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REMARKS

OF

HON. J. [✓]SHERMAN, OF OHIO,

ON THE

ORGANIZATION OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

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DELIVERED ON THE 16TH OF JANUARY, 1856.



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ORGANIZATION OF THE HOUSE.

The question was upon the adoption of the following resolution, offered by Mr. THORINGTON, of Iowa:

Resolved, That LEWIS D. CAMPBELL be declared the Speaker of the House of Representatives for the Thirty Fourth Congress of the United States.

Mr. SHERMAN (when his name was called) said: The proposition of the gentleman from Iowa places me in a very embarrassing situation. Up to this time I have never had any doubt as to how to cast my vote, but now I confess, in all candor, that I do hesitate. The result of my reflection is to vote for this resolution. In doing so I separate, to some extent, from many of my own colleagues, and from many of my friends. I desire, therefore, to state the reasons why I shall so vote. For twenty-three times I voted for LEWIS D. CAMPBELL, of Ohio. It was the desire of the people of my district, and of the State which I in part represent, that Mr. CAMPBELL should be invested with the high honor of presiding over the deliberations of this House. I voted for him in good faith, and desired his election. For ninety-one times I have voted for the distinguished gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. BANKS.] I have likewise voted for him in good faith, desiring on each ballot to secure his election.

But now, without the knowledge of my distinguished colleague, and without consulting, so far as I know, any of the Representatives of the State of Ohio, the gentleman from Iowa offers this resolution. If he belonged to either of the parties in this House who do not agree with us I might regard it as designed to divide and distract us; but I am satisfied that such was not the purpose of that gentleman. He is a friend, true to the principle which unites us, and his object was simply to show to the House and the country, that we were willing to organize by the election of any reliable anti-Nebraska man as Speaker. Such certainly is my desire, and therefore I shall vote for the resolution.

Here, sir, I might end this explanation, but by the courtesy of the House many members have been allowed to express their opinion upon the question seriously considered by our constituents—who is responsible for our failure to organize? Waiving for the present the duty which, in my judgment, requires every one of us to vote for the plurality rule, whoever it may elect, I desire

to say candidly that I think the great responsibility rests upon those gentlemen who, professing to be, and no doubt being, opposed to the repeal of the Missouri compromise, and agreeing with us in our anti-Nebraska sentiment, have yet separated from us, and have uniformly voted for gentlemen who have been voting either for Mr. CAMPBELL or Mr. BANKS.

Mr. DUNN. Will the gentleman allow me to interrupt him?

Mr. SHERMAN. Yes, if the gentleman will not take much of my time.

Mr. DUNN. I have to state to the gentleman from Ohio and to the House, and, adopting the common parlance here, "to the country," that I am not answerable to the gentleman, nor to this House, nor to any one outside of my own district, for any votes which I may give here for Speaker. There, sir, I can make this matter satisfactory; I can make it satisfactory upon the record I now hold in my hand. I will be held to no responsibility here, and I will submit to no reflections on my course here.

Mr. SHERMAN. The gentleman from Indiana certainly could not have supposed that I intended to cast any personal reflection upon him; but the votes of the little party with which he acts are proper subjects for discussion. The responsibility for the organization of this House is a public matter. The people of the country are looking to us and fixing the responsibility here and there. I have a right to my own judgment as to where that responsibility rests, and I will express it freely and frankly. Having done so, I say this, that the only way in which those gentlemen who have been acting separately from us can justify their course is by adding to this House a good reason why Mr. BANKS is not fit to occupy that chair. If they can cast the least shadow of suspicion upon him—if they can show that he has demanded pledges or promises in order to obtain that position—if they can justly cloud him with even a shadow of dishonor, I will be the first man to leave him;—ay, if they will give to the House any reason that would satisfy even gentlemen on the other side that Mr. BANKS is unfit for that position, I will leave him, and vote for the gentleman from Indiana, or for anybody else; but since they have failed to give any such reason, I have felt myself bound uniformly and honestly to vote

for the distinguished gentleman from Massachusetts. If this resolution does not pass, I shall continue so to vote hereafter.

