

WOOLLENS BILL.

[Remarks of Mr. BUCHANAN, of Pa. before a County meeting at Lancaster, on the Woollens Bill.]

Mr. Chairman:—I never rose with more pleasure to address an assembly, than upon the present occasion. This meeting presents a spectacle which is the strongest illustration of the freedom and excellence of our institutions. You have called upon me, as your representative, to render you an account of my conduct, in regard to the Woollen Bill. To the people of this congressional district I hold myself responsible, and to them I shall therefore cheerfully answer. As your representative, I have no doubt often erred in judgment; but that I have ever intentionally abandoned the rights or the interests of my constituents, no person, I trust, within the sound of my voice, will for one moment believe. Such an abandonment of duty would, upon my part, be the basest ingratitude as well as the blackest guilt. I am bound to you by every tie which can bind man to his fellow men.

Friendly to the tariff policy as you know I am and ever have been, still reflection has only served more firmly to convince me of the propriety of my vote against the Woollen Bill. Before I proceed to state the reasons which induced me thus to vote, it will be proper to explain to the meeting the nature of its provisions.

Immediately after the organization of the federal government, congress, in the preamble to the act of 1789, recognized the policy of protecting domestic manufactures. Under that act, the duty upon the importation of woollen goods was fixed at five per cent. This duty has been increased, from time to time, until at length, by the tariff of 1824, it was raised from 25 to 33 1-3 per cent. This is the present nominal duty. The actual duty is greater, because in estimating it, you must add ten per cent to the cost of the article at the place from which it is imported, and calculate the duty upon the aggregate. Thus, if a yard of woollen cloth cost one dollar at Liverpool, you add to this ten per cent, which makes \$1 10. Thirty-three and one third per cent, upon that sum gives you the actual rate of duty, which is equal to 36 2-3 per cent. Every man in this country, who purchases a coat of imported cloth, pays a tax of 36 2-3 per cent, upon its original cost, for the benefit of domestic manufactures and of the public revenue. Thus stands the law at present.

At an early period of the last session of congress, many petitions were presented from New England, alleging that the tariff of 1824, had been evaded at our custom houses, and that the protection which it meant to extend to our woollen manufacturers, was not afforded. For this evil, the petitioners asked a remedy; and I never heard a member of congress express an opinion adverse to their petition. The language of one and all was, let the act of 1824, be fairly executed; if frauds against its provisions have been committed, let them be prevented & punished. The committee of domestic manufactures, instead of reporting a bill for this purpose, reported the Woollen Bill, which does not contain a solitary provision against the frauds upon the revenue, of which the manufacturers complained.

This bill, nominally, did not increase the existing rate of duty. It was intended to produce its effect in a different manner. Instead of continuing to estimate woollen goods imported into this country, at their real value, it established four arbitrary standards. Thus, in assessing the duty under it, whenever the actual value of a square yard of woollen cloth, at the place whence imported, did not exceed 40 cents, it was valued at 40 cents; when it exceeded 40 cents, and did not exceed \$1 50, it was valued at 1 50; when it exceeded 1 50, and did not exceed 2 50, it was valued at 2 50; and when it exceeded 2 50, and did not exceed \$4 00, it was valued at 4 00. The tariff of 1824, remained unchanged in regard to all cloth which cost \$4 00, or more, the square yard. These arbitrary standards of 40 cents, 1 50, 2 50, and \$4 00, were called minimums.

The nature of the Woollen Bill, will be best explained by a few examples, shewing the manner in which it would have operated.

What would have been the rate of duty to be paid under it, upon a square yard of cloth, worth 50 cents, at the place from which it was imported? In estimating the duty, you must assume the fact, that it was worth 1 50 instead of 50 cents. Add 10 per cent to 1 50 and the aggregate is 1 65. 33 1-3 per cent upon this sum, is equal to 55 cents. Thus it appears, that such a yard of cloth worth 50 cents, under this bill, had it become a law, would have paid a duty of 55 cents or 110 per cent. Under the law, as it now stands, it would pay a duty of 18 2-3 cents.

Under the Woollen Bill, a square yard of cloth, worth but 41 cents at the place whence imported, would have paid the same duty as though it had been worth 1 50. The principle of the bill was, the higher the price, between any two of the minimums, the lower the duty. A yard of cloth worth 41 cents, would have paid

a duty of 55 cents; but if the estimate of its value could have been reduced to 50 cents, the duty would only be 14 2-3 cents.

