

THE WHIG PARTY IN KENTUCKY 1847-1851

Whig against Whig, North against South, East against West



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In that turbulent period in our history between the close of the War with Mexico and the outbreak of hostilities within the country itself there were roughly two periods of increasing crisis in which the forces for discord and disunion mounted in strength against those interests which would make the country a united whole. The first of these two periods in which the two sections of the country were divided and estranged was terminated at the last by a peaceful settlement, a compromise which relieved the nation for a decade more of the consequences of a major war fought entirely on her own soil and between her own people.

This first period, ending in apparent harmony, was concerned with settling the post-war problems posed by our conquests in the Mexican War, with westward expansion, with slavery. In the struggle that took place at this time, between 1847 and 1850, each of the two national political parties took on more and more a sectional role with each party suffering from the resulting internal upheavals and change.

In this political bisection of the country, the Whig party became the dominant force for union and the Democratic party became the spokesman for disruption and dissolution. That the Whig element, or the conservative elements led by the Whigs, was able to prevent the Union from breaking apart at this time was a great national victory and the nation's gain, but union was achieved at a tremendous cost to the Whig party.

In the exact center of this gathering storm was the state of Kentucky. Geographically, economically, and ideologically she was allied to all the great contending forces. Her many navigable rivers, cutting across the state in a series of north-south parallels gave her easy access to the whole Mississippi Basin and at the same time made her peculiarly vulnerable to invasion in any conflict. Her two chief crops of hemp and tobacco were universally used and while much of her livestock was driven to the south there was a general demand for Kentucky-bred cattle, horses, and mules. Situated on the most northern limit of the section in which slavery was profitable, she was both a slave-holding state and a state of small farms on the northern pattern. Settled in two successive waves, and aided by the series of deep swift rivers, she retained an eastern culture in the older northeastern section of the state and in the west was scarcely removed from a pioneer stage.

To these internal differences there was added still another factor peculiar to herself in this period which made her more susceptible to the fluctuations in the national scene than many of the other states and which in turn made her actions of more than usual interest to the whole nation. That factor was the national political leadership furnished in great part by the state at this time, making the local political loyalties of greater intensity and of more prophetic consequence.

Kentucky had followed the career of her native son and accepted leader of the Whig party, Henry Clay, through a series of political defeats which had evoked scenes of near personal bereavement within the state, particularly after his defeat as a presidential candidate

in 1844. As the presidential campaign of 1848 approached, the logical candidate for the people of Kentucky to support was their perennial favorite. However, the rather dismal ceremonies that had been observed after his defeat in 1844 had been interpreted by many to be the funeral rites of one whose political life was over, and since that time Clay had done little to improve his position. In a speech at Lexington, Kentucky, November 13, 1847, he managed to lose the support of those Whigs of southern tendencies who favored the Mexican War and expansion by referring to the recent acquisition of Texas as an "irreparable national evil" which had led to the existing "lamentable Mexican War" which he considered an unnecessary act of aggression.¹ This sentiment was expressed despite the obvious popularity of the war in Kentucky² which he admitted himself was as much supported by the Whigs as it was by the Democrats. In the same speech he became so devious in his remarks on the slavery issue that he lost support from

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1. Clay lost a son at the battle of Buena Vista in February of that year, which intensified his disapproval of the war. He wrote to John M. Clayton shortly after his son's death in much the same words he used in this speech. (Henry Clay to John M. Clayton, April 16, 1847, Library of Congress, John M. Clayton Papers. Hereafter cited as Clayton Papers.)
 2. Kentucky was called upon for four regiments of volunteers, or 2400 men. At this call, 105 companies, 75 more than were requested, were organized and presented to the governor. (Richard H. Collins, History of Kentucky Covington, Kentucky, 1874, I, 53. Hereafter cited as R.H. Collins, Kentucky.) Enlistments were so high that some of the factories in Louisville had to close down for this reason. (Hiles' National Register, LXX(1846), 202. Hereafter cited as Hiles').

both the anti-slavery northern Whigs and with the pro-slavery southern Whigs. He felt that slavery was "a great evil, a wrong, to its unfortunate victims. I should rejoice if not a single slave breathed the air or was within the limits of our country...." At the same time, the abolitionists were named mischief-makers, and he mourned that the Colonization Society for the Free People of Color which he had helped organize in 1816, and to which he was still nominally pledged, had come into being too late to remedy the situation. He further muddled his position by saying in his concluding remarks on the subject that although he considered slavery to be unjust, there were some things that "it is not always safe, practicable or possible...to repair,... that we may oppose and denounce...but after its consummation, there is but to deplore its perpetration, and to acquiesce as the only course, in its existence, as a less evil than the frightful consequences which might ensue from the vain endeavor to repair it...."³

