

WASHINGTON CITY.

THURSDAY MORNING, MARCH 16, 1858.

THREE PARTIES—DEMOCRATIC, REPUBLICAN, AND THE ABSENTISTS.

The experience of the present session of Congress has shown that there are at least three ways of defeating a bill. First, to secure against it a majority of votes; second, to institute a system of factious opposition under the rules, by calling out that time-killing process of taking down the yeas and nays upon frivolous motions to adjourn, to call the House, and to excuse members; third, just sufficient of the friends of a bill to be absent, being careful to select precisely such times as will place it in the power of the opposition to secure all possible advantages.

We have a stupid way of thinking that there is precious little difference, in a practical sense, between the first and last process of inviting and securing the defeat of the majority. It is said that the great Carthaginian general lost his army by an over-free indulgence in the good things of this world, producing demoralization, weakness, and ultimate overthrow. The historian is silent on the subject, but we entertain no doubt of the fact, that a large portion of his best troops and officers were absent when the hour of trial came. It is easy to see at all events, that a majority is wholly unlike Mr. Robert J. Walker's sovereignty—it is both alienable and divisible.

The democratic party elected a majority of all the members of the present Congress. We would like exceedingly to see them collected together for once in the House of Representatives. In this respect, if in no other, they might follow the example set them by the opposition, whose forces constitute a compact body, always on hand and always wielding the utmost strength of their numbers.

We hold it to be clear that the majority should be able to control legislation; and if they do not, a defect exists in their weapons or in their organization, which should be remedied at once. When high duties are devolved upon public servants, indifference to their execution becomes a political offence of serious and alarming import. Nor are we able to see the distinction in a practical point of view, between indifference to the success of a measure and a neglect to perform those duties which are necessary to secure such success.

THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION NOT A "SOCIAL COMPACT"—THE UNION OF STATES NOT A CONSOLIDATED REPUBLIC.

Among the southern opposition journals upon whose co-operation we had most confidently counted, in the pending struggle of the national men and party with the black-republican party of the North and its sectional allies, there was none to which we looked with more confidence than the Richmond Whig. But we find, with surprise and regret, that that journal has allowed itself to be arrested and trammelled, in the advocacy which it evidently intended to give the proposition before Congress for the admission of Kansas, by an absurdity of the New York Express.

The Express has suddenly conceived a profound veneration for constitutions, especially for the federal constitution, and affects to find, in the recent speech of Mr. Dix at Tammany Hall, doctrines wild, Jacobinical, subversive of the federal constitution in particular, and alarming to the integrity of constitutions in general.

The doctrine announced by Mr. Dix, at which the Express affects to stand aghast, hath this extent—no more: "The constitution of Kansas contains a provision that it shall be unaltered until 1864. But I regard all such attempted limitations of sovereignty as nugatory. It is the right of every people to amend or abolish at will the form of government under which they live." That is the doctrine of Mr. Dix; though the advocates in Congress of the admission of Kansas under the Lecompton constitution base the right of the people of the State to change their constitution not only on the abstract principle announced by Mr. Dix, but also on the express reservation of that right embodied in the Lecompton declaration of rights.

The Express, with the true monarchical instincts of the old Adams party, of which it is a fossil scion, resists the right of a majority of a people to change at will the constitution of government under which they live; and exclaims with earnestness, that, if such a right were conceded, "not a charter in the country, or a compact, or a vested right, so-called, would be worth the paper it is written on." The Express labors under a delusion. The majority of the people is not a mob or a demon. To concede to the majority of a people the right to change their constitution at will, is not "to abolish property," to instal agrarianism, to light the torch of anarchy, to invoke the demons of confusion and chaos. The reason is simple and obvious; but is one which we do not expect the Express to be capable of appreciating. The reason is, that the people are capable of self-government. The people are more honest, more intelligent, more wedded to order and justice, more capable of conducting their own government peacefully and with just protection to property, than the Express or any other organ of that old party in our country which never could acknowledge the capacity of the people for self-government, imagines or can believe. The people—the majority of the people—are wise, just, honest, peace-loving, law-abiding, and conservative. The majority is not a wild beast or a devil. The experience of three-quarters of a century on our continent ought certainly to have convinced the Express ere now that the people can be safely trusted with their own affairs and are capable of self-government.

