



JOHN C. CALHOUN.

On Nullification

A portion of Chapter XVI
"Building the Nation"
by Charles Carleton Coffin ©1883.



DANIEL WEBSTER.

Manufacturing by machinery had begun in the United States. England had been using machinery for a third of a century, and it was becoming rich by manufacturing goods for the people of other countries.

The question of a tax or tariff on foreign goods agitated the country. The word tariff had its origin on the other side of the Atlantic. From the point Tarifa, near the straits of Gibraltar, pirate vessels used to dart out upon ships that were sailing through the Straits and compel the captains to pay them money for the privilege of going through. The pirates assumed to own the straits; and the captains, rather than have a fight, paid them for the privilege of going on their way. In the course of years the word came to mean a tax or duty imposed by government on articles imported or exported.

Henry Clay believed that it would be a good way to build up manufacturing in the United States to tax cotton and woolen cloth and a great variety of other goods manufactured in England and other countries, and which the people of the United States were beginning to manufacture. Under his influence, a tariff, or list of taxes, on goods manufactured in other countries was established in 1816. It was done to encourage and protect the manufacturers of the United States. The men who were beginning to manufacture had little money, while the manufacturers of Great Britain were rich. Money was dear in America. Men who had to borrow money paid ten, fifteen, or even twenty percent for it; in Great Britain the rates were not half so great. Labor was dear in America, but cheap in England. America was new. The people were obliged to build roads, bridges, school-houses, and churches. England had the advantage, and could manufacture clothes cheaper than they could be made in the United States. Hence the tariff.

There were no manufactories in the Southern States. The tariff made goods dear to the planters of South Carolina, who wished to repeal it. In 1828 Congress passed a still stronger tariff, which gave great offense to South Carolina.

The people of South Carolina and Virginia remembered that Thomas Jefferson had written in 1798, resolutions which were passed by the Legislature of Kentucky, that the Union was only a compact between the States, and that each State had a right to judge the validity of laws passed by Congress.

South Carolina, under the lead of John C. Calhoun, determined to nullify or make void the tariff so far as that State was concerned, and passed a law which declared the acts of Congress of no account, and forbade the custom-house officers at Charleston collecting any revenue. The Governor ordered the troops of the State to be ready to support the law.

In 1832 came a great debate in the United States between Senator Hayne of South Carolina and Daniel Webster on nullification. South Carolina had started upon a course which would bring civil war - the overturning of the Constitution, breaking up the nation. Very eloquent were the words of Mr. Webster:

"While the Union lasts we have high, exciting, gratifying prospects spread out before us, for us and our children. Beyond that I seek not to penetrate the veil. God grant that, in my day at least, that curtain may not rise! God grant that on my vision never may be opened what lies behind! When my eyes shall be turned to behold for the last time the sun in heaven, may I not see him shining on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union; on States dissevered, discordant, belligerent; on a land rent with civil feuds, or drenched, it may be, in fraternal blood! Let their last feeble and lingering glance rather behold the gorgeous ensign of the Republic, now known and honored throughout the earth, still full high advanced, its arms and trophies streaming in their original lustre - not a stripe erased or polluted, nor a single star obscured, bearing for its motto no such miserable interrogatory as 'What is all this worth?' nor those other words of delusion and folly, 'Liberty first, and Union afterward;' but everywhere, spread all over the sea and over the land, and in every wind under the whole heavens, that other sentiment, dear to every true American heart - Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!"