THE SOUTHERN UNITY MOVEMENT

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THE SOUTHERN UNITY MOVEMENT

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PREFACE

It is indeed fortunate for the historian when he is able to view current events that readily lend themselves to comparison with topics of past interest and influence. The present furor over state-rights and interposition, even though it be to a lesser degree, offers such a comparison to another period in this country's history. The political crisis of the battle over state-rights which reached its climax in 1850 was the result of many and varied causes. Not only politics lay behind the dispute, but also reasons economic, social and moral in nature. In reviewing the source of those difficulties that transpired just over a hundred years ago, many points need only a cursory review while a few facts require more emphasis or illustration.

Not since the Union was founded had it come so close to a dissolution, not even in the nullification controversy in the 1830's. From that time on, however, the South continued to claim certain "avowed rights" that had been guaranteed to them by the Constitution. The struggle over those rights became enmeshed in the emotional quarrel over the institution of slavery as the abolitionists pushed for emancipation of the Negroes. A battle had raged over slavery in 1820 and had been solved, temporarily. In 1850, the issue was once again met with no serious consequences. In 1861, forcible resistance was
attempted in an effort to "protect the South" and those results are known to all. Today the fight for state rights again makes the headlines but with nothing of the magnitude and force that it did a century earlier.

On January 1, 1850, a leading South Carolina newspaper ran an editorial that prophesied, with unfortunate accuracy, events that were to transpire a decade later. "When the future historian shall address himself to the task of portraying the rise, progress, and decline of the American Union, the year 1850 will arrest his attention, as denoting and presenting the first marshalling and arraying of those hostile forces and opposing elements which resulted in dissolution; and the world will have another illustration of the great truth, that forms and modes of government, however correct in theory, are only valuable as they conduce to the great ends of all government--the peace, quiet, and conscious security of the governed." All that was here indicated came true, only the catastrophe of secession was lacking to complete the task assigned to the future historian.
CHAPTER I

GENESIS OF THE UNITY MOVEMENT

The first hint of a southern movement might be said to have been born in the nullification controversy of 1833. The forces of John C. Calhoun and his lieutenants in South Carolina were not content with the powers being exercised by the federal government on the question of the protective tariff. In this controversy many decried their love of the union as being firm, but asserted that their love of the sovereign state was even stronger. When the battle was over both sides claimed victory, and although the greater immediate gains probably went to the state-righters, it was not a clear cut decision. Doubt still existed as to where the powers of states began and where the power of the federal government left off. Thirteen years later, with the controversy over the Mexican war, the question was still not solved.

The economic decline of the Atlantic seaboard states of the South was not the least of the reasons behind the dispute between the states and the national government. The agricultural dominance of these states was rapidly disappearing in favor of the new lands to the west. The following decade, 1840 to 1850, forced them further into the background with the most severe depression, particularly to cotton culture, that the South experienced prior to the Civil War. During the
preceding ten years cotton prices had average 12.6 cents a pound and the industry was profitable. During the 1840's, however, the average price was about eight cents, and the cotton planters were greatly disheartened. The decade opened with cotton prices between eight and nine cents but they steadily declined until in 1845 middling upland sold for five cents, the lowest price ever paid for American cotton. A North Carolinian reported that for three years the profits of agriculture had not been more than 3 per cent because of poor crops and low prices. Similar complaints came from South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama. Scarcely a report was optimistic about the outlook for agriculture.¹

As cotton prices fell the older cotton states were the first to find its culture unprofitable. Their lands could not compete on equal terms with the newer lands of the Southwest; they faced not only reduced prices and diminished returns but also a loss of population through emigration to more bountiful acreage. Thus while the lower South was at economic odds with the industrial North, they also found themselves in competition with their brothers to the West.

As the situation became worse, Southern leaders, not willing to face the internal ills inherent in their agricultural systems, began to look around for someone or something to blame. The root of their trouble, they rationalized, was in the abuses that they suffered at the

hands of the northern businessmen who demanded tariff protection for their growing industries at the expense of southern agriculture. In addition there were the northern idealists who demanded that the entire labor system upon which a large part of southern agriculture was based should be abolished. Here were tangible issues upon which the southerner could rise to fight, as it appeared that the North was intent upon destroying what southern prosperity there was left.\(^2\) To some of the more radical, the only way out of this situation was a dissolution of the Union.

The radical element found substantial reason for concern in the long discussions in Congress, in the northern press, and in the attitude of the northern states, all of which led to a growing belief that the Union was a detriment to their prosperity and economic progress. These "fire-eaters" reasoned that the South would be more prosperous and would develop more rapidly if the Union were dissolved. To southern planters, whose lands continued to decrease both in production and value, those extremists' ideas appeared to be one answer to their economic difficulties. The radicals also recruited adherents from among those who, while they did not look for disunion to bring about positive economic advantages, expected it to bring no serious disadvantages.\(^3\) They could face it with the complacency that with it would come no new terrors and it might be a solution to their economic ills. There was no


\(^3\)Russel, p. 71.
wide-spread acceptance of these secessionist ideas at this particular time although some of the southern leaders let it be known that the idea was not completely unlikely. For example, in 1845, even Calhoun informed James H. Hammond that the abolition of the custom houses, thereby letting the money that was collected in the South be spent in the South, would make southerners among the most flourishing people in the world. "All we want to be rich is to let us have what we make." 4

On the other hand, unionists and conservatives also utilized economics as a basis for their arguments. Instead of the impractical talk of disunion, they urged that southern efforts be turned toward an effort to develop southern manufacture, to promote direct trade, to construct internal improvements, and to otherwise build up the South commercially; let this be a substitute for disunion rather than allowing the economic disadvantages to be a cause for secession. They based their position on two lines of reasoning: economic regeneration of the South would tend to preserve the political equilibrium of the sections and thus enable the southern states to maintain their rights without forsaking the Union; and since the basic causes for the movement were economic discontent and the belief that the Union had been unequal in its

material benefits, therefore, the successful programs of economic improvement would allay discontent and gain what was desired without the price of dissolution.\(^5\)

The best proof for the unionists’ cause, however, was the fact that some of the states began to overcome the dual disadvantage of northern industrialists and western expansion. In these sections the property-holding classes tended to evaluate their own prosperity as evidence that there was yet hope for the South within the Union. One example of this economic rejuvenation was Georgia, which forged ahead not only in agriculture but also in railroads and manufacturing.\(^6\)

Unionist sympathizers utilized this prosperity to point out that if other states were still suffering after the end of the general depression of the early 1840’s then the blame must reside within their own borders and not in the abuses or criticisms from the North.

The development of the northern attitude toward slavery presented a new threat to the whole scheme of revitalized prosperity. The growth of the antislavery sentiments lay partly in the belief that slavery was a moral, religious, and social evil and partly it was due to the conviction that there was an inherent hostility between the systems of free

\(^{5}\text{Russel, p. 59. For a more detailed analysis of the role played by economics see ibid., pp. 65-92; Shryock, pp. 10-63; Shanks, Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861, pp. 1-17; Boucher, “In Re That Aggressive Slaveryocracy,” Mississippi Valley Historical Review, VIII, 13-79.}\)

\(^{6}\text{Shryock, pp. 29-30, 46-47.}\)
labor and slavery. This attack upon the Negro slave system loomed on the southern horizon and threatened to blot out the partial success of the agricultural recovery.

The abolitionists had been preaching against the institution of slavery for some time, but now the attacks became more specific in nature in their attempt to prevent the extension of slavery into new territories. There had long been an economic basis for that extension, involving the migration of masters and slaves from the old to the new lands. That movement had several effects. It usually left the old states with worn out lands and it also increased the supply of cotton and the demand for slaves. This in turn resulted in a decrease in the price of cotton and an increase in the price of slaves. Both of these added to the persistent economic embarrassment of the planters of the older states such as Virginia and South Carolina.

Knowing full well the probable results that would develop from a vigorous antislavery movement, southern leaders had tried to keep the slavery question out of congressional discussions. With the advent of the Mexican War and subsequent disputes over territorial annexations, this task became more difficult with each debate. Southern Whigs had even opposed any acquisition of Mexican territory in an attempt to prevent a rupture with the North. The thirst for new lands, however, overrode those sentiments, for, as J. M. Mason confided to Daniel Webster,
slavery must expand or die. 7 The controversy broke wide open in August, 1846, when David Wilmot introduced his Proviso in the House of Representatives.

Many theories have been expounded as to why Wilmot introduced this amendment to a prospective two million dollar appropriation bill designed to pay Mexico for some of her western territories. Some thought the impetus came from those who felt that they had been cheated by President Polk's veto of the rivers and harbors bill. Others believed that it came from northerners who were either prodded by abolitionist constituents or else they recognized the potentialities of a South-West alliance and wanted to divert the political power of the West to a realization of their own sectional aims. The most probable of the varied theses was the idea of northwestern revenge for the South's violation of the so-called "bargain of 1844." In that year when the proposal of Texas annexation threatened the southward expansion of slavery, northern Democrats indicated a willingness to bargain with southern Democrats for a combination of the Texas and Oregon issues. The agreement was drawn up and ratified at the Baltimore presidential convention in May, 1844. When Polk was elected, southern Democrats began to pressure for their portion of the bargain relating to the annexation of Texas. All but a few of the northwestern Democrats voted in favor of this expansion.

but when the next session of Congress took up the Oregon question, southern Democrats under the guidance of Calhoun became recalcitrant and questioned the advisability of obtaining Oregon. They opposed the claim to the "whole of Oregon," opposed giving notice to Great Britain of the intention to abrogate the joint-occupancy treaty of 1828, and opposed attempts to establish a free-soil territorial government over that portion of Oregon which the United States did succeed in obtaining. The southerners denied any part of the "bargain," or else claimed that it did not pertain to the fifty-fourth parallel. So betrayed, the northwestern Democrats sought to curtail any future expansion on the part of the slave states. They felt that the Proviso was the only means possible for the restoration of the traditional free-soil and slave-soil balance in Congress. 8

Although delivered by Wilmot, the proviso was authored by John Brinkerhoff, of Ohio, the same congressman who had bitterly complained against the Mexican War tax on coffee and tea as being a sectional tax in that all western people used tea and coffee, whereas three million slave laborers scarcely used them at all. In other words he accused Congress of asking for a war tax to make southern conquests while northern territory was being given away by empires. 9

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The wording of the amendment did everything that the northwesterners wanted:

Provided that, as an express and fundamental conviction to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico by the United States, by virtue of any treaty which may be negotiated between them, and to the use by the Executive of the moneys herein appropriated, neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall first be duly convicted.

In addition to securing adherence of the northwestern leaders, the amendment gained immediate support from the northern and middle-Atlantic states.

Southerners quickly rose to the floor in protest and declared the amendment out of order, but they were overridden by a vote of 92 to 37. So stymied, they attempted to insert the stipulation of the Missouri Compromise but this was defeated, 89 to 54. Finally after more debate and heated arguments the appropriations bill passed the House, with the Wilmot Proviso, 87 to 64.

As the discussions had taken place in the waning days of the session, the House suspended the rule for not passing any new measures to the Senate in the last three days. In that body the bill never came to a vote as John Davis, of Massachusetts, while glorifying the free-states of the Union in a verbose manner, refused to allow Dixon Lewis of Alabama to make a motion, the contents of which were unknown. After

10 Congressional Globe, 29th Congress, 1st Session, p. 1217.
finishing its executive business, the Senate adjourned sine die with the appropriations bill and the Wilmot amendment tabled. 11

In the next session of Congress, various attempts were made to alter the wording of the Proviso which was attached to a new appropriation bill of three million dollars. These efforts met the same fate as the previous attempt at alteration, and the bill passed with the Proviso on February 15, 1847, by a vote of 115 to 105. Unless the South were able to construct a senatorial bulwark, there was a distinct possibility that the Proviso would become law. Several southern leaders went to work to obtain not only its defeat but also the principles for which it stood. Not the least of these was the perennial spokesman for the South, John C. Calhoun.

Four days after the second House passage of the Proviso he introduced into the Senate a series of resolutions soon to become known as the "Platform of the South." In brief they stated that Congress had no right to pass any discriminatory law concerning the territories which belonged to the states jointly; that any law so passed was a violation of the Constitution; and that the passage of laws for the territories was to be reserved to the people of the territories and not to Congress. 12 The resolutions never did come to a vote but they were

11 Ibid., pp. 1220-1221.
successful in attaining the immediate southern objective; the Senate rejected the Proviso and sent the bill back to the House. That body then receded from its previous position and passed the original bill, 115 to 81.\(^1\)

The subsequent adjournment of Congress postponed for the time being the threatened sectional conflict, but there could be little doubt that the effort to prevent any further expansion of slavery would be renewed. For example, before the year was up all of the New England and Middle states, together with Ohio and Michigan, had passed resolutions favoring the Proviso. Typical of the resolutions denying the right of slavery to enter the new territories were those of Pennsylvania which stated in part:

That our Senators and our Representatives in Congress be requested to vote against any measure whatever, by which territory will accrue to the Union, unless, as a part of the fundamental law upon which any contract or treaty for this purpose is based, slavery or involuntary servitude, except for crime, shall be forever prohibited.\(^2\)

Some of the states, as in Ohio, also resolved that slavery should be prohibited in Oregon. All of these moves served as additional fuel to the emotional fires that had been kindled in opposition to the abolitionists. They also served notice as an indication of further and final attacks upon slavery.


\(^{2}\)Ibid.
On the other hand, the legislatures of the South were not idle. In Virginia the legislature in general echoed the sentiments contained in the Calhoun resolution of the preceding month. In addition to seconding the fundamental views of the Carolinian, the General Assembly resolved that only two choices would be left to them if the Proviso were passed—either submission or determined resistance. They also deemed it the duty of every man to whom the Union was dear to oppose passage and they called on the citizens of the slave-holding states to take "firm, united and concerted action in this emergency." These were not only favorably received but were also echoed in other southern states. The Alabama Democratic convention approved them in May, 1847, and a few weeks later Georgia did the same. Texas declared that the prohibition of slavery was unconstitutional and March 18, 1848, asserted that the state would not submit to such a restriction. 

While this controversy was raging throughout the states, advocates of the Oregon Bill were still trying desperately to get that measure past the Senate. As the second session of the twenty-ninth Congress drew to a close, it was pointed out that any new discussion would last long past adjournment. A motion to table the bill was made by James Westcott, of Florida, and was passed 26 to 18. The Oregon Bill

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15 Ibid., pp. 4-7.