But the rights of property, and social order and peace, are not the only things supposed to be jeopardized by this doctrine of Mr. Dix. The Express finds in the doctrine immense danger also to the federal constitution. Mr. Dix did not so much as allude to the federal constitution in declaring that no such "imitations of sovereign power" as that contained in the Lecompton constitution could impair the right of a people to amend or abolish their form of government at will. Nevertheless the Express takes alarm at the doctrine as subversive of the federal constitution. What incorrigible consolidationists are these old federal journalists! A State is a unit—a consolidated community of people. A State constitution prescribes the forms and rules under which a State community is organized and consolidated into a government. Mr. Dix's declaration referred to State constitutions—to the sovereign power of single peoples or States to change their forms and rules of government.

The Express—an inveterate consolidationist, who

regards the United States as one consolidated people, and the federal constitution as organizing all the States into a unit republic, sovereign in itself, sovereign over the constituent States; who believes that the federal government represents the sovereignty of the people, not as a partnership of distinct States, but as a mass—very naturally cries out against the doctrine of Mr. Dix as "subversive of the federal constitution." The Express is mistaken. Its alarm is causeless. The federal constitution is in no sort of danger from Mr. Dix's doctrine, which had no more reference to it than it had to the Koran.

The United States is not a unit State, but a confederation of constituent, independent, sovereign States. A man is a man, a woman a woman, a child a child, and a servant a servant; but a family is neither a man, a woman, a child, nor a servant, but a family. The United States is not a consolidated Republic, but several States confederated together under a treaty of confederation. The purport of Mr. Dix's declaration is, that a State is a sovereignty, that a State constitution organizes that sovereignty, is a "social compact," is the creation of a majority of the people, and, being a creature, cannot be set above the creator.

A State constitution is a different affair altogether. It is not a treaty between distinct powers; it is only an instrument by which a single community is governed. The instrument may be abrogated, and yet the State be as much a State as before.

A State constitution and the federal constitution are by no means similar instruments. To predicate, therefore, a doctrine in regard to a State constitution is not to predicate the same doctrine in regard to the federal constitution. The federal constitution is a totally different instrument from a State constitution, designed for a different object, effecting a different purpose, and operating upon an entirely different constituency. Nine-tenths of the States of the world have no constitutions at all; but they are as much States as if they had them. One of the States of the Union (Rhode Island) remained a State thereof half a century without a constitution. A constitution is not a sine qua non of a State; it may not exist, or it may be abrogated, and yet the State will remain a State just as positively as before. But the federal Union cannot exist, except under and by force of a federal compact.

A State constitution is the work of a majority of the unit community which it operates upon. The federal constitution is a treaty between several distinct sovereignties, under which neither became bound except by its several individual, express sanction. As a nation cannot disregard its treaty stipulations with a weaker, so a majority of the constituent States of the confederacy cannot disregard or abrogate the common treaty of confederation.

The outcry of the Express against the doctrine of the Pugh amendment as subversive of the federal constitution, therefore, natural as it is in the mouth of a consolidationist, is mere balderdash. We are only surprised that our State-rights cotemporary of the Richmond Whig should have allowed himself to have been ensnared into any such consolidationist notions emanating from the neighborhood of Hartford.

THE PROGRAMME OF THE ANTI-LECOMPTONITES.—GEN. WEBB'S ADVICE.

We have never had the slightest confidence in the political honesty or fairness of the black-republican leaders. We have always regarded them as a set of unscrupulous tricksters and demagogues, with whom success is everything, and who hold themselves in readiness at any time to seize upon any and all means, of whatever character or kind, calculated, in their judgment, to advance their ends, or assist in breaking down the democratic party, and with it the constitution and the Union. Abundant evidences of the correctness of this opinion exist in the records of the country; but if they did not, a single day spent at the Capitol in watching the movements of these men on the great question now pending before Congress would be enough to satisfy the most incredulous that what we believe and have said of them is true to the letter. Their object is to defeat the settlement of this question, and to do so every possible expedient has been or will be resorted to. This was the object of Mr. Harris's resolution calling for a special investigating committee; of the refusal by himself and his friends to receive the report of that committee, and of his question of privilege and the appeal from the Speaker's decision thereon. But all these expedients have so far failed; and, from the proceedings in the House of Representatives on Thursday last, it became evident that the friends of the Lecompton constitution were in a decided majority in that body, and that to defeat them it was necessary for their opponents to hit upon some new plan of operations. It had been intimated that the contest might be reduced to one of physical endurance, and the New York Courier and Enquirer, profiting by the suggestion, openly recommends its friends to adopt it. That paper says:

