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COLEMAN LIVINGSTON BLEASE,
SOUTH CAROLINA
POLITICIAN

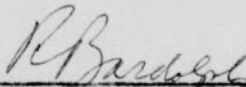
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Anthony Barry Miller

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Coleman Livingston Blease was an active participant in South Carolina politics for over fifty years. From 1906 to 1938 he was a candidate for governor five times and the United States Senate five times. He was elected twice to the former and once to the latter. In office he had few achievements, but his entire career was marked by notoriety. Many charges of corruption were made against him, yet none was ever proven.

This study concentrated on Blease's campaign style and oratory as his legacy to South Carolina politics. In his role as demagogue, he specialized in race-baiting and claimed to be the champion of the state's textile workers. Through the years he did little for his constituents other than enunciate and reinforce their prejudices. Blease was certainly one of the most flamboyant Southern demagogues to capitalize on racial prejudice. His career reflected the extent of racial antagonism in South Carolina during the first four decades of the twentieth century.

This thesis has been approved by the following
committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The
University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Thesis Adviser

R. Bardolph

Oral Examination
Committee Members

Jane DeHos + McThaw

Allen W. Trice

Feb. 8, 1972
Date of Examination

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter	
I. THE MILL HANDS.	8
II. THE "STABLE BOY" FROM NEWBERRY.	20
III. THE ELECTION OF 1910.	29
IV. THE FIRST ADMINISTRATION, 1911-1912	45
V. THE ELECTION OF 1912.	62
VI. THE SECOND ADMINISTRATION, 1913-1914.	78
VII. DEFEAT AND MORE DEFEAT, 1914-1922	97
VIII. THE SENATE YEARS, 1924-1931	142
IX. OLD MAN BLEASE, 1930-1942	166
X. CONCLUSION.	180
BIBLIOGRAPHY	189

INTRODUCTION

After Wade Hampton and the Red Shirts had "redeemed" South Carolina from Radical Republican government in 1876, the aristocratic tradition of the state's political system appeared to return to its pre-Civil War status. South Carolina society, however, had undergone many changes as a result of the War and Reconstruction, and they were to have a profound effect on the state's politics. Small farmers, who now constituted the bulk of the population, grew to distrust the old conservative oligarchy because it was no longer responsive to agricultural interests. One such farmer was Ben Tillman who led a successful political movement to overthrow the Bourbon aristocrats.¹

Named after its leader, Tillmanism was essentially a middle class farmer movement which sought to control the state Democratic Party for its own purposes. Many of the other discontented members of the lower classes believed that the overthrow of the aristocracy would mean a new white democracy which would be attuned to their needs. Most of their grievances were very similar to those that

¹Francis B. Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944), 70-81.

Tillman voiced in behalf of the farmers, but once Tillmanism was established, the masses found that they were little better off.

Tillmanism made no class distinction in its appeal to oust the old aristocracy, but it was basically an agrarian movement that never offered much for the poor man. Tillman himself was a middle class farmer turned politician and the reforms he called for reflected the needs of his own class. In a negative sense though, everything that Tillman opposed, such as the aristocracy and the Negro, was believed by the lower classes to contribute to their misfortunes. The overthrow of the aristocrats in 1890 was by the common people, but it did not mean the end of class rule. Instead it determined which class would rule.

During Tillman's campaigns the agrarian issue became submerged under a general "reform" movement purporting to end aristocratic privilege. Tillman exhorted the up-country against the low country, the county against the city, the white man against the black, the poor against the rich, and the common man against the aristocrat. He made no distinction between farmer and worker, but spoke in general for those who were discontented with the status quo. In almost every way Tillman appealed to the white masses. His background, appearance and his speech could be identified by nearly all farmers, sharecroppers, and tenants as

their own. He was the first political leader in South Carolina to arise from the common people and speak for them. To insure its success, Tillmanism, while a middle class farmer movement, extended its negative appeal to all the disgruntled members of the lower classes. All those in social and economic bondage, except the Negro, came to believe that Tillman, the rural Moses, would lead them to a democratic promised land.²

During Tillman's two terms as Governor, South Carolina witnessed no radical reforms in behalf of the masses. With the exception of the State Dispensary system, most of the reforms were only the completion of the proposals that the Farmers' Association had asked for from its earliest beginnings. All agricultural education was centered at Clemson College; Winthrop College was established at Rock Hill as an industrial school for girls, the lien law was repealed, and a new constitution was written. Upper class privilege suffered little from the effects of Tillmanism while the lower classes were not greatly improved. There was scarcely any change in the social and

²W. W. Ball, The State That Forgot (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1932), 207-208. Ball was the conservative editor of the Charleston News and Courier during the Tillman and Blease eras. In his book he bemoans the demise of aristocratic leadership by the "sorry advent" of white democracy in South Carolina politics. See also; D. D. Wallace, South Carolina, A Short History (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), 597-622, for a balanced appraisal of Tillmanism by a South Carolina up-country historian.

economic structure of South Carolina after Tillman came to power, but there was a significant political change.³

White political supremacy was enlarged and strengthened by two measures. In 1892 the primary system replaced the party convention as the means of nominating candidates for office and "that and not the election of Tillman was the real revolution in South Carolina politics."⁴ Candidates were now forced to face a popular plebiscite rather than be selected at a machine convention. This was a real step toward a more democratic government in South Carolina, at least for the whites. Using the Mississippi plan of disfranchising the Negro, the new Constitution of 1895 was written almost exclusively to remove the Negro from South Carolina politics. Property and residence qualifications, a poll tax, and a literacy test were required before a person could vote in the general election. Criminals, lunatics, and paupers were not to be allowed to vote. It was certain that such qualifications would disfranchise most of the Negroes, but there was also the danger that they would exclude a great many poor whites as well. The solution was twofold: whites could vote in the primaries, but Negroes could not; and there was a temporary "understanding

³Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 485.

⁴Ball, The State That Forgot, 236.

clause" in lieu of the property qualifications. In general, every white man in the state was assured of a vote, and every Negro was almost certain to be disfranchised.⁵

In the final analysis, Tillmanism only accomplished a program of moderate agrarian reforms, but indirectly it gave every white man an opportunity to have a voice in South Carolina politics. For the common man the direct primary was the "most glorious achievement" of Tillmanism.⁶ A new form of democracy had been introduced into South Carolina politics.

Tillman had many political lieutenants while he was in power in South Carolina. Practically all of them were farmers turned politicians as he himself had been. With only one exception, none of them ever rose to anything like the state and national prominence that Tillman achieved. That one exception was Coleman Livingston Blease, a professional politician who had never been a farmer. Blease first entered politics as a Tillmanite candidate in 1890 and was elected to the state House of Representatives

⁵D. D. Wallace, "The South Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1895," The Sewanee Review, IV (1895-1896), 348-360.

