machine, the Bank of South Carolina. Through loans to politicians, "the bank controlled the State, and Colonel Elmore controlled the bank." Where bank loans did not suffice, Elmore's superb talents for political maneuver—"one of the most adroit managing public men that I ever saw," Benjamin F. Perry called him—were usually more than adequate to the occasion. "If there were two ways of approaching any point, equally safe and secure, the one direct and the other circuitous," observed another South Carolinian, "Elmore would always take the latter."

To direct Calhoun's presidential campaign, Elmore had constituted a committee of high-minded gentlemen in Charleston. Similar gentlemen in the other southern states—except in North Carolina, where for a lack of authentic South Carolina types the Calhounites had to rely on loud, vulgar, and ambitious Romulus M. Saunders—coordinated their activities for Calhoun through correspondence with the Charleston committee. There was a similar directorate at Washington, where Robert M. T. Hunter of Virginia and the fiery South Carolina congressman Robert Barnwell Rhett supervised the national Calhoun newspaper, the Spectator, and managed the campaign in the North and West.

Outside the South the Calhoun cause attracted a weird collection of the doctrinaire, the disaffected, the mercenary, and the opportunistic. In the great port cities, importing merchants desiring free trade joined forces with radical laborites like Orestes Brownson, who envisioned an anticapitalist alliance between northern workingmen and southern slaveholders, and with raucous demagogues like Mike Walsh, whose gang of "Bowery B'hoys" stood ready to brawl for Calhoun in order to strike at well-fed and well-groomed Tammany politicians.

These elements were marshaled and manipulated, however, by more opportunistic types. In New York City a little group of scheming politicians led by Levi D. Slamm, the venal publisher of a popular Van Buren newspaper, set themselves up as a secret Calhoun committee, professing Van Burenism while they burrowed from within to seize control of the Democratic organization. One of Slamm's associates had to work night and day to "beg, borrow or steal" money enough to keep him loyal to Calhoun; and when Slamm eventually sold out to the Van Burenites for larger pay, he

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88 Perry, Reminiscences, i, 99, 102.
cynically but cheerfully inquired of his erstwhile associate “if I had done cursing him yet.”

In New England Calhoun’s fortunes were entrusted to the powerful Conservative faction of the Democratic party, led by the gouty, choleric Boston banker, David Henshaw, who had bossed the Massachusetts Democracy until Morton and Bancroft led a successful rebellion against him. Henshaw sat in Tyler’s Cabinet, and it was in New England that the patronage of the Tyler administration was applied most unsparingly in Calhoun’s behalf. The Yankee Calhounites were counting, too, on the support of the “cool, cautious & selfish” Senator Levi Woodbury of New Hampshire, before whose nose the Calhoun managers were dangling the vice presidential nomination.

The prim wantonness with which Calhoun and his gentlemanly managers yielded to the seductions of democratic politics was matched by the virginal ineptness with which they played the game. The amateurs and adventurers who volunteered to conduct the Calhoun campaign in New York and New England had no trouble passing themselves off with Elmore and company as practical, influential politicians, or in convincing the gentlemen at Washington and Charleston that Calhoun was on the verge of a tremendous victory in the North. At any rate the Washington Calhoun committee permitted one of the New Yorkers to conduct the Spectator long enough to demonstrate his impracticality even to gentlemen, while the Charleston committee raised thousands of dollars from wealthy South Carolina planters for Calhoun newspapers and campaigning in the North.

The optimism of the Calhounites reached its peak in August and September of 1843. Their letters from the North exuded confidence; the party had agreed to their demand that the national convention at Baltimore be postponed until May 1844; the Georgia Democratic convention had given substance to their dream of a united South by instructing its delegates to support Calhoun at Baltimore; and Polk’s defeat in Tennessee seemed to presage the collapse of Van Buren’s candidacy by demonstrating his unpopular-

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84 J. A. Scoville to R. M. T. Hunter, 11 Sept. 1841, 21 Nov. 1842, Hunter Correspondence, 41-48, 52.
85 Cave Johnson to Polk, 29 Jan. 1843, Polk Papers.
86 Hunter to Calhoun, 23 May 1843, “Correspondence to Calhoun,” 185-186; Elmore to Calhoun, 4 Sept. 1843, Calhoun Correspondence, 872-873.
ity and showing “that there are other spokes to the Democratic wheel besides the ‘Old Hero.’”