After this, there were many who felt that Clay had sufficiently alienated a large enough group of Whigs both north and south to prevent the party from succeeding with him at the head. There were other sentiments expressed - a general pessimism and doubt that the party would ever win with Clay because of his record of three unsuccessful attempts at the presidency. One such remark from a prominent Whig, the Rev. Robert J. Breckinridge, pastor of the first Presbyterian Church in Lexington, Kentucky, was very aptly phrased when he said: "Mr. Clay's

3. Whig Almanac and United States Register (New York, 1848), pp. 7-16.
Hereafter cited as Whig Almanac.

race is run: there is an end of all things: even of running for the Presidency. He is a grand old fellow, but he is finished...."⁴

Breckinridge, at this time the superintendent of public instruction for the state, was having difficulties with the Whig legislature over the money necessary for his schools and was somewhat free with his criticisms of both party leaders and principles. Only twelve days after Clay's Lexington Speech he startled his congregation with a Thanksgiving sermon which treated the Mexican War as a part of our national growth. The democratic newspapers immediately played up the sermon as a division in the party. In one case there was a somewhat exaggerated story of the occasion under the headline "A VOICE FROM MR. CLAY'S HOME." In this account it was emphasized that Breckinridge was a noted Whig and had taken the ground that the "war with Mexico was just, and should be vigorously prosecuted to an honorable termination; that the President was perfectly justifiable in the course he had pursued....Some of his friends are endeavoring to prevent a publication of the sermon...believing that it will injure Mr. Clay."⁵ Breckinridge was somewhat confused and amazed at the political results of his sermon. Three days afterwards he wrote an indignant letter to a friend in which he denied having said anything to cause such a furor. "The newspapers," he wrote, "did me great injustice, in the publications to which you allude about my discourse on the day of public thanksgiving. I did not

4. Robert J. Breckinridge to S.R. Williams, Esq., January 28, 1848, Library of Congress, Breckinridge Family Papers. Hereafter cited as Breckinridge Papers.

5. Breckinridge Papers. Undated clipping in volume 129, item number 23842.

say a word about party politics. My text was 'The Lord God Omnipotent Reigneth'; and I took occasion to illustrate in the history of the nations of the earth...&, briefly & incidentally, to allude to this Mexican War, as one episode, in our national development;...it made an immense sensation; which greatly astonished me. But the person who published the letter you saw, told hardly a word of truth, except that I really did preach. Some of my private opinions - which I did not utter - he seemed to have known; and having exaggerated & distorted them, he said I preached them. While I am thus writing - I may add, that nothing is more clear to me, than that General Taylor is the choice of this state; & that Mr. Clay, cannot, in any event, that is likely to happen get its electoral vote. I shall not be surprised if the old General is nominated, at Frankfort this winter; nor even if the Whig members of the Legislature, participate in that act...."⁶

Many other Kentucky Whigs believed that Clay had tried three times and failed and they wanted to win this time. John J. Crittenden, destined for a time to replace Clay in national and state influence in the Whig party, and then a senator in Congress, was one of the very early supporters of General Taylor.⁷ In 1848 he wrote to his close friend, Albert T. Burnley, that while he preferred Clay to any other man for the presidency, he did not believe that he could be elected. With Taylor, he felt the Whig party had a chance.⁸ Crittenden, with Robert Toombs

6. R.J. Breckinridge to S.R. Williams, Esq., January 28, 1848, Breckinridge Papers.

7. Arthur C. Cole, The Whig Party in the South (Washington, American Historical Association, 1913), p. 127. Hereafter cited as A.C. Cole, Whig Party.

8. Mrs. Chapman Coleman, The Life of John J. Crittenden (Philadelphia, 1871), I, p. 290. Hereafter cited as Mrs. C. Coleman, Life of Crittenden.

and Alexander Stephens of Georgia, and others, was among those in Congress who began the Taylor movement as a southern reaction to the Clay principles of nationalism and believed that by electing Taylor on the crest of his war popularity they would have a president they could control for sectional purposes. Taylor was known to be a slaveholder and a southerner and it was believed that he would give the South the power of his veto.⁹

Taylor was immediately popular in Kentucky as a presidential candidate. Although he had been born in Virginia, he was considered a Kentucky man because he had been reared on Beargrass Creek, only a few miles from the present city of Louisville.¹⁰ He was a military hero from a war that Kentucky had just supported with great enthusiasm and one which those Whigs who had approved of it could sustain, and by their votes reflect some measure of credit to themselves.