⁶George M. Koester, "Bleasism," The Greenville (South Carolina) Piedmont, September 9, 1916. This is the first of a series of thirty-two articles which attempted to analyze the political appeal of Blease, but it actually dealt more with Tillman than with Blease.

in that year. There he became closely associated with Tillman and in the years that followed, he was known as the Tillmanite leader in the South Carolina House. During the years in which they were friends, Blease learned much from Tillman of the art of catering to the common man for political gain. Blease had to imitate what was natural to farmer Ben Tillman. Although a gifted speaker, Blease copied many of Tillman's "speechifying" platform mannerisms in order that he might also become the "poor man's friend."⁷ Blease, however, was no mere imitator of Tillman, nor was he a true representative of a certain class of people. Tillman was a farmer and a representative of farmers; Blease was a politician and attempted to present himself as representative of the common people. While Tillman was actually something of a reformer, Blease campaigned in the name of reform, but accomplished little.⁸

Just as Tillman had a hard-core following of farmers, Blease developed a following of textile workers in the state. Tillman had referred to this group as the "damned factory class,"⁹ but Blease realized the political

⁷Allan A. Michie and Frank Ryhlich, Dixie Demagogues (New York: Vanguard Press, 1939), 265. The term the "poor man's friend" was often used to describe either Tillman or Blease.

⁸Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 489.

⁹Ibid., p. 485.

potential in their growing numbers about the turn of the century. Capitalizing on the discontent of the cotton mill workers, Blease became a major figure in South Carolina politics until 1938. During this time he ran for the office of governor of South Carolina eight times and for the United States Senate five times. He was elected only three times: as governor in 1910 and 1912 and as Senator in 1924.¹⁰ During his career he was one of the most controversial and outspoken politicians in the history of South Carolina. It is the purpose of this thesis to examine the influence of Cole L. Blease on South Carolina politics and the significance of his role in the history of that state.

¹⁰ Although no biography of Blease exists, there are many short biographical sketches of his public career. The following is a selected list of such sketches:

- Congressional Directory (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1929), 104.
National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, 1898 (New York: James T. White Company, 1916) XV, 276.
 Yates Snowden, A History of South Carolina (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1920), III, 175-176.
 D. D. Wallace, The History of South Carolina, IV, 961-962.
Who's Who in the South (Washington: Mayflower Publishing Company, 1929), 85.
Who Was Who in America, 1897-1942 (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Company, 1942), 106.
Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1961 (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 564-565.

CHAPTER I
THE MILL HANDS

Tillman had wakened the political consciousness of the white masses, but his reforms had not really improved the condition of the poorer classes. As Francis Butler Simkins, Tillman's biographer wrote:

He had aroused certain classes without satisfying them. The tenant farmers and the small landowners were hopping the same clods they had hopped before they heard of Tillman. Tillman's 'damned factory class' [the cotton mill workers] multiplied with the expansion of cotton manufacturing but did not develop the economic and cultural resources necessary to use the colleges and other shining achievements of Tillmanism.¹

By 1910 new cotton mills were established all over the South Carolina up-country and old mills were expanding. Mill villages such as Clinton, Greer, Pelzer, Pacolet, Honea Path, Liberty, Whitmire, and Newberry doubled and even tripled in population from 1900 to 1909.² The mills sent out agents into the countryside to recruit mill workers. These labor scouts were usually carefully selected men who

¹Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 485.

²U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population, II, 649.

either seemed pleased with mill work or were persuasive talkers. Most of the workers whom the agents recruited came from the poorer agrarian classes, commonly called gullyjumpers and clodhoppers. Most of these people were unsuccessful tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and small landowners. Except for the Negroes, these people were on the bottom of the South Carolina social strata. Lured to the mills by the security offered by regular wages, the mill workers hoped to improve their economic and social positions. To say the very least, they were disappointed.

The ex-cotton farmers had a difficult time adjusting to their new environment. The principal cause of their frustration seems to have been their intense individualism. They were accustomed to dealing with landowners as one man to another. As one contemporary noted:

it was still difficult for them to realize that they were not working for any individual as an individual-- that they were working for a corporation, complicated, technical, highly organized, and involved. These men were individuals; they were cotton farmers who had moved to town.³

Just as they had in the fields, the mill workers had to struggle merely to exist. Though they made more money than they had previously, they were still poor. Every member of the family had to work in order to survive. Wages averaged around ten cents an hour in 1910 for males, while women and

³Ben Robertson, Red Hills and Cotton (New York: Alfred A. Knopf and Co., 1942), 28.

children were usually paid less. The workers could complain to their overseers, but often found it hard to understand why they were sympathetic with their grievances but could do nothing about them.

Other elements in addition to long hours and low wages caused discontent among the mill hands. Most mills owned all the houses in which the workers lived and charged rent at a rate of about twenty-five cents a room. For this reason few took much pride in their shabby, rented houses. The mills in general controlled the entire mill village for they owned not only the houses, but also the churches, the schools, and the stores. This led to an almost complete segregation of the mill operatives from the other elements of the South Carolina social structure. Such segregation and economic deprivation led to social ostracism.⁴ No one seemed to have forgotten that Negroes were the only laborers before the Civil War. If a man had to work for wages and was not able to own anything himself he could count for very little in the eyes of the better elements of South Carolina. No one really seemed to care how bad conditions were in the mills as far as the workers were concerned. The Charleston News and Courier ran a special series on the cotton mills in the state and

⁴George M. Koester, "Bleasism," The Greenville (South Carolina) Piedmont, September 7, 1916.

concluded only that the workers were better off than they had been before. The reporter conceded, "Those who work in the cotton mills haven't accumulated a fortune, but nor have they met with marked success in other callings."⁵ The mill hands escaped their old nicknames of "gullyjumpers and clodhoppers" only to receive a new one from the better elements of South Carolina society--"lintheads."

Many mill workers resigned themselves to their fate. No doubt many would have agreed with the opinion of one of their fellow workers, "You sure do have to slave your life away at the mill and you get nothing for it, but there is nothing else for poor folks to do."⁶ Some, however, moved from mill to mill hoping, but without success, to find a better life. Most tried to take pride in what little they had. Work in the textile mills was strictly for whites. As one student of the mill operatives observed, "The whites who had the least self-assurance as to their social standing or whose economic position was least secure were naturally those who felt the most bitterness toward the Negro."⁷ The textile workers' hatred for the

⁵August Kohn, The Cotton Mills of South Carolina (Charleston: The Daggett Printing Co.), 22.

⁶Louis MacDonald, Southern Mill Hills: A Study of Social and Economic Forces in Certain Textile Mill Villages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), 74.

⁷Marjorie A. Potwin, Cotton Mill People of the Piedmont (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), 58-59.

Negro was probably fiercer than that of any other class of people in South Carolina. When asked his opinion of Negroes, a typical mill hand replied:

I don't have no use for them anyway. I don't bother with niggers. They ain't fit. The niggers in this country are about to take it. They would take the mills too if they could get in. but they can't.⁸

Likewise other workers had contempt for immigrants since they might be competitive labor. One worker expressed his feelings by saying, "I don't want to see a pack of furriners coming down here to get the jobs away from the white folks."⁹

The cotton mill workers often felt that they are trapped once they had begun working in the mill. Most seemed to want a better opportunity for their children, but few saw any hope of keeping their offspring out of the mills. Many children had to work in order to help support their families. This of course interfered with their education, which was at best poor. The state public education system was poorly run and the mills did little to assist the schools. Even if a child was able to attend school regularly, he was likely to receive a poor education. One mill hand summed up the common attitude of the mill people when she said, "There is no chance for the children of such as

⁸MacDonald, Southern Mill Hills, 72.

⁹Ibid., 71.

us."¹⁰

The dismal life on the mill hill naturally led its inhabitants to seek refuge in religion. Most of the workers had been staunchly religious before they came to work in the mills. Every mill village had at least one church, usually owned and operated by the mill and not by the people. The workers were too poor to build a church or to pay a minister's salary. The predominant number of mill churches were Baptist or Methodist, but other Protestant denominations were sometimes represented. The mill churches usually carried on highly emotional services, emphasizing rewards in the hereafter rather than here and now. For many, especially the women, the church was the only outside activity where one could find relief from the dismal mill life.