From these rosy reveries they were wakened with dismaying suddenness. In rapid succession the Democratic conventions of New York and most of the New England states declared for Van Buren, destroying any hope of substantial Calhoun support from the North. Nearer home the disillusionment was even more bitter. The Georgia endorsement of Calhoun had only stirred up the powerful currents of hostility and suspicion toward the South Carolinian that stemmed from the days of nullification; and as a result the Georgia Democrats suffered a stunning defeat in the fall elections. Promptly a new state convention was called to revoke the endorsement of Calhoun; while indications multiplied that the anti-Calhounites would predominate in the Democratic conventions of the other southern states. “Our friends in New England have greviously [sic] misled us,” one of Calhoun’s advisers mournfully told him, “and . . . there is nothing left but to decide how you should be withdrawn so that you may be preserved for the country in future.”

To this renewed disappointment Calhoun reacted with a characteristic swing from excessive optimism to self-righteous despair. Just a year before, when he still expected to win the presidency through the party system, he had “beheld with joy” the “truly republican and noble stand,” the “rigid adherence to principle,” of his fellow Democrats. Accordingly “I made up my mind to waive the objections which I have long entertained” to the convention nominating system. Now, however, with his hopes for a convention nomination blasted, he declared that “The whole affair is a gross fraud and I intend to wash my hands of it.” “I am the last man that can be elected in the present condition of the country,” he told his son. “I am too honest and patriotick to be the choice of anything like a majority.” It was only from the perspective of Calhoun’s almost pathological need to be justified and somehow victorious that the country, the party, and the convention system had so abruptly and so completely changed their character.

37 E. J. Black to Calhoun, 1 Sept. 1843, Calhoun Correspondence, 888-889.
38 Virgil Maxcy to Calhoun, 3 Dec. 1843, Calhoun Correspondence, 897; James Hamilton to Calhoun, 21 Nov. 1843, ibid., 891-893; Calhoun to A. P. Calhoun, Jr., 5 Dec. 1843, Calhoun Papers (Univ. of S.C.).
39 Calhoun to J. B. I’On and others, 21 Dec. 1843, Washington Globe, 2 Feb. 1844; Calhoun to A. P. Calhoun, Jr., 5 Dec. 1843, Calhoun Papers (Univ. of S.C.); Calhoun to J. E. Calhoun, 7 Feb. 1844, Calhoun Correspondence, 567; Wiltse, Calhoun, m, 139.
And so, as he had often done before, Calhoun struck a pose of principled intransigence. In a written address to his friends at Charleston and Washington, he withdrew his name from consideration as a candidate before the now contemptible Baltimore convention and called on his followers to defeat Van Buren by abandoning the Democrats and “standing fast and rallied on our own ground.” What he clearly wished was to be run as an independent candidate, though even he recognized that such a movement had no chance of success. “The object now is, not victory,” he explained, “but to preserve our position and principles; the only way, under [the] circumstances, by which we can preserve our influence and the safety of the South.” It was also the only way to preserve Calhoun’s image of himself as a heroic figure in the struggle between light and darkness that raged across his peculiar field of vision. His friends might follow if they wished: “if they shall have the spirit to raise the banner of free trade & the people.” that is, the banner of Calhoun, “against monopoly and political managers, we shall have a glorious cause to rise or fall by.” If not, “it will cause me no mortification or pain to stand alone, on the ground which I find it my duty to occupy.”

For once, however, Calhoun had to admit that his position was “altogether too high to be sustained by a large portion;—much the majority: and among them many the most intelligent and devoted” of his supporters. The men at Charleston and Washington had been pulled too deeply into the game of democratic politics to forswear so abruptly the rewards it might confer. Holding up the publication of Calhoun’s address, they implored their chief not to cut himself off irrevocably from the Democracy. If he did not get the party nomination this time, he surely would four years hence. Besides, by leaving it uncertain whether he would support the Democratic nominee, he might coerce the Van Burenites into a correct position on the tariff and slavery questions at the session of Congress that was just opening.