Clay could not understand the sudden popularity of Taylor, and feared the effects upon the Whig party in the free states when the fact was generally known that Kentucky was not supporting him.¹¹ He was persuaded by his friends in Washington not to withdraw from the race, but the sudden support of Taylor caused him to write in great perplexity to his lifelong friend, General Leslie Coombs, "Great surprise exists here as to the hot haste of our Taylor friends in Kentucky. Why is it? I am often asked, without being able to give any very satisfactory answer.... After the long period of time during

9. A.C. Cole, Whig Party, pp. 127-128.

10. Holman Hamilton, Zachary Taylor, Soldier of the Republic (Indianapolis, New York, 1941), p. 25.

11. Calvin Colton, The Works of Henry Clay, Comprising His Life, Correspondence and Speeches (New York, 1904), V, 555.

which I have had the happiness to enjoy the friendship and confidence of that State, what have I done, it is inquired to lose it?"¹² General Scott, perhaps with a design to induce Clay to resign from the contest, since he was also a candidate for the same office, informed Clay of some Washington gossip he had heard from an unidentified source, that none of the Kentucky delegation in Congress was supporting him.¹³ At least there was some basis for this rumor in the person of Crittenden, who was urging General Taylor's cause with the secret ambition of succeeding him to that place after a consolidation of the Whig party in the Taylor administration. A letter from General Taylor to Clay written on April 30, 1848, which explained his grounds for maintaining his candidacy was worded much like some of the letters Crittenden was writing at the same time to others in Kentucky on behalf of Taylor. The General explained he would not have continued but for the urgency of some of Clay's own warm personal and political friends.¹⁴

To the Whigs in Kentucky the nomination of the Whig candidate for president was a decision between two Kentucky candidates, Clay from the Bluegrass, and Taylor from western Kentucky, a gentleman of culture/ against a frontier soldier, an anti-expansionist against an expansionist, Whig against Whig and Kentuckian against Kentuckian.

In the midst of the confusion in the Whig ranks over the presidential candidates, there was posed the additional controversial

12. Ibid., p. 554.

13. Ibid., pp. 570-571.

14. Ibid., pp. 557-558.

problem of electing a governor of the state, but this election was seen very closely identified with the national controversy. It was believed that if Taylor were nominated for president the resulting popularity would carry over to the gubernatorial contest, and the Whigs would be assured of the governorship.¹⁵

The two strongest candidates for governor both had many personal enemies and it was feared that either of them might be beaten by the Democrats who would at any rate give the Whigs a hard fought battle.¹⁶ The possibilities for success were sufficiently doubtful to cause John J. Crittenden to allow his name to be used as a candidate to pull the party together and defeat the Democrats. The few days before the Whig nominating convention was held in Frankfort was described as a period of the greatest excitement with plenty of log rolling and constant conferences.¹⁷ A contemporary described the scene on the day of the convention and showed how closely the state and national elections were associated in the minds of the people.

There was a great crowd in F. [Frankfort] the 22nd. The Convention resulted as you may have heard in the unanimous nomination of Mr. Crittenden. This I had anticipated on Saturday as I passed through Frankfort. The friends of the different candidates were determined that neither of the three should be nominated except their favorite. In this state of case the nomination of some fourth man was inevitable for the strength of the three candidates was so equally balanced [sic] that neither could secure a majority in Convention. Mr. Crittenden's nomination will be received with enthusiasm throughout the State and I doubt if any opposition will

15. William C. Anderson to Isaac Shelby, Jr., February 17, 1848, Breckinridge Papers.

16. William C. Anderson to Isaac Shelby, Jr., February 12, 1848, Breckinridge Papers.

17. Ibid.

will be made by the Democratic party. The Taylor meeting Monday night at the capitol was attended with so much excitement and ill feeling between the friends of Mr. Clay and Genl Taylor, that many were alarmed with the apprehension that the Party would never be reconciled again but the nominations of Mr. Crittenden and Helm the next day has quieted local jealousies and tended to harmonize the party on the Presidential question. We may now look for a splendid triumph at the next election.¹⁸