It may be called unfair in me, to put extreme cases under this Bill. What then would have been its operation upon the three intermediate prices, between the four minimums? They are 95 cents, \$2, and \$3 25. A square yard costing 95 cents, would pay a duty of 58 per cent; if it cost \$2, the duty would be 46 per cent, and if \$3 25; it would be 45. From \$3 25, the duty would have gradually sunk, as the value of the cloth increased, until it arrived at 4, at which point it reached the old duty, and would have been free from the operation of the bill.

Having thus endeavored to explain the nature of the Woollen Bill, I shall now proceed to state to you, some of the reasons which compelled me to vote against it.

And, in the first place, had it become a law, it would have been a grievous tax upon the poor, for the benefit of domestic manufacturers; but it would have imposed little, or no additional burden upon the rich.

Whilst the poor man would have been compelled to pay a tax of 100 per cent upon the coarse cloth which he purchased to cover his nakedness and shield him from the wintry blast; the wealthy individual, who clothed himself with costly raiment, would have paid no more than the existing duty. Such a law would have been unequal and unjust. It

would have violated the spirit of our republican institutions. I do not wish to play the demagogue upon this, or upon any other occasion. The poor man has no right to exclusive advantages, on account of his poverty. He ought to bear his share of the public burdens. He ought to be taxed, as he now is, in proportion to what he purchases. In this respect, he now stands on the same footing with the wealthy. All are now taxed by this equitable rule. I was willing

to increase this burden for the benefit of the Woollen manufacturers, provided the bill had continued to tax all our citizens, in proportion to what they purchased.

It is necessary, that the duty upon the importation of foreign Woollens should be increased, in order that the protection may be afforded, which was intended by the Tariff of 1824. Since the passage of that law, the British Government have reduced the duty upon the importation of foreign wool, from 6d. to 1d. sterling per pound.

The decrease of duty upon the raw material, considerably diminishes the cost of the manufactured article. To

that extent it enables the English manufacturer to enter into competition with the American manufacturer, in our market, upon terms more favourable than he could have done, immediately after the passage of the Tariff of 1824. The relative position of the parties has thus been changed, and the effect upon our manufacturers is the same, as though there had been a reduction of our duties.

Mr. Cooks, of Illinois, made a motion, which was intended to increase the present rate of duty upon all imported woollens, to an extent sufficient to counteract this late British legislation upon the subject. This motion I advocated with all the ability in my power. The friends of the Woollen Bill, however, would not suffer its form to be changed. This motion was defeated, and I was compelled by a sense of duty, to vote against a Bill which would have extorted from poverty its hard earnings, whilst it suffered wealth to escape, without imposing on it any additional burden.

It has been said that a precedent exists in our legislation, for the unequal and unjust provisions of the woollen bill, in the mode by which the domestic manufacture of coarse cottons was protected. Even if that were the case, a dangerous and unjust precedent should not be followed. But there is no foundation for this assertion. In 1816, a single minimum of 25 cents the square yard was established in favor of domestic cottons, which was increased by the Tariff of 1824, to 30 cents. But one minimum exists with respect to cottons—the woollen bill proposed to establish four in regard to woollens. When the one cotton minimum was established, we had a sufficient supply of the raw material not only for ourselves, but for the world; at this time, when every effort is used to establish four woollen minimums, our country does not produce any thing like a supply of wool for the manufacture already in existence. If the friends of the woollen bill had been contented with the single minimum of 40 cents upon woollens, there might have been some resemblance between it and the cotton minimum; but even then the likeness would have been faint. As the Woollen Bill stood at the last session, no parallel can be drawn between them.

I shall now state a second reason for my opposition to this bill. Had it become a law, its tendency would have been to give the woollen manufacturers of the Eastern States a monopoly of the market of the whole Union. Pennsylvania would then have needed a Tariff against New England, as much as a Tariff against Old England. It was said, in Congress that \$40,000,000 of capital had been in-

vested in the woollen manufactures of the Woollen Bill should be recommended to the committee on manufactures with instruction so to amend the same, as to make the duties on the importation of foreign woollen goods and foreign wool, commence at the same time; and to make the duties the same on foreign wool, whether imported upon the skin or not; also to increase the duty on the importation of foreign spirits not less than ten cents per gallon; also to increase the duty on the importation of foreign hemp not less than \$5 per ton."