“This giving away, was so extensive at Washington,” Calhoun observed unhappily, “and acted with such force from that point on

40 Calhoun to George McDuffie, 4 Dec. 1843, Calhoun Correspondence, 554-555; Calhoun to Hunter, 22 Dec. 1843, ibid., 555-557; Calhoun to A. P. Calhoun, Jr., 5 Dec. 1843, Calhoun Papers (Univ. of S.C.).
this state, or rather on the Committee in Charleston, that I soon saw there was little hope, that the position I took would be backed . . . .” Reluctantly he softened his address somewhat, but still his supporters dragged their feet. With characteristic indirection Elmore found it difficult to convene the Charleston committee to consider Calhoun’s revised address; and for nearly two months the public was kept in ignorance of his decision to retire from the race for the Democratic nomination, while Calhoun railed at the “timidity” by which his friends “have already done much to expose us to scorn.”

VI

Calhoun had reached his decision to withdraw at the beginning of December 1843, just as his friends at Washington were joining the other anti-Van Buren forces in a last-ditch effort to stop the New Yorker. The Democratic politicians were streaming into the capital for a session of Congress at which they expected to settle finally on the candidates to be nominated by the Baltimore convention in May; and the anti-Van Burenites hoped to cripple the New Yorker’s candidacy by electing anti-Van Buren Democrats over the regular nominees of the party caucus for officers of the House of Representatives. With Robert Barnwell Rhett negotiating for the Calhounites, ex-Senator George M. Dallas of Philadelphia for the Cass men, and “Old Dick” Johnson for himself, it was agreed to back Dallas’s protectionist brother-in-law, Judge William Wilkins of Pittsburgh, for speaker, and to vote for the old-time Jacksonian Amos Kendall against Blair and Rives of the Globe for the lucrative post of printer to the House.

This plan might have succeeded if the Whig minority had been willing to support the dissident Democrats. Normally the Whigs would have exploited any opportunity to embarrass the Democratic majority, but this time the Whig leaders exerted “the most decisive & even violent action” to keep their followers from interfering in the Democratic quarrel. “If we cannot beat Mr. Van Buren,” they had decided, “we can beat no one”; and they carefully avoided anything

42 Calhoun to Duff Green, 10 Feb. 1844, Calhoun Correspondence, 568; Calhoun to Hunter, 1 Feb. 1844, ibid., 563.
43 Rhett to Calhoun, 8 Dec. 1843, Calhoun Papers; Cave Johnson to Jackson, 30 Nov., 7 Dec. 1843, Jackson Papers.
that might weaken Van Buren's chances of nomination. "A compromise candidate—Cass for instance," said one of the Whig strategists, "would have greatly endangered us in Penn. & Ohio, whereas as against Mr. V. B. these states are regarded as absolutely certain."44

Rather than give up, however, the dissidents carried their fight into the Democratic caucus, where they hoped to succeed by imposing the two-thirds rule for nominating House officers. To their shocked surprise the Van Buremites, secure in the possession of an overwhelming majority of the House Democrats, readily agreed to the two-thirds rule, and then proceeded to carry the Van Buren candidates for every House office with votes to spare.45

This stunning demonstration of Van Buren's strength appeared to settle the question of the Democratic presidential nomination. Within a week the canny Buchanan had withdrawn as a candidate. "I waited," he said, "until I saw there was no earthly prospect of success . . . Mr. Van Buren is not my first choice among the other candidates; but it is now manifest that he will obtain the nomination by an overwhelming majority & it is our duty to submit; though I know it will be a painful duty to many." Cass's friends likewise now had to confess that "the great popular movement in the democratic ranks is decidedly in favour of Mr. Van Buren"; and they promised to give the New Yorker "a most cordial and hearty support." Even Old Tecumseh scurried for cover, announcing that he would be glad to accept the vice presidential nomination if the convention preferred another for the presidency.46