I do not pin my faith to any man. I am an independent Representative here, and I will vote for any one of a dozen—ay, of a score of those who have been acting with me upon this side of the House. I will vote for no supporter of this Administration. I will not vote for the gentleman from Pennsylvania, [Mr. FULLER.] If the sorry alternative should be presented to me, I would rather vote for the gentleman from Illinois, [Mr. RICHARDSON,] because we are told that the gentleman from Pennsylvania represents an anti-Nebraska constituency, and was elected, to some extent, upon that principle, and the memory of a confiding people, whose sentiments he does not express, rises up in judgment against him.

Mr. FULLER, of Pennsylvania. As the charge now made by the gentleman from Ohio has been variously repeated, I will state a single fact: At the same election when I was returned a member of this House, ex-Governor BIGLER, now United States Senator from Pennsylvania, was a candidate for the office of Governor, standing upon the same platform with my competitor, addressing the people from the same stand, and advocating substantially the same measures. He carried the district by a handsome majority; I was elected by over two thousand majority. I would not have alluded to this fact but to correct a wrong impression, and to show that it was not the anti-Nebraska issue which determined that election. It is but just to say, that a strong feeling existed in my district adverse to the repeal of the Missouri compromise; but I feel assured that I am now representing the wishes of a large majority of my constituents in resisting further agitation.

Mr. SHERMAN. I will take the gentleman's declaration as true, as no doubt it is; but he has declared upon this floor, that, if he had been a member of the last Congress, he would have voted against the repeal of the Missouri compromise as an unwise and useless violation of public faith; and yet he tells us this paradox, that now, if he had the power, he would not reinstate that prohibition of slavery in the Territory north and west of Missouri.

Mr. HOUSTON. He said that he would do it.

Mr. SHERMAN. No, sir, I think he went far beyond that the other day. His position, at any rate, is known to the House and the country. He goes far beyond the gentleman from Illinois, and now tells us that Congress has no power to prohibit slavery in the Territories—and that the people who inhabit them can only do it when they are forming a State government. Whatever his constituents may say, an almost universal public opinion in the northern States has condemned him. A majority of his own friends and colleagues, who supported him at the commencement of the session, deserted him when he defined his position; and now he is voted for by the very few anti-slavery men from the free States who are willing to bow with submission to an acknowledged wrong.

Sir, however the fear of agitation may trouble the gentleman from Pennsylvania, it will not deter us from insisting upon the prohibition of slavery north and west of Missouri. Nothing less than that will satisfy the country; and if it is not done,

as it probably will not be, we will maintain our position of resisting the admission of Kansas as a slave State, under all possible circumstances.

The CLERK. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. SHERMAN. I vote ay.

In the debate which followed the vote on the foregoing resolution,

Mr. DUNN said: I wish to make another remark to some gentlemen upon this floor. Several gentlemen have announced this morning to the country—because it is the country which is interested in all these matters—that the whole responsibility of this want of organization rested upon those here who, *professing* to be anti-Nebraska men, would not give their support to the gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. BANKS.] Let me tell those gentlemen, I am not only a *professor* of anti-Nebraskaism, but one fully in the *faith and practice*, and that I am almost as old upon that subject as some who are the most noisy and stormy here now. Sir, I will not yield one inch from the front line of those who claim to be the *old soldiers*, or the *neophytes*, in this army; and when you, gentlemen, one or all of you, undertake to read me from the church, I imagine, before this trial is through, the church will be ready to turn you out. That is all I have to say upon that subject, save this: I do not permit any one of you to keep my judgment, my conscience, my politics, or my honor; nor will you control my vote upon any subject here against my own sense of right. They are in my own care, and I shall, in all cases, conform to what I regard just and proper.

In reply to a question put by Mr. GIDDINGS, of Ohio,

Mr. DUNN resumed. I wish only to say to the gentleman from Ohio, as he has stated, that I came to the caucus, as he calls it, in pursuance of a call signed by myself and some others, on the occasion of the "informal meeting" of which he speaks—a call which some other gentlemen *refused* to sign; but instead of finding a full meeting I found but a partial meeting; and the gentlemen who were there I found to be simply prepared—as seemed necessary in the predicament of men who could not help themselves—to register the edict of those who stayed away. There was no liberty of *choice* given them; their position was ridiculous. I was unwilling to submit as a slave to any such thing; and, sir, I never will. But I have said enough on this point heretofore, and will not repeat it. I am not here to give reasons for my course, but simply to repeat that no one here has any right to call my vote in question.