The men, however, found a means of escape by joining one or another of a multitude of secret fraternal organizations. Almost every male mill worker was a member of at least one of the secret societies. Here they banded together to assume new identities in the regalia and paraphernalia of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, the Improved Order of Red Men, Loyal Order of Moose, Knights of Pythias, Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, Woodmen

¹⁰Ibid., 78.

of the World and that nemesis of everything that the mill worker hated, the Ku Klux Klan. In these organizations a mill hand might also give vent to his negative feelings, in the company of men of like minds. In the KKK these negative feelings occasionally might be expressed in a cross-burning or a lynching rather than mere discussion. Whatever their stated purposes, these secret orders in South Carolina were quite commonly used by the mill operatives to express their opinions, if only among themselves.

As the outlook of the mill hands was exceedingly negative in other areas, so were their political views. Of Tillman's reforms the only one that really benefited the lower classes was the direct primary. Tillman's departure from state politics to the United States Senate left the poor classes without a champion. The meager demands for reforms begun by Tillman practically disappeared when he left the state scene. Actually Tillman had taught the masses to vote, not in a positive manner, but rather a negative one. No politician needed to present a positive platform of reform to woo the mill workers at the polls; he had but to speak out against what they hated. Tillmanism had conditioned the lower classes to vote in this manner. As one writer stated about the mill voters, "They vote to defeat rather than to promote."¹¹

¹¹Potwin, Cotton Mill People of the Piedmont, 52.

With Tillman in Washington, the turn of the century opened with a resurgence of conservative political power in South Carolina. Governors Duncan C. Heyward and Martin Ansel resembled the Bourbon politicians of pre-Tillman days, and were labeled by some newspapers as "reactionaries." To the mill workers they became symbols of all the things they hated and an obstacle to legislation that might benefit them. All that the masses needed was a popular leader, such as Tillman had been, to rally their political support. Coleman Livingston Blease emerged as such a leader during this period.¹²

Blease sought the vote of the poor and discontented in general and the mill workers in particular. During the bulk of his political career, he could always depend on carrying most of the mill precincts. Usually the outcome of the election was decided by the performances of Blease and his opponents on the stump, but he could always rely on a strong nucleus of voters from the mill workers. Blease had learned a great deal about the common man's attitudes in his father's hotel and livery stable as well as from Ben and Jim Tillman and Josh Ashley. In addition Cole learned much directly from the mill people themselves from mill village to mill village and talking to workers individually. Cole knew a great number of the factory workers

¹²Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 486.

personally and called them by their first names. "In his heyday he probably knew more workers personally than any other man in the state."¹³ For many years his electioneering never ceased; when he was not actually engaged in a campaign on the stump, he was befriending the mill operatives individually.¹⁴

Blease also penetrated the mill hill society by joining every secret order that he could. Although it is not known whether Blease was ever a member of the Ku Klux Klan, he was extremely active in all the rest. He was often elected to high offices in the fraternal organizations and proudly boasted that he was "the only one who has represented three of the State fraternal bodies in National Grand Bodies."¹⁵ Blease's membership in these orders was a valuable political asset as far as his influence on the mill workers was concerned. Here he became an intimate friend to the mill hands as he did in his door-to-door canvass.

In addition to making personal friends with many of his supporters, Blease deliberately strove to become

¹³Potwin, Cotton Mill People of the Piedmont, 98.

¹⁴Yates Snowden, History of South Carolina (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1920), II, 1057.

¹⁵Ibid., IV, 964.

"the poor man's friend." With earthy rhetoric, he appealed to the poor white's common beliefs, prejudices, hatreds, and fears. Coley, as they affectionately called him, won the heart of every "linthead" and "gullyjumper" with his emotional harangues. As one perceptive commentator wrote:

He spoke for the poor man. That was it! He was the mouthpiece for the poor man's discontent. He articulated the poor man's unexpressed emotions, ambitions, and disgruntlements; did it garishly, did it sentimentally, did it courageously, and he gained his leadership because he did it.¹⁶

When Coley spoke on white supremacy, individualism, the sanctity of white womanhood, and economy in government, the poor whites listened and approved. Often his stomp speeches were punctuated by outbursts from the audience such as: "Tell about it, Coley!"; or, "Goddermighty ain't he a man!"¹⁷ Blease's ability to arouse their feelings was almost uncanny. One writer noted that nobody could "more quickly catch the superficial feeling of an audience than Governor Blease. His oratory is that of Billy Sunday, headed in the other direction."¹⁸ Testimonies of loyalty such as: "I'd put in my vote for Coley if I was astanding

¹⁶James C. Derieux, "Crawling Toward the Promised Land," The Survey, XLVIII (April-September, 1922), 178.

¹⁷Ibid., 176.

¹⁸W. K. Tate, "After Blease: A New Program for South Carolina," The Survey XXXIII (February 27, 1915), 577.

knee-deep in hell;" or, "Coley, I'd put in my vote for you if you was to steal my mule,"¹⁹ were not uncommon.

Many of Blease's opponents could not understand how he inspired such unquestioned devotion from the poor white without offering a program of social and economic reforms. The poor whites, however, had only a choice between Coley and the traditional conservatism of the state Democrats. Without making specific reference to Blease, William Watts Ball, the South Carolina apologist for the Bourbon Democrats, lamented, "Duped as the mill workers are by the shallow, but plausible demagogues, they are not blamable for following them often in preference to better men who neglect them altogether."²⁰ Likewise, one poor white supporter of Blease stated, "Even though Coley don't ever do a durn thing for us poor fellows, he does at least promise something, and that's more than any of the others promise to do."²¹

Blease did not have to do anything for his people as long as he was against everything that they deplored. In their eyes Coley fought courageously against his political

¹⁹O. L. Warr, "Mr. Blease of South Carolina," American Mercury, XVI (January, 1929), 29.

²⁰W. W. Ball, The State That Forgot (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Inc., 1932), 276.

²¹Warr, "Mr. Blease of South Carolina," 29.

enemies, the newspapers, the aristocracy, foreigners, business interests, and the Negro. The poor whites grew to consider Coley Blease as their leader against common enemies. If nothing else, he gave them hope to improve their lot through political action. So it was that Cole L. Blease, a townsman and a lawyer, became the hero of a class of people whose background diverged sharply from his own. Ben Tillman had been a farmer and then a farmer politician; Cole Blease had never been a factory worker.

CHAPTER II

THE "STABLE BOY" FROM NEWBERRY

Cole L. Blease often spoke with pride of his childhood background and related that "the stable boy was born without a silver spoon in his mouth, but had silver on his lips."¹ Coleman Livingston Blease was born on October 8, 1868, the son of a respectable Newberry hotel and livery stable proprietor. Cole also demonstrated a talent for oratory at an early age. While he was a student at Newberry College, he entered an oratorical contest, and although he did not win first prize, his hearers were so pleased with his performance that they awarded Cole a gold watch chain. Later at South Carolina College, now the University of South Carolina, the young Mr. Blease won a prize in a debating contest sponsored by the Clariosophic Literary Society. But Cole's boast that he was a stable boy with a talent for speaking in his youth, was not the whole truth.