Not until late January, however, did the Charleston committee finally publish Calhoun's address of withdrawal as a candidate before the Baltimore convention. Ignoring Calhoun's desire to stay in the race as an independent candidate, the Charleston Mercury at the same time removed his name from its masthead; and at the Virginia Democratic convention a few days later the Calhounites of that state further chagrined their chief by promising to support the Baltimore nominee. Thus deserted by his friends, even Calhoun could not endorse the project of his visionary supporter Duff

44 W. P. Mangum to P. C. Carrington, 10 Feb. 1844, Mangum Papers, iv, 42.
45 Wiltse, Calhoun, iii, 146-147.
THE ROAD BACK

Green for a convention of anti-Van Buren Democrats to meet at Philadelphia on the Fourth of July.47

Meanwhile eighteen state Democratic conventions had been held, five of them on the eighth of January, the anniversary of Jackson’s great victory at New Orleans. By the close of that Democratic day of jubilee, twelve of these eighteen states, including the southern states of Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, had declared for Van Burenen; four had been noncommittal; Georgia had withdrawn its endorsement of Calhoun; Kentucky adhered to its early nomination of Johnson; and no state had declared for any other candidate. There seemed to be no gainsaying Cave Johnson’s report to Polk: “All the fragments of our party seem likely to unite upon Van Buren, make his nomination unanimous & each party seek the succession by distinguished services in his behalf.”48

48 Johnson to Polk, 11 Dec. 1843, Polk Papers. A fairly complete summary of the actions of the state conventions is reprinted from the Albany Argus in the Washington Globe, 24 May 1844.
"THIS NEW AND MIGHTY QUESTION"

The sudden rush to the Van Buren bandwagon, following so closely on the Tennessee convention's refusal to endorse the New Yorker, left Polk in an extremely awkward position. At the convening of Congress in December 1843, Cave Johnson heard much adverse comment about Tennessee's position, for to suspicious Van Burenites it seemed to confirm the charges that Polk was behind the Cass agitation in the state. "They talk of Tennessee, Jackson's State having hauled down her flag, standing in a position to go on either side," Johnson reported to Polk, "that a new spirit has sprung up among our people since Jackson's day &c &c . . . —many indeed speak of your having lost the nomination by it."

Polk had already begun to regret the no-endorsement strategy, and by the opening of Congress he was hard at work trying to salvage as much of the Van Burenites' good opinion as he could. Not content with writing himself to Van Buren, he induced Jackson and the presiding officer of the Tennessee convention, Leonard Cheatham, to do the same; while Cheatham and Laughlin also sent detailed accounts of the convention to Cave Johnson for exhibition to the leading Van Burenites in Congress. All these letters maintained, somewhat disingenuously, that Tennessee Democrats favored Van Buren overwhelmingly, but that an explicit endorsement would have caused such a row with the perfidious Cass element as to weaken the party dangerously in the closely divided state. Van Buren could count on Tennessee's support at the Baltimore convention, he was told; and if he took Polk as his running mate, Tennessee would surely vote Democratic in the fall election.

Polk's greatest asset, however, was the confidence the Van Burenites had in Cave Johnson, a confidence recently strengthened by Johnson's "zealous and efficient" work in getting Blair and

1 Johnson to Polk, 29 Dec. 1843, Polk Papers.
2 Laughlin to Cave Johnson, 28 Nov. 1843, Blair-Lee Papers; Jackson to Van Buren, 29 Nov. 1843, Van Buren Papers; Polk to Van Buren, 30 Nov. 1843, ibid.; Cheatham to Van Buren, 22 Dec. 1843, ibid.
Rives elected as printers to the House of Representatives. He was now regarded as such "a thorough reliable Democrat," Johnson proudly told Polk, "that some of the Southerners call me a Northern Democrat & our leaders talk of course more freely to me than ever." Johnson was especially trusted by Silas Wright, who had also come to respect Polk when they had worked together in Congress in the thirties; and Johnson had little trouble convincing Wright and the New York and New England Van Burenites of Polk's loyalty to their chieftain.