Mr. SHERMAN. I would state that I did not attend the meeting spoken of; but if the gentleman [Mr. DUNN] thinks that even now he can give me any reason why, as an honorable man, I should withdraw my vote from Mr. BANKS, I would like to know it, and I now desire that he shall give it. Imputations have been thrown out on this floor long enough; and I now say that, if a charge can be proved against the candidate for whom I am voting which can reflect any dishonor upon him, I shall abandon him; but if the imputations thrown out against him cannot be sustained by a direct charge, then they will only bind me to him with links of steel, and I

will never abandon him. So I would, in all kindness and in all courtesy, ask the gentleman from Indiana, for whom I have high respect, to let us have these charges and these proofs. [Here the hammer fell.]

Mr. DUNN resumed the floor, but was reminded by the Clerk that his time had expired. [Cries of "Let him go on!"]

The CLERK. If there be no objection, the gentleman from Indiana will proceed.

Mr. DUNN. I may take this occasion to make an inquiry of the gentleman from Ohio, [Mr. SHERMAN,] as to a fact which has been reported. If it is incorrect, he cannot object that I give him an opportunity to set it right; and that is, whether he defeated his predecessor on this floor for the seat that he now occupies, among others, for the reason that he gave the very same vote on the Kansas and Nebraska bill on account of which I make some objections to Mr. BANKS? It may be useful to the public to know just what have been the views of gentlemen and of their constituents in regard to that vote, before the zeal here to accomplish certain ends had sanctified all the delinquencies of the past.

Mr. SHERMAN. When the gentleman is through with his explanations, I will answer him upon that point, as well as upon others which he has made.

After Mr. DUNN closed his remarks,

Mr. SHERMAN said: Mr. Clerk, when I rose this morning and stated that, in my judgment, the responsibility for the want of an organization of this House rested mainly upon those gentlemen who have been voting for Mr. PENNINGTON, I did not anticipate that that remark would lead to a general discussion by gentlemen upon all sides of the House. Sir, many opinions have been expressed with regard to where that responsibility rested. The Administration party have charged it upon the anti-Nebraska men; those who have been voting for Mr. FULLER claim it rests upon both sides of the House; and the gentlemen with whom I vote have insisted that the only solution of our difficulty is the plurality rule, which we have repeatedly offered. I expressed the opinion—and I now entertain that opinion still more strongly—that those few gentlemen who have voted for Mr. PENNINGTON for some days past were responsible for the non-organization of this House. I did not impugn their motives. I did not attempt to read them out of any party. I only alleged the fact, that those gentlemen—any three of whom might, for a whole week, have organized this House—were responsible for our inability to do so.

And now, Mr. Clerk, let me examine the reasons which have been given by the distinguished gentleman from Indiana [Mr. DUNN] for the course they have pursued. I appeal to every member of this House whether, with the grave fact before us that this House has remained disorganized for six weeks, while they have had the power to close the controversy by the election of Mr. BANKS at any moment, these reasons are not ridiculous? What are they? One was, that the friends of Mr. BANKS desired that when my colleague withdrew as a candidate that the vote should not be concentrated upon Mr. BANKS. Admit this to be true, and what of it? Is it not right and proper that the friends of a candidate who sincerely

desire his election should choose their own time to press his claims. But suppose that this request of the friends of Mr. BANKS was wrong, must it be followed by the grave consequences that have ensued? I submit this question to the candor of any man.

Another reason has been urged,—more plausible perhaps, and that is, that Mr. BANKS and his friends were opposed to a caucus. Now, I say, as one of the original friends of my honorable colleague from Ohio, [Mr. CAMPBELL,] so far as my knowledge extends, he, as one of the candidates, was *not* in favor of a caucus.

