

THE CULMINATION.

Senator Conkling's Threatened Surrender to the Country.

He and Senator Platt Resign Their Offices as United States Senators.

Political Circles in a Fever of Excitement over the Probable Result to the Party.

Following closely on the surprise to the political world by President Garfield in his withdrawal of certain nominations to the Senate, comes the unexpected resignation of Roscoe Conkling and Thomas C. Platt, as United States Senators from New York, the act being the culmination of the unpleasant controversy between the President and the New York Senators over the nomination by the President of Judge Robertson to be Collector of the Port of New York. The first intimation in Washington of this step, was the reading of the following letters on the assembling of the Senate, on May 16:

WASHINGTON, May 16, 1881.—To Hon. C. A. Arthur, Vice President:—Sir—Will you please announce to the Senate that my resignation as senator of the United States has been forwarded to the governor of the state. I have the honor to be with great respect, your obedient servant, ROSCOE CONKLING.

SENATE CHAMBER, May 16, 1881.—To Hon. C. A. Arthur, Vice President:—I have forwarded to the governor of the state of New York my resignation as senator of the United States for the state of New York. Will you please announce this fact to the Senate. With great respect, your obedient servant, T. C. PLATT.

The reading of the letters created an intense excitement on the floor of the Senate and in the galleries, and soon the news spread outside the capitol, causing such a furor as has not been seen in Washington since the war. Telegrams were sent flying to the executive department and to every part of the country by senators. The intelligence was spread through the city and it appeared of such an improbable character that the people generally refused to believe it.

THE FEELING AT THE WHITE HOUSE

is given authoritatively as follows: The President had given to the New York Senators credit for ordinary sense and discretion, but this somewhat shook his confidence in their judgment. If the Senators concocted this plan to annoy the President, they failed in their purpose. It gives him no trouble so far as it bears upon the fall campaign in New York. To have that great state go into Democratic hands the first year of his administration, would be deeply regretted by the President. From the recent performance of the New York Senators he is led to believe that they will not exert themselves to prevent this catastrophe. Senator Conkling has several times intimated that the President's course, as he called it, would be disastrous to the party in New York, and he seemed to be willing to let the experiment be tried. The Conkling men say that the loss of New York would be a rebuke to the White House which would attract the attention of the country.

The first official information that the President received was a dispatch from the Capitol received about 12:20 p. m., containing the letter of resignation of Conkling. The President read and believed. Up to this time he had been doubting Thomas. He immediately dispatched a messenger for Blaine, and the latter arrived in a few minutes. He displayed some excitement, for the move was as much a surprise to him as to the others. The President's room was cleared, and the two engaged in a private consultation. The President also sent for other members of the cabinet, who soon arrived and the matter was quietly talked over. What result was reached is not known, but it was evident that the cabinet ministers were not much disturbed by the event.

The intention of the resignation of the senator is to submit their action in the opposition to the confirmation of Judge Robertson, to the endorsement of the people of the state of New York, in expectation that they will be so far successful as to receive a full and complete vindication at the hands of the legislature now in session, and that they, themselves, will be elected as their own successors. On this point opinions differ. The matter is now in the legislature, and it is to be decided whether or not it approves their action. The news at Albany created a most profound sensation, as it is the first time in the history of the state in which it has been without a senator. The revised statutes of the state provide that in case of a vacancy occurring during the session of the legislature, it shall be filled on the second Tuesday after the ratification is received, which will be May 24.

Conkling's Letter of Explanation.

The following joint letter of Ex-Senators Conkling and Platt to Governor Cornell, explanatory of the matter and questions in dispute, and leading directly to their action, is published.

WASHINGTON, May 14, 1881.—Sir: Transmitting, as we do, our resignations, respectively, of the great trusts with which New York has honored us, it is fit that we acquaint you and, through you, the legislature and people of the State with the reasons which, in our judgment, make such a step respectful and necessary. Some weeks ago the President sent to the Senate, in a group, the nominations of several persons for public offices already filled. One of these offices is the collectorship of the port of New York now held by Gen. Merritt. Another is the consul generalship at London, now held by Gen. Badeau. Another is charge d'affaires to Denmark, held by Mr. Kirkwood, and the mission to Switzerland, held by Mr. Fish, son of the former distinguished secretary of state. Mr. Fish had in deference to an ancient practice placed his position at the disposal of the new administration, but like the other persons named he was ready to remain at his post if permitted to do so. All these offices save Mr. Cramer are citizens of New York, and it was proposed to displace them all; not for any alleged faults or any alleged needs or advantage of the public service, but in order to give the great office of collector of the port of New York to Mr. W. H. Robertson as a reward for acts of his, said to have aided in making the nomination of General Garfield possible. The chain of removals thus proposed was broken by Gen. Badeau's declining to accept the new place to which he was to be sent. These nominations summoned every member of the Senate to say whether they would have advised such transaction.