Johnson had more trouble with Missouri's Thomas Hart Benton and with his admirers among the Ohio Van Burenites, who were still battling in their state for the hard-money policies that Old Bullion epitomized. Johnson found Benton "full of wrath that Jacksons state should have taken such a course." "The spirit of Jackson was gone," he fumed; and the failure to endorse Van Buren "injured the state" and might well lose Polk the vice presidential nomination. When Johnson blamed the state convention's action on the Cass movement and on Nicholson, Benton asked with surprise, "Is he not Polk's right hand man?" Johnson explained the true state of affairs between Polk and Nicholson, but Benton was not satisfied, and neither were the Ohio men.

Johnson concluded, and Aaron Brown and Judge Catron agreed, that Benton and his Ohio friends had another reason for opposing Polk's nomination: the fear that it would strengthen him as a rival for the presidential nomination in 1848. Buchanan, too, was thought to oppose Polk for the same reason. Though Johnson and Catron did their best to assure "both the B's" that Polk was still a comparatively young man and would never think of competing against them, these aspiring statesmen continued to behave as though they preferred a vice presidential candidate who was less likely to develop into a presidential possibility.

Hatred for Calhoun was Benton's dominating passion, and before the meeting of Congress he had been trying to stir up vice presidential support for Joel R. Poinsett, leader of the lonely little band of anti-Calhoun Democrats in South Carolina. When the Poinsett proposal failed to catch on, Polk's friends feared that the Missouri senator would fall in with the scheme of Virginia's Thomas

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3 F. P. Blair to Jackson, 6 Dec. 1843, Jackson Papers; Johnson to Polk, 15, 29 Dec. 1843, Polk Papers.
4 Johnson to Polk, 29 Dec. 1843, Polk Papers.
Ritchie to give the nomination to his crony Andrew Stevenson, former speaker of the House and minister to Great Britain. But Stevenson, too, failed to show any popularity, and the choice quickly narrowed down to Polk and his two principal rivals, Richard M. Johnson and William R. King. Old Dick had so infuriated the Bentonians by competing with Van Buren for the presidential nomination that at first he seemed out of the question; and by the third week of the congressional session Cave Johnson was reporting to Polk that "the current sets strongly toward King."

William Rufus King, a senator from Alabama since 1819, was a fifty-seven-year-old bachelor whose fastidious habits and conspicuous intimacy with the bachelor Buchanan gave rise to some cruel gibes around Washington. "Miss Nancy," Jackson had once dubbed him, while to John Quincy Adams he was "a gentle slave-monger." As in 1840, Buchanan had doomed King for the vice presidency in connection with his own campaign for the presidential nomination. Though Buchanan had now been forced once more to postpone his own ambitions, he was still working hard to get his friend second place on the Van Buren ticket. "Mr. Buchanan looks gloomy & dissatisfied," reported Aaron Brown following the Pennsylvanian's withdrawal, "& so did his better half until a little private flattery & a certain newspaper puff which you doubtless noticed, excited hopes that by getting a divorce she might set up again in the world to some tolerable advantage." As a result, "Aunt Fancy may be now seen every day, triged out in her best clothes & smirking about in hopes of securing better terms than with her former companion."

By the end of December it was clear that Van Buren and the New Yorkers would not interfere in the vice presidential struggle, that the Bentonians were averse to both Polk and Old Tecumseh, and that King, backed by his own state of Alabama, would also have Buchanan's powerful support among Pennsylvania Democrats. As a result of all these factors, Polk's friends in Congress believed

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9 Adams, Memoirs, xu, 25; Brown to Sarah Polk, 14 Jan. 1844, Polk Papers. When King was about to sail to France as United States minister, he wrote as follows to Buchanan (14 May 1844, Buchanan Papers): "I am selfish enough to hope you will not be able to procure an associate who will cause you to feel no regret at our separation. For myself, I shall feel lonely in the midst of Paris, for there I shall have no Friend with whom I can commune as with my own thoughts."
“THIS NEW AND MIGHTY QUESTION”

“the current running strongly agst. you at this time & in favor of King”; while Tennessee’s Whig senator Ephraim Foster opined from his neutral corner that “Senator King will prove to be the successful competitor.” “‘Little Lodi,’ poor fellow,” he observed, using an epithet the Whigs had attached to Polk in the recent gubernatorial campaign, “seems to be a good ways in the back ground, since his sad discomfiture last summer.”