16 Philip M. Hamer, The Secession Movement in South Carolina (Allentown, 1918), pp. 16-17.

17 Congressional Globe, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 571.
was left for the new session. When the next Congress took over, however, supporters of the measure had little more success. Argument followed argument until on July 26, 1848, after a continuous session of twenty-one hours, the thirty-six sectioned Oregon Bill passed the Senate, 33 to 22. It was then sent to the House for their approval. Once again, arguments, debates, and discussions ran the time out. In the closing hours of the session, the House was engaged in calling roll for the passage of a resolution to see whether the Committee on Printing would remain in force during the recess. The call started at nine minutes to twelve and after two interruptions was still not complete when the house adjourned, August 14. **18** The Oregon Bill had made it half way through Congress this time; perhaps with some new faces, the next session would have an easier time of it.

This was not the only issue that was left undetermined with the adjournment, however. The status of California and New Mexico was still a matter of uncertainty, and as the southern slave owners had more at stake in these two territories, the struggle in Congress was certain to be bitter. There were various reasons why this crisis was evaded or at least postponed by both parties, but the primary reason was that it was an election year. A crisis would divide parties along sectional lines and would risk the loss of control of the next administration. So for the

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**18** *Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, pp. 1002-1005, 1082.*
time being, both sides joined in a "gentlemen's agreement," so to speak, and the question of slavery and the territories was shelved at least until December.

Although this truce was advocated by the leaders of both parties, the whole tenor of the election was one based on the Wilmot Proviso. The growth of the Free-Soil Party and the strength that it obtained in the 1848 elections served as ample indication of this. 19 As for the two major parties, both sought candidates that would garner the most votes from the South while losing a minimum from an anti-slavery North. The Democrats decided on Lewis Cass of Michigan, a northerner of consistently moderate bent on the slavery question. A southern slave-owner, Zachary Taylor, was the Whig nominee, obviously selected as a result of the recent sectional struggle in Washington as his only other claim was his military exploits in the Mexican War. The Charleston Mercury described the choices as "the two horns of a dilemma to Southern patriots. We want no statesman who has knuckled to abolitionists, or who marches under the banner of Whiggery. Yet if compelled to elect will prefer the advocate of a Tariff to the approver of the Wilmot Proviso." 20 The opinion of most of the southern states ran along

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19 See "The Correspondence of Salmon P. Chase," in American Historical Association, Annual Report, 1902, II, for a contemporary account of the Free-Soil party and its growth in the years, 1847-1849.

20 Hamer, p. 19.
similar veins, and although the final result in November was victory for Taylor, it was by no means indicative of southern sentiment.

With the election out of the way, the primary interest of the country turned back to the slavery question and the development of the southern movement. Robert Toombs, of Georgia, wrote to J. J. Crittenden that the movement was:

A bold strike to disorganize the Southern Whigs and either to destroy Genl. Taylor in advance or compel him to throw himself in the hands of a large section of the democracy at the South. The Southern democracy are perfectly desperate. Their Northern allies, they clearly see, will unite with the Free-Soilers; and even now the peace is broken between them forever. 21

To witness the validity of Toombs' claim, it was only necessary to view the struggle that had renewed over California and New Mexico.

The issues that had been laid aside for the campaign were revitalized and supplemented with newer and stronger ones. The Savannah Georgian described the South as being in a dangerous position, for:

Arrayed against her is not only the Northern Proviso men but the unenlightened moral opinion of the world. The South might temporarily secure peace by accepting the proviso, without immediate injury to Georgia or the other slaveholding states, but the difficulty of the race situation would make such a policy suicidal. Slave numbers would increase rapidly therein until the slave labor system would become so burdensome as to demand emancipation. And what then? Experience proved

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that the two races could not live together in a state of social equality. The result of emancipation would, therefore, be the ruin of both races.\textsuperscript{22}

A letter from J. H. Harmonson, Democratic representative from Louisiana, indicated that the abolition movement was carrying everything before it in Washington and he asserted that if the South vacillated or yielded in the least, it would lose all. On the other hand, if it remained firm and let the North know that it would be their equal or their foe, that they would hesitate and abandon their "traitorous violation of the Constitution."\textsuperscript{23} It was hardly likely that the latter situation would develop but such northern concessions as the proposed Walker's amendment, which would have extended the Constitution to the California territory, had led some of the less radical in the South to hope for a compromise.

Any hopes that might have been held were considerably dimmed when the South soon became faced with two new problems in connection with the slavery issue, the attitude of the border states and the proposals for the District of Columbia. Mississippi and other cotton states had become increasingly uneasy over the growing tendency in the border states to get rid of their slaves. The possibility that such

\textsuperscript{22} Shyrock, p. 179.

states as Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware would soon
dissolve their slave holdings and cease to act as a buffer zone proved
to be a growing source of worry to the lower South. The situation be-
came so desperate that the governor of Mississippi was urged to con-
vene the legislature in a special session in early 1849 to consider the
prohibition of the inter-slave trade. In the opening days of the
Thirty-first Congress, Representative Daniel Gott's resolution to
abolish slavery and slave trade in the District of Columbia presented
a new plank in the anti-slavery platform. The Vermont legislature
quickly seconded the idea and adopted a set of resolutions that asked
not only that these two aims be accomplished but also, if they were not,
that the capital should be moved to some free state, more central,
and more convenient for the nation, where the representatives may
be more free to legislate for the general welfare.  

This only served to further convince the South that they must
make a more determined last ditch stand for their avowed constitu-
tional rights. The disputes over the tariff, a national bank, internal
improvements, free immigration, public lands, and minority rights
in general, had now become wrapped up in one symbol—slavery.
National and sectional reasons for the northern attitude toward slavery
had been complemented, even supplanted in some instances, with the

24 Ibid., pp. 36-37.
moral attack on the southern institution. The situation was no longer merely a case of northern industrialists opposed to the system of labor in the South; it was now assuming the position of refusing to let that system be extended into the new territories. Northerners believed that they had conceded on the admittance of Texas, that they had been betrayed on the Oregon territorial annexation, that they were morally justified under a "higher law" to fight for the remaining Mexican lands of New Mexico and California. On the other hand, southerners stood by the constitution, insisting that certain rights had been guaranteed to them and any further northern violations or encroachments were not to be tolerated. Their defense of those rights took on the form of a defense of slavery. Their stand on the issues embodied in the New Mexico, California, and the District of Columbia controversies epitomized not just a defense of constitutional claims but a steadfast adherence to slavery as an integral part of their economic and social life. Seeing that their defenses were weakening within the Union, more and more southerners listened to the radicals' call for disunion.

The battle continued to rage from Washington to Richmond; cries of secession, dissolution, and protection for southern rights began to ring out anew from every corner of the South. Aaron Brown, ex-governor of Tennessee, spoke on the North's handling of the fugitive slaves, the breaking of the Constitution, the proposed abolition of the Negroes, and the territorial questions:
In such a future, who then can talk of a Constitution with its violated covenants, or of a Union with all its shattered fragments strewn around us! The great law of self-defence will then be all that is left us. Under that law, whether to be found in the reserved rights of the States under the Constitution, or in the admitted right of revolution, I care not—under that law of self-preservation, the States will have to fall back upon their original rights, and provide again for "the enjoyment of life, liberty, and property." 26

Others, however, were not so radical although they still battled for the South's cause. For example, Governor Brown of Mississippi wrote that there was in the South "a calm dispassionate determination first, to exhaust all the resources of reason and argument . . . and if these fail . . . we feel prepared to become enemies, and defend our rights." 27

He abhorred such a position unless it were forced upon them, yet it was their duty to watch the approach of any further abuse and be prepared to meet it, and meet it united. Even less radical was R. K. Cralle who indicated that should the Wilmot Proviso be passed, "nay, should Congress next proceed to abolish Slavery in the District, I am compelled to say, with feelings of deep mortification, that Virginia, after a few patriotic groans will submit." 28

Moderation was certainly not the keynote in Mississippi, however, especially in May, 1849. An informal meeting of prominent citizens

26 Collected and Edited by Editor of Union and American, Speeches, Congressional and Political, and Other Writings of Ex-Governor Aaron V. Brown (Nashville, 1854), p. 324; hereafter cited as Brown's Speeches.

27 Hearn, p. 23.

28 Calhoun Correspondence, p. 1200.
was held in Jackson to protest against the policy of Congress in excluding slavery from the territories. This meeting issued a call to the people of the several counties to elect delegates to a state convention, whose purpose was to consider "the threatening relations between the North and the South."\(^{29}\)

Conforming with the call, the Mississippi convention assembled at Jackson, October 1, 1849, appointing Judge William Sharkey as president. With great solemnity he opened his address with a carefully prepared exposition of constitutional rights and the encroachments upon them:

The attempt of Congress to prohibit slavery from the territory of California has caused this meeting. The territory is common property. There each citizen of the United States has equal rights, is entitled to equal freedom in the territories. I am proud to say that in acquiring it, Mississippian displayed as much valor as any other portion of their brethren in arms, and shed as much blood in proportion to their number as the citizens of any State. They were distinguished for their prowess in many a hard fought battle, but now they are told that restrictions are to be imposed upon their right to enjoy that conquest. Can we, should we yield the fruits of our valor and surrender with it our constitutional right of equality?\(^{30}\)

He concluded his opening remarks by reducing the argument to two questions: "The great and serious inquiry is, shall we submit to


\(^{30}\)Congressional Globe, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, Appendix (Washington, 1850), pp. 174-75.
farther degradation, or shall we seek redress? If the latter, how is it to be obtained?" 31

When the convention assembled the next day, a committee of twenty was appointed. They drew up a series of resolutions which reaffirmed their devotion to the Union, but as it was originally formed and not as the present engine of oppression. The resolutions also asserted the right of Mississippi in the territories; recommended that the legislature pass laws to encourage the carrying of slaves therein; and embodied the governor with the power to call a general convention of the people upon the passage, by Congress, of the Wilmot Proviso or any law abolishing slavery. The seventh resolution stated that the time had arrived when the southern states should "take counsel together for their common safety; and that a convention of the slave-holding States should be held at Nashville, Tennessee, on the first Monday in June next, to devise and adopt some mode of resistance to these aggressions." 32

In addition to the resolutions, the meeting drew up an address to the people of the South which invited the states to send delegates


to the convention to be held June 3, 1850, "with the view and hope of arresting the course of aggression, and, if not practicable, then to concentrate the South in will, understanding, and action." Only as the last possible resort were they to call another "like regularly constituted convention of all the assaulted States, to provide for their separate welfare by the formation of a compact and a Union, that will afford protection to their liberties and rights." 33

At last the southern movement began to take on an organized form, with the southern states utilizing more than lip service in reacting to "northern abuses of their rights and violations of the Constitution." It was not merely a political affair with disgruntled Democrats as the only advocates, for Southern Whigs also approved and planned to act in concert. Whig sentiments were voiced in the Jackson Southern:

They will meet not as citizens of the South . . . but as citizens of the American Union. It will be a time for calmness and caution, for firmness and moderation. . . . There can be no endeavor to create excitement or animosity in any part of the Union; for the great purpose of this convention will be to promote peace and good neighborhood among all the members of the confederacy and to allay agitation—-to put it down forever. 34

33 Congressional Globe, 31st Congress, 1st Session, p. 578.

Northerners had acted together in condemning the institution of slavery and in protesting against its extension in the new territories. It was now time for unified southern action in its defense.
CHAPTER II

CALHOUN AS SECTIONAL SPOKESMAN

The call for united action from Mississippi was merely the culmination of a lengthy campaign for concerted action. There had been other efforts on a smaller scale at various periods throughout the preceding fifteen years but the time had not been right for any wide spread adherence. In fact, earlier in the year, a southern caucus was held in Washington, comprised of the congressional representatives from the slave-holding states. That group of men, led by the venerable southern statesman, John C. Calhoun, had gathered to see what could be done to unify the South against abuses suffered at the hands of the northern abolitionists.

The impetus for the meeting was a resolution, proposed December 21, 1848, by a Whig representative from New York, David Gott, which would prohibit slave trade in the District of Columbia. The southern congressmen met the next day, and after several methods of retaliation were considered they decided to appoint a committee to draw up an address protesting the motion. Calhoun represented South Carolina and was subsequently placed on the subcommittee to draft the address. In fact, due to his line of thinking, which was between the fire-eaters who wanted immediate action and
others who would wait until the objectionable measures had been
enacted into a law, he became the logical person to write the address.
Many felt that he had called the meeting for that specific purpose, to
have an avenue for voicing his thoughts on the issue of slavery and
southern rights, and it must be admitted that it afforded him an ex-
cellent opportunity to put before the combined people of the South
his theories of the dispute—theories which he had grown to believe
were the only solution. His work was approved by a majority of the
fifteen committeemen and was to be read to the assembled southern
congressmen the following January. 1

The address typified Calhoun's thoughts and actions of the past
eighteen months. It was a candid, concise, and logical analysis of
the points of dispute between the two sections. There was no im-
passioned appeal to arms, in fact no appeal at all except for one of
unity, which to Calhoun meant success for the South. In showing how
the situation had evolved, he traced in the speech the history of the
dispute between the North and the South back to the days of the fram-
ing of the Constitution and described the provisions that were made
for slavery therein. He then showed, one by one, how these pro-
visions had been violated.

1 Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun, Sectionalist, 1840-
The first violation was in reference to the return of fugitive slaves. That situation had grown increasingly worse until it was, for all practical purposes, defunct in all northern states with the possible exception of Indiana and Illinois. In fact, the southern slave-owner had to face the possibility of insult, heavy pecuniary loss, imprisonment, and sometimes his life in attempts to reclaim his property, even though that right was guaranteed him by the law of the land. On this point, Calhoun also showed how the violations could be indirect as well as direct in that certain northern elements were enticing the slaves to run away and then aiding them to get to Canada. To him, this was equally a violation of southern rights.

The entrance of Missouri into the Union under the auspices of the "Missouri Compromise" served as the next point of narration. The end result of that agreement was highlighted, recalling that "it was forced through Congress by the almost united votes of the North, against a minority consisting almost entirely of members from the Southern States." In other words, in 1820 northerners had almost unanimously accepted 36° 30' as the point of slavery limitation but in 1850 that same section, again almost unanimously, disregarded the previous arrangements.

In conjunction with that discussion Calhoun brought the narrative up to date by reviewing the struggles over Texas, New Mexico, Oregon, and California. He enumerated the violations of southern rights in
connection with those areas that had become so enmeshed with the Mexican War. He culminated his description of the situation in which the South found herself with an explanation of the current attempts toward the abolition of slavery and slave trade in the District of Columbia.

Having set up this premise in the address, Calhoun proceeded to show what a continuance of this predicament would mean to the South. He generalized that the first result would be the emancipation of the Negroes. As evidence of what such a future could hold for the South, he cited the results in the British West Indies and warned that it would be even worse in the South in that the emancipated Negroes would combine forces with the northern abolitionists in forcing southern whites to change conditions with the former slaves. It would then be a "degradation greater than has ever yet fallen to the lot of a free and enlightened people." To prevent this future of disorder, anarchy, and misery he concluded that there could only be one answer—unity.