After receiving the nomination, Crittenden resigned from the Senate on June 22, 1849, in order to make the race for governor. However, the election was not an easy one for the Whig party in spite of the hoped-for nomination of Taylor by the national Whig convention in Philadelphia just prior to the election. The results might have been even worse had there not been a fortunate confusion among the Democrats over one candidate, Richard M. Johnson, once vice-president of the United States, who refused for a time to withdraw even after the Democratic Central Committee had announced Lazarus W. Powell as the official candidate for the party.¹⁹

The election was a Whig victory, but a close one. Participation was high. Out of a total possible vote of 141,620 eligible voters, 124,411 votes or 88 per cent were cast. Crittenden received 66,465 votes to 57,945 for Powell - a majority for the Whigs of 8,521 votes.²⁰ This represented, however, a sharp recovery for the Whigs from the universal loss they had sustained generally over the state in 1847 at a time when the Whigs, under the leadership of Clay, were denouncing

18. John M. Todd to Isaac Shelby, Jr., February 24, 1848, Breckinridge Papers.

19. Charles Kerr, ed., History of Kentucky (Chicago, New York, 1922), II, 831. Hereafter cited as C. Kerr, Kentucky History.

20. R.H. Collins, Kentucky, II, 831.

the Mexican War and expansion. The additional support of the conservative Democrats after the announcement of Taylor's victory at the National Convention had been enough for the time being, to counterbalance the loss of the Clay Whigs.²¹

The national Whig nominating convention which had met in Philadelphia on June 1, 1848, had fought out the contest between Taylor and Clay, widened the breach between the two factions in the party, and pointed out their sectional bases.

The sectional voting on the actual candidates was foreshadowed at the very beginning of the first day's meeting by a vote taken on representation in that body. In organizing the convention it was found that every state but Texas was represented,²² and that at least Arkansas was not fully represented.²³ A resolution was presented which would have made it possible for the majority of the delegates from states not fully represented to vote for districts from which there were no delegates. The votes followed a fairly strict north-south pattern, with the northern states voting against the resolution and the southern states voting for it.²⁴

21. See Appendix.

22. She authorized Texas to vote for her.

23. Hiles', LXXIII, pp. 355-356.

24.	Aye	No		Aye	No
Massachusetts	0	12	Virginia	11	6
Vermont	0	6	Kentucky	11	1
Rhode Island	0	4	Tennessee	13	0
New York	2	34	North Carolina	2	9
Pennsylvania	8	17	South Carolina	0	2
New Jersey	3	4	Georgia	10	0
New Hampshire	3	3	Florida	3	0
Connecticut	3	2	Alabama	6	1
Delaware	1	2	Mississippi	6	0
Ohio	0	23	Louisiana	6	0
Indiana	6	6	Texas	4	0
Illinois	2	11	Arkansas	3	0
Michigan	0	5	Missouri	7	0
Maryland	5	3			

(Hiles', LXIV, 356.)

Significantly enough, the Kentucky vote of 11 to 1 was the same vote she finally gave to Taylor on the last ballot of the convention. Although Kentucky was fully represented,²⁵ she voted in the southern pattern, predicting the final vote against Clay.

On the first three ballots for the nomination, five of the Kentucky delegates, among them James Harlan, voted for Clay. Seven of them, including John A. McClung, voted for Taylor. On the fourth and last ballot all of the delegates from Kentucky voted for Taylor except James Harlan, a close personal friend of Clay.²⁶

There was a sprinkling of these single unyielding Clay supporters from many of the states when the final vote was taken, and the speeches that were made at the conclusion of the convention were much more preoccupied with the defeat of Clay than they were with the victory of Taylor. An Alabama delegate expressed the feelings of this group when he said he had voted for Clay every time and would have if the convention had sat until next November. Richardson of Maryland said he would have walked barefoot from the Arcostock to the Rio Grande to make Clay president. Ex-Governor John M. Morehead of North Carolina, the presiding officer of the convention, in a long speech concluding the last meeting declared that he had been defeated in the first wish of his heart when Clay had lost the nomination. He emphasized the cleavage among the Whigs when he said he considered himself "among the vanquished party."²⁷ There

25. Ibid., p. 349; R.H. Collins, Kentucky, I, 57.

26. Ibid.

27. Niles, LXXIV, 388.

were others who saw that the election of Taylor had caused the formation of a "Taylor Party" from which they, as followers of Clay, would be excluded.²⁸ Clay himself, when he heard the news of his defeat, declared that the Whig party was dead and refused to support the Taylor regime in any way during the period between the convention and the election in November. For the part which he played against Clay in this convention Crittenden received the lifelong enmity of Clay, which extended to near feud intensity between the two families even after Clay's death.

