

CIRCULAR.

To the people of HANCOCK, BROOKE, OHIO, MARSHALL,
WETSEL, TYLER, PLEASANTS, MONONGALIA, MARION,
PRESTON, and TAYLOR COUNTIES, Virginia.

Although the law re-apportioning the State under the last census has not yet passed, it seems to be rendered probable that the counties named will compose the District for the Northwest.

There are questions connected with the next canvass, which you are only competent to determine, and it is proper that, they should be early laid before you.

As a member of the Congressional Convention, which met at Blacksville, on the 21st of January, 1845, I proposed, as the official proceedings show, a rule with reference to our District, which does not seem to be properly understood at the present day. Permit me to recur to its language:

“On motion of MR. CLEMENS, the following resolution was adopted:

“*Resolved*, That while this Convention *acknowledges* that its members have no power to fetter the action of a future convention, regularly appointed by the people, yet we declare it as our opinion, which we conceive to be founded upon a correct and equitable principle, that rotation in office is applicable to territory as well as to persons, and we believe, and hereby expressly stipulate, that the mountain and river counties SHALL HAVE THE REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS, alternately, EACH for FOUR years.”

The adoption of that rule may have been a fatal and indiscreet step. Its advocacy on my part, may have been more a matter of impulse, than of sagacious premeditation; and some of the very best and most circumspect men in the District have always denounced it in terms of the severest reprehension. It is undeniable, that the only effect it has had hitherto, has been to foster sectional controversy, and to operate as an utter exclusion upon the representative, at the very time when, after matured experience in Congress, he was best fitted to serve you. Instead of being the representative of the whole District, he is made in fact the representative of a part. The barriers interposed by nature upon our territory are perpetuated, and made part of our political polity.

It is true, that the resolution does not profess to bind a future convention; it was a mere declaration of sentiment; but it had, and still has, an unseen and all-prevading influence, amounting to a permanent covenant of prejudices.

Under these circumstances, there are two questions for you to decide:

First. Shall the rule heretofore subsisting for the future, be abandoned?

Second. If you determine it shall still be enforced, which particular geographical section of the District is entitled to the next term in Congress?

Throwing out of consideration, as far as I possibly can, any benefit I may be supposed to deprive from the policy, permit me to suggest, that so far as we are concerned as one people, so far as you are interested in

the efficiency of the public service, it will be for the better, that no such exclusion should be tolerated by you hereafter. It will create, as it has created, bitter feuds between the leading men, not merely of the District, but of every section of it. It may operate, in this view, to the entire destruction of your party supremacy. It may deprive you hereafter of the services of your best men, and put your power in the hands of the inexperienced and the inefficient.

I hope you will do me the justice to believe that, in the declaration of these deliberate convictions, I am doing my duty to you, at the hazard probably, of not pleasing many.

With reference, then, to the question as to the next term, in case the exclusion referred to, should be perpetuated, it seems to me perfectly plain, that the next term in Congress belongs to the river counties.

The resolution does not provide that each section shall have THE CANDIDATE, as seems to be contended in some quarters. Such was certainly not its purpose. The very equality intended to be secured, might under such circumstances be destroyed. We have such a case presented even now.

Under that rule the Hon. W. G. Brown served four years. Judge Thompson was selected as his successor. He was defeated by Col. Haymond, and he served out his term, making six years for the mountain counties. At the next election Judge Thompson was again selected, and was triumphant over his former competitor. Under this state of the case, the river counties have only had two years of the four, of the representation in Congress, secured by the very terms of the compact.

If it is to be enforced hereafter, they are, and ought to be, guaranteed in the rights secured to them, or the whole proceeding is the most idle of all mockeries.

My fate, in the sense political, at least, is in your hands. In your judgment I am willing to repose. Upon your magnanimity and sense of justice I am willing to rely. If you are determined to cut me off with my service in the present Congress, I shall submit to the stroke without a murmur; I shall go back to the privacy from which you drew me, with the consolation, at least, of having discharged my duty to you faithfully and conscientiously.

For the favor you did me, to place me in my present high position by the largest majority ever given to any man in the District, over a most gifted competitor, I beg you to believe I shall always feel deeply grateful; and if I can reward you in no other way, I am perfectly willing to make any sacrifice you may require of me, to promote the success of your cause.

SHERRARD CLEMENS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, Feb. 12, 1853.