Blease deliberately tried to identify himself with the common people. As David D. Wallace, the historian of South Carolina, observed: "Mr. Blease represented himself

¹Cole L. Blease, Annual Message, January 12, 1915 (Columbia: The R. L. Bryan Printing Co., 1915), 42.

as more common than he actually was."² After all Cole's father owned the stable and hotel in which he worked, and although the family was not rich even by local standards, the Blease business was "operated successfully over a long period of time."³ None of Cole's ancestors were aristocrats, but neither were any of them poor.

The Blease hotel was a place where men gathered to drink and to talk. No doubt at any early age Cole had learned much about local up-country feelings on race, religion, and politics. In this atmosphere he not only listened but also became quite a sociable talker himself. Before he was twenty-one years old, he maintained that he could call "nearly every white man and woman in my county and a large majority of the colored, by their first names."⁴ He learned what the people of his area thought and felt and he knew how to talk to them.

In addition to his public school and livery stable education, Cole attended three colleges--an opportunity denied most poor South Carolinians. Blease revealed his political ambitions while he was a boy as well as other

²D. D. Wallace, The History of South Carolina, III, 426.

³Ibid., IV, 964.

⁴U. S. Congress, Congressional Record--Senate (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1927) 69 Congress, 2 Session, 1940.

characteristics he later displayed in his political career. The reason he did not win the oratorical contest was that the judges found his speech was not exactly original; their misgivings were confirmed when a faculty member discovered that Cole's message was remarkably similar to another that had appeared in the Davidson College Monthly. Though he had already won the prize, he was expelled from the debating society, and shortly after left the school. Undeterred by this setback, the young Cole entered Georgetown University at Washington, D. C. and completed a law course there in 1889.⁵ As a young man he showed ability as a public speaker though he had little concern for what he said. Oratory, notoriety, and ambition seem to have come naturally to him, and he used the first two to further the last.

Blease's appearance scarcely suggested a champion of the poor. In fact he looked much like an aristocrat, very meticulous in his dress, and usually wearing dark Prince Albert suits, hand-tailored in Charleston. In his younger years Cole usually wore a string tie and in later years when he switched to white suits to match his hair and moustache, he habitually wore a bow tie. Another obvious feature of his dress was a broad-brimmed black felt hat which was more often in his hand than on his head. His

⁵Columbia State, August 19, 1908.

most highly prized ornament, however, was the gold watch chain he had won while at Newberry College. A number of fraternal badges also adorned the chain that Cole almost always wore. Tall, slender and erect, he was described in his older years as "a perfect imitation of a Confederate colonel."

After completing his work at Georgetown University, Cole was admitted to the South Carolina bar and as soon as he began his career as a lawyer he entered politics. Although he was not yet twenty-one years old, Blease ran for the state House of Representatives in 1889. The election was typical of many of those to come: Blease lost. The next year, however, he was victorious for several reasons. His father Henry Blease, a well respected citizen of Newberry, campaigned for him. It was the Tillman Reform Movement, however, that was mainly responsible for Cole's election. Cole called himself a Tillmanite and went to the South Carolina House of Representatives in 1890.⁶

The young legislator did not take long to establish himself as a Tillmanite once he got to Columbia. Re-elected in 1892 Blease was then recognized as Tillman's personal leader in the House of Representatives. Cole also became acquainted with James H. Tillman, Benjamin R.'s

⁶D. D. Wallace, The History of South Carolina, IV, 963.

nephew and Joshua D. Ashley, an illiterate but rising member of the House. Both of these men were radical champions of the poor and advocates of what Ben Tillman called "the darker phases of Tillmanism."⁷ Though Blease was a clever man, rarely was he original. Ben Tillman provided Blease with much to imitate, but Jim Tillman and "Citizen Josh" Ashley added the radical touch to Blease's thinking and words. Jim Tillman could outdo his uncle at Negro baiting, and he and "Citizen Josh" were the heroes of the growing number of mill hands in the up-country. Both men were known for their crude language and violent tendencies. Jim Tillman's career was cut short after a bitter campaign for governor in 1902, when he shot and killed Narcisco G. Gonzales, editor of the Columbia State. Although Gonzales was unarmed and the murder appeared to be premeditated, Tillman was acquitted and went free. Blease always maintained that Jim's attack on Gonzales was justified because of the slanders Gonzales had written about him. Even if Josh Ashley had possessed the intelligence to become a real leader of the mill people, his chances were ruined when he led a successful lynch mob. Blease was the only member of this unsavory triumvirate who was clever enough to remember that actions spoke louder than words. Blease always talked a lot but never did much; and thus was more successful in

⁷Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 488.

politics than Jim Tillman or Josh Ashley.

Under the influence of the younger Tillman and Ashley, Blease began to cultivate the support of the cotton mill operatives as early as 1892. The factory owners complained that if a bill limiting labor to a sixty hour week were passed, the economy of the state would be ruined, Cole defended the bill introduced by Citizen Josh by replying that "If we have to buy capital by murdering women and children, for God's sake, let it go, let it go!"⁸

Cole ran for a third term in the House, in 1894, but again was defeated. Returning to Newberry and his law practice, he remained active in state politics. In 1896 and 1900 he was a presidential elector on the Bryan ticket, and in 1897 he was elected mayor of Helena, a small town near Newberry. Then in 1898 Blease went back to the South Carolina House for another term; two years later he ran for lieutenant governor against Jim Tillman and lost. After serving as Newberry city attorney for several years, Blease was elected to the state Senate in 1904. After his term he returned to Newberry and was elected mayor in 1909.⁹

⁸Francis B. Simkins, The Tillman Movement in South Carolina (Durham: Duke University Press, 1926), 176-177.

⁹Wallace, The History of South Carolina, IV, 963.

During this period Blease had made two unsuccessful attempts to become governor. In 1906 he began the first of his eight campaigns for the governorship of South Carolina. Blease, Richard I. Manning, and Martin Ansel were the three major candidates for the Democratic nomination. In selecting Manning as the target of his attacks, Blease had made a tactical error. Manning was from a family that was easily identified with the ante-bellum aristocrats. Five of his ancestors had been governors of the state before the Civil War. Blease was quick to point out that Manning represented the Bourbon interests, while he himself was an advocate of reform. Blease also strongly defended the controversial State Dispensary, although while serving in the House, he had introduced a prohibition bill in 1892. Blease was probably effective in securing Manning's defeat in the primary, but the colorless Ansel had won when the ballots had been counted. Cole had lost, but he did receive about twenty thousand votes, cast largely in up-country counties, the home of the textile workers.¹⁰

After his showing at the polls in 1906, Blease was encouraged to compete once more for the governorship in

¹⁰Ronald D. Burnside, "The Governorship of Coleman Livingston Blease of South Carolina, 1911-1915" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1963), 11.