The presidential election in November found the voters of Kentucky in large part duplicating the votes they had given to Crittenden for governor, with a slight general increase over the state in the per cent of Whig vote to the total vote cast. Taylor polled 67,486 votes to 49,865 for Cass, a majority of 17,621.²⁹ There was a decrease of 5 per cent in the total votes cast.

The southern Whigs had carried the state for Crittenden and Taylor with the help of the Democrats, but at an expense to the Whig party. Many of the Clay Whigs remained loyal to the old party principles and would not vote for Taylor. These were soon further alienated by their exclusion from the patronage in Kentucky by Crittenden, and in the national government by the determination of General Taylor to have a non-party government, which actually resulted in the few places given to the Whigs going to his own supporters.

28. C. Colton, Life of Clay, V, 554.

29. R.H. Collins, Kentucky, I, 87.

There is evidence to support the theory that at least in the early days of General Taylor's administration when he had not yet taken much personal control of the government, Crittenden exercised an unusual amount of power in the national government from his position as governor of Kentucky. As governor of one of the strong Whig states and as a leader in the original Taylor faction, he was in a position to demand and receive almost presidential powers. He had given up his own very good chances as a presidential candidate because he considered Taylor's cause to be the only sure chance for victory. In return, he desired to be the successor to Taylor in that office, and soon set about his scheme to consolidate his plans to that end. These plans consisted of a series of clever maneuvers to keep the power of the new Taylor Party as completely within his own hands as possible, first through an attempt to dominate General Taylor and then when that failed, through domination of the cabinet to the exclusion of the president. There was also involved the placing of as many Kentucky men as possible in Washington to give Crittenden a more complete grasp of national affairs until he became actually the President of the United States, the successor to Taylor.

General Taylor was known to have no particular party prejudices and his few strong beliefs had not had a chance to appear when the initial "plans" were laid for his administration. Crittenden was looked upon from the beginning as the inevitable choice of the General for his secretary of state, and was urged by many of his

friends to accept the place when offered. Situated as he was as a newly-elected governor, and with his every act open to the bitter criticisms of both the Democrats and the die-hard Clay Whigs, Crittenden was pressed to know what to do. In addition, a group of reformers and the democrats of the state had seized their opportunity while the Whigs were disunited and had called for a constitutional convention to revise the old constitution of the state to remove many of the old Whig advantages. To go to Washington and use his influence directly on the government at the expense of losing his control of the state for the Taylor Whigs, or to keep his state for Taylor at the risk of using his influence only indirectly was the decision he had to make. In the end he must have felt that his own position as a potential candidate for president must be preserved as well from the charges of "corrupt bargain" which had hounded Clay throughout his career.

J.A. McClung, who had been one of the Kentucky delegates to the national Whig convention in Philadelphia, and who had voted for Taylor and thus for Crittenden from the first ballot, revealed much in his letter to Crittenden dated January 8, 1849.

You are now at the turning point of your destiny....You will certainly be offered the lead in General Taylor's cabinet, and I am satisfied that if you decline it you will never regret it but once and that will be forever. I shall speak frankly!... I am told that it is your present purpose to decline a seat in General Taylor's cabinet, and that you are inclined to serve out your time as Governor of Kentucky.... this will be fatal to you....General Taylor will come into office without experience....He is a man of great simplicity of character, frank, confiding, and ignorant of that complex machinery which pervades the political atmosphere of Washington. If he falls into wrong hands his Administration will soon be involved in difficulties and disasters, which

will result in ruin to himself and all who have contributed to exalt him. It will require a master hand and...a leading mind at headquarters...to keep him in the right and safe course. Now there is no man in the United States, who will suffer half so much from any false step taken by Taylor as your self. If Taylor eats our grapes, your teeth will be on edge, although you should be removed a thousand miles from him. You cannot possibly survive a misstep taken by him. Now if you are to bear the responsibility, should you not have a voice in the direction?...In taking your stand for Taylor you threw the die for empire or a grave! For a time it was uncertain which would be the result. A grave was dug for you, and thousands who voted for you, desired that you might fall into it. This I know positively. You have done that which will never be forgiven....They [Glay Whigs] bide their time and upon the first opportunity will eagerly spring at your throat. To my certain personal knowledge they desired Taylor's defeat, and in October were exulting at the prospect of the ruin of the Taylor party, and the Execution of the Ringleader....Go into Taylor's cabinet. Be the heart and soul of the Administration....By your counsel his Administration will last eight years and during that eight years you may be its soul and its strength. Eight years is far enough to look ahead. What may not eight years develop....The people have endorsed your course, by electing your favorite...do you think the same people will not be gratified to have your aid in counseling and directing their favorite... 30