Under these circumstances the Ohio Democratic convention, meeting at Columbus on January 8, was expected to be virtually decisive of the vice presidential nomination. Polk feared that the Ohio men at Washington had, under Benton’s influence, sent orders for the convention to endorse King. Polk’s chances were the more desperate because Nicholson had spiked the two main weapons he had hoped to use for winning support in Ohio and other states. The Tennessee party convention had appointed a committee to issue an address to the people. Through this body, and through the columns of the Nashville Union, Polk had hoped to create the impression that Tennessee Democrats were strongly committed to him for vice president, that they overwhelmingly supported Van Buren for the presidential nomination, despite the state convention’s failure to endorse him, and that with Polk on the ticket Van Buren could carry the state.

Unfortunately Nicholson had wangled the assignment to draft the state convention’s address. Although Polk made a special trip to Nashville to help Laughlin revise the Nicholson draft, the committee finally accepted a version so lukewarm about Van Buren that it could not be used outside Tennessee. The truth was, as a Nashville politician told Polk, that “there is a restless fever amongst the politicos here on the subject of Van B. to an extent which is not made known and which may break out into something imprudent or dangerous.” In fact, he continued, “The belief that you are identified with V. B. has created some aberation [sic] on the part of some friends here.”

While in Nashville, Polk also sounded out Laughlin about taking over the editorship of the Union from the ineffective William Hogan, who was manifestly dying of tuberculosis. Though Hogan and pub-

7 Cave Johnson to Polk, 29 Dec. 1843, Polk Papers; Foster to W. B. Campbell, 21 Dec. 1843, Campbell Papers; Van Buren to Polk, 27 Dec. 1843. Polk Papers.
lisher John P. Heiss demurred at this proposal, they did promise that the paper would come out for Van Buren. This promise they forgot as soon as Polk left town, partly because Nicholson was himself trying to get control of the Union and threatening to establish a rival, anti-Van Buren paper if he failed. So it was that Polk had to hasten back to the capital and spend Christmas Day of 1843 persuading Heiss to make Laughlin editor and come out for Van Buren. Even so, Van Buren’s name did not appear on the Union’s masthead until February 8, too late to help in the most crucial phase of the vice presidential campaign; and only when Laughlin finally took complete charge of the editorial columns a month later could Polk cease to worry about the paper. 9

Deprived of the state convention’s address and the Union, Polk had to make do with a manuscript circular letter signed by the state central committee and distributed to leading Democrats in all parts of the country. In addition he redoubled his entreaties for Jackson and other friends to write to Ohio Democrats. Finally he insisted that some of his friends must go to Columbus to press his claims in person. Various men begged off, but Senator Hopkins Turney agreed to make the long trip and came to Nashville to find someone to accompany him. Not until the day of the Ohio convention did Polk learn that Turney had not gone after all. 10

Lacking a personal representative at Columbus, Polk now considered it almost inevitable that Ohio would endorse King, making his own candidacy hopeless. Any ordinary politician—a Buchanan, for instance—would have withdrawn at this point, but not the dogged Polk. Without even waiting to hear from Columbus, he made up his mind. “As my name has been kept thus long before the country without any agency of mine,” he announced with more determination than accuracy, “it shall not by my agency be with-


10 Polk to Donelson, 20 Dec. 1843, Donelson Papers; Polk to Jackson, 25 Dec. 1843, Jackson Papers; Turney to Polk, 26 Dec. 1843, Polk Papers; Laughlin to Polk, 29 Dec. 1843, 1 Jan. 1844, ibid.; Cave Johnson to Polk, 29 Dec. 1843, 7 Jan. 1844, ibid.; L. H. Coe to Polk, 30 Dec. 1843, ibid.; Armstrong to Polk [31 Dec. 1843], ibid.; W. H. Polk to Polk, 31 Dec. 1843, 1 Jan. 1844, ibid.; Laughlin to Moses Dawson, 28 Dec. 1843, Dawson Papers.
drawn.” If “ruled out” by the national convention, he would fight earnestly “in the ranks”; but he could not help feeling bitter at “the schemes at Washington to defeat me.” “It will not be the first time that I have performed hard service & made immense sacrifices [sic] in the cause,” he complained, “whilst others who have enjoyed their ease have been rewarded with the Honours.”