1908. Actually his campaign never ceased after 1906. He travelled all over the state, making speeches and friends, and concentrated these efforts in the textile piedmont. By taking special interest in the individual workers, Blease won them to his cause. As one writer said, "Coleman L. Blease sought out every available vote and awoke the mill people to political activity."¹¹

Despite the fact that tradition assured the governor of South Carolina a second term, Blease was eager to challenge Ansel on a stumping tour of the state in June of 1908. In the ensuing campaign, Blease clouded any relevant issues by reducing the political debates to personal attacks on Ansel's character, denouncing him as a "nigger lover" because he had made "one of those infernal baboons" a notary for the state. Furthermore, Blease declared himself as opposed to Negro education altogether and implied that since Ansel had made no statement on the subject he must have been in favor of it. Later, when it was pointed out that Tillman had also appointed Negro notaries, Blease replied that he did not always approve of Tillman's actions. In the same spirit, Blease appealed to mill workers directly by opposing Tillman's idea to bring immigrants into the state to work in the factories, since "foreigners are

¹¹Potwin, Cotton Mill People of the Piedmont, 45.

worse than Negroes."¹²

The newspapers made the fatal mistake of lowering themselves to Blease's level by attacking his personal life. Blease was accused of being personally immoral, a drunkard, and a nigger lover himself. Cole lost the election, but the newspapers overdid their attacks on him by exaggerated accusations that anyone could see were false. The chief beneficiary of all the publicity was Blease. After a later hard-fought campaign, he said,

I have been criticized and pretty severely criticized and I love criticism. If it had not been for the newspapers in South Carolina, I would never have been elected. Their abuse and vituperation did more to elect me than anything I ever did.¹³

Blease received close to 40,000 votes in 1908, just short of the number needed to defeat Ansel. The newspaper attacks had certainly helped him, but the biggest reason for his impressive showing at the polls was his cultivation of the mill operative vote. Blease had worked hard for a number of years to gain the support of these people and in 1910 his hard work would pay off.

¹²Spartanburg Herald, August 22, 1908.

¹³Congressional Record, 69 Congress, 1 Session, 2299.

Chapter III
THE ELECTION OF 1910

Early in 1910 the Newberry lawyer announced that he would again be a candidate for the office of governor in the Democratic primary to be held in August. Although many of the candidates often declared their intentions to run for office as early as the preceding January or February before the election, most of the real campaign action did not usually begin before the latter part of June. At that time the state Democratic Party would issue the "stump" itineraries. From the end of June to the end of August the candidates would travel over the entire state, all of them speaking on the same platform at the county seats as designated by the schedule. This plan gave all the voters an opportunity to compare each of the candidates with his opponents and a chance to meet each candidate as well.

"Stump Day" had become something of a holiday since its inauguration by Tillman. The women prepared fried chicken and washtubs of lemonade for the listeners before the candidates spoke from such impromptu platforms as wagons or truck beds. Although women were sometimes present at the speech making, they rarely took much interest in the electioneering proceedings, even after the enactment of the

Nineteenth Amendment. Politics were left to the "menfolks" for their entertainment and participation during the late summer and early fall of election years. These political rallies, to say the least, were usually quite colorful and lively as the candidates employed every conceivable antic to attract potential voters and to harangue their opponents. The audience also felt as free to interrupt speakers with shouts of approbation or disapproval as did the candidates themselves. A good stump speaker might even parry remarks with the audience. For about fifty years or more an office-seeker's success in South Carolina politics was usually dependent to a great extent on his performance on the hustings. All in all it seemed like a good idea for it brought the politicians into direct contact with the people so that the voters might make an informed decision at the polls.¹

Except for the exclusion of women, it also appeared on the surface that stumping was a democratic institution. It should be remembered that the campaign was for the Democratic party nominations. If a candidate won the primary, the formal election in November was only a formality that made his election official. Voting in the Democratic state

¹For some interesting later pictures of activities on the South Carolina stump see: "Carolina Jubilee," Newsweek (August 22, 1930), 14.

primaries was usually heavy, while in the November general election only a fraction of the primary vote was cast. The obvious reason for this anomaly was, of course, to prevent the Negro from voting while still permitting the franchise to many whites who would otherwise be disfranchised. In fact the state constitution written in 1895 at the instigation of Ben Tillman, took away many whites' voting rights as well as those of the Negroes. The real problem in South Carolina politics was that for many years, before and after the Civil War, the Negro population was greater than the white. Reconstruction was still a bitter memory in many white South Carolina minds and the fear of Negro rule was ever present in state politics. When Tillman had captured the Democratic Party's gubernatorial nomination in 1890, a group of conservative Bourbon Democrats led by A. C. Haskell had "bolted" from the party to run on an independent ticket in the general election. The "Haskellites," as they were called, however, committed the arch sin in South Carolina politics by appealing to the Negroes for support. Only through intimidation had the blacks been kept from the polls (at least so the Tillmanites believed).² Without explicitly violating the Fourteenth or Fifteenth Amendments, the Constitution of 1895 robbed the average Negro in South

²Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 163-168.

Carolina of his right to vote, but the primaries allowed propertyless and penniless whites, who were also disqualified, to cast a vote for the man of their choice. Thus for many years South Carolina had an extremely limited form of democracy in which only white males participated. Despite the fact that the Negro had been eliminated from the election process, one idea was intuitively and intensely believed by every white who had only recently received a voice in the state government: if the system were changed at all to allow Negro voting rights, the whites would again be subjected to "Black Rule." This fear was very real for many poor white Democrats. From the fear came more prejudice and hatred for the Negro so that the race issue was always deeply intertwined in South Carolina politics. Appealing to racial and other prejudices, a whole series of politicians were able to win the confidence of the white voters. Men, like Pitchfork Ben Tillman, Cole Blease, Cotton Ed Smith, Olin D. Johnston, and Strom Thurmond, by the sheer force of their personalities and the manipulation of inflammatory issues were elected to high offices in South Carolina. So it appears that many successful South Carolina politicians were racist demagogues although they might disagree on other issues. Cole L. Blease was above all else a professional politician who often managed to weave the race question into many issues of the 1910 campaign for the governorship of South Carolina.

Blease announced in April that he would run on the same platform that he had held in his two previous campaigns. In itself the platform created no stir in the state; as D. D. Wallace stated, "Blease's platform and some of his measures looked fair enough."³ None of the provisions seemed radical at all; in fact they were in keeping with the state's traditional conservatism in government. The candidate stressed that the financial condition of the state was the main issue of the campaign and promised an honest, fair, impartial administration, which would strive to keep "forever" the legislative, judicial, and executive branches separate, while at the same time working in harmony. Such an administration would guarantee the enforcement of the laws of the state and federal constitutions while insuring justice through trial by jury.⁴ Blease then enumerated a twelve-point "reform" program: biennial sessions of the state legislature; liberal pensions for Confederate veterans; liberal but not extravagant appropriations for the state institutions of higher learning; a good free school system "so that every white child may be given a good common education," but absolutely no compulsory

³Wallace, History of South Carolina, III, 424.

⁴Blease would later be accused of attempting to subvert all these measures that he proposed.

school law; opposition to the higher education of Negroes, and a declaration "in favor of white taxes only for white education," strict enforcement of vagrancy laws, a marriage registration law, a flat rate of two and one-half cents per mile on South Carolina railways; "good roads, good morals, and honest government;" local option whiskey laws and total opposition to any type of barroom; opposition to any restriction on the rights of Democrats to vote in primary elections; operation of the state government on a "liberal but not extravagant" budget, with a reduction of taxes.⁵

In many ways the platform appealed to poor whites without offending the comfortable. A promise of reduction in taxes was bound to be approved by most voters as would the pledge of economy in government. The proposals on education also favored the poor whites. Instead of spending large sums on the state colleges which few of the poor were able to attend or on Negro education, educational funds would be used to build a common school system for all whites. Blease's declaration that higher Negro education was dangerous and his proposal that no white tax money be spent on Negro schools were also attractive to poor whites. The conservative threat to purge the Democratic Club rolls of ineligible voters alarmed many whites who

⁵"Mr. Blease's Platform," Columbia State, April 25, 1910.

could easily be disqualified since the poor could not meet the property requirement or pay the poll tax, much less pass the literacy test. Blease assured them that he was against any such restrictions on their primary voting privileges.