The people of the eastern part of the state were not in complete accord on the question of the cabinet position as McClung intimated in another part of his letter, and a friend in the western portion of the state confirmed the fact that even among the political friends of Crittenden there was much dissention over the matter. ^{The latter} ~~He~~ added that there was as well much criticism from the Glay contingent who realized that they would have little enough influence in the Taylor party and did not want to see the cabinet strengthened by the addition of Crittenden. ³¹ A newspaper campaign which was going on at this time and which purported to show that Crittenden's intentions had been

30. John A. McClung to John J. Crittenden, January 6, 1849, Library of Congress, John J. Crittenden Papers. Hereafter cited as Crittenden Papers.

31. Judge R. Shackelford to John J. Crittenden, January 30, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

to withdraw from the presidential race and run for governor in order to save the state for Taylor and then as a reward to go immediately into the cabinet made his position rather uncomfortable.³²

However, from Washington came a steady stream of requests for his presence.³³ Among them was one from the son-in-law of General Taylor, Jefferson Davis, who wrote to Crittenden on January 19, 1849, "I did not intend to have said one word to you about the new administration as I feel quite content with the result and willing that good Genl. Taylor should have his own unbiased way in organizing his administration but they all believe or affect to believe that you were by the vote of the people elected Secretary of State (in which I concur and hope you will take your place without any countermoving) and must therefore from your position as well as the friendly relations which exist between you and the Genl. know much of what is very apparent that many fears and anxieties exist - that there are projects and counterprojects - marchings and countermarchings all which you will readily understand if you have been attentive to passing events."³⁴

Crittenden was not only attentive to passing events but he was busy in some projects and counterprojects of his own. His friend Albert T. Burnley was sent on a mission to Baton Rouge, where General

32. P.W. Hefkins to John J. Crittenden, January 2, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

33. Crittenden Papers, 1848, 1849.

34. Jefferson Davis to John J. Crittenden, January 19, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

Taylor was living at the time, to sound out the president-elect and see how far he could be influenced in the selection of the rest of his cabinet appointments. Unfortunately, the General showed an independent spirit that forced Crittenden to use a more subtle means of control, which consisted in keeping the president as nearly a mere figurehead as possible.

Burnley reported from New Orleans, after having visited the "old gentleman" at Baton Rouge, that when he broached the subject of political preference for the members of the societies of "Original Taylor Men" and of pledging himself not to run for a second time, "He told me to tell you, he would disregard all 'Societies,' & make no pledges in any way about the succession."³⁵ Furthermore, Taylor stated to Burnley at this time that he intended to spread out his cabinet appointments over the country and that there could be but one Kentucky member. Crittenden had hoped to get at least one other Kentucky Whig into the cabinet if he decided to go into it himself, and desired ex-governor Robert P. Letcher in the cabinet if he found his own political fortunes required him to stay in Kentucky. Both of these ambitions were dissolved when Burnley repeated a part of the General's conversation: "In commenting on a remark...that it was understood you wished Letcher to go in to the Cabinet, I was very sorry to hear the Genl say- no, after I have offered one appointment to Ky, if it is declined, I must go on to Tennessee....From Ky, you are his first choice, & the only one he has written to. He fears you will decline, but still

35. Albert T. Burnley to John J. Crittenden, January 12, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

has some hope you will not."³⁶ An even more serious threat to Crittenden's power over the president was seen in the warning Burnley plainly gave him when he said: "...the old gentleman is very much bothered because he does not know all these men, & will therefore have to enquire and consult with his friends - which he would rather not do - for I tell you he means to be president of these United States himself."³⁷

Meanwhile, Clay had been modifying his position as an undying opponent to the Taylor regime as the senatorial elections approached, and in 1849 was returned to the United States Senate by the Kentucky Legislature. This was a cause for consternation both at Washington and in Kentucky, among those who hoped to benefit from the triumph of the Taylor faction. Alexander H. Stephens felt that Taylor would be most insidiously influenced by Clay who was, according to Stephens, endowed with a malignant heart full of hate and revenge for those who had cheated him of the presidency.³⁸ Jefferson Davis was concerned over the evil influence he would have in both houses of Congress. He felt that "many who would have done very well in his absence will give way in his presence. This will also introduce a new element in the selection of the Genls. Cabinet. It must be composed of men of nerve and of no Clay affinities....You see that I disregard Mr. Clay's pledge to support the administration...."³⁹ Kentucky people also expressed

³⁶. Ibid.