If you become united, and prove yourselves in earnest, the North will be brought to a pause, and to a calculation of consequences; and that may lead to a change of measures, and the adoption of a course of policy that may quietly and peacably terminate this long conflict between the two sections. If it should not, nothing would remain for you but to stand up immovably in defence of rights, involving your all—your property, prosperity, equality, liberty, and safety.²

²Calhoun Works, VI, 285-313, for the complete text of the address and associated correspondence.
Calhoun closed the address by urging all southerners to be united and for that purpose to adopt any necessary measures. Beyond this point he would not advise them. He felt that only if united action should fail would it be time to decide what course should be adopted.

The address was read to the reassembled eighty-eight men on January 15, 1849. Many of the representatives, for the most part Whigs, were not willing to follow his advice lest it embarrass the incoming administration. Senator Berrien of Georgia, after prolonged debate, proposed a substitute motion which called for compromise between the North and South. Howell Cobb of the same state also made a minority motion which protested against the formation of a southern party, stating that the Democracy alone could save the Union. Neither one of these efforts achieved much success and after Calhoun agreed to some changes in the wording, the address was signed by forty-eight men from twelve slave-holding states. 3 The South would at least hear from Calhoun; whether or not they heeded him would be another thing entirely.

The border states responded to the call for united action in various ways. The Missouri legislature passed resolutions which in essence pledged that state to cooperate with the other slave-holding states in such measures as might be deemed necessary for their protection against northern fanatics. In Kentucky a controversy was

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3 Shyrock, pp. 183-185.
centered around the emancipation of slaves to be proposed in the constitutional convention assembling in October; not one delegate favoring emancipation was elected. While it approved of neither secession nor nullification, the Democratic convention in Tennessee declared that the encroachments of northerners had reached a point beyond which they could not be tolerated. ⁴

In other southern states, where necessity for action was more deeply felt, Calhoun's Southern Address met with widespread approval. The Virginia General Assembly approved the address and passed resolutions which reaffirmed those of 1847, stating further that interference with the slave trade or any such measure as the Wilmot Proviso would be considered a direct attack and would be resisted at all hazards. ⁵ In Mississippi both Whigs and Democrats joined forces to approve of the Southern Address, while in Alabama at least the southern counties responded without distinction of party. ⁶ Even the Whig legislature of North Carolina adopted resolutions which declared the abolition of slavery and slave trade unconstitutional. In addition, the subsequent re-election of one of the signers of the address, A. W. Venable, by a significant majority was considered as a complete triumph of the

⁴Hearon, pp. 43-44.

⁵Shanks, p. 26; see Ames, pp. 10-12 for complete text of resolutions.

⁶Hearon, pp. 44-46.
"principles announced in the Southern Address." The Florida legislature pledged the state to join the others in the defense of their rights and South Carolina professed a willingness to co-operate with the southern states, re-emphasizing the necessity for a firm and united stand. Only Georgia remained lukewarm in the face of an almost unanimous acceptance of Calhoun's document. Even though the legislature would not give approval to the address they did second the Virginia resolutions and it was generally conceded that the address had prepared the minds of men for any emergency which might arise.

Part of the reason for the failure of a unanimous acceptance was the strong Whig opposition in some states, but a considerable portion of southern opinion resisted the call because of the association of Calhoun's name. Leaders in this latter group included the perennial anti-Calhounite, Thomas H. Benton. Even one of Calhoun's supporters, however, indicated that Senator Foote's letter disclaiming Calhoun's connection with the address "will do good in Georgia, and I doubt not in all the slave states, for it will neutralize the slang by which the non-signers are seeking to throw ridicule on the movement." The


8Hamer, pp. 31-32.

9Toombs Correspondence, p. 151. 10Calhoun Papers, pp. 512-13.
stigma placed on the South Carolinian in nullification days was still a warning to some of the more conservative.

It was a paradox that a man who had dedicated the better part of his political career to the South should be viewed by a part of that section with suspicion. Calhoun had been accused by southerners and northerners alike of acting as he did with only one thought in mind, the presidency. He explained his relationship to southern politics in a letter to Duff Green:

It is not that of a leader aspiring to the presidency, but that of an individual, who, in the discharge of his public trust, looks only to his duty and only expects their concurrence in opinion with him. Occupying that position towards them, as associates and equals, and not as partisans, or followers, I assume no right to dictate, nor do I admit the right on their part to dictate to me. It is the relation of independence on both sides; and I feel it to be a matter of delicacy, to respect it especially when they stand in the relation of contributors to the support of a cause, which I would advocate without reference to their support, or opposition. ¹¹

Not that he did not want the position of the chief executive, as an analysis of preceding presidential elections, especially 1840 and 1844, would support. Yet when it came to a choice between the White House and the South, he was described as one who "has sacrificed his own national Rights of Promotion to stand by Southern Constitutional Rights." ¹²

What manner of man was this stalwart defender of southern minority rights? There were few indeed who would say that he was not

¹¹ Calhoun Correspondence, pp. 722-723.
¹² Calhoun Papers, p. 530.
a man of character even though they did not always agree with his principles. His character was marked and decided, with uncompromising traits such as firmness, kindness, and honesty. Though he clung to his ideas with a stubborn tenacity, he never shrank from any duty no matter how displeasing—as witnessed by his acceptance of Secretary of State under Tyler. In answer to those who called his actions inconsistent, he defined inconsistency as "a change of conduct, when there seemed no circumstances to justify it." In his opinion, any change that would better the South was ample justification in itself.

His mind was one of the best that the country had produced to that time. The faculty of reasoning with accuracy was natural with him. He was shrewd in argument and a master of dialectics, but his great power lay in analysis. There was a logical exactness about his work that stripped most of the emotion from the arguments that surrounded the great moral issues of his day and laid bare the facts as he saw them. His devotion to the South was not as much sectional as it was the natural consequence of his political views with reference to theories of government.\(^\text{13}\)

From the theories of nullification and the concurrent majority to his disquisitions on the constitution and on the government, he had but one thought in mind, the defense of minority rights. This thought was manifested in his speeches as well as his writings.

It was acknowledged that he was one of the most arresting speakers of the day although he did not speak in the "grand style," that is, ornamented or eloquent style, which was used by most orators of his time. In a period dominated by Clay, Webster, and Benton, Calhoun appeared too cold and logical to satisfy audiences who expected a more ornate rhetoric. There was little ease, flexibility, grace, or charm in his manner. His words would rush rapidly from his mouth as if his lips were trying desperately to keep up with his brilliant mind. One of his outstanding characteristics was the ability to put his thoughts into simple sentences made for ease of understanding, leaving figurative language or words used merely for their effect to those with more eloquence. His strength of character and integrity were responsible in a large degree to Calhoun's ethical appeal and, coupled with his intense earnestness, one of the highest attributes of true eloquence, gave him his reputation as a speaker.

A legislative occasion preceded by adequate preparation was the type of speaking situation which he preferred. He was seldom successful on those occasions as he nearly always spoke against the majority opinion. His speeches on the Oregon Bill, the proposed occupation of Yucatan, the war with Mexico, and the slavery question were outstanding examples of well-organized and powerful deliberative speeches but they were still not enough to offset the fact that Calhoun was sectional spokesman for a minority South.

Ibid., pp. 123-124.
His structure and style followed the classical pattern of organization. He used almost every known logical device, favoring the cause-to-effect form, but even then he rarely supported his arguments with only one device, preferring to utilize several. Although his use of logical proof was excellent, his facility with the pathetic and ethical proof was stilted, obvious, and usually poorly used.\(^{15}\) D. J. McCord, a lawyer from South Carolina, said of his speech on the Mexican War, "I am extremely pleased with its style and substance. Its simplicity, purity, and dignity is admirable. Preston says it is antique and an imitation of Demosthenes."\(^{16}\) In that speech and in others in which he defended the South before Congress, he would state the issues clearly with the formal elements of unity, emphasis, and coherence rigidly observed. His function as a speaker was to present and keep alive a minority viewpoint which, though doomed to failure, was not to be blamed on any ineptness in his oratorical abilities.

His speaking engagements outside of the legislative sessions were few in number and most of the speeches have not been preserved. One such engagement, a speech at Charleston in March of 1847, however, was destined to be remembered if for no other reason than as the


\(^{16}\)Calhoun Papers, p. 426.
point when Calhoun declared that secession was not only imminent but was also probable if northern abuses could not be checked. He arrived in Charleston on March 6 for a four day rest before continuing to Fort Hill. The night before he left he was asked to address a mass meeting at the theater. He described the scene that night as:

Literally crowded, and hundreds had to retire from the impossibility of getting in. I was unfortunately labouring under a severe cold, accompanied by hoarseness; but I succeeded in making myself heard, in a short address of about 30 or 40 minutes. I dwelt wholly on the slave question, its danger and our means for resisting it. 17

He later wrote to Duff Green that it was not only a large but also a very enthusiastic meeting, with Whigs and Democrats in perfect unanimity.

The speech began with a characteristic introduction employed by Calhoun, --a short, factual, and unemotional statement of his purpose. He proposed to discuss the general state of affairs in connection with the federal government, restricting it to the institution of slavery. Using one of his favorite approaches, he asked a question, "Does Congress have the power to appropriate the territories for themselves to the exclusion of slavery?" He answered it in the affirmative, at least numerically, although the South still had the Constitution on her side. But more than sheer numbers, he showed that she had to fear the motives and objects of the crusade against slavery. He pointed out

17 Calhoun Correspondence, p. 720.
that the North was not hostile to the labor of the slaves; they were in fact financially dependent on them and their products. It was neither a fear that the South would outnumber them in Congress, for the greater population would keep both the House of Representatives and the Electoral College safe in northern control. He found the real source of agitation in the presidential elections.

He explained his point further by dividing the North into four divisions: 5 per cent, who viewed slavery as an institution as did the South; 70 per cent, who regarded slavery as an evil but were not willing to violate the Constitution; 5 per cent, who were the rabid abolitionists; and the remaining 20 per cent who were the political leaders and their partisans. To him the latter group was perfectly indifferent to sectional struggles, because they catered to the side which could help them attain their objective, which was the presidency and the honors that went with it on both the federal and state level. Those divisions were so evenly aligned in most states that the influence of only a small portion of the total voting strength could determine the outcome. In other words, he concluded that the abolitionists, while comprising only 5 per cent of the over all political strength, had
attained so much power because the political leaders were courting that element to insure a margin of success. 18

When he first rose to speak Calhoun would almost always bend forward as if from diffidence yet when fully aroused he became stern and erect in his bearing. His voice had been cultivated to make his utterances strong, full, and distinct. This ability was demonstrated in the Charleston speech when he told the assembled Carolinians that what must be done was to show both parties that by courting the small radical element they would lose the vote of the South. To achieve this successfully, he said it must be done through unified action, for:

The end would be, should we act in the manner indicated, the rally of a new party in the non-slave-holding States, more powerful than either of the old, who, on this great question, would be faithful to all of the compromises and obligations of the Constitution; and who by uniting with us, would put a final stop to the further agitation of this dangerous question. 19

He called on them to cease all party affiliations and let safety of their domestic institution be the paramount issue, a safety that could only

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18 Calhoun Papers, p. 498; this letter from J. C. Weems illustrates Calhoun's point. "So nearly equal do the Parties stand in Md. that a very few votes taken from either side and given to the other so compleetly [sic?] elevates or depresses the Beam of Party scales as to induce such Pittyfull [sic?] political miscreants rather to commit perjury(as all inevitable do who averse to support the Constitution) than to chance the consequence of the loss of a few abolition votes."

19 Calhoun Works, IV, 382-396.
be attained through unification. He believed any delay or indecision would eventually prove fatal to them and the union. Only fourteen years would have to pass before his prophecy was unfortunately proved to have been a valid one.

Such was the character, integrity, and ability of this man who had personified the minority struggle for so many years; who had considered every solution to the problem; who had tried most of them and would try even more, even a dissolution of the union, if southern rights and privileges could not be guaranteed any other way. Calhoun had been against secession since the early days of the nullification controversy when some talked then of a southern confederacy, but he had held out for a southern convention as the means to obtain a "fresh understanding of the bargain." In 1837 in a dispute over the "gag resolutions," Calhoun's faction, energetically supported by Rhett, proposed the calling of a southern convention to strengthen the South's position. During the Bluffton movement in 1844, the idea for calling a southern convention had again appeared, but attention had been diverted away from it by the presidential election of that year. Now in 1847, Calhoun asked for a southern party, for unity in thought and action, as the solution to their ills.

20 Laura A. White, Robert Barnwell Rhett; Father of Secession (New York, 1951), p. 36.
It was not to be assumed, however, that he had given up the idea of a convention of the slave-holding states. In reply to a letter written to him in late 1847, Wilson Lumpkin of Georgia indicated that he concurred with Calhoun on a concerted action and that he could "see no way of effecting this object, except by a Convention of the States interested." Calhoun's influence was also obviously felt in South Carolina around this same period as Armisted Burt, a member of the House of Representatives, recommended a convention of slave-holding states as the only means whereby the South could save herself from the ultimate destruction of slavery. The Sumpter Banner hoped that South Carolina would take the lead in organizing a southern convention to pledge the South to equality in the union or secession from it. The governor of South Carolina, David Johnson, thought that unity of time and concert of action were indispensable and a southern convention was the best means for obtaining them. In 1848 a letter from John Cunningham, son of one of Calhoun's lifelong friends, also revealed that the South Carolinian was not alone in thinking about a convention. Cunningham wrote that "nothing can now arrest so well this fatal tendency as a concerted effort by the leaders of both parties of the South to get up a Southern Convention."  

21 Calhoun Correspondence, pp. 1135-1137.  
23 Calhoun Correspondence, p. 1186.
Spurred on by these pledges of encouragement, Calhoun began to take the pulse of public opinion throughout the South on the idea of a convention. One report came to him in January, 1849, from H. W. Connor, who wrote:

The people of Georgia of both parties are up to the mark and ready to act, but may not take the lead but they may consider the issue as inevitable and the sooner it is made the better. The people of Alabama as a whole are with us in everything but the difficulty is with the politicians and the parties.

I fear for Louisiana, she will be the last if at all to strike for the defence of the South. In Florida I was no where but at Apalachicola. They are all Northern agents there but Florida is right. Of our own people many of them are desponding. They began to think that the Institution of Slavery is doomed. Here to my mind is the only danger of the South.24

Connor was convinced from all he had seen and heard that prompt and decided action was what was needed most. Calhoun obviously agreed and began to put a well-organized plan into action.