The movement was more than a surprise. We had been told only a few hours before that no removals in New York offices were soon to be made, or even considered, and had been requested to withhold the papers and suggestions bearing on the subject, which had been sent to us for presentation, should occasion arise, until we had intimation from the President of his readiness to receive them. Learning that the Vice President was equally surprised, and had been equally misled, we went to Mr. James, cabinet officer from our State, and learned that though he had not seen

some time with the President on the morning of the day the nominations were sent no disclosure of his intention to send them had been made to him, and that the first he knew of the matter was by hearsay. Following this event, after earnest reflection and consultation, we believed the proceeding unwise and wrong, whether considered wholly in relation to the preservation and integrity of the public service, and public example to be set, or in relation also to the integrity of the Republican party. No public utterance of comment or censure was made by either of us in the Senate or elsewhere. On the contrary, we thought the President would reconsider the action so sudden and hasty, and would at least adopt a less hurtful and objectionable mode of requesting personal or individual service. In this hope the following paper was prepared and signed and presented by Mr. James to the President, who was subsequently informed that you had authorized your name to be added also.

To the President: We beg leave to reiterate against the change in our citizenship as New York by the removal of Mr. Merritt's appointment of Mr. Robertson. The proposal was wholly a surprise. We heard of it only seven or eight days before it was announced in the Senate. We had only two days before been informed from you that a change in the entire staff at New York was not contemplated, and quite ignorant of the purpose to take any citizen now, we had no opportunity until after the nomination of Judge Robertson to express our views. We do not believe that the interests of the public service will be promoted by removing the present collector and putting Mr. Robertson in his stead. Our opinion is quite the reverse, and we believe no political advantage can be gained for either the Republican party or its practical friends. Believing that no individual can be so well qualified to discharge the duties of such a position as the one now in the hands of Mr. Merritt, we believe that the nomination of Mr. Robertson is unwarranted. (Signed) OSWEGO ANDREWS, T. C. PLATT, THOMAS C. PLATT, ROBERTSON.

This paper was presented to the President by Mr. James Monday, the 25th day of March. Knowing the frequency with which every one of the twenty of the Presidents of the republic, and marked the present incumbent, had withdrawn nominations or less serious representations, we did not apprehend that such a suggestion would be treated as an intrusion or invasion of any prerogative of the nominating power. We were disappointed. Immediately the papers, especially in articles and dispatches written by them in close and constant association with the President and with influential members of his cabinet, teemed with violent denunciations of Senators from New York for opposing the administration and dictating to the President.

Persons who cited the executive mansion reported the President as resentful and impatient of dictation, to what he proposed. We have not seen any of these reports. We have at all times refused to answer questions of representatives of the President, or make complaint or comment, or even denial, of many untrue charges published against us by officious champions of the administration. Indeed, beyond a confidential consultation with our brother Senators and officials, we have said nothing till now on the subject, nor have we, or either of us, promoted the dead-lock in the Senate in order to prevent or influence action on any nomination, nor have we ever so stated.

Immediately the nominations were published, letters and telegrams in great numbers came from every part of the State, from its leading citizens, protesting against the proposed changes, and condemning them on many grounds. Several thousands of leading mercantile firms of New York, constituting, we are informed, a majority of every branch of trade, sent us remonstrances. Sixty of the eighty-one members of the Republican members of the Assembly, by letter or memorial made objection. Republicans in Congress, State officials, business men, professional men, commercial, industrial and political organizations, are among the persons, strangers, and they speak from every section of the State.

Besides the nominations already referred to, there were awaiting action of the Senate several New York nominations for offices connected with the courts, district attorneys and marshals. These were all resp. appointments. The most of them had been originally commissioned by Mr. Hayes, and were recommended by judges of the court, and many other eminent persons who attested their faithfulness and merit, and recommend their continuance. They were not presented by us. We have not attempted to dictate, nor have we asked the nomination of one person to any office in the State. Indeed, with the exception of the written request set forth above, we have never expressed an opinion to the President in any case, unless questioned in regard to it.