"We believe that if our friends would consent to let the vote be taken in the House of Representatives at this time, there could be little doubt of the result." "But no such folly will be practised by the friends of freedom in the House." "If need be, let it at once be understood by the Executive and his ministers that the friends of freedom in the House are unalterably resolved that, if necessary, they will continue in session until the 4th of March, 1858, sooner than permit the question to be taken upon the admission of Kansas under the Lecompton constitution." "It requires less than forty members present to prevent a vote on the Lecompton fraud. All that is necessary, therefore, is to divide our party into two squads, relieving each other every twelve hours from now to the 4th of March next, and to proclaim their determination to adhere to their principles until the existence of the present Congress shall terminate. The simple announcement of this fact will settle the question. The executive minions will probably show fight for a week or so; but once convinced that the friends of freedom are unalterably resolved to stand by their principles, and the triumph of these principles will be assured. There is no hardship in this."

Here we have it boldly proclaimed by a "friend of freedom"—by one who professes to be shocked that a minority should control a majority in Kansas—that a minority ought to control a majority in Congress; and this, that agitation may be fostered and kept alive in the country. The programme is sketched out and marked down. It has already been adopted in the Senate and will no doubt be attempted in the House at the proper time. General Webb has issued his orders to Major Harris. The latter is to marshal his black cohorts; divide them into two squads, and stand on the defensive against the democracy. The campaign promises to be an interesting one, but we imagine it will be of much shorter duration than is expected. The democracy have the power

to settle this question; the good of the country demands that it should be done, and they should not allow a minority to defeat their purpose by a resort to factious movements. They will soon show the chivalrous New York General that his strategy will not succeed, and ere he is aware he will find himself, his gallant Major, and all their followers emphatically hors de combat.

FRIGHTFUL NEWS FROM WASHINGTON.—THE REIGN OF TERROR.

Everybody that has read the graphic account of the burning of the hotel and the rescue of the ladies, in night-caps and gowns, from the second story window, will remember well the alarm and consternation of that faithful and virtuous young missionary, Humphrey Clinker, who with his heel upon the foot of the ladder and up-stretched arms, received the fair damsels in their rapid escape from the flames. It is even recorded that the good Clinker, mantled all over with blazes, and anxious of course to get away, not the less remained faithful to his post and never closed his eyes, even in a wink, till the last of the maidens had been landed in safety. Till the publication of Col. Forney's letter in the Press the other day on his arrival in this city, we have seen nothing to equal Clinker's feelings and embarrassments on the occasion referred to. The cases to be sure are widely different, but that is nothing. Col. Forney found the federal metropolis full of spies, terror, blood, and martyrs. We can imagine how horrified he must have been. How like Clinker, he was fearfully distressed—how he dodged about, squinting over his right shoulder and then over his left; how he closed and locked his doors, lowered his tremulous voice, lest some ugly conspirator should recognise him as a patriot and a freeman! It was the Reign of Terror in all its frightful reality. The steam guillotine was doing its bloody work—the hounds were on the scent—the victims for to-morrow were marked with the red chalk of the executioner. Worst of all—most shocking and heart-rending of all—this fearful carnage was amongst Colonel Forney's best, and the President's best, most loyal, and only true friends. It is easy to see that Colonel Forney's stay in the city was not unnecessarily prolonged. Like the virtuous Clinker, he was glad to get away. His business was to save Mr. Buchanan, and to that end he became the author of a letter which exceeds anything we recollect to have seen in the renowned adventures of Don Quixotte or the Arabian tales. Being disposed to spice up the Union with a little light literature, we cannot do better than to copy a paragraph or two from Col. Forney's manifesto:

"And what a change has one year produced! I can hardly believe my senses that I am writing from the capital of my country, and that my old friend—the to whom I have borne almost filial relations from my boyhood—be to whom I have confided my few hopes and fears—be for whom I dared the frowns of fate, and for whom during four long years in the lower house of Congress the patronage in my gift was fearlessly bestowed, and he knows how gladly and how spontaneously, too—I can hardly believe my senses that this is the city of Washington, and that James Buchanan is President."

"What is the aspect now? One wide reign of terror. A test is erected here, like some horrid instrument of torture, upon which democrats are tried and executed for their opinions. The work of desecration has ceased against life-time foes, and is now waged upon old and cherished friends. Men are removed and culminated not for being opposed to democratic principles, but for being too much in favor of them. The humblest clerk, with his little family, who struggles along on his thousand dollars a year, must hide his sentiments or leave his place. For the bold and upright democrat who dares to think about there is shot short. If he has an office he must be ready for the ominous card of dismissal on the instant. If he is an independent citizen, he is excluded from the departments and from the White House like a common leper. An army of spies are on the alert hunting for victims. 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