The real issue in the campaign was not finance as Blease had stated, but the liquor question. Ben Tillman's "baby," the State Dispensary system, had been killed by legislative decree. Afterwards most of the state's counties had adopted prohibition, but a few counties, such as Charleston, operated their own liquor systems. Many elements in South Carolina had begun to favor state-wide prohibition by 1910 because of the charges of corruption in the local dispensaries and of the widely shared misgivings about the evils of drink. Blease seemed to be the stronger of the local option candidates, although Thomas G. McLeod appeared to have the support of the Charleston pro-liquor interests. Claudius C. Featherstone was the leading prohibition candidate, followed by F. H. Hyatt. John G. Richards, who ran for governor almost as often as Blease, had no definite position on the liquor question, but seemed to favor local option. The leading state newspapers generally opposed prohibition. Although they might not endorse a candidate, they were usually in agreement with their denunciations of Featherstone as a prohibition

leader.⁶

Featherstone was not harassed by the editorials, but based most of his campaign on an appeal for statewide prohibition. While the other candidates argued over each other's pronouncements on prohibition, Blease calmly stated that the decision should be left to people and not the office seekers. Although he promised to abide by the will of the people in the matter, Blease flatly stated that he enjoyed a drink of liquor occasionally himself, proving to some that he was not a hypocrite on the issue. Blease also presented prohibition as a threat to law and order since those who would want liquor would try to get it illegally. Prohibition then he argued, led to bootleggers "in the form of free niggers backed by white men."⁷ Such frankness and apparent honesty on the behalf of the candidate from Newberry won the approval of many voters on the stump.

While the other candidates debated endlessly over prohibition, Blease elucidated the platform issues which the other candidates rarely mentioned or bothered to pronounce upon. Only Blease and F. H. Hyatt gave any serious attention to economy in the state budget. On other important issues such as compulsory education, suffrage restriction,

⁶Burnside, "The Governorship of C. L. Blease," 14-25.

⁷Columbia State, August 9, 1910.

railroad rates, Confederate pensions, and Negro education, Blease had left no doubt as to his position. Although his main appeal was emotional, in some respects, Blease sounded quite reasonable to the average South Carolina voter. For example, his comment on Negro education that it "ruins a good farm hand, makes a bad convict,"⁸ made good sense to many whites.

As the campaign progressed, the newspapers made the mistake of opposing Blease as well as Featherstone. Led by the Columbia State, the South Carolina press, with the exception of the Newberry lawyer's hometown paper and a few other small weeklies, sought to discredit him altogether, deploring his tactics on the stump, especially his appeals to prejudice. Blease's opposition to compulsory education was considered to be evidence that he was surely not the "poor man's friend" since the children of lower income families stood to benefit most from a free education. The press failed to realize that Blease was catering to the strong individualism of the poor by insisting that parents, not the state, had the right to control their children. Similarly, the newspapers erred in supporting primary restrictions which would remove the voting privileges of the poor. Blease replied by calling the editors and reporters various unflattering names and accusing them of showering

⁸Charleston News and Courier, August 16, 1910.

him with "vituperation and abuse."⁹ If elected, Blease promised to introduce a severe libel law in the General Assembly to protect the state's citizens from the slander of the press.

Finally, the end of August and the primary election arrived. Thomas McLeod, the local optionist, was favored to win by the Charleston News and Courier, but such a prediction meant little since the News and Courier had supported McLeod throughout the campaign. To be sure, few political observers predicted that Cole L. Blease would gain a plurality in the first primary, but such was the case. Featherstone tallied slightly over 30,000 votes to come in second, almost 3,000 short of Blease's total; McLeod placed a strong third; the other candidates received only fractions of the previous counts. Because no candidates had a majority, a run-off primary in September matched Blease with Featherstone.¹⁰

The outcome of the first primary had really placed the newspapers in a predicament. Most had supported neither Blease nor Featherstone; in fact, both had been denounced by the press. Now the papers had to make a choice between two candidates, of whom they had previously

⁹One of Blease's favorite phrases.

¹⁰Burnside, "The Governorship of C. L. Blease," 25.

disapproved. Again the Columbia State assumed the initiative by declaring that there was no choice in the matter-- Cole L. Blease was definitely not the man for the office. Prohibition, which had been the main issue in the campaign, should now be ignored, declared the press. Such was the editorial logic given to the voters by the state newspapers. The issues were no longer important, but the personalities of the candidates were. "The issue is one of men not measures," declared the State.¹¹ Inspired by the State's spearhead thrust, the other papers joined with it in launching a series of attacks on Blease, some of which unfounded, others true. The real error committed by the press, however, was to overstate their case.

Blease was accused of changing his views on liquor whenever it was convenient to do so; of accepting graft funds during the days of the corrupt state dispensary commission; and of frequenting "blind tigers." Such unproven charges were easily denied by Blease. The epitome of editorial folly, however, was reached by the State only a few days before the run-off primary. The State issued a political cartoon depicting a noble female figure, representing the state, holding a sword labeled "the ballot" to defend herself against a horrible buzzard. Blease's head adorned

¹¹Columbia State, September 5, 1910.

the ugly body on which was written "Dispensary Grafters, Ignorance, Race Prejudice, Lawlessness, Demagoguery, Blind Tigers, Injustice, Class Prejudice." Below the cartoon were the words, "The Menace."¹²

The effort to discredit Blease, however, only resulted in the making of a popular martyr.¹³ Many voters had little desire to support a cause that defamed its opponents. After these attacks, many voters disassociated themselves with the anti-Blease movement and became active Bleaseites. The State's tactic of demanding that the voters vote against a candidate rather than for one backfired. On election day Blease polled over 56,000 votes compared to Featherstone's total of approximately 50,000. Even if the newspapers could not explain why, Blease was to be governor. The defeated conservative forces offered no opposition in the November general election as they had against Tillman in 1890 and Blease was officially elected governor by the qualified electorate.¹⁴

After his election although many of his opponents believed him unfit for office, some conservatives hoped that Blease would calm down his bombastic oratory and become a capable governor. They may have been encouraged by

¹²Ibid., September 8, 1910.

¹³Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 490.

¹⁴Burnside, "The Governorship of C. L. Blease," 29.

Senator Tillman, who speculated that Blease would "disappoint his enemies" and embark on a successful administration. But Blease had forgotten neither the harassment of the opposition nor the statements he had made in campaign. As far as he was concerned, the battle, far from being ended, had only begun.

The strenuous campaign had obviously weakened the governor-elect's physical condition and he had been under the care of his physician for some weeks before the inauguration. There was even some speculation as to whether or not Blease would be able to attend the ceremony or if indeed the ceremony would take place at all. Everything, however, occurred as planned. On January 17, 1911 Coleman Livingstone Blease, apparently still quite ill, took the oath of office of Governor of South Carolina. Immediately thereafter, he announced to the audience assembled in the capitol that he would be unable to deliver his inaugural address because of illness. Instead, the reading clerk would make the speech for the Governor. It was one of the few occasions in Blease's career when another was allowed to speak for him.¹⁵

The inaugural address, which sounded much like his stump speeches, contained no words of forgiveness for his

¹⁵Charleston News and Courier, January 18, 1911.

enemies. Calling his election the "greatest political victory in the history of South Carolina," Blease condemned not only the gentlemen of the press but also ministers who had given vent to "malice and slanders of the most virulent and malicious nature."