Calhoun was convinced that the South would soon be faced with a choice of disunion or submission. But perhaps it could be delayed if some decisive measure could be promptly enacted to arrest the violation of southern rights and principles. Advising John H. Means in April, 1849, as to what action a meeting in Charleston should follow, he explained that:

It will be impossible to present such a front except by means of a Convention of the Southern States. That, and only that could speak for the whole, and present authoritatively to

24 Ibid., pp. 1188-1190.
the North the alternative, which to choose. If such a presentation
should fail to save the Union, by arresting the aggression of the
North and causing our rights and the stipulations of the Constitution
in our favour to be respected, it would afford proof conclusive that
it could not be saved, and that nothing was left us. 25

To emphasize the importance of the proposed meeting, he urged that
"a Convention of the South is an indispensable means to discharge a
great duty we owe to our partners in the Union." Along that same line
he informed Andrew Calhoun that the call for a convention should be
made before the year ends, that it ought to be addressed to the people of
the South, and that it might be made by the legislatures of one or more
of the southern states or by the members of Congress. He assured
him that the call itself would have a powerful effect on Congress and
"could not Alabama be induced to make the call?" 26

Calhoun began to receive more support from various leaders
throughout the South. Hilliard Judge, of Alabama, advised him that
his suggestion as to the necessity of calling a convention was perfectly
obvious. 27 R. K. Crallie was also in accord with the idea that "a
Convention of the People should be called immediately, and recommend
a General Convention of the Southern States at an early date to take
the whole matter into consideration." 28

25 Ibid., p. 765.  26 Ibid., p. 769.
27 Ibid., p. 1196.  28 Ibid., pp. 1202-1204.
So it was that when the Jackson meeting was held in May, 1849, Calhoun was the obvious man to turn to for assistance in planning a course of action. He wrote to C. S. Tarpley in July:

In my opinion there is but one thing that holds out the promise of saving both ourselves and the Union and that is a Southern Convention; and that, if much longer delayed, cannot. In the meantime, firm and resolute resolutions ought to be adopted by your legislature and such meetings as may take place before the assembly of the Legislature in the fall.

The great object of a Southern Convention should be to put forth, in a solemn manner, the causes of our grievances.29

If Mississippi were to make the call, Calhoun suggested that it be made to all those who were desirous of saving the union as well as their institutions.

Senator H. S. Foote, of Mississippi, acknowledged his state's indebtedness to Calhoun. He wrote that leaders of both political parties had promised him that they would take action in the approaching October meeting on his suggestion "relative to the recommendation of a Southern Convention."30 A member of that October meeting, A. Hutchinson, reaffirmed Foote's letter and mentioned some of the details of the assembled delegates:

Sharkey and myself thought that Washington was the best place of the assemblage, but the majority preferred Nashville as more central! All agreed that February or March was the time but here the majority believed that it would require until the first of June to enable the Southern States to act.31

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29 Congressional Globe, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, p. 52.
30 Calhoun Correspondence, p. 1204. 31 Ibid., p. 1206.
Hutchinson also indicated that if the other states would gather round Mississippi and support her, the constitution and the union could be rescued from the hands of the "northern madmen."

Calhoun was pleased with the results of the Jackson convention. He wrote Andrew Calhoun that "Mississippi has acted well on the slave question and I hope that Alabama and every other Southern State will back her and send delegates to Nashville. Bad would be our condition if the Convention should fail for want of backing." He asked Herschel Johnson to use his influence in getting Georgia to back the movement, for "if they should and the other Southern States should follow, I feel assured it would do more than anything else to bring the question to a speedy issue." He also sent urgent letters to friends in other states requesting that they take action on the call and worked diligently with every effort to make the proposed meeting in Nashville a success.

The story of the southern movement was almost synonymous with the work of John C. Calhoun. He had sacrificed much for the South, his ambitions, his time and energy, even his health but he considered it as an effort well expended if it would achieve his purpose. That purpose was one of unity and concerted action which he believed to be the only successful and workable solution to the encroachment upon

\[32\text{Ibid., p. 773.}\]  \[33\text{Ibid.}\]
southern rights; the only solution short of secession. He believed that the latter step should be taken only when and if all else had failed. He would offer adherence to the federal union only as long as it abided by the constitution. In his interpretation of the latter, the minority must have some way of protecting their rights. For that purpose he had labored long to obtain a southern convention, his dream of protecting the South. In the latter part of 1849, with the storm raging throughout the states, he was closer to that dream than he had ever been.
CHAPTER III

DEFINING THE SOUTHERN POSITION

As the remaining days of December ran out, the new year of 1850 was ushered in with overtones of caution, anticipation, and expectancy. The air around Washington was charged with apprehension from both the North and the South as to what Congress planned to do concerning the issues at hand. Northern abolitionists and southern state-rights extremists were both calling for final action or dissolution. Conservatives of both sections were also aiming for a common goal, some means of adjustment or compromise to ease their way out of a dangerous situation. The southern element of these moderates placed their hopes on the forthcoming Nashville Convention to be held in June.

Initially southern opinion, as expressed in the newspapers, public meetings, and private correspondence, was decidedly aggressive in favor of the convention. Perhaps the show of unity would produce the only real cure for the South's ills, a cessation of northern abuses and encroachments on southern "rights." A Whig paper in conservative North Carolina warned the North that "the sentiment at the South is assuming a stern character than heretofore, that unless there is a reform there will be found an immense majority in all the Southern
states, who will very readily entertain a proposition for disunion."

Felix Huston wrote in the Mississippi Free Trader that the purpose of the delegates assembling "was to secure their rights under the Constitution of the United States and preserve their equality as members of the Confederacy; or, failing therein, bring about a separation of the Union and the establishment of a Southern Confederacy." Statements such as these led to a diversity of opinions that confused many of the participants and observers of the movement. Just what was to be the purpose of the convention? Was it to be a formal, organized protest against the North, or was there validity to the cries of "dissolution" and "secession"? To more than a mere fringe element the clarification of this point meant either acceptance or rejection of not only the proposed convention but also of the principles embodied in the entire southern movement.

Senator Foote, in Washington, defended the Nashville advocates against the charge of a "second Hartford Convention."

If the North should prove unwilling to do justice—if the offensive enactments menaced shall be adopted and the grievance already confessedly inflicted shall remain unredressed—then the Southern States will assemble in Convention, to consult for their own safety and welfare; and if justice shall still be withheld, after all pacific and constitutional expediates have been tried,

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2Hearon, pp. 122-123.
and tried in vain, why then the Southern States may feel it to be a duty, forced upon them, of seceding in the last resort from the Union. 3

Albert G. Brown, congressman from Mississippi, phrased his opinion as to the southern position in much stronger terms. "We ask you to give us our rights by NON-INTERVENTION; if you refuse, I am for taking them by armed occupation." 4 Henry L. Benning, recognized leader in middle-western Georgia, emphasized that the North already had the will to abolish slavery and that she was rapidly acquiring the power to execute this will. "These two propositions being true, abolition is inevitable unless something shall be done to change this 'will' or to stop the acquisition of power. If there is a remedy within the Union, embrace it by all means, if not, do not hesitate to go beyond for one." 5 On the other hand, one observer attempted to defend the calling of the convention by stating that "it is utterly impossible formally to dissolve this Union, and it never will be dissolved by any convention or by any declaration of independence." 6 Even the National Era, leading Free-Soil newspaper, had no objections to the convention and were determined not to condemn it until it had committed some overt

3 Congressional Globe, 31st Congress, 1st Session, p. 579.


"We have no objection that such a convention should calculate the value of the Union. Americans are a calculating people. We know nothing so sacred that it should command our blind veneration."

Nevertheless, opposition to the convention mounted daily and after the introduction of Henry Clay's compromise measure in the Senate, objections steadily increased. It was believed by the National Intelligencer that despite what some leaders and politicians thought, two thirds of the people of the southern states were against the convention or any other project which included the possibility of a design to break up the Union. From Tennessee, W. Bosson reported that "the result of my observations convinces me that there is not to be found in this and the adjoining counties fifty citizens who sympathize with this political movement to get up a southern convention." Other reports of unfavorable reaction to the idea poured into the nation's capital. The Harrisonburg Republican predicted that it would not convene and even if it did, the members would find "no better means of security to Southern interest than we already possess in Congress, under provisions of the Constitution."

As the opposition to the convention grew stronger, whether due to party politics or to Clay's conciliatory measures, or both, the

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7 Quoted in National Intelligencer, March 23, 1850. For examples of opposition to the convention, see accounts quoted in ibid., February 23, March 17, March 23, 1850.

8 National Intelligencer, February 23, April 14, May 13, 1850.
interest throughout the South began to wane. Realizing that the great majority were weary of strife and inclined to grasp at any move that offered peace, pro-convention editors desperately reminded their readers of the continued hostility to slavery and of the need for holding firm. There was still, even more than before, a need for southern unity. "You cannot close your eyes upon the fact that a feeling of determined hostility towards the institution of slavery prevails generally in the non-slaveholding states of the Union," warned the Richmond Enquirer. The South was further urged to ignore the cries of "disunion" as they were nothing but a pretext for a desertion of her interests in the hour of danger.  

Despite all the attempts to promote the Nashville convention in the border states, very little, if any, success was realized. From the Baltimore Patriot came word that "Love of the Union is the feeling uppermost in the heart of every Marylander.... nor will have any part of its dissolution." Governor J. J. Crittenden's message to the legislature explained Kentucky's position:

Kentucky is not insensible to the causes which have produced so much sensibility and irritation with her brethren of the Southern States, nor is she without her sympathies with them. But she does not permit herself to harbor one thought against the Union. She deprecates disunion as the greatest calamity; she can see NO REMEDY in it, --none, certainly for any grievance as yet complained of or to be apprehended. Kentucky will stand by and abide by the Union to the last.  

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9 Craven, p. 85.  
10 Coleman, p. 351.
The legislature followed this line of thought and put its seal of condemnation upon the proposed convention by almost a three to one vote.

Tennessee Whigs managed to keep Davidson County and Nashville from becoming too active in selecting delegations; charges of "secession" and "disunion" achieved their purpose. Governor Aaron Brown made a speech to the public in which he maintained:

I know nothing more of the objects and purposes of calling said convention, than I have learned through the public press, detailing the proceedings of State conventions, the resolutions of State Legislatures, and of primary assemblies of the people who have acted on this subject. All these, no remembered exception, announce the objects and purposes to be eminently patriotic and entirely consistent with the preservation and perpetuity of the Union. Not one of them avows or intimates the slightest purpose of dissolving it. 11

Despite his entreaties, and those of other leading figures in the state, the Whigs had their way and the pro-convention forces were placed on the defensive. When the legislature refused to authorize delegates, A. J. Donelson officiated at a meeting after the regular legislature adjourned and a minority-approved list of delegates was submitted. 12 A considerable number were appointed to represent Tennessee but they were not officially sanctioned and reasons more geographical than patriotic explained their large number.

11 Brown's Speeches, p. 324.
12 St. George L. Sioussat, "Tennessee, the Compromise of 1850 and the Nashville Convention," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, II (December, 1915), 313-347 contains a complete coverage of Tennessee during this period.
The action of the states west of the Mississippi demonstrated little more emphasis or interest. The extremist southern-rights position was never very strong in Arkansas where the majority was contented with the compromise measures offered by Clay, although they stood opposed to any further concessions to the North. As the Helena Shield explained, "We are not against southern rights but it is necessary to keep the proper perspective and not conjure up imaginary evils."\(^{13}\)

There was little response to a call for delegates even though Congressman Robert W. Johnson urged his state to send representatives from Arkansas to the southern convention where "the South will present to a world one united brotherhood and will move in one column under a banner—Equality or Independence, Our Rights Under the Constitution Within or Without the Union."\(^{14}\) His words stirred some debate on the issue but not united action as talk of the convention generally slipped into the background.

On January 21, the Louisiana legislature met at the new seat of government, Baton Rouge, for the first time. Governor Walker, in his inaugural address, emphasized that while he did not believe the Union was in immediate danger, he also did not believe in submission and recommended that action be taken to approve the convention. Journals across the state immediately opposed the suggestion on the grounds that sectional agitators would dominate the convention and it would only result

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\(^{13}\)Quoted in National Intelligencer, March 4, 1850.

\(^{14}\)Craven, p. 87.
in increased antagonism between the North and South. Some even began to say that such a meeting was no longer necessary and that it should be abandoned, while others doubted that it would ever be held. Whigs and Democrats were to be found on both sides of the issue, and although the Senate favored sending delegates, the matter never came to a vote in the House. 15

The Texas legislature met February 11, 1850, for the purpose of recommending suitable persons as candidates to represent the state in the southern convention. They decided on, and presented to the voters, H. G. Runnels, H. P. Bell, J. S. Mayfield, and Fielding Jones. With these names went a plea for unity from one member of the legislature who said, "Everything which is purely Southern is Texian. We have a common cause and should have common action." The election was held but it registered a defeat for the pro-convention men in all districts. The results were described:

There was an overwhelming majority of votes in this section cast against the measure. . . . The movement is equally unpopular in Louisiana and several of the other Southern States. The South is not ready to act, she must arouse like the Lion from his Lair, and put forth all her energies. Tennessee has refused to appoint delegates to this convention and her legislature has passed resolutions disapproving the measure. Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, and Virginia will in all probability act

15 James K. Greer, "Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XII (October, 1929), 570-574.
in concert with Tennessee. Without the unanimous approval of these great States, the convention would be not only powerless, but would become even an object of ridicule.\textsuperscript{16}

It was evident that Texas was not ready to become part of that ridicule as scarcely a twentieth of the voters were in favor of sending delegates. Typical of the turnout was the vote in Houston where only seven voted for the convention and 165 against it.\textsuperscript{17}

With the border and southwestern states either against the convention or at least not interested in participating, it was up to the lower South to carry the burden in a fight for minority rights. In Mississippi, twelve delegates had been selected at the October meeting in Jackson, and pro-convention feeling remained steadfast among the people and the party leaders. Governor John A. Quitman declared in his inaugural address that he regarded the subject as one which must be met calmly, deliberately, and boldly, for the South had too long submitted to grievous wrongs. "The people of Mississippi have taken their stand, and, I doubt not, their representatives will maintain it by providing means to meet every probably contingency."\textsuperscript{18} Senator Foote reaffirmed Quitman's belief and further stated that "more than ninety-nine hundredths of all parties in Mississippi recognize the expediency of this measure, and will sustain the expected convention." In addition

\textsuperscript{16} Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register, March 14, 1850.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., January 31, 1850; February 28, 1850.

\textsuperscript{18} Claiborne, p. 24.
he felt that opinion throughout the South was following Mississippi's lead:

If the aggressions, to counteract and avert which the Nashville Convention has been called, should be persevered in . . . I speak advisedly when I say so, there will not be two—
I doubt if there will be a single southern state that will not be represented at Nashville; and despite domestic treachery, and all other causes, obstructive of united action, ninety-nine hundredths of the whole southern population will prefer any fate whatever to an unconditional submission to tyranny. 19

The editor of the Natchez Courier attempted to evaluate the sentiments of the newspapers throughout the state on the subject of the Nashville convention. Of about forty-six, he found that twenty-two were opposed to it, eighteen were in favor of it, five were neutral, and "there is one paper that defies our best endeavors even to guess at its opinions." 20

The majority of the people, however, preferred the principles of cooperation to those of secession and referred the whole matter to the June meeting.