No question was ever taken upon this motion. A member from New Hampshire rose and moved the previous question, which was sustained by the house and put an end to all amendment and to all debate. The vote was 102 to 98. Every representative from New England except one, voted for the previous question. The friends of the Woollen Bill have all seek our market, where they would find a most strange discriminating duty in their favor. In this manner the remaining eighteen voting against it.

The friends of the Woollen Bill have protect wool and woollens, and afterwards we will protect other articles. I ask have we any

reason to hope, that after we shall have afforded them the protection which they demand, they will assist us in obtaining additional duties for the benefit of the grain and hemp, and manufactures of Pennsylvania. If they will not now vote for an additional duty upon any of these articles, when they have so much at stake, will they generously and voluntarily give it to us, without any equivalent, after they have obtained all they desire? All our experience is at war with such a supposition.

I shall state but another reason, in justification of my conduct, and that is the frauds of the revenue to which the Woollen Bill must have given birth. Our frontier, both upon the ocean and upon the lakes, is so extensive, that there is great danger of smuggling. We should present as little temptation for the commission of this crime, as consists with a proper regard for our domestic manufactures. The unnecessary and extravagant duties imposed on particular classes of woollen goods, by the Woollen Bill, would probably have given rise to a system of smuggling. In this manner our revenue might have suffered, and the morals of our people might have been corrupted.

Frauds of another description must have sprung from this bill. A square yard of cloth costing 40 cents would have paid a duty of only 14 cents and 2-3—whilst if it had cost 41 cents it would have paid a duty of 55 cents. So a square yard which cost \$1 50, would have paid only 55 cents, whilst if it had cost \$1 51, it would have paid a duty of 91 cents and 2-3. One cent of difference in value at the minimums would have made an enormous increase of duty. The temptation to commit fraud upon the revenue, by perjury, would thus have been very great. No man ever would, if he could avoid it, have imported woollen goods into this country which should be valued at a price a little above any of the minimums. Every effort which self-interest could command, would have been used to reduce their value to the minimum price, or below it. A difference of one cent in the price might make a difference of 40 cents in the duty.

Thus perjury and fraud must have been the natural growth of the Woollen Bill. If there had been but one minimum, as is the case with respect to cottons, no such temptation could ever exist. The minimum of thirty cents is the standard of value for the square yard of all cotton goods which cost less than that price; when you get above it the duty rises gradually in proportion to the value of the article. You do not at once leap to a second, to a third, and to a fourth minimum.

Such my fellow citizens, was the bill, against which I voted. So novel, so unequal, so undigested are its provisions, that I never heard a member of congress express entire satisfaction with its details. Indeed many doubted whether after the end of a few years, it would have been of much benefit to the woollen manufacturers themselves. Many believed that the English manufacturers would soon have accommodated their cloth to the minimums which is established, and thus have evaded the additional protection which it intended to afford. Upon the whole, so far from regretting that I did not vote for this bill, I feel sincerely sorry, that circumstances prevented me from opposing it in such a manner as I believed the duty which I owed to my constituents, demanded. I was in the chair, whilst the bill was in committee of the whole, and by the rules of the house, could not then either move to amend it, or participate in the debate.—Without meaning, in the slightest degree to reflect upon others, whose opinions were no doubt, equally honest with my own, I can declare in the most solemn manner before this meeting, that had I voted for the bill I should have done an act at war with my most solemn conviction of duty and with what I firmly believe to be the best interests of my constituents, and of my native state. Still it is possible I may have been mistaken; and to your candid judgment I shall now leave this subject.

The additional duty upon woollens would have taken effect on the 1st August, 1827; whilst upon the wool was not to commence until 1st June, 1828, nor to attain its maximum until 1st June, 1829. Although the growth of wool is in a state of equal depression with its manufacture, yet the wool grower was to suffer for nearly two years, after the manufacturer had been relieved. What would have been the effect of this provision? The manufacturers would have had sufficient time between the passage of the law and the commencement of the additional duty on foreign wool, to lay up a store of that article, sufficient to last them for years. That they intended to adopt this course, no man acquainted with the springs of human action, and the selfish feelings of our nature, can doubt for a moment. The relief, then which this bill intended to afford to the growers of wool would not object to a small additional duty upon foreign hemp,—for the benefit of agriculture. We thought this was no more than a just reciprocity; but we found that the representatives of the eastern manufacturers were of a different opinion.

A motion was made by myself, that But the relief which the second section of the bill purported to extend to them, would probably have been alto-