After his bitter indictment of his political enemies, Blease continued with a miscellany that touched on a variety of subjects. He proposed that legislation be enacted to prohibit the use and sale of cocaine and other harmful drugs. Rather than encourage the "evil, habitual drinking of coca-cola, pepsicola [sic] and such like mixtures," Blease believed it would be better for the people if they had "nice, respectable places where they could go and buy a good, cold, pure glass of beer, than to drink such injurious concoctions." Speaking of the liquor issue, the governor proposed that the present law be expanded to allow the counties to decide if they wanted county dispensaries, privately-owned liquor stores, or prohibition. This issue should be voted on in the primaries not "in a general election where the Negro might be and is the balance of power." Blease further asked for laws to prohibit the sale of toy guns in the state to prevent children from becoming violent at an early age. Executions of condemned criminals should be made public in order to impress young potential trouble makers. As a final measure to prevent the corruption of youth, the legislature should enact a law prohibiting

boys under sixteen from smoking cigarettes.

The remainder of his proposals were chiefly concerned with a strange mixture of finance, race and education. Echoing his campaign promises, Governor Blease called for "a poor government and a rich people." To achieve this purpose, taxes and state institutions of higher learning should be reduced and the resultant savings appropriated to the public school system. Furthermore, taxes paid by whites were to be used only for white education. The Governor reiterated his belief that it was "a serious, grave mistake to educate negroes." Blease particularly desired that white children learn history from books written by Southern authors to perpetuate the glory of the South. Children should be taught to love old Confederate veterans so that anyone who did not was "either a Yankee or had negro blood in his veins." With regard to the Negro, Blease stated that he was a friend to the black race, but that South Carolina was a "white man's country and will continue to be ruled by white men, regardless of the opinions and editorials of quarter or half-breeds and foreigners. The pure-blooded Caucasian will always defend the virtue of our women, no matter the cost. If rape is committed death must follow!" In conclusion, Blease asked that God direct and guide him as governor, and promised a "fair and impartial" administration to all citizens, "both

black and white."¹⁶

To the audience of Bleaseites that packed the galleries, it was the kind of speech they had come to hear their triumphant hero make. The newspapers retaliated by criticizing the new executive's speech as the "worst state paper" ever delivered, and declared it sufficient evidence to prove that Blease was unfit for office. The real reason that Blease had been unable to deliver his address, according to the press, was that he had become intoxicated during a victory celebration and was too inebriated to read his speech the next day. The editorial accounts forecast that the governorship of Blease would begin a new era of factionalism and political partisanship in the state. The majority of his proposals were worthless and the only hope for South Carolina lay in Blease's prayer for divine assistance. Richard C. Hemphill of the Richmond Times-Dispatch, wrote, "If God fails, what then? We tremble to think!"¹⁷

¹⁶Journal of the Senate of the State of South Carolina, 1911 (Columbia: Gonzales and Bryan, 1911), 77-89.

¹⁷Richmond Times-Dispatch, January 20, 1911.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST ADMINISTRATION, 1911-1912

V. O. Key in his book Southern Politics has observed that:

South Carolina's chief executive has limited power. He controls the state constabulary. He has the power of appointment to state offices except many of the really important state agencies. He can grant pardons, send messages to the state legislature, and exercise the power of veto; yet he has the narrowest sort of power of direction of state administration. 'There's nothing to it except the honor' is the common attitude.¹

Cole L. Blease had anything but "the common attitude" about the powers of the governor of South Carolina. He deftly used every resource of his new office to antagonize his enemies and to reward his friends. Blease neither disappointed his enemies in their predictions of factionalism and partisanship nor forgot the promises he had made in his campaign.

On January 21, 1911, he announced in the first of his hundreds of messages to the General Assembly that he had revoked the commissions of every notary public in the state. The notaries "carry much more power than is thought," and he said, he intended to fix some qualifications

¹V. O. Key, Southern Politics in State and Nation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 150.

and a limitation to the term of office.² By this measure he accomplished several purposes. Since notaries have been appointed without time limitations by his preceding political enemies, the governor removed opposition at the local level and later rewarded his "friends" by appointing them to the vacant offices. In regard to his action concerning the notaries Blease later commented, "I expect to see that some of my friends receive at least some consideration from this administration. I do not propose to appoint my enemies to office upon recommendations by anybody, unless I cannot find a friend who is competent and worthy of the position."³ Another reason given for revoking the notaries' commissions was that Governor Ansel, his predecessor had made an "infernal nigger" a notary. In addition to ridding the state of black office holders, Blease boasted that his revision of notary commissions was a victory for economy in government. By charging two dollars for each new commission, the executive claimed to have saved the taxpayers' money by providing a new source of

²Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of South Carolina, 1911 (Columbia: Gonzales and Bryan, 1911), 130. Hereafter cited as House Journal.

³House Journal, 1911, 347; Richmond Times-Dispatch, February 5, 1911.

revenue.⁴

Before public amazement over Blease's change in the notary system had faded, the Governor engaged in another attempt to test the powers of his office. Although the Governor of South Carolina has the power to appoint persons to certain state offices, according to the state Constitution he must abide by the recommendations of appointees given by the proper body. The governor, in short, has the power to commission, but not to designate. The state supreme court often nominated special judges for circuit courts when no circuit judges were available. Such was the case, when in February, 1911, Chief Justice Ira B. Jones sent the name of a nominee for special judge. Blease had learned of the need for a special judge and without waiting for a recommendation from the state supreme court, appointed one of his friends from Newberry to the position. Then he sent a letter to Chief Justice Jones explaining that he was within his rights as Governor in the action and that a "large majority of the people of South Carolina

⁴Reports and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina, 1915 (Columbia: Gonzales and Bryan, 1915), 202. Hereafter cited as Reports and Resolutions. For a revealing letter concerning the Blease strategy in revoking the notary commissions, see, A. W. Hasty to Governor C. L. Blease, January 24, 1913, Governor C. L. Blease MSS, South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Hasty advised Blease to "cut off some heads in Greer since those men are against you."

had elected me as governor,"⁵ giving him the mandate to exercise such power. Shortly thereafter, Blease sent a special message to the General Assembly asking for the specific power to appoint special judges without recommendations from the court.⁶ So it appeared that the governor knew he had the power to commission but not without receiving appointments from the Supreme Court. Blease nonetheless interpreted his power of appointment as a device to reward his friends.

In the foregoing case Blease's effort to expand his power as governor failed. His friend was unwilling to accept the position when he learned that he had not been recommended by the Supreme Court. Nor did the legislature give the governor the power to appoint judges. Later the Supreme Court ruled that the executive must respect the judgment of the judiciary in the area of appointments. None of this deterred Blease in his pursuit of the appointive power. When denied the right to appoint judges, Blease refused to commission any special judges at all. As a final measure Blease offered a list of those he deemed eligible for special judgeships to the Supreme Court and

⁵Columbia State, February 3, 1911. For a fuller description of Blease's conflict with the state Supreme Court, see Burnside, "The Governorship of C. L. Blease," 46-50.

