

REMARKS OF MR. BLAIR,  
OF SOUTH CAROLINA,

On the resolution offered by Mr. CLAYTON,  
of Georgia:—

“That a Select Committee be appointed to examine into the affairs of the Bank of the United States, with power to send for persons and papers, and to report the result of their enquiries to this House.”

The amendment of Mr. ROOT, *to appoint the Committee by a ballot of the House*, being under consideration,

Mr. BLAIR, of South Carolina, said, as the amendment offered by the gentleman from New York, was only for the purpose of fixing the *mode* of appointing the Committee for investigating the affairs and management of the Bank of the United States, it would not

be in order to discuss the general merits of the resolution: And as the amendment only proposed that the Committee should be elected by the ballot of the House, it would be equally out of order to debate the propriety, or impropriety, of re-chartering the Bank of the United States. Nor was he desirous of doing either. He knew (he said) but very little about any banking institution whatever, and still less about this mammoth Bank of the United States; and he should not have attempted the smallest participation in the debate, of even an incidental point connected with the great question of re-chartering the Bank, was it not that he conceived the proposed mode of appointing the examining Committee, by a ballot of the House, objectionable in the highest degree.

Mr. B. said, it might be true that this Bank had, in the outset at least, done much good for the country. But it was alleged that it has the *power* of doing much harm, and that it is a highly dangerous institution—that it is an establishment fraught with great danger, not only to the personal interests of the great body of the American people, but hazardous to the independence of the Government itself. It is also alleged that the officers of this Bank have violated some of the provisions of its charter, and have abused the trust confided to them. An investigation, by a Select Committee, “with power to send for persons and papers,” and to make a thorough examination and report of the condition and administration of this Bank, has therefore been proposed by a gentleman from Georgia. Such examinations (he said) into the affairs of the Bank, are provided for by the charter itself, and ought to be regarded *as matters of course*, whenever charges were preferred against that corporation from a respectable source. The charges, in the present instance, did emanate from a respectable source, and some of them, he believed, could not be gainsayed.

An honorable and highly respectable member from Georgia had brought forward against the Bank what he called "a bill of indictment," containing some fifteen or twenty counts or specifications—and how (Mr. B. asked) was it proposed, by the friends of the Bank, to dispose of that bill of indictment? Were they willing to let it go before an impartial inquest of the people by which the guilt of the accused, if ascertained, would be faithfully reported to the House? No sir, the friends of the Bank show a disposition to shield it from a rigid and impartial scrutiny. They seem to be unwilling that any one should scrutinize the transactions of their favorite except those who have a strong motive to conceal or to palliate its misconduct. They are unwilling that the complaints against the Bank should be investigated by a disinterested and unprejudiced grand jury indifferently and impartially chosen by a responsible officer [he meant the Speaker] lest "a true bill"

should be returned. Their object was to "pack a jury" in the dark, under the veil of impenetrable secrecy, composed of the friends of the Bank, that they might have a return of "no bill." And, Mr. B. contended, that without the return of "a true bill" against the Bank, and made by a grand jury impannelled for that express purpose, the Bank could not be put upon its trial before the people. What he meant was, that without a report, unfavorable to the Bank, made by a committee appointed for the *express purpose* of examining the situation and arrangement of that institution, no legal proceeding could be instituted against it, by the direction of the House in order to have its charter set aside and abolish the corporation. Such reports, from a *Select Committee* must, he said, *precede* the issuance of a sciere facias against the President of the Bank.

of the Bank for the purpose of deciding the question, in the District Court of Pennsylvania, whether the charter shall be declared forfeited. The report of a *Standing Committee* of the House, he said, would not answer the purpose, because *it was not such a committee as the law, establishing the Bank, contemplated.* If, for example, the charges now brought forward against the Bank had been referred to the Committee of Ways and Means as was proposed some days ago, and that Committee had reported *against* the Bank—suppose they had even declared, after a full and strict examination, that every charge against the institution was well founded and true,—and that the conduct of its officers was as reprehensible as its most inveterate enemies could desire, still the House would not be authorized on such a report, *from such a committee,* to direct a *Sci. M'a.* against the President of the Bank in order to put that institution upon its trial, or make it a party in the District Court of Pennsylvania.

[ Here the Speaker, not distinctly understanding what Mr. B. said, perhaps, interrupted him by observing that it was not in order to make personal allusions, or to impugn the conduct or motives of any Committee of the House. ]



Mr. B. then assured the Speaker that such was not his intention—that nothing could be farther from him than a wish to reflect discredit on any gentlemen, or on any Committee in the House. And, certainly, nothing could be more repugnant to his inclination than to wound the feelings of his distinguished colleague at the head of the Committee of Ways and Means. His real object (Mr. B. said,) was to point out the impropriety and *illegality* of referring this enquiry to a *Standing Committee* of the House, while the law itself recognized none other than a *Select Committee*,—a Committee chosen *for that express purpose*. And further, he wished to demonstrate, if he could, the *futility* and *mockery* of confiding this investigation to the friends of the Bank, who might be liable to an influence and a bias, in favor of the institution, of which they themselves were unconscious. To a Committee that certainly had no incentive to that sort of industry necessary to develop the hidden abuses of the Bank, but, on the contrary, having the strongest motives to slur over, and to palliate all such acts of malfeasance as may be *obtruded* upon their notice.