³⁷. Ibid.,

³⁸. Alexander H. Stephens to John J. Crittenden, February 6, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

³⁹. Jefferson Davis to John J. Crittenden, January 30, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

this doubt about Clay's sincerity. From the western part of the state one correspondent wrote to Crittenden that he was "by no means satisfied that that state of brotherly love exists between Clay and Taylor that some of the public press would have us believe."⁴⁰

Another, from the Bluegrass section, had more specific grounds for his fears when he said that "the Clay party are not dead, and...they will be armed neutrals during Taylor's administration, and if he does not please them, they will make him feel the weight of their battle axe. Mr. Clay was in Bourbon during the cattle show in October [1848] and I have it upon most unquestionable authority that his whole conversation to his warm partisans from Mason and Fleming, breathed the most bitter hostility to the whole Taylor Party....

Now it seems that he loves Taylor above all things, and is corresponding with him upon the most intimate and friendly terms...."⁴¹

Such a state of brotherly love did not suit Crittenden's purposes at all, and he made sure that any direct personal influence of Clay upon Taylor was obviated, when he sent his friend Burnley to Baton Rouge. In this matter, Burnley was highly successful. On January 12, 1849, he wrote that, "All intimacy or confidence between Genl. Taylor & Mr. Clay is among the things that were. He has seen a copy of a letter written by Mr. Clay in September... but the

40. Robert Patterson to John J. Crittenden, February 5, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

41. John A. McGlun to John J. Crittenden, January 6, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

contents did not surprise him at all -- it was nothing more than he expected. He says he has known Mr. Clay longer & knows him better, than you do... ⁴² Clay had said in a letter in September that he was definitely opposed to the elevation to the presidency of any "mere military man" and that he would not support the Taylor administration. In speaking of his own voting he did not say that he intended to vote in a way that would be most beneficial to the nation but "as I think may be most likely to be least injurious to the country."⁴³

Having failed somewhat to influence the independent Taylor, Crittenden had nevertheless accomplished his purpose in keeping Clay and the president apart. He next turned to the cabinet officials. His own refusal of the office of secretary of state despite his obvious popularity had placed the incumbent, John M. Clayton, in a peculiarly indebted position - both negatively, because Crittenden had refused the place, and positively because he had then urged the selection of Clayton upon Taylor.⁴⁴ This position became of more and more use to Crittenden as Clayton became increasingly dependent upon his advice in matters ranging from petty consular appointments to recognition of foreign governments. On March 16, 1849, Clayton wrote, "I have minded all your admonitions... this friend you wanted

42. Albert T. Burnley to John J. Crittenden, January 12, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

43. G. Colton, Life of Clay, V, 573-574. Clay had said, however, before the nominating convention met in Philadelphia that he would vote for Taylor over Scott among the military candidates. (Henry Clay to John M. Clayton, April 16, 1847, Clayton Papers.)

44. Brainerd Dyer, Zachary Taylor (Baton Rouge, 1946), p. 314. Hereafter cited as B. Dyer, Taylor.

in the cabinet (as I also did) shall have a full mission abroad - I mean L. [Letcher]... Speak freely to me for I am devoted to you. Tell me how I can serve you."⁴⁵ Again he wrote in the same vein, "Write me confidentially who ought to be full minister from Kentucky - who charges so - Oh! that I could see you one hour!"⁴⁶ Letcher was, after a struggle, made Minister to Mexico over another candidate who had had the post before, knew the people, and spoke the language. Crittenden's son was made consul at Liverpool, in spite of Taylor's recommendation of Governor Edward Kent of Maine.⁴⁷ The Mexican post was considered of first rank at the time because of the diplomatic aspects, and the Liverpool consulate was one of the most lucrative of its kind.

In addition to these specific posts, there were many minor ones which Clayton had it in his power to give, in general. Crittenden wrote to him and told him to pay particular attention to the consular appointments because he understood that they were used in indoctrinating the emigrants with political ideas before they arrived.⁴⁸ General Taylor's reluctance to make these offices political appointments was effectively set aside.