The South Carolina legislature was the first to meet after the Mississippi call had been sent out to the states. As could have been expected, that state was quick to approve the work at Jackson, and Governor Seabrook hailed with satisfaction the call for a southern convention. The legislature, meeting in an adjourned session,


20 National Intelligencer, June 3, 1850.
recommended that the people elect delegates on the district level and they themselves chose four delegates, Langdon Cheves, F. H. Elmore, Robert Barnwell, and James Hammond. Prior to the district elections, which were to be held in May, the South Carolina press offered varying degrees of support not only for the convention but also, due to the influence of Rhett and other radical leaders, for secession. The previously conservative Charleston Courier gave heavy support, stating that the object of the convention was to aid the South in upholding her institutions, rights, and honor, "peaceably if she can, forcibly if she must." Even the Mercury spoke moderately for the convention, recommending that South Carolina should follow the path of the others and not endanger the movement by active leadership. The Winyah Observer believed that the Union was an engine of oppression and warned that "the South will either have their rights under the constitution or dissolve the Union." The Spartan echoed that sentiment and cried out for disunion, "the sooner the better." With support of this nature, it was no surprise that in the May elections of the various congressional districts, some fourteen men were selected to accompany the four delegates-at-large to Nashville. Some of the more prominent among those selected were Robert B. Rhett, F. W. Pickens, R. F. W. Allston, and D. F. Jamison.

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22 Hamer, pp. 46-48, 60.
The Alabama legislature convened in November and although the outgoing governor, Reuben Chapman, and his successor, H. W. Collier, both favored the convention, the two houses were never able to agree on a single set of resolutions. The House favored a state convention while the Senate supported the idea of the southern convention at Nashville. Thus stymied, members of both houses met in an extra-legal session on February 6 and 7 and selected thirty-six delegates, four to represent each congressional district and eight delegates-at-large, dividing the number equally between Whigs and Democrats. Several men of prestige were selected but the manner in which they had been chosen left open the question of legality. The main complaint from the Whigs was that the men were not authorized by the people. The Democrats answered that the convention was one of counsel and did not plan to take any action that would bind the people and therefore did not need their approval. The delegates, despite the controversy over their selection, were among "the ablest, the most reliable and patriotic of the State—the old leaders and veterans of the party," which explained their conservative sentiment. The future "orator of secession," William L. Yancy, and the radical state-rights men refused to participate in the convention. 23

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Calhoun's friend in Georgia, Herschel Johnson, had already begun work on the movement in that state. Fearing that the legislature would not appoint delegates, he instigated a call for a special state convention. He urged that this be done inasmuch as a southern convention was "the best and perhaps the only mode of securing harmony and concert of action among the Southern States." The state convention met in January and unanimously agreed to submit resolutions to the legislature recommending that it place Georgia "where she belonged, side by side with Mississippi and South Carolina and the Old Dominion." 24

When the Georgia legislature met, it provided, in planning the elections for Nashville delegates, that preliminary meetings were to be held in each county early in March to choose delegates to congressional district conventions. These, in turn, were to nominate one or more candidates from each party. Then on April 3 the voters in each district would vote for two of these nominees to represent their district at Nashville. Provision was also made for the governor to appoint alternates in case any vacancies occurred. All things considered, the plan represented a tactical victory for the southern-rights majority in the Georgia legislature.

The real test of popular sentiment for the movement was to be made on April 3, when the people voted for the nominees. After all

the preparation, struggle, and fanfare to announce its coming, the southern convention election simply did not arrive. It was a complete failure primarily due to the fact that the majority of both parties ignored it. A statement from one of the candidates, James A. Meriwether, indicated the indifference of the people:

This district is composed of nine counties, containing in all a voting population of eight thousand persons. Of this number of counties only two responded to the recommendation of the legislature by opening any polls at all; the other seven refused any consideration whatever of the proposition! The two counties which did open the polls voted only one hundred and thirty-nine votes out of a voting population of seventeen hundred votes.  

With these results, he declined to go to Nashville for "I cannot presume to think myself a representative, rightfully so, of the people of this district." Commenting on the results, the Savannah News admitted that the elections were "humiliating" and marveled at the "strange apathy of the Georgia people." This journal felt that the southern convention should never be held if it was to be unrepresentative. It later conceded, however, that "the movement has now gone so far that honor requires it to be carried out. Even if a compromise is reached the Nashville Convention will be useful to ratify."  

Even those men that had been selected from Georgia were not the best available. The Morning News was disappointed in the class of men who were appointed to attend the convention. The result would be,

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25 National Intelligencer, June 4, 1850.

26 Shryock, pp. 231, 255-257, 259.
declared the editor, that "no ground that the convention may take will be considered common ground, and the result will be to leave us just where we are now, without union, without harmony, and without confidence." 27

The Florida General Assembly unanimously passed a resolution which stated "... we are ready, heart and soul, with a united front to join Virginia, the Carolinas, and the other Southern States in taking such measures for the defense of our rights ... whether through a Southern Convention, or otherwise." Governor Brown disagreed with the legislature, however, and denounced all southern demagogues and questioned both the wisdom and the constitutionality of a southern convention. He bluntly refused to appoint delegates to the convention which he considered "as revolutionary in its tendency and directly against the spirit if not the letter of the Constitution of the United States, which declares that 'no state shall enter into any treaty, alliance, or confederation.'" Despite this refusal, six delegates were elected in local bipartisan meetings as Whigs and Democrats alike talked of defending southern rights to the last extremity. 28

In North Carolina, for the first time a concerted movement backed by both parties developed. The Democrats, with the North Carolina Standard as spokesman, urged the sending of delegates to Nashville.

27 Taylor, p. 93.

28 National Intelligencer, March 7, 1850.
A few Whigs agreed and fewer expressed objections, and opposition to
the convention was slow in materializing. Soon, however, the Whig
press began to condemn the movement openly as a scheme of the dis-
unionists. The Raleigh Register stood opposed to a meeting which was
to prepare for secession. The Fayetteville North Carolina Argus ex-
pressed itself as "heartily sick of this everlasting twaddle about the
South--that word of talismanic charm with southern demagogues."
Whig opposition was centered around certain central arguments: No
cause for it existed since no overt act against southern rights had been
committed; such a convention could accomplish nothing; the convention
was a scheme of disunionists; and the holding of such a convention at
that time would be a threat to the Union.

Soon only the Standard carried the pro-convention banner with
any great enthusiasm. The editor of that journal contended that it was
the duty of North Carolina to resist and, should the other slave states
elect delegates, it would be the duty of Governor Manly to convene the
legislature to assure North Carolina's representation. The proponents
of the convention followed this lead and attempted to refute Whig charges
against participation: it would prove to the North that the southern states
were united on certain principles; the convention was called to preserve
the Union, not to dissolve it; and if North Carolina was not represented

29 Joseph C. Sitterson, The Secession Movement in North Carolina
(Chapel Hill, 1939), p. 59.
and the other states were, she would be placed in an unfavorable position in the eyes of her sister states. 30

Despite the strong Whig opposition, when the elections were held four delegates were chosen. The impetus for the elections came, however, not from the legislature but from the southern-rights meetings throughout the state. Of the men selected, Robert Strange and Griffith McCree refused to go on the grounds that the convention was a "dead question;" Green Caldwell was ill and could not attend; and Walter Steele was detained in the state on business matters. North Carolina was not to be represented at Nashville in June and the Charlotte Hornet's Nest felt "ashamed for our State, that she was not represented in that able, respectable, and dignified convention." 31

It was generally expected that Virginia would wholeheartedly support the idea of protection for southern rights. In January J. H. Claiborne offered a resolution in the House of Delegates calling for a committee on federal affairs. This resolution was subsequently amended to provide for the appointment of delegates to Nashville, with their expenses to be paid by the legislature. The final version was changed, however, in that it merely recommended the selection of delegates on the congressional district level and left out any mention of financial backing from the legislature. This weakening of the resolution was due in a large

30 Ibid., pp. 57-58.
31 Ibid., p. 60.
part to active Whig opposition to the move. Democratic leaders and press had tried to neutralize the attack by consistently maintaining, in reply to the cry of disunion, "that the purpose of the convention was not to dissolve the Union but to unite the South in defense of her rights. Even J. M. Mason and R. M. T. Hunter, friends of Calhoun and leading political figures in the state, were unable to offset the powerful Whig attack.

When the results of the election were in, only fourteen delegates had been selected from seven of the fifteen districts in the state. Of these, only six later appeared at Nashville. Beverly Tucker was the only extreme disunionist, and T. S. Gholson's strong unionism balanced his influence. The other delegates were W. O. Goode, Willoughby Newton, W. F. Gordon, and R. H. Claybrook. Two of the elected delegates who declined to go, James Lyons and Robert G. Scott, felt that some compromise would be made in Washington and thus obviate the supposed necessity for holding the convention. Others felt the combined efforts of Clay and Webster were the solution to the problem. Whatever the reasons, the results were bitterly disappointing to those who had counted on Virginia for support.

While the battle was raging on the state level, the convention was not being ignored by southern representatives in Washington.

32Shaaks, pp. 29, 31, 34-35; National Intelligencer, June 1, 1850.
Jefferson Davis, senator from Mississippi, defended his fellow southerners in remarks on the Vermont Resolutions:

They make no threats against any one, and least of all against the Union, for which they have made such heavy and continued sacrifices. They know their rights, while they resent their wrongs; and they will maintain the one, resent the other, if it may be, will preserve our constitutional Union; but the Union without the Constitution they hold to be a curse. 33

Later in the same session he pointed out that the people of the South would meet, not only in defense of their individual rights, but in defense of the Union. "In this unfortunate controversy, there are but two choices, -- one is submission, the other resistance. To the one we cannot, we will not consent; the other we are reluctant to adopt." 34

He continued his defense of the South by giving voice to the main arguments of the times, that Congress had no power over constitutionally-recognized slaves, that congressional power to legislate for the territories was not a power to declare what was, or was not, property. Davis pointed out that Congress had been assailed by every known mode, even state conventions, but that emotion had twisted this particular issue out of its proper perspective. He cited the meeting of the Rhode Island convention, March 18, 1850, as an illustration. The resolutions adopted by that meeting announced that the state

33 Dunbar Rowland, editor, Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist, His Letters, Papers, and Speeches (Jackson, 1923), pp. 252-253.
34 Ibid., pp. 336-337.
would not "so far degrade our common humanity" by the enforcement of the fugitive slave laws and recommended a call for a New England convention of Free-Soilers. Davis was highly critical of the nation's complacency in the face of these northern threats:

"Here is the proposition to assemble a sectional convention for the purpose of violating the constitutional rights of another portion of the Union; yet this passes unnoticed, at least unrebuked, but such as have willified those who have peaceably assembled, not to assail or endanger their neighbors, but to secure their own constitutional rights. They, however, being from the South, therefore are charged with purposes of disunion." 35

Despite his efforts, and those of others, in protesting for southern rights, northern moderates continued to contend that the report prepared by the committee of thirteen commonly known as Clay's compromise, would take care of all the South's claims.

Even some of the southern leaders agreed with the moderates and saw no necessity for the South to meet. For example, Senator Sam Houston, a unionist Texan, regretted that the South had even called the convention. It was a useless gesture, in that:

"If it was called in contravention of the Constitution, and in violation of its proceedings, I do not think well of it. The Constitution declared, that no one or more states shall enter into any compact or agreement without the consent of Congress; and I do not believe Congress was ever consulted on the subject. If it meant anything, it was contrary to the Constitution, because it

must be a compact or agreement; if it was not intended to be a compact or agreement, then I must think it was a piece of ridiculous flummery. 36

He added that the people had supported him in this opinion as not more than two hundred and fifty votes out of thirty thousand were given in Texas for a representative to the convention. Houston was seconded by such other southern leaders as Thomas H. Benton of Missouri and Howell Cobb of Georgia.

The biggest focal point of interest in Washington, however, surrounded the oratorical battle between Calhoun and Webster in their speeches of early March. Clay had introduced his Omnibus Bill on January 29. Calhoun carefully prepared an answer, not so much to the details of the measure but more as a vehicle for his final words on the sectional dispute. Inasmuch as Calhoun's health had almost deteriorated, his friend, J. M. Mason, read the speech for him on March 4, 1850. The all-important fact to Calhoun was that the equilibrium between the sections had been destroyed; that consequently all branches of the government were in control of the North; and as a result, in all questions of vital interest between the sections, the South would be sacrificed. Slavery was the vital question, and he declared that the ultimate aim of the anti-slavery movement was the total abolition of the institution. Unless some decisive settlement were made,

36 Amelia Williams and Eugene Barker, editors, The Writings of Sam Houston (Austin, 1941), V, 191.
the South would be forced to choose between abolition and secession, and he felt that there was little doubt as to the outcome. Calhoun's solution as to the final settlement which would have to be made included: equal rights in the territories, faithful fulfillment of the fugitive slave laws, cessation of the anti-slavery agitation, and a constitutional amendment restoring to the South the power of protecting herself that she had possessed before. The speech closed by stating that California was the test question, if she were admitted with the exclusion of slavery then "we would be blind not to perceive in that case, that your real objects are power and aggrandizement," and the South would proceed to act accordingly. 37

The speech was hailed by some as a mighty blow for southern rights, while a few moderates, led by Foote, did not agree with all Calhoun had to say and would not give their full approval. The dispute was soon put aside when word came that Webster would speak three days later.

There was good reason for apprehension on the part of the South; Webster's reputation as an orator was not only widespread but was also well founded. Compared with the other great speakers of his time, Webster was surpassed by Calhoun in firmness of logical organization and lagged behind Clay in attractive delivery and popular appeal. Webster's superiority lay in comprehensiveness and strength of

37 Calhoun Works, IV, 542-573.
intellect, and more particularly, in strength of imagination. Utilizing this power he mastered the art of epideictic oratory which, according to Aristotle found its persuasive end in establishing honor or shame. His orations on the "Founding of the Plymouth Colony" and the "Bunker Hill Monument" were sufficient to warrant his fame in that field. In deliberative speaking, an Aristotelian definition for speeches which urge or deter a course of action, Webster attained his moments of greatness in debate and refutation, exemplified by the "Webster-Hayne Debate" in 1830. It was no wonder that Washington was astir at the prospect of Webster following Calhoun to the senatorial podium.