But with permission

But, with permission of the House, he would read, (he said) that section of the law, establishing the Bank, which relates to the appointment of the Committee to which he had just alluded. It was the 25d section of the Charter, and might be found in the sixth volume of the Laws of the United States, page 49, and reads as follows:

“And be it further enacted, That it shall, at all times, be lawful for a Committee of Congress, appointed for that purpose, to inspect the Books, and to examine into the proceedings of the corporation hereby created, and to report whether the provisions of this charter have been, by the same, violated or not; and whenever any Committee, as aforesaid, shall find and report, or the President of the United States shall have reason to believe, that the

charter has been violated, it may be lawful for Congress to direct, or the President to order a *scire facias* to be issued out of the Circuit Court of the District of Pennsylvania, in the name of the United States, (which shall be executed upon the President of the corporation for the time being, at least fifteen days before the commencement of the term of said court,) calling on the said corporation to show cause wherefore the charter hereby granted shall not be declared forfeited; and it shall be lawful for the said court, upon the return of the said *scire facias*, to examine into the truth of the alleged violation, and if such violation be made appear, then to pronounce and adjudge that the said charter is forfeited and annulled."

Now, Sir, [said Mr. B.] from the terms used in this section of the charter nothing can be more plain than that a *Standing* Committee of the House would be incompetent for the purposes contemplated by the law, because it requires the examination and report of a Committee "*appointed for that purpose.*" before a *scire facias* can issue against the President of the Bank. Why was it thought necessary to arm the President of the United States with a discretionary power, by a provision in this section? Mr. B. said he could imagine no other reason than that those who framed the charter conceived it possible, perhaps *probable*, that at some subsequent day there might be such a majority in Congress, friendly to the Bank, that conduct as it might, that corporation would have nothing to fear from Congress—as its friends would screen it from all responsibility, and prevent any process from issuing against the President of the institution. In such event (and he feared we were about to realize the necessity and utility of the provision) it was thought prudent by the framers of the charter, to vest in the President of the United States the discretionary power just alluded to.

If the amendment of the gentleman from New York, (said Mr. B.) is adopted, it will be carried by the vote of those friendly to the Bank. The same members will then hand in their folded tickets, and elect a Committee, the *majority* of whom, if *not the whole*, will be in favor of renewing the charter, and friendly to the Bank; and that institution will have nothing to apprehend from the result of their enquiries. We will see exhibited the absurd farce of the accused sitting in judgment upon its own trial, or rather, deciding whether it will submit to be tried, even by its own particular friends. Yes, Sir, [said Mr. B.,] all this will be done, and the American people will be left to *guess* at the agents by whom it is effected. They will be left to guess at the names of those who have constituted the Bank the sole judge in its own cause. A Committee friendly to the Bank, and disposed to screen the malversations of its officers, will be selected by an agency perfectly *irresponsible*; because *unknown* to the People.

Now Sir, [said Mr. B.,] I would ask, is this the course of conscious rectitude and innocence?—Is this the course an honorable, high minded individual would pursue, when his official character has been implicated and slandered? Would he not instantly demand a *court of enquiry*, and, instead of *shunning*, would he not *court* investigation? Finally, he would ask the friends of the institution *themselves*, if they could *hope* to sustain its character and credit with the American people, by shielding it from a full, a free and rigid examination of its condition, and of all its transactions by a Committee that has no motive to palliate delinquencies, or to cloak misdemeanors?

Mr. B. said that although his present impressions were against the Bank, and although he thought it probable he would vote against a renewal of the charter; he was nevertheless, open to conviction. He had not, absolutely determined to vote against re-chartering the Bank, *right or wrong*. He was disposed to hear all that could be said both for and against the Bank, and to bestow his vote according to the dictates of his best judgment—and in accordance with what he considered the true and permanent interests of the country. If the charges against the Bank are obviated and removed by the report of a Committee *properly* chosen—and the *out-cry* against the dangers of that institution, is shewn to be a mere "*bug-bear*;" and that the independence of the Government, and the interests of the



more sagacious; and that the independence of the Government, and the interests and liberties of the people, have nothing to fear from the monied monopolies of that colossal establishment, he would then vote for a renewal of the charter. But, (said Mr. B.) let me tell the friends of the Bank, they are pursuing a bad way to make proselytes. Their conduct, on this occasion, was an impressive comment on their favorite institution, and furnished one of the best reasons imaginable, why the charter of the Bank ought not to be renewed.— They have suffered their *zeal* to outstrip their discretion; and he did not think that any corporation ever had greater cause than this Mammoth Bank, to exclaim, “*God save me from my friends!*”