Mr. CAMPBELL, (interrupting.) When I came to Washington, at the commencement of this session, I confined myself for several days to the hotel. I was called upon by various members who were opposed to the Nebraska bill. Some of them, who had been members of the Democratic party, said to me, that they would prefer to vote for a candidate for Speaker who had not a caucus nomination; that a caucus nomination would be a weight upon them at home. My friends from the Northwest who called upon me assured me, if we went into a caucus, I should probably receive the nomination upon the first ballot. I said to them I desired that no course should be pursued, beneficial to myself, which would tend to prejudice any anti-Nebraska member before his constituents. I desired them to take a course by which to ascertain who was the strongest man, and, if they found it necessary to resort to a caucus in order to ascertain that, I was content to leave the matter entirely with them. I made no serious opposition to a caucus, further than simply to say there were those who said they would prefer to cast their votes for an anti-Nebraska Speaker without the formality of a caucus nomination. I said further, that all I desired for myself was, that it should be ascertained in some fair and honest way who could command, at the outset, the greatest vote upon this question, let me know the result, and that that man should receive my support so long as the contest should last. That is what I said. If my colleague knows of my having said anything to the contrary, he is at liberty to make the correction.

I may as well say now, that I was disposed to regard a preliminary vote in the House preferable, and just as good a means of ascertaining the strongest man as a caucus could be, with barred doors. I uniformly declared that we should ascertain who had the most strength, and then rally upon him, and all I desired of my friends was, if they should come to the conclusion that I was the man, after a fair test, they should stand by me. This was all that I asked of any one. For the twenty-three first votes the greatest strength was thrown upon me; yet the votes given for other anti-Nebraska candidates would not concentrate upon my name for reasons then unknown to me, but which I now fully understand. On the night of the fourth day some of my friends came to me, and advised me that I ought to withdraw from the contest. Against my own judgment I yielded. My colleague [Mr. SHERMAN] was one of them. I discovered I was about to be abandoned by some of those who had professed friendship on the next day, notwithstanding that I had requested only at the outset that I should

not be voted for at all, unless I was to be sustained so long as I was in the lead of candidates on one side. I therefore determined to withdraw, and did withdraw from the canvass.

Mr. SHERMAN. The remarks of my colleague, then, have sustained the assertion I made that he, and indeed all the northern members of this body, whose opinions decided the course of the anti-Nebraska members of this House, advised against a caucus.

Mr. CAMPBELL, (interrupting.) I wish to have it distinctly understood that any remarks I may have made in opposition to a caucus were not predicated upon a personal desire, but upon the idea that perhaps a caucus might prove injurious to the interests at home of some of those who came here expecting to vote for an anti-Nebraska candidate.

Mr. SHERMAN. My colleague has stated the reasons why he thought it inadvisable to have a caucus. They are satisfactory, and commended themselves to the good sense of many of the ablest members on this side. Nevertheless, the fact stands out, that all the candidates who were spoken of were, for reasons satisfactory to themselves, opposed to a caucus. My friend before me, [Mr. LEITER,] who was one of the leaders of the Democratic party in Ohio, was always decidedly in favor of a caucus, and insisted that discipline was necessary to success.

I allude to this merely for the purpose of disposing of one of the reasons mentioned by the gentleman from Indiana, [Mr. DUNN,] for his opposition to Mr. BANKS. All the candidates are liable to the same objection; and, whether there is any force in it or not, it ought not to be urged solely against Mr. BANKS.

But, sir, the gentleman from Indiana has called the attention of the House to another fact, which I suppose, from the tenor of his remarks, is a reason for the course he has taken. The gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. BANKS] voted on the first vote for the gentleman from New York, [Mr. WHEELER.] Well, sir, until that gentleman defined his position on this floor, I supposed they both stood upon the same platform. I supposed that they were both anti-Nebraska Democrats. But my friend from New York, [Mr. WHEELER,] it seems, stands solitary and alone on a national Democratic platform of his own making; but when we came here, at the beginning of the session, I certainly recognized him as a candidate, occupying precisely the same position as the gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. BANKS] does. I would have voted for him [Mr. WHEELER] with the same readiness with which I voted for the gentleman from Massachusetts; therefore the gentleman from Massachusetts should not be condemned for voting for a man who apparently, at least, agreed with him in all respects.