The morning of the seventh of March found the senate hall filled with spectators. As Webster rose to speak, no one knew how he would handle his theme but few doubted what that theme would be. Was he not a northern senator whose views on slavery and its extension were well known? Yet as Webster gave his introduction, "I wish to speak today, not as a Massachusetts man, nor as a Northern man, but as an American," he set the stage for his whole speech. He came directly to the point. He did not defend slavery, as it was abhorrent to his people and he himself rejected it on principle, but the facts remained that on this question the South was correct. Slavery existed, antedated the

Constitution and was guaranteed by it—the North would have to live up to her obligations. He considered it a duty of Congress to divide part of Texas which lay below the 36° 30' into additional slave states when the population warranted. He declared, however, that the South was not blameless in the dispute, that the drafters of the Constitution, from the South as well as from the North, had no expectations of any future effort to add slave states. In essence, he accepted most of what Calhoun had to say concerning the immediate cause of Southern discontent but he denied that a disruption of the Union would be a remedy, protesting any right of peaceable secession. In the course of the speech he indirectly endorsed every phase of Clay's master plan. 39

When he finished speaking, the result was measured in three portions: he was disappointing as a northerner; he had failed as an effective deliberative speaker; yet he had succeeded as "an American." His northern constituents were dismayed in that his organization of material had led them to believe that the speech was pro-southern in nature, so designed in an attempt to enlist that section's support for the presidency. From every pulpit to the furthest tavern in the North, Webster was branded an "ambitious traitor." As an orator he did not achieve the full effectiveness of delivery as he made the mistake of not analyzing his audience as the determinant of a speech's

39 Daniel Webster, The Works of Daniel Webster (Boston, 1851) V, 324-368.
end or object. The majority of Webster's audience had gathered to hear him defend the North and answer the attack delivered by Calhoun, yet he had devoted twenty minutes to detailing southern grievances and less than eight minutes for those of the North. What was worse in their eyes, he had blamed the North as being wrong in their stand on the fugitive slave bill and support of the abolition societies. By ignoring the effect that such a division of material would achieve, Webster lessened his chances for attaining an immediate goal, that of convincing both sections to take action to save the nation. A more balanced treatment of the situation at hand would have accomplished the purpose he desired, and at the same time enhanced his effectiveness by satisfying that particular audience. On the other hand, his ultimate objective was successful as evidenced by the subsequent passage of Clay's measures. Even the opinions and attitudes held by many northerners as a result of his stand that day in early March were ultimately reversed.

40 Oratorically, if a speaker hopes to be effective he must adjust both himself and his ideas to the audience. See Lester Thomsen and A. Craig Baird, Speech Criticism (New York, 1948), pp. 15-16, 359-362 for more specific treatment in the analysis and evaluation of speaker-audience relationship.

41 Herbert D. Foster, "Webster's Seventh of March Speech and the Secession Movement of 1850," American Historical Review, XXVII (January, 1922), 245-270 gives more space to the reaction of the speech in all sections; Robert T. Oliver, "Behind the Word: Webster," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXIII (February, 1937), 15-32 deals more specifically with Webster's orations and oratory; John F. Kennedy, Profiles in Courage (New York, 1956), pp. 61-80 offers a readable, if not altogether factual, account of the man and the speech.
Webster's weakness was in part due to his evaluation of Clay's compromise measures. He contended that there was no necessity to restrict slavery formally in the territories as that had been virtually accomplished by soil and climate. What he failed to realize was that there was more at stake than the extension of slavery, that it was merely a symbol utilized in the battle over state rights. Until a favorable agreement was reached by which both sections could be satisfied, there could be no preventing the conflict from reaching its inevitable climax. The settlement offered by Clay would only serve as a temporary measure. A more permanent solution would entail either northern concession on southern rights, as they claimed them to be guaranteed by the Constitution, or the submission of the South to the position of a minority section. Judging from the situation prevalent in 1850, neither one of those possibilities had much hope of fulfillment. Therefore, although Webster and Clay were obviously sincere in working for a permanent solution, the question of state rights was not to be settled in 1850, nor in 1860, and still remains a source of dispute.

Thus by the time the convention at Nashville was to meet, the northern radical element had become firmly entrenched in the position of the abolition of slavery while the northern moderates worked frantically to secure the passage of the compromise. Southern opinions and attitudes were not so clearly defined. There were those who sincerely felt that the convention was a necessity, who placed no faith in the
efforts in Washington to settle the matter through compromise. There were those who felt that the convention could utilize the compromise as a basis from which to work for a more permanent settlement. There were also those who, even though they had previously favored the idea, now joined ranks with those who had consistently opposed the movement, considering the meeting to be anti-climactic. Of the delegates who began to prepare for the convention, most were without instructions or authority to act, not a few were without credentials, and few were of such character as to give much weight to the proceedings. Nevertheless, with or without sufficient support or hope for success, some seventy-odd men journeyed from nine states to Nashville in the waning days of May, 1850.
CHAPTER IV

TRIUMPH OF MODERATION

The month of June found Nashville teeming with delegates, alternates, and many others who had been attracted by curiosity as to what the southern convention would accomplish. A subcommittee of the Tennessee delegation opened an office in the Nashville Union building for registration. Hotels and restaurants were filled to capacity and evening entertainment was on the upsurge to take care of the visiting conferees. When it became evident that Odd Fellows' Hall would be too small to house the convention comfortably, the trustees of McKendree Church offered the use of that building and after the first day all subsequent meetings were held there.

The first session of the southern convention was called to order, June 3, at three o'clock by Aaron V. Brown of Tennessee. Judge William L. Sharkey, who had presided over the October convention in Jackson, Mississippi, was elected president by acclamation, with Charles J. McDonald, ex-governor of Georgia, as vice-president. William Cooper and E. G. Eastman of Nashville were appointed secretaries. President Sharkey's opening remarks were short and indicative of the moderate sentiment of most of the members. He stated that the purpose of the convention was not to dissolve but to
perpetuate the Union. He asked, "Who is the greatest patriot—he who would avert approaching danger by preparing for its approach, or he who waits until the evil is irremediable?" At the close of his remarks, Reverend J. B. Ferguson formally opened the convention with a prayer. A great deal of discussion was then centered around the objections to credentials of some of the delegates. A committee consisting of one representative from each state was set up to receive and register the names of all the delegates present. On that note R. B. Roberts made a motion that the meeting adjourn until ten o'clock the next day.

The second day opened with a dispute between John Winston of Alabama and M. J. Crawford of Georgia over the next item of business to be placed on the agenda. Winston moved the recommission of the report of the committee on organization while Crawford preferred to ascertain just who were members of the convention. The motion by Winston passed by a large majority and General Pillow of Tennessee reported a list of delegates elected to seats in the convention. A motion was made to give each state one vote, but it was opposed by John Erwin of Alabama. He claimed that while some men represented whole states, others like himself were representative of congressional districts and the people of his district would not get proper representation under the one-vote ruling. Others agreed with him and while the majority preferred the original motion, the assembly room soon became

1 National Intelligencer, June 4, 1850.
a scene of confusion, forcing Judge Sharkey to assume authority to
decide the manner of voting. After order had been restored and two
amendments to the motion were voted down, the proposition of the
committee on organization, giving one vote to each set of delegates,
was adopted. Before the meeting adjourned Sharkey let it be known
that he was in favor of the compromise measures pending in Washington
but the general opinion of most of the members apparently was against
that report. 2

The third day of the convention found two new members enrolled,
Sam Roane from Arkansas and Thomas Judge of Alabama. Roane's
arrival left Texas as the only state with a solitary delegate. 3
J. J. McRae submitted a series of resolutions that declared the
spirit of the convention to be conciliatory and desirous of preserving
the Constitution and the Union. The resolutions announced, however,
that all the territory acquired by the United States belonged to the
several states, to be governed by them through their agents in
Congress, and recommended that, if the North would not concede to
the South its rights, then the formality of the association should be
broken. They also contested the right of Congress to discriminate

2 National Intelligencer, June 6, 1850; Democrat Telegraph and
Texas Register, June 13, 1850.

3 Ames, p. 22, lists the convention delegates from each state:
Va., 6; S. Caro., 17; Ga., 11; Fla., 4; Ala., 22; Miss., 12; Ark.,
2; Tenn., 100; Tex., 1. The Texas delegate, General J. P. Henderson
was described by Senator Sam Houston as "the sole representative of
the sole lone star of Texas--and self-constituted at that."
as to different species of property in the territories. McRae's resolutions were accepted and referred to the committee on resolutions and reports. This committee was comprised of two delegates from each state where possible, and had been organized under a proposal by Aaron Brown. A resolution offered by a Tennessee delegate providing for the appointment of a committee on printing carried. H. N. Benning proposed that the convention should come out in favor of the Missouri Compromise line of 1820. Several fiery speeches were given by some of the Alabama delegates but no vote had been taken up to this point to serve as an indication as to how much emphasis the radical element would have on the convention. 4

The fourth day was filled with a host of resolutions that covered every subject from the Texas boundary dispute to the question of compromise or secession. J. P. Henderson, delegate from Texas, resolved that his state had the rightful claim to the disputed territory in New Mexico and that it was in the interest of the remaining southern states to stand by Texas and see that the territory was not taken away unless consent was freely given. W. O. Goode and Beverly Tucker of Virginia jointly submitted a resolution against taking any territory from Texas for the purpose of making a new non-slave holding state. A Mississippi delegate offered resolutions which stated that every party

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4 National Intelligencer, June 6, 1850; Democrat Telegraph and Texas Register, June 13, 1850.
of the Union had a right to peaceably withdraw when the rights "to
establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, and secure the blessings
of liberty" had failed, but that the convention, with love for the Union,
would refrain from advising the South that a case had arisen showing the
necessity of withdrawal with a hope that no such case would ever occur.
Alabama delegate S. Buford seconded those sentiments but recommended
that the South organize in defense of her rights. He pointed out that
the agitation in the North was a source of southern danger, and that the
policy of President Taylor in regard to the territories was better for
the South than the compromise from the committee of thirteen. He
further urged that, for the sake of the Union, the South should accept
any reasonable compromise that would curtail northern agitation against
southern rights. 5

Other resolutions concerning the fugitive slave law and northern
encroachments on avowed constitutional rights were offered by John
Coleman of Alabama and Simpson Fouche of Georgia. The delegate
from Alabama proposed:

That northern enactment of laws to prevent recovery of
fugitive slaves is in violation of the Constitution and an ag-
gression on the South; that, adoption of resolutions by Northern
legislatures, denouncing slavery and requiring its abolition,
and the transmission of such resolutions to Southern legislatures,
is proof of a desire to excite the slaves to resistance, and a
heedless disregard of the obligations due from one portion of

5 National Intelligencer, June 10, 1850.
the Union to the other; that, it is expedient to remonstrate against the injustice of such conduct, which tends to alienate fraternal feelings on the part of the Southern people.\footnote{Ibid.}

Fouche insisted on proclaiming the Missouri Compromise line through New Mexico and California, and if that failed, for the convention to meet agains and adopt measures of defense and safety. He also maintained that the right to recover fugitive slaves was a constitutional right and could not be considered as part of any compromise. He recommended non-intercourse in case Congress passed any act interfering with the right of property in slaves or the continued resistance on the part of the North to the recovery of fugitive slaves. All the resolutions were referred to the committee for consideration.\footnote{Ibid.}

While the resolutions were being devised, orators sought to sway the convention delegates. Some of the "fire-eating" element tried futilely to get the convention to send an ultimatum to the North demanding all rights or secession. Beverly Tucker, an extremist state-righter from Virginia, delivered a speech which was indicative of the ultra element in the convention. He labeled as useless the suggestion to equalize Clay's compromise measures by amendments. He proclaimed that any delay only meant further degradation to the South and that the South should not fear disunion as the value of cotton and southern trade was too valuable to northern manufacturers for there
to be any threat of war. "Let Virginia be told that she must fight some-
body, and she will not be long in deciding whom she will fight." Tucker
was obviously representing a minority opinion, however. The cold re-
ception that the delegate election had received from the "State of
Presidents" hardly substantiated this "heroic defiance." In fact, one
of Tucker's fellow delegates, T. S. Gholson, spoke up for the conserva-
tives. He desired to use every effort "under heaven" to save the
Union; he believed that it could be preserved without "sacrifice of
rights or honor;" he thought the original resolutions by Clay could
serve as a basis for a settlement which would guarantee the South's
safety. The majority of delegates undoubtedly favored Gholson's more
moderate approach to the dispute between the two sections.  

While southerners sought to clarify their position, there was
little reaction to the convention's proceedings either in the North or
in Washington. The center of attention was focused on the capital
where the current question surrounded the admittance of California
to the Union. From Baltimore came a report describing the attitude
toward the Nashville meeting:

The proceedings of the Southern Convention at Nashville
have, to some extent, lost their novelty and interest. Nothing
appears to have been done beyond what might have been antici-
pated. . . . The Convention, however, has acted with be-
coming dignity.  

8Shanks, pp. 34-35.

9National Intelligencer, June 11, 1850.
The Nashville Union had telegraphed the day-by-day proceedings since the meeting had convened. When no report was received for the sixth day, it was assumed in the East that the day had been spent in discussing the report which was given by the resolutions committee. The next day a wire was received giving the essence of the first set of resolutions which were described as "embodying Southern principles, much as we have heard reiterated over and over again." 10

The results of the committee deliberations were read to the convention by John Campbell. With a few minor changes, all thirteen were unanimously adopted June 10th. The next day fifteen additional resolutions were read and after some dispute, they were also approved with only one dissenting vote. The consensus of the completed resolutions revealed that the convention was in harmony as to the main issues confronting the sectional clash, namely, the absolute equality of the states; the doctrine of state sovereignty; the right of a state to settle its own domestic relations; and the right of each state to an equal participation in all national property. The Missouri line of compromise was regarded as "an extreme concession upon consideration of what is due to the stability of our institutions." No threat was made in anticipation of the defeat of their demands, merely a provision for the re-assembling the sixth Monday after the adjournment of Congress. 11

10 Ibid., June 12, 1850.

11 Resolutions and Address Adopted by the Southern Convention (Nashville, 1850), pp. 3-9; Ames, pp. 23-29.
The same committee met and drew up an "Address to the People of Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, etc." It was written by Rhett and began with a historical review of the increasing aggressions of the North. Much of it was devoted to a criticism of Clay's compromise. It denied the validity of the organization of California as a free state with the argument that only the people of a territory, when forming their state constitution, could prohibit slavery in a given region. The address continued:

The people of California constitute a people in no proper sense of the word; but are citizens of the States or countries from which they have come, and to which they still owe their allegiance. When, therefore, Congress attempts to carry out and confirm the acts of these individuals, erecting California into a State and excluding slavery therefrom, it is the same thing as if Congress had originally passed a law to this effect, without the intervention of these individuals. . . . Here then is that exclusion from this Territory by the acts of Congress, which almost every Southern State in the Union has declared she would not submit to, plainly and practically enforced by this bill of the Senator from Kentucky. 12

In answer to the prohibition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia, Rhett included, "If Congress can legislate at all between the master and slave in a state, where can its power be stayed? It can abolish slavery in the States." The address also elaborated on such other sources of contention as the Texas boundary dispute and the fugitive slave bill. It was, in the main, a summary of southern contentions, but it was worded in stronger language than had generally been used to date.