Some days ago the President abruptly withdrew, in one and the same act, the names of Gen. Woodford, Mr. Tenny, and of two marshals. This unprecedented proceeding, unauthorized by law or precedent, and of grave significance. The President has nominated these officers after they had been weighed in the balance. Their official records were before him and had been scrutinized and approved. It may be presumed that the nominations fit to be made and that it was his duty to make them. There is no allegation that he discovered any unfitness in them afterwards. It could hardly be that he had discovered unfitness in all of them alike. What then was the meaning and purpose of this peremptory step? It was immediately stated, as if by authority, and seems to be admitted, that the purpose was to coerce the Senate to vote as they would not vote if left free from executive interference. The purpose was to control the action of the Senators touching matters committed by the constitution to the Senate and the Senate exclusively. It was to create a displeasure, and by calling these nominations and holding them in his own hands, the President might in the event of failure of another nomination use them to compensate that failure.

It can be supposed that all these public trusts are to be, or would in an event, be personal perquisites to be handled and disposed of, not only to punish the independence of Senatorial votes and action, but to liquidate the personal obligations of the individual, however high in station, the conditions are utterly vicious and degrading, and their acceptance would compel representatives of the States to fling down their oaths and representative duty at the foot of the executive power. Following this sweeping and startling executive act, came ominous avowals that dissent or future "adverse consent" would be held an act of offense, exposing all Senators, from whatever State, to executive displeasure.

Thus we find ourselves confronted by the question whether we shall surrender the plain right and duty of Senators, by consenting to what we believe to be vicious and hurtful, or be assigned a position of disloyalty to the administration which we helped to make, or the success of which we earnestly wished. For every reason and motive which can enter into the case, we know no theory advanced by any party which requires such submission as we are exacted. Although party service may be fairly considered in making selections of public officers, it can hardly be maintained that the Senate is bound to remove, without cause, incumbents merely to make places for those whom any individual, even a President or member of the cabinet, wishes to repay for being recreant to others or serviceable to him only. About two years ago the Senate advised Gen. Merritt to appoint collector at New York. It was understood that among the Senators who so advised, was Mr. Windom, now secretary of a department whose subordinate Gen. Merritt is. Another Senator known to us, and whose integrity and capability we know, was Mr. Kirkwood, now secretary of the interior. It is said that like the postmaster general from our own State, these cabinet officers were not taken into consultation touching the removal of Gen. Merritt, but their views and official action as Senators is none the less instructive. The late secretary of the treasury and the late administrator, up to his expiration, less than two weeks ago, approved Gen. Merritt as an officer of well known integrity and capability. No citizen has petitioned for the removal of that official. Delinquency on his part is not charged, but it is proposed in place of this experienced officer, in

the midst of his term fixed by law, to suddenly put a man in who has had no training for the position and who cannot be said to have any special qualifications. The inaugural of President Garfield, delivered on the 4th of March, contains these words: "The civil service can never be placed on a satisfactory basis until it is regulated by an explicit law of the service. It is the protection of those who are intrusted with the appointing power against waste of time and obstruction of public business caused by inordinate pressure for place, and for protection of incumbents against intrigue and wrong. I shall at the proper time ask Congress to fix the tenure of minor officers of the several executive departments, and prescribe grounds upon which removals shall be made. It is a tenet of our policy that incumbents have been appointed."

However good the claim is which would make major offices a prey to intrigue and wrong, and shield minor offices from like havoc, and whether the collectorships of the country shall belong to the exposed or protected class, it is not for us to decide. Assuming General Merritt to be an officer of average fitness and honesty, it might be reasonably argued that all Senators should with a man in the good of the service. It might be said that all should advise the selection of Gen. Merritt's place of a man, without superior fitness, had rendered his country, or his party, conspicuous and exalted service. The case in hand does not belong to either of these classes. The avocation of Mr. Robertson, and his legislative and Congressional experience and surroundings, do not denote superiority in the qualities, or that knowledge or familiarity with the revenue laws and system of the United States, which might make him more competent than Gen. Merritt to collect the vast revenues and administer the vast business pertaining to the port of New York. He is not in the line of respect he held an exception to the rule of right and consistency of which the constitution and law have placed the public service.

We know of no personal or political service of Mr. Robertson which would entitle him to the collectorship of New York to be taken in the midst of a term and given him as recommended. Mr. Robertson's nomination, as reported by the New York Tribune, was a direct violation of the explicit promise of the National convention. If Mr. Robertson was influenced in his action by a sense of duty, if he voted and acted his honest convictions, it is difficult to see what claim he has on the public. Mr. Robertson and sixty-nine other men accepted from the State convention a certain trust. They sought and accepted the position of agents or delegates to the national convention, and it is to be presumed that they stated judgment and policy was to be observed by that body. To this declaration all selected as delegates gave implied consent, but several of them in addition made most specific personal pledges and engagements to the national convention. 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