The gentleman from New York had steadily opposed the Nebraska bill, and his course had been highly approved by the country and his constituents. Since he has defined his position he has received no Republican vote.

These are the only reasons that have been given by the gentleman from Indiana [Mr. DUNN] that now occur to me. It is true, he states that he has others, but when called upon in good faith to state them, so that they may influence the votes of others, he tells us that he is not responsible to

this House for his reasons or his votes. Well, sir, until he enlightens us we can only grope in the dark, and form our opinions of the consequences of his votes from the glimmering light he yields us. These opinions I, as a member of this House, have a right to declare, and that, too, whether I am an "old soldier" or a "neophyte."

And, sir, since I have been drawn into this discussion by simply stating a fact, which in my judgment has been in the minds and on the lips of thousands, I appeal to every member of this House to judge of the truth of the fact I have alleged, and whether the reasons that have been stated by the gentleman from Indiana can justify the grave consequences that have resulted from his course. Six weeks have been spent in futile efforts to elect a Speaker, civil war has been impending on our borders, and a breach of diplomatic intercourse is threatened with Great Britain. The appropriation bills and all the ordinary legislation of Congress are suspended. The just hopes of the people have been disappointed, and we are compelled to appeal to a defeated Administration to adopt the plurality rule to avoid a difficulty which, in my judgment, ought never to have arisen.

While I have felt it my privilege and duty to speak thus frankly of the course pursued by the party to which the gentleman from Indiana belongs, and to examine the reasons he has given us why we should abandon our candidate, I have never impugned his motives, or attempted to read him out of any party. On the contrary, I have a high respect for his ability, and hope often to follow his leadership in the contests on this floor. I deeply regret that he now differs from the great body of his political friends in the selection of a Speaker. Yet truth and candor compel me to say, that with all the reasons that have been given, and with all the facts that are before the House, the people of this country, North, South, East, and West, will hold these anti-Nebraska men who have refused to vote with us, when one hundred and seven members had concentrated upon one man, and when three of them would have elected Mr. BANKS Speaker of this House—I say public opinion throughout the country will hold these gentlemen responsible for the delay in the organization of this House.

Mr. DUNN. Will the gentleman from Ohio permit me to interrupt him?

Mr. SHERMAN. Certainly.

Mr. DUNN. The gentleman from Ohio is simply showing that some gentlemen here have not been occupying precisely the same ground on the record as they have occupied before the country, and that that was one part of my reasons for abandoning the gentleman from Massachusetts. I would let gentlemen know that, whatever my reasons were, they are not a matter which concerns this House, or which the House has a right to inquire into. I am answerable for them elsewhere, and I will submit to no lectures here on the subject. Such was the whole tenor of my remarks on that point.

Mr. SHERMAN. It cannot be out of the recollection of the House that, when, a few minutes since, the gentleman from Indiana was about closing his remarks, and was intimating that he had reasons for abandoning the gentleman from Massachusetts, which would have influence on

the members of the House, I rose in my place and desired him to state those reasons; and the gentleman was permitted, by the courtesy of the House, to go on and state the reasons which prevented him from voting for Mr. BANKS—

Mr. DUNN, (interrupting.) The gentleman from Ohio will allow me to interrupt him. Does not this House distinctly recollect that to the gentleman there, [Mr. MEACHAM,] and to the gentleman here, [Mr. SHERMAN,] I again and again declared that I would make no charge, nor go into my reasons? That was well understood and distinctly stated. No man could have misunderstood me. It was too plainly stated.