12Ibid., pp. 10-21.
The address was not acceptable to all of the delegates, and all Tuesday and Wednesday were spent in spirited debate on its content. Before the minority would sign, a series of amendments were made and adopted. One such amendment was made by General Pillow of Tennessee, to the effect that "while the convention regarded the Missouri Compromise as an extreme concession, they did not mean to demand it as an ultimatum, but that the South would acquiesce in any other adjustment which secured to her substantially the same rights and privileges."13

Another reason for the division on support of the address was that the Whig members did not think they had the power to prepare an address, but were empowered simply to report the resolutions to the South. Amended to designate that it was not unanimously approved, the address was adopted and the convention adjourned June 12, 1850.

Of the word accomplished in Nashville, Hammond wrote to Gilmore Simms that the results "do not amount to much. The great point is that the South has met, has acted in great harmony in a nine days meeting, --and above all, has agreed to meet again."14

The delegates made their way back home to find various reactions to their recent work. The National Era said, June 20, "Its proceedings have excited little interest. It was an abortion and is not worth

13 Brown's Speeches, pp. 333-334.
a word of comment." The National Intelligencer agreed, especially if it was considered in the light of the purpose for which they supposedly met. "It must be allowed that it has ended in a very small way; and the prospect is that the members have each made good an excellent claim to ridicule for life."15

A similar reception greeted the proceedings in North Carolina. The people were much more concerned with the progress of the compromise in Congress. Some southern-rights meetings were held and one even proclaimed "the States composing the Federal Union are free and independent sovereignties." The adoption of the compromise measures, however, largely checked any sentiment for a southern movement that might have been developing. An attempt to obtain representation for the reassembling in November was a failure.16

The people of Virginia were also too concerned with the discussion in Congress to give more than slight attention to the Nashville resolutions. The Richmond Enquirer attempted to justify the convention by insisting that its purpose from the beginning had been to gain a united South and not to split the Union. In its approval of the resolutions and address, this Democratic organ emphasized the statement of principles and overlooked the part which declared a

15Hearon, p. 127; National Intelligencer, June 20, 1850.

16Sitterson, p. 63.
dissolution inevitable. On the other hand, the Richmond Whig ripped into the results, declaring that Virginia would have nothing to do with Rhett's disunionist ideas, and that it was fortunate for many elected delegates that they could not go to Nashville as it would have been a dishonorable attachment. Their refusal to co-operate wholeheartedly with the Nashville work did not mean that Virginia leaders were indifferent to the complaints common in the South. Instead, they thought that the best means of gaining guarantees for their wrongs was through Congress, so it was here that they exerted their influence. 17

The political result in Alabama was indicative, in varying degrees, of the reaction of most of the South after the adjournment of the convention. The situation in that state developed to the point that the Union Democrats began to affiliate and form a new political party based upon an acceptance of the Compromise of 1850 as a finality. These ultra-Unionists regarded the compromise as evidence of a new northern attitude toward the South, and they stood firm for the Union, right or wrong. There was a segment of these men who believed in the compromise but declared that it would be the last concession to the North. These southern-rights Unionists demanded respect for the South or they would join the ranks of the secessionists. This party realignment forced the disunionists, led by Yancey and the Montgomery Advertiser, to the organization of the southern-rights party. This new friction

17Shanks, pp. 35-36.
developed until, by the end of the year, there were two loosely organized factions in Alabama, lacking only leadership and closer organization to be real political parties. This, however, was of no benefit to the supporters of the convention as neither element had given the Nashville movement backing. 18

There was also a diversified reception in Georgia. The Southern Whig urged ratification of the actions of the convention, saying that it was the only stand the South could take. The Georgia Telegraph upheld its actions as a "calm, temperate, dignified and truthful exposition of the state of things, and of the danger to the Southern States, and to the duties of Southern men." The people of the state held meetings to ratify the proceedings. John Lumpkin wrote to Howell Cobb that he feared a large majority would approve of the work. His fears were groundless, however, as the result was not overwhelmingly for the convention at all. About the only consolation to the proponents of the southern movement was that Georgians did agree to the principle of resistance. Opposition to the Nashville meeting was led by the Southern Banner which heaped ridicule upon the resolutions and the extremists who had vowed that they would "march up to the Missouri line with their coffins on their backs." The Banner was representative of newspapers in general, as witnessed by an appraisal of sixty newspapers in

ten slave-holding states from Maryland to Louisiana, which indicated
that not more than fifteen journals gave the movement decided support. 19

In other southern states, the reaction was of the same moderate
tone. Tennessee ignored the unapproved delegates from Davidson
County, labeling their attempt to represent that state as a "ridiculous
trespass on the rights of their fellow citizens." The Nashville Banner
asked these delegates, "Has it ever occurred to any of you that the
State governments . . . are quite adequate to protect their citizens
from harm, internal or external, without the aid of your volunteer
wisdom?" 20 Florida's attitude was manifested in the senatorial
election between Stephen R. Mallory and David L. Yulee. The latter,
although a protege of Calhoun and a critic of the Compromise, lost to
the comparatively unknown Mallory who favored the Compromise and
the Union. 21 Even in South Carolina, where supposedly all thoughts
were turned toward disunion and "rights for the South", the drafter of
the convention's address and successor to Calhoun as political magnate,
Robert E. Rhett, gradually lost control of his party and subsequently
resigned in protest of the increasing co-operationist sentiments of
the Carolinians.

19 Johnson, pp. 94-95; Shryock, pp. 273-274; Toombs
Correspondence, p. 153.

20 National Intelligencer, June 13, 1850.

21 Dorothy Dodd, "The Secession Movement in Florida, 1850-1861,"
The Florida Historical Society Quarterly, XII (July, 1933), 6-14.
The popularity and acceptance of the Nashville convention, symbol of the southern unity movement, indicated that it was an enterprise with which the South as a whole showed little sympathy. The Louisville Journal described public opinion when they asked the conventionists:

What right do you have to speak for the South when four-fifths of the people throughout the Southern States have rejected all the sectional appeals that have been urged upon them, and have refused to have any participation in the proceedings of that convention? What right for Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Delaware, or North Carolina with no delegates? For Texas and Arkansas with only one drummed up? For Georgia as nineteen-twentieths of the voters refused to sanction her legislature?²²

That paper went on to describe the delegates as a "few hunters up of notoriety...[who] have the impertinence to pretend to speak for the entire South!" The Baltimore Patriot echoed the Journal's commentary on the conferees and added that the Union was safe "with or without them."²³

General opposition on the state level soon turned to an over-all condemnation of the proceedings from Washington. In that city, Howell Cobb was not at all pleased with the convention's demand of the Missouri compromise line. He had not sanctioned the meeting from the beginning and now bitterly criticized the results, as he felt that had the South allied with him earlier they could have obtained the line.

Earlier, however, Calhoun would have no part of compromise and

²²National Intelligencer, June 14, 1850. ²³Ibid.
demanded instead the constitutional principle of non-interference.

Cobb's reaction to the reversal in philosophy was "Well! Non-interference is tendered and is to be rejected on the ground that the heretofore repudiated Missouri Compromise is preferable. . . . I have no patience with such men." 24

Thomas Benton, long an enemy of Calhoun, went to great lengths in an attempt to prove that the only purpose behind the Nashville convention, and its leaders, was secession. He quoted southern spokesmen as using the same theme, disunion—force—secession, over and over again in speech after speech. Yet Benton completely overlooked other key phrases such as "if all else fails," "the last resort," "only if the North will not grant us our rights." His overall effect was, at the first glance, all that could be desired in emotional persuasion. Logically speaking his fault lay in the one-sided evidence that had been amassed to supposedly paint the full picture. True, there were men of an extreme radical nature, as Yancy, who were ready to secede imme-
diately; yet there were also men who would not have seceded, and still who had assembled together at Nashville in an effort to protect the South. 25

In fact, an attempt in Aberdeen, Mississippi, to get up a mass meeting of the "ultra" element was defeated two to one. All through Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi, the Union party, or as it

was facetiously called, the Water-Bucket party, put out the fires of
dissention so effectively that there was scarcely a spark left to kindle
a new flame. 26 The South was not filled with secessionists as Benton
and other extreme northerners would have the nation believe. Moderation and conservative analysis were as much a part of southern action
as were the radical methods for a solution to the trying situation.

As it became increasingly apparent that the Compromise was
threatening the entire southern movement, the necessity for immediate
action was urged by those who still felt that the South could succeed
through unity. A frantic plea was issued in Alabama to call the legis-
lature into session to act on the adoption of the Compromise. But as a
Houston paper commented:

Governor Collier of Alabama hesitates to call an extra
session of the Legislature until the Nashville convention
reconvenes, and until the Convention of Georgia, the legis-
lature of Texas or Virginia have acted on the great
questions that have lately agitated the South.

The Nashville Convention, it is now understood,
will never assemble again, Sharkey having declared the
objects sought by the members have been attained . . .

Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and
all Southern States now furnish evidence that they are
attached to the Union by ties as firm as those that connected
the old thirteen states. 27

Sharkey was quoted further as "willing, for one, to submit to the
reproach of being called a submissionist rather than act with a set of

26 Democrat Telegraph and Texas Register, November 13, 1850.

27 Ibid., October 30, 1850; November 13, 1850.
men whose object was a dissolution of the Union, under the pretext of defending Southern rights." Other conservatives who had met together in June agreed with the stand taken by the convention president, but his opinion was not enough to deter those who clung to the idea of secession as the answer to the South's problem.

Since Sharkey refused to issue the call for the second meeting, Vice-president McDonald took it upon himself to send out the notice. As the former meeting had decided upon a day for reassembling, the president's call was regarded as a mere formality and preparations were made for the November session. Less than sixty delegates attended and only the South Carolina and Tennessee delegations were to any extent composed of the same men as those who met in June. Texas and Arkansas had no representation in the second session, which left only seven states to "protect the South."

The body was called to order by General G. J. Pillow on November 11, 1850. The meetings were held in the Christian Church and the procedure was much the same as it had been before. McDonald was unanimously elected to the presidency with Reuben Chapman, ex-governor from Alabama, as vice-president. McDonald's opening remarks were a short but eloquent appeal in which he acknowledged the growing necessity for secession without ever directly recommending it:

The hope that our labors in June would cause the whole matter to be remedied and peace restored has been miserably shattered. Everything depends upon the Constitution remaining unchanged and unbroken. . . .
Shall we rest quietly, seeing the approaching dissolution, and make no exertion to avert it, and adopt no measures of safety if it must come? No, no. If the constitution be doomed to perish, we must nerve our arms to secure the rights it was intended to guarantee, relying on the guidance and aid of the Omnipotent in so just a cause. 28

The committee on resolutions was reorganized with William Gordon retained as chairman. Resolutions were introduced from almost every state, each claiming to be an expression of its attitude toward the question at hand.

The withdrawal of Sharkey and other moderates had given the extremist element a free-rein in propounding their desire for secession. Several of the "fire-eaters" delivered flamboyant bits of eloquence, all with the same theme—dissolution. J. G. McWhortor expressed the feelings of the Georgia delegation by stating that the "Union and Slavery cannot exist together." Aaron Brown asked the body just what the South had received from Clay's omnibus bill:

What has she received for the loss and surrender of these vast possessions, for California... for Utah and New Mexico? The fugitive slave Bill! What for the loss of nearly two States proposed to be carved out of Texas? The fugitive slave Bill! Truely this bill must be something new, miraculous. But, NO! it is not new. What a pass has the country come to when one half of it has to bribe the other, simply to do its duty under the Constitution! What a commentary on the fraternal, Constitution-abiding spirit of the North! But, it seems

that after giving up all our interest in the Mexican territories, even then, they are not willing to surrender our slaves. They seem determined to take our lands and keep our Negroes too! 29

The most vivid oratory came from the aged but still powerful Langdon Cheves. He submitted a resolution stating that secession with the joint action of the slave-holding states was the only effective remedy for the aggravated wrongs which the South endured and "the enormous events which threaten them in the future, from the usurped and now unrestricted power of the Federal Government." For three hours he elaborated on the idea embodied in the resolution; he denounced and ridiculed the "glorious Union"; he pleaded for a Union of the South and the establishment of a southern confederacy as "even now the Union is divided." 30

The sentiments that had been expounded orally were also embodied in the resolutions that were being written. J. J. Davenport read the committee report which endorsed the right of secession and enumerated the wrongs inflicted upon the South. The views of most of the members was written into the next to last resolution:

Resolved: That in view of these aggressions, and of those threatened and impending, we earnestly recommend to the slave-holding states, to meet in a congress or convention to be held at such time and place as the States desiring to be represented, may designate . . . intrusted with full power and authority to deliberate and act with a view and intention of arresting further aggression, and if

29 Brown's Speeches, p. 313. 30 Hamer p. 71.
possible of restoring the Constitutional rights of the South, and if not to provide for their safety and independence. 31

The resolutions were adopted by a vote of six to one, Tennessee voting in the negative. Delegates from that state then submitted a minority report that also recognized the right of secession but endorsed the Compromise of 1850 as the solution to the current problem. 32

The convention adjourned once more; the members wound their weary way homeward, unhonored and unsung. J. D. Freeman described the attitude prevalent in Mississippi as to the results:

The second session was reassembled by one having no authority to do so. It was sparsely attended and in all respects, a beggarly account of empty boxes. The whole delegation from Mississippi refused to attend this second session. Governor Quitman, without any authority of law, appointed three delegates to represent him in that convention. The people of Mississippi had no part nor lot in the matter. 33

There was little difference in the attitudes of other southern states, since the compromise measures, now adopted by Congress, had rechanneled interest and emphasis away from an unconditional fight for southern rights. The Nashville convention had been called largely to consider the problem of the rights of slaveholders with reference to slavery in the territories. As to the fulfillment of that purpose, both


32Brown's Speeches, p. 319 has the full text of the Tennessee resolutions.

33Congressional Globe, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, p. 338.
sessions had failed to find a solution which was acceptable to the nation as a whole. This second phase of the movement which had been envisioned by Calhoun and others as a plan for unity and concert of action had, like the first step, ended on a weak note.
CHAPTER V

CULMINATION OF THE MOVEMENT

The two sessions of the Nashville convention accomplished one purpose in that they revealed to the southern leaders what had become increasingly apparent for several months. Despite all efforts, the great attempt at a southern movement to unite the South in support of a definite program, with reference to the questions before Congress concerning slavery and territorial rights, had been a failure. The conventionists had not succeeded in their efforts to secure congressional action which would satisfy southern extremist demands; in fact, when the Nashville convention did not accomplish some sort of concrete action, it probably served as a contributing factor in aiding the passage of the compromise measures.