45. John M. Clayton to John J. Crittenden, March 16, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

46. Ibid., May 7, 1849.

47. B. Dyer, Taylor, p. 325.

48. John J. Crittenden to John M. Clayton, May 12, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

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Clayton found an official and just cause for removal of many of these to which he said Taylor could not object - failure to make out their semi-annual returns. He reported to Crittenden that he could remove some twenty in this manner, and forty more for what he considered a "good cause." He revealed his position of loyalty to the governor of Kentucky rather than to Taylor when he said in a letter to Crittenden: "I am toiling 12 hours a day for you... Keep up my courage... We are doing well in spite of difficulties & shall overrun them all. But pat me on the back."⁴⁹ It was no wonder that Gideon Welles recorded in his diary, "if Genl. Taylor only knew what I know of that rascal he would go straight from his house to the State Department and kick his backsides out, and tell him to be gone forever."⁵⁰

The Navy Department, as well, would seem to have been involved in the defection. In a long letter to Crittenden, Charles W. Morgan, U.S. Navy,⁵¹ incidentally showed that he believed that any interference by Crittenden in naval matters would be immediately effective. He feared that he was not going to get the command of the Mediterranean squadron and was further annoyed that he might not get the flagship he wanted from his rival. He concluded his letter with the remark, "Pray

49. John M. Clayton to John J. Crittenden, May 31, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

50. Entry of June 12, 1849, Diary of Gideon Welles, Huntington Library. Requoted from B. Dyer, Taylor.

51. In 1849, Morgan ranked fourteenth on the list of Naval Officers, according to date of present commission. (House Executive Document 27, Thirty-first Congress, First Session, "Letter from the Secretary of the Navy, Transmitting a Report of the Pay and Allowances of the Officers of the Navy and Marine Corps, for the Year Ending June 30, 1849.")

let him have her fitted out, if he can - and then, do you have her sent to the Mediterranean as my Flag Ship."⁵²

Whether or not at Crittenden's instigation, Morgan was given the Mediterranean command. It was found "necessary to order a senior captain to the command of the Mediterranean squadron. Commodore Morgan was selected; he sailed from the United States in the steamer Mississippi, on the 7th of June. Important considerations made it necessary, in the judgment of the department, to increase the force in the Mediterranean. By active exertions, two vessels, in addition to the Mississippi, (the razez Independence and the frigate Cumberland) were dispatched;... "⁵³

By June, 1849, the appointment of Crittenden's secretary of state, Orlando Brown, to the office of Commissioner of Indian Affairs, a position equal to a cabinet appointment in its powers for party purposes, led Clay to protest in a letter to Nicholas Dean, "It is undeniable that the public patronage has been too exclusively confined to the original supporters of General Taylor, without sufficient regard to the merits and just claims of the great body of the whig party. This is both wrong and impolitic."⁵⁴ A friend of Clay's, and formerly a strong Whig leader in Kentucky, General Leslie Coombs, confirmed the fact that the ordinary variety of Whig might as well not be in the party at all in Kentucky. In a very outspoken way he wrote his views

52. Charles W. Morgan to John J. Crittenden, April 26, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

53. Senate Document 5, Thirty-first Congress, First Session, "Report of the Secretary of the Navy, December 1, 1849," p. 427.

54. G. Colton, Life of Clay, V, 587.

to Crittenden and added, "I have been credibly informed that such is the fact at Washington as well as in Kentucky."⁵⁵ Perhaps as a counter measure, Clay, at Washington, applied personally to General Taylor for a diplomatic post for his son. When granted, the ensuing clamor redounded to the discredit of the whole Taylor Party and brought some stern letters of reprimand from Crittenden to Clayton, to quiet the storm about their ears.

Orlando Brown, in the meantime, was the eyes and ears of Crittenden in Washington, keeping close to the president according to his instructions.⁵⁶ In July, he reported that something was going wrong with the machine. The people were beginning to be dissatisfied with the ceremonies that had been put up to keep them from seeing the cabinet members freely. Letters of recommendation were neglected, it was charged. The cabinet officials would not talk to anybody but each other about measures or appointments, and above all the president seemed impossible to reach. There were suspicious comments that the cabinet seemed "to be marvelously of one mind upon every subject, even the minutist...." He warned that there was a growing sentiment "for change, daily getting louder until it must reach the White House.... [and] if the President does not come to be considered as an acting principle in politics and not merely as a consenting instrument...it will be impossible for us to hold our own.... [However] it would not do to intimate that the President himself was mistaken as to the part he really took in the Council."⁵⁷

55. Leslie Coombs to John J. Crittenden, May 25, 1849, Crittenden Papers.

56. B. Dyer, Taylor, p. 313.

57. Orlando Brown to John J. Crittenden, July 10, 1849, Crittenden Papers.