Mr. COMINS. Will the gentleman from Ohio allow me to state—

Mr. SHERMAN. Not now. I state this, that the objection of the gentleman from Vermont [Mr. MEACHAM] would have compelled the gentleman from Indiana [Mr. DUNN] to take his seat; and that that objection was withdrawn for the purpose of giving the gentleman from Indiana time and opportunity to state the reasons why he did not vote for Mr. BANKS: and when objection was withdrawn by the gentleman from Vermont, that the gentleman from Indiana might proceed to state the reasons why he holds this House disorganized, he did proceed with his remarks, and did state reasons for not voting for Mr. BANKS. These reasons I have examined. If he has not stated all, I have only to say, the House gave him the opportunity—the friends of Mr. BANKS invited the disclosure, and we have the right to infer that we have now all that has prevented him, and those who vote with him, from uniting in the support of Mr. BANKS.

I now proceed to but one point more, and then I have done. It is this—

Mr. PENNINGTON, (interrupting.) Will the gentleman from Ohio yield to me a moment for the purpose of addressing to him an inquiry?

Mr. SHERMAN. I yield with pleasure.

Mr. PENNINGTON. I wish to know of the gentleman from Ohio, whether I am to understand him as imputing to me any responsibility whatever for the delay in the organization of the House?

Mr. SHERMAN. Most certainly not.

Mr. PENNINGTON. I think I should have a nice little entertainment if I were to attempt to put a ring in the nose of my friend from Indiana, [Mr. DUNN.]

Mr. SHERMAN. I am far from imputing to the gentleman from New Jersey any blame whatever. Every one must give him the highest credit for his course here. He has uniformly voted for Mr. BANKS, while these gentlemen have been voting for him, [Mr. PENNINGTON.] Here is the rub. It is upon no question of principle they withhold their votes; and the man they have selected of all others in this House to fill that chair gives his great name, his high reputation, and his voice here, constantly in favor of the gentleman from Massachusetts. The leader condemns his followers.

But I will proceed now to a matter personal to myself, which has been drawn into this discussion by the gentleman from Indiana, [Mr. DUNN.]

It has been charged on this floor—and Democratic papers in the State in which I live have reported the story over and over again—that the canvass in my congressional district in Ohio, against my friend, General Lindsley, was conducted, and the chief opposition to him made, on the ground that he voted the same way as Mr. BANKS did on postponing the Pacific railroad bill. Now, I state to the House that I consider that vote wrong. But if my predecessor had come home, and gone to the people of his congressional district, and repudiated this Administration, which had sanctioned and adopted the repeal of the Missouri compromise as a party measure, he would have been returned here without opposition from the Republican party, precisely as his colleague [Mr. NICOLS] has been. But, instead of this, he acquiesced in that wrong, and allowed himself to be placed on a platform approving the general course of this Administration. He would not pledge himself to vote for the restoration of the Missouri prohibition. He occupied the same position as that now taken by the gentleman from Pennsylvania, [Mr. FULLER,] in acquiescing in what he declared to be wrong.

On this point alone, waiving all previous party questions, we went before the people of my district, he the nominee of the Administration party, and I as the nominee of the Republican party. In the canvass I gave him great credit for his general fidelity to principle, and the manner in which he had discharged his duty in Congress—speaking of him everywhere with kindness—seldom alluding to his vote on postponing the Pacific railroad bill, but basing my opposition to him on the fact that he was willing to acquiesce in the Nebraska bill, and on certain contingencies allow the institution of slavery to be extended north and west of Missouri. I declared that I never would submit to the extension of slavery over that Territory, if my vote or voice could prevent it; and I now say, before God and my country, that I never will.

I am no Abolitionist in the sense in which it is here used. I had always been a conservative Whig, until my southern brethren discovered the ties that bound us by aiding this Administration in its attempt to extend slavery. A great majority of our people were willing to adhere to all the legislative compromises until they have been shamefully violated; and now, since the issue has been forced upon them, they will demand that, under no circumstances whatever, shall the South derive any advantage from this breach of faith. Since my Whig brethren of that section have allowed this Administration to lead them from their duty; when they abandon the position which Henry Clay would have taken; forget his noble name and proud achievements, and decline any longer to observe his counsels and carry his banner, they lose all their claims on me. We do not desire to interrupt or disturb the harmony which ought to exist between the different sections of the country. That was done by the last Congress. We only appear here to demand justice; to demand compliance with conditions that will restore the peace and good feeling that prevailed when the wrong we complain of was done. We ask no more, and we will submit to no less.

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