The oratorical struggle between Calhoun and Webster in early March had by no means decided the course of Clay's hopes for a compromise. The "Great Debate" raged throughout the remainder of the spring and well into the summer when two things happened to influence the stalemate which had negated any progress. The first incident, as has been indicated, was the meeting at Nashville; the second factor, that played a deciding role in the eventual passage of the measures, was the death of President Taylor. The removal of this major obstacle,
coupled with the fact that Vice-President Fillmore actively sustained the compromisers, did much to speed up passage of the measures. The Omnibus Bill as offered by Clay was doomed to failure because southern congressmen had been able to strip it of all points except the provision concerning the Utah territorial government. However, the general assumption of most of the people in Washington indicated that it was only a matter of time until the major points originally introduced by Clay would be passed in separate bills.

On August 13, with the passage of the bill to admit California as a free state, these generalizations began to materialize into fact. The bill passed the Senate 34 to 18, and gained the approval of the House on September 7 by a vote of 150 to 56, becoming a law on the ninth of September. That same day another law was enacted, the Texas and New Mexico Act, which had passed the Senate, 27 to 10, on the fifteenth of August, and the House, 108 to 97, September 6. This measure organized New Mexico as a territory without restriction of slavery, adjusted the Texas-New Mexico boundary, and provided for the payment of ten million dollars to Texas for her claims to the disputed territory.

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3Ibid., pp. 1589, 1764.
The Utah Act, which left the question of slavery up to the state constitution, also received President Fillmore's signature on the ninth of September.  

The following week the president signed the Fugitive Slave Act which had been approved by the Senate on August 23, 27 to 12, and by the House on September 12, by a vote of 109 to 76. This concession to the southerners strengthened the legal means of recovering runaway slaves by amending the original law of 1793. The provision now placed fugitive slave cases under exclusive federal jurisdiction and provided for special United States commissioners who were authorized, following a summary hearing, to issue both warrants for the arrest of the fugitives and certificates for returning them to their masters. The last portion of the "Compromise of 1850" was the act abolishing the slave trade in the District of Columbia after January 1, 1851. The Senate passed the measure without much difficulty by a vote of 33 to 19, September 16, and the House voted it through with the largest majority of any of the provisions, 124 to 47, the next day. The bill was enacted September 20.

Reaction to the compromise measures varied throughout the nation. Northern Whigs and Democrats alike hailed the acts as a

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4Ibid., pp. 1490-1491, 1776; the Senate vote was 32 to 18, the House, 97 to 85.

5Ibid., pp. 1647, 1807.

6Ibid., pp. 1830, 1837.
permanent settlement of the disputes which had threatened a cleavage for many months. Northern radicals condemned the Fugitive Slave Bill and hinted that it would not be enforced. Southern moderates indicated their approval of the measures by not attending the second session of the Nashville convention. Southern extremists found in the proposals no reason for curtailing their radical ideas which would culminate in dissolution of the Union. On the whole most southerners acquiesced in favor of the settlement; however, some of the states felt that specific action must be taken to specifically clarify their position.

Georgia became the first state to take official action. Governor Towne issued a proclamation on September 23, calling a convention of the people to meet on December 10. For a while it appeared that the radicals, led by McDonald, would dominate the election of delegates, but they calculated their success without assessing the political power of Toombs, Cobb, and Stephens. These three returned to Georgia from an adjourned Congress and immediately took to the stump in defense of the compromise. The campaign for delegates to the convention entailed a bitter and hard-fought battle that called upon every facet of logic, emotion, and oratorical ability that both sides could muster.\(^7\) The results, however, were hardly indicative of the depth of the struggle as the Unionist forces won by a decided majority. There remained only the

\(^7\)See Shryock, pp. 296-322 for description of the campaign.
question of what action, if any, could be taken by Georgia that would endorse the compromise measures on the one hand, yet not indicate a willingness for submission on the other. Some two hundred and fifty delegates assembled at Milledgeville on December 10, to search for such a workable solution.

The work of that convention resulted in a series of five resolutions which came to be known as the "Georgia Platform." The members resolved: that the Union was to be perpetuated only as long as it continued to guarantee and safeguard the rights and principles on which it was founded; that just as the thirteen original colonies founded the Union with a compromise, so should the thirty-one parties now members of the Union yield to compromise to preserve it; that while they did not wholly approve of the recent congressional actions, they would abide by them as a permanent adjustment to the sectional controversy; that the State of Georgia would resist any move to unbalance or destroy the principles embodied in the approved measures; and that "it is the deliberate opinion of this convention that upon the faithful execution of the Fugitive Slave Law by the proper authorities depends the preservation of our much loved Union." 8

The results of this convention were not characterized by any distinct party line but developed from a coalition of nearly all the Whigs

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8 Ames, pp. 32-33; Shryock, pp. 325-336 offers analysis of the convention proceedings of December 10-14.
and a strong section of Democrats led by Howell Cobb. The nucleus of opposition to the resolutions came from southern-rights Democrats, which indicated a complete reversal of philosophy in both parties with reference to their position regarding state-rights since nullification days. Despite this reversal, the opinion held by most Georgians agreed on the point that their rights had been invaded yet the majority felt that the invasion had been neutralized. The only real point of controversy that remained was whether the encroachments had been ample justification to warrant forcible resistance; statewide reception of the December convention's work answered that question in the negative. 9

The "Platform" exerted a great deal of influence in other southern states which were also involved in assessing the value of the compromise measures. In the Alabama legislature, the Union men endorsed the work done by their sister state, but, although they were strong enough to obtain adoption by the Senate, the Democrats and southern-rights men won out in the House. Nevertheless, the re-election of Governor Collier by a twenty-five thousand vote majority, proved to be a tempering influence on any extreme action that might have been taken by Yancy and his followers. The latter only received 411 votes in the gubernatorial election as evidence of disfavor of him

and others who would array themselves openly and boldly for extreme southern action.\textsuperscript{10} A similar result occurred in the contest in Mississippi between Foote and Davis. The latter had taken over when Quitman bowed out. The slim margin of victory for Foote represented a victory for the compromise and a setback for any contemplated separate action.\textsuperscript{11}

South Carolina stood as the only bulwark between the on-rushing tide of Unionism and the receding flow of southern rights. In that state public opinion favored secession but there developed a controversy over the advisibility of seceding alone. The legislature completed the work of the second Nashville convention by naming a time, January 2, 1852, and place, Montgomery, Alabama, for the proposed "Congress of Southern States." The bill also provided for the election of delegates to that meeting and further provided for the holding of a state convention at the call of Governor Seabrook to consider the final action of the state. A subsequent act by the same legislature appropriated three hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the defense of the state. In the delegate election, however, the attitude of the people had obviously mellowed as the co-operationists elected 114 to the secessionists\textsuperscript{154.}

\textsuperscript{10}William Garrett, \textit{Reminiscences of Public Men in Alabama} (Atlanta, 1872). pp. 545-548; Dorman, pp. 52-64.

\textsuperscript{11}Hearon, pp. 148-227 offers a detailed account of Mississippi's reaction from the passage of the compromise measures through the November election of 1851.
Although in the convention that was subsequently held a resolution decrying the right of secession passed, 136 to 19, even here the influence of conservative action was felt in the passage which stated, "that she forbears the exercise of this manifest right of self-government from considerations of expediency only."\textsuperscript{12}

Despite the florid assertions of their rights as a sovereign entity, the victory of the Unionists and co-operationists meant the collapse of the South Carolina secession movement. The election had been won by the hard-fought efforts of a coalition composed of Unionists, politicians who were afraid they would lose through secession, conservatives, and those of the state who envied slave owners and would never lend support for the maintenance of slavery. In a letter to Webster, J. J. Petigru summed up the results of the radical defeat, "The secession or revolution party has been beaten upwards of 7,000 votes. . . . The no-secession party were joined by all Union men, or nearly so, the rest refusing to vote." He described the co-operationists as men who had taken the state from Rhett and "broken the spell, I think, that Mr. Calhoun left." He also expressed belief that public opinion was so decidedly pronounced against a direct attempt at disunion that it was doubtful whether the state convention for that purpose would ever meet.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12}Hamer, p. 81; Ames, pp. 32-35.

\textsuperscript{13}Hamer, pp. 124-125.
Not only was this prophesy fulfilled but a similar fate befall the proposed southern Congress which was to have met in late winter.

Reaction in other southern states demonstrated a similar moderate trend. Virginia passed resolutions in March, 1851, which indicated sympathy for those adopted by her sister state, South Carolina, yet "the people of this state are unwilling to take any action in consequence of the same calculated to destroy the integrity of this Union."\(^{14}\) Unionist victories in other states, such as Tennessee, also put the seal of approval on the compromise measures and the Georgia Platform, and the seal of condemnation on the Nashville convention and the South Carolina resolutions.\(^{15}\)

Although the effect of the Compromise of 1850 cannot be minimized, there were other factors that aided in the defeat of the southern movement. For example, the combined efforts of the Whig leaders and newspapers had a definite influence on the appointment and method of selecting delegates to the Nashville convention; the importance of that meeting relative to the success of the southern movement having already been established. Although Whig leaders failed to influence delegate elections in Georgia, they struggled to a draw in Alabama; enjoyed partial success in Mississippi, Florida, Virginia, and Tennessee; and

\(^{14}\) Shanks, pp. 36-40; Ames, pp. 35-36.

\(^{15}\) Craven, pp. 103-112 gives brief description of various state reactions.
overwhelmed their opposition in Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Maryland. Their telling influence was also felt in the reaction to the convention when it adjourned. In addition, the Democrats were afraid to go too far in favor of secession inasmuch as such a course would enable the Whigs to emerge as friends of the Union. Therefore, in both a direct and indirect manner, party politics played its part in the southern defeat. 16

One of the primary reasons for the failure of the movement lay in the uncooperative attitude of the people. A Virginia congressman, T. H. Haymond, expressed his constituents' feelings as to the Nashville convention: "It is believed by the people to be conceived in sin. . . . They have already given it the appellation of Hartford Convention number two." 17 The Federal Union, after a survey of public opinion, gave as reasons for lack of interest or influence by the populace: the mistaken fear that the Nashville convention was a secessionist move; a belief that an adjustment could be reached in Congress; the incredible "apathy" of the people; and the indifference of the ignorant mass. 18 The New York Herald seconded this classification

16 See Cole, pp. 135-173 for more information of Whig activity in this period.

17 Congressional Globe, 31st Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, p. 599.

18 Shryock, p. 260.
and added its own theory. After a careful study of a hundred southern journals, that paper found the opinion of the people in the South divided into three main parts: a small element who wished to proceed to extremities; a considerable group who desired to set up a southern political party with the Nashville declarations as its platform; but the most important body of all was in favor of compromising all sectional difficulties at once. 19 If these were valid assessments of the prevalent attitude toward a "fight for southern rights," then Clay's compromise measures and not the Nashville resolutions justly represented the people's voice and not merely the machinations of political powers.

Actually, only two groups of men showed any real enthusiasm for the movement, the old nullifiers of the 1830's and the fiery young men who worshipped Calhoun. When he died the movement indeed lost a lot of ground and there could be a strong case built for the contention that his death delivered an irreparable blow to the southern cause. Certainly no other man in this period could have assumed the role as spokesman for the South, or stalwart leader around whom the section could rally for support, leadership, and firmness of belief. For example, his appeal for a southern party was twice proposed in the Nashville convention by a staunch supporter, Andrew Dawson of Georgia. He offered resolutions proposing the formation of all parties in the South

19Allan Nevins, Ordeal of the Union (New York, 1947), I, 315.
into one called the "Southern Republican Party" with the motto "The Union of the South for the Sake of the South." The first time it was suggested, opposition forced Dawson to withdraw the motion and the second time they tabled it without debate. It would be safe to assume that the political power and personal integrity of the South Carolinian would have commanded sufficient respect to at least have the proposition discussed and perhaps passed.

Economics had played a part in the genesis of the movement but it was also detrimental to its success. The planter and merchant classes from Georgia and certain southwestern and border states did not consider their ultimate economic interests in immediate danger. Conservatives emphasized the dangers of war which might result from secession and appealed to the economic motives naturally adverse to a conflict. In addition, a class that prospered did not wish to alter the status quo nor court danger before it was thrust upon them. The impact of this appeal carried a great deal of influence in states like rejuvenated Georgia; much more than it did in economically decadent South Carolina. The **Columbian South Carolinian** pointed out that "disunion feeling in Georgia is neutralized by the high price of cotton."

South Carolina's Governor Seabrook wrote to Governor Quitman, of

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Mississippi, with reference to the South in general, that "prosperity makes the masses indifferent to the crisis." Another observer reached the same conclusion as to the economic forces at work:

It is indeed fortunate for this Union that cotton is thirteen to fourteen cents a pound, instead of four to five. There is now a state of prosperity they do not care to disturb—-but were it otherwise, all the depression in trade and prices would have been attributed to the burden on the Union and to the baneful effects of national legislation and northern agitation. 21

In a word, prosperity did not incline the South to surrender, but it did incline her toward compromise rather than secession.

Success or failure of the southern unity movement, and the causes of either, cannot be weighed with any great degree of exactness. Many elements must be taken into consideration and evaluated. Although the South was receptive on an emotional basis, political and economical forces influenced her to search for a practical solution to her problems. Many did not consider the Nashville attempt at unity to constitute such a solution. Added to the factors already mentioned, the indifference of the people, the emphasis on conciliation emphasized by Webster in his seventh of March speech, the opposition of the Whigs and the rise of the Union parties, and especially the work done in Congress in the late summer of 1850, the time had not yet arrived for the South to adamantly demand, and fight for, a solution to her avowed loss of rights and relegation to the position of a minority section.

21 Shryock, pp. 289-291.
Men of unparalleled stature and ability were to be found on both sides of the conflict. Logical reasoning, emotional appeal, and oratorical skill had representation in both the North and the South. Congress became the battlefield of primary importance; the center of the struggle which received the brunt of the attack. As long as the issues could be debated, and solved, there was hope for a lasting success. It was only at that point when the last issues were debated and both sections were forced to turn to the endless, almost unanswerable question of state sovereignty, that debate ceased to have any effect and the sword replaced the podium. The Union stopped short of this point in 1850, only to fail to meet the test in the next decade.

So it was that the southern unity movement, born in the days of the nullification controversy, nurtured in the turbulent 1840's, developed from one man's dream to an almost successful reality. Had the circumstances been different, it might have succeeded. Even in failure, however, the movement was destined after all to have a certain amount of influence. Even if the extremists had been checkmated, they had been given an opportunity to clasp hands, to exchange counsels, and to fortify each other. Furthermore, they learned a lesson at Nashville in 1850. They realized that if the South were to preserve her "rights" it would take more than mere concert or unity; that it would take separate state action, for one to lead off in hopes that the others would follow. This lesson that was learned manifested itself ten years later
in dissolution, thereby completing the task originally assigned to the future historian in his portrayal of "the rise, progress, and decline of the American Union."
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