II

But the vice presidential affair had taken an unexpected turn. Ohio did not endorse King after all. Orders had not gone out from Washington. Instead Old Tecumseh had been in Columbus campaigning, and the convention declared Johnson to be Ohio’s choice for the vice presidency.12

On the same day Johnson’s prospects were further enhanced by a violent newspaper controversy that broke out in the columns of the Washington Globe between King’s friends and Polk’s. The King partisans struck the first blow with a communication pointing out that the Tennessee Democrats had not endorsed Van Buren or been able to carry their state for the party. In further attacks they charged Polk with cowardice, on an occasion when he had been insulted by Congressman Henry Wise, and taunted him with having been “twice repudiated in his own state by large majorities—defeated by an inexperienced politician.” Polk would not “add one particle of strength to the ticket in any State of this Union,” they said, and the Democrats should not “jeopard their success by vain attempts to force upon the people of Tennessee a man whom they have twice refused to honor.”13

Replying for Polk, Cave Johnson, Aaron Brown, and Hopkins Turney exposed the long forgotten fact that King had voted for the bill chartering the national bank back in 1816. But by this time Ohio’s endorsement of Old Dick was known in Washington, and the two factions made haste to patch up their quarrel and make common cause against this suddenly threatening rival. The King men’s final communication praised both Polk and King for not traveling about and soliciting support like Johnson, and they began negotiat-


It was too late. "'Old Dick' is after all to be the 'Old Nick' of our special friend," Aaron Brown reported to Sarah Polk; while Cave Johnson told her husband that "there is a good deal of talk of settling the controversy between you & King by giving it to R. M. J." The Rhode Island Democrats had declared for Johnson about the same time as the Ohio endorsement, and the New Jersey convention followed suit soon after. The last opportunity to stop the Johnson bandwagon was at the Pennsylvania convention on March 4. Here King had the powerful support of Buchanan, while Polk entrusted his cause to his old Jacksonian friend Henry Horn, leader of the Van Buren organization in Philadelphia. But Johnson's grass-roots popularity in the Keystone Commonwealth overwhelmed all the influence that could be brought against him, and he was nominated by acclamation.\footnote{Brown to Sarah Polk, 14 Jan. 1844, Polk Papers; Cave Johnson to Polk, 13 Jan. 1844, \textit{ibid.}; Horn to Cave Johnson, 2 Feb. 1844, \textit{ibid.}; Polk to Laughlin, 20 Jan. 1844, \textit{ibid.}; Polk to Cave Johnson, 21 Jan. 1844, \textit{“Polk-Johnson Letters”}, 232-233; Nashville Union, 7 Mar. 1844; Washington Globe, 10, 12 Jan., 8 Mar. 1844.}

King gave up at once, and soon afterward accepted from President Tyler an appointment as minister to France. But Polk still refused to quit. Angered by the newspaper attacks, he was determined to "overpower the schemers at Washington, who seek to direct public opinion and thereby to defeat me." The Arkansas and Mississippi conventions had joined Tennessee in recommending him, and with King's removal from the race he could rightly regard himself as the choice of the Southwest. The "few powerful leading men at Washington" who opposed him, he argued, were "but a small portion of the party"; while "the popular voice of the party is for me, and I am resolved to contest the nomination with the leaders at Washington who would have it otherwise." His name had been brought forward by his friends, he announced to Silas Wright, "and will not be withdrawn."\footnote{Polk to Cave Johnson, 21 Jan. 1844, \textit{“Polk-Johnson Letters”}, 233-234; Polk to Wright, 9 Feb. 1844, copy, Polk Papers; Washington Globe, 27 Dec. 1843, 26 Jan. 1844.}

Unfortunately it was becoming all too evident to Van Buren and his advisers that "the popular voice of the party," at least outside
THE DEMOCRATIC OLD REGULARS

Martin Van Buren
Andrew Jackson
Francis P. Blair
Silas Wright
Henry Clay  
John Tyler  
THE DEFEATED AND THE SUPERSEDED  

Inauguration of President Polk—The Oath