⁶Senate Journal, 1911, 520-521, 682-694.

declared that he would only commission special judges whose names appeared on the list or whose names he might add later. When the Supreme Court refused to follow his dictum and sent him another nominee's name for special judge, Blease flatly stated again that he would make no appointments during his administration except those on his eligible list. To underline his position he declaimed, "Ira B. Jones can mandamus or Godamus or do anything he pleases. I am not going to appoint Ernest Moore as special judge."⁷

Such remarks were well received by many Bleaseites who admired the frank language of their governor. Others sought to prove that Blease was infringing on the powers of the judiciary. Whatever their opinions or Blease's purpose, the controversy between the executive office and the court was not resolved while he was Governor. Likewise he appointed his friends to office whenever possible and withheld commissions from his enemies whenever he could.

Although Blease often referred to the power given him by a majority of the people to justify his action in the matter of appointments and other affairs, he ignored the fact that the legislature was also an elected body. During his first administration, there were few Bleaseites in the state Senate or House of Representatives. By

⁷Columbia State, March 26, 1911.

contrast Tillman had commanded a majority of followers in both houses of the General Assembly, even in his second administration. Consequently, relations between the legislature and the executive were stormy, to say the least. The General Assembly strongly resented the governor's demands sent in the form of special messages and very rarely paid any attention to his words. Often infuriated at being ignored, Blease found ways to chastise the legislature for its unwillingness to obey his wishes.

The main weapon in the Blease arsenal was the power of executive veto. This was used effectively in forcing the General Assembly to read the governor's veto message if nothing else. Only on a few occasions did the legislature sustain his vetoes; usually the bills in question were repassed into law by the required majority. In 1912 Blease approved of only 15 acts and joint resolutions of over 300 passed by the General Assembly.⁸ His attitude seemed to be that if the General Assembly would not pass the bills he wanted, it would not pass any.

To justify his frequent use of the veto, Blease offered a number of explanations. His favorite was to refer to the size of the majority which had elected him and whose interests he was serving. Using campaign promises

⁸Burnside, "The Governship of C. L. Blease," 56.

as reasons, Blease vetoed every general appropriation bill sent to his office. Although rarely used in the state's history, the Governor of South Carolina has the power to veto items from annual appropriations bills. As he had stated on the stump, the financial issue was the chief problem of the state. Deeming 26 items of the 1911 appropriations bill as "useless or excessive expenditures,"⁹ Blease returned the bill to the General Assembly in the final hours of its session. In 1912 the governor urged the General Assembly to limit its expenditures, eradicate the state debt, and "abolish useless state offices" such as "Bank Examiner, Bureau of Agriculture, State Geologist, Game Warden, Government Printing, and Insurance Commissioner." According to the governor the "state institutions of higher learning are receiving entirely too much money," as were public utilities and the Catawba Indians. All of these retrenchments were necessary since it was "possible to run the government on less money, which would relieve our people from their heavy tax burden."¹⁰ When the General Assembly refused to comply with his wishes concerning what he called "ending extravagances," Blease

⁹Senate Journal, 1911, 846; Richmond Times-Dispatch, February 22, 1911.

¹⁰Senate Journal, 1912, 6; veto message in ibid., 955-959.

again vetoed the annual appropriations bill of 1912 which was again passed over his veto.

Another Blease tactic was the sending of a large number of messages to the legislature on particular subjects, and placing the responsibility of his actions in the General Assembly's hands. An outstanding example of this method was the governor's war on the state penitentiary. Following a tour of the state prison shortly after he assumed office, Blease threatened to pardon every convict in the penitentiary unless the legislature completely reformed the state penal system. According to the Governor, the state prison had become a tuberculosis factory in which prisoners were forced to work long hours in a privately owned hosiery mill within the prison. The mill was a certain deathtrap, with inadequate sanitation, lighting and ventilation. The prison itself was no better, but the abolition of the hosiery mill became an obsession with the governor. Throughout his administrations Blease crusaded for the abolition of the mill, the last vestige of the convict lease system in the state. Not only was the mill a health hazard to the inmates of prison, but according to the Governor it was also detrimental to the state as a whole. John Graham, the owner of the mill, was making a fortune by the cheap labor and was simultaneously spreading potential tuberculosis carriers over the entire

state with every visitor to the penitentiary. In the melodrama that followed, the rich aristocrat was the villain and Blease the champion of the underdogs, demanding that the legislature "abolish this infernal deathtrap, this earthly hell."¹¹ Again and again Blease warned, threatened, and harangued the General Assembly concerning prison reforms and the abolition of the hosiery mill. Initially the hostile legislature refused to acknowledge the need for reforms and obstinately stood its ground during Blease's first administration.¹²

Although Blease's charge of inhumane conditions in the state prison were justified, his policies regarding prison reform were not. When the legislature denied that penal reform was necessary and refused to take action, Blease reprimanded the legislature by saying: "My advice to you is to do something. If you do not, then don't blame me for what I do."¹³ He had, however, done a great deal previous to his warning. By the end of his first year as

¹¹Senate Journal, 1911, 729.

¹²Jane Zimmerman, "The Penal Reform Movement in the South During the Progressive Era, 1890-1917," Journal of Southern History, XVII (1951), 462-492. Blease is here specifically mentioned as a penal reformer in the South. Blease appealed to the General Assembly to tear down the prison and build a new one. One of his best arguments is found in the Senate Journal, 1912, 90-95.

¹³Senate Journal, 1912, 93.

governor, he had pardoned, paroled, or commuted the sentences of 317 prisoners. In 1911 when he began his crusade, he appeared to be sincere in his motives for using executive clemency. Most of the prisoners he freed were either suffering from severe illness, serving sentences for crimes they did not commit, or were serving longer terms than their sentences had prescribed. In these cases, Blease drew attention to be injustices of the institution.

Unfortunately, Blease seemed to have formed a habit of exercising the pardoning power. It became a habit he could not break while serving as Governor. Even after the legislature had enacted certain penal reforms including the abolition of the hosiery mill, the high number of pardons continued to flow from the governor's office. Altogether he pardoned over 1700 convicts and very nearly emptied the prison at the end of his second administration. While he never forgave political enemies, he grew quite fond of his absolute power to pardon the criminal enemies of the state. Concerning pardons he said, "Nothing has given me more genuine pleasure than the privilege of exercising the power of forgiveness."¹⁴ Aside from his sheer enjoyment and humanitarian justification of the pardoning power, Blease reiterated that he was only

¹⁴Senate Journal, 1912, 565.

exercising the will of the people as their duly elected representative. He received many petitions for pardons and was only honoring their requests. In his own words, "When the best people, the white people of the community sign a petition for a criminal, I took the position that I was a servant of the people and turned him out."¹⁵

Although he was accused of accepting bribes in exchange for pardons, no evidence was ever found to substantiate the charge. Graft was possibly involved in the many pardons made by Governor Blease, but it is unknown whether he ever received any money for his acts of clemency. Blease himself had been a criminal lawyer and so were many of his friends. He had often stated publicly that he was partial to his friends; so if a convict or an outside contact could purchase the expensive services of one of the governor's lawyer-friends, a pardon was sure to follow. More often, inmates who had an outside spokesman, influential with Blease could depend on a pardon.¹⁶ In the final analysis there really seemed to be no one reason for Blease's abuse of executive clemency other than merely

¹⁵House Journal, 1913, 60. For examples of the men Blease pardoned and his pardon philosophy, see: New York Times, January 17, 1915.

¹⁶C. L. Blease to John D. Bivens, June 4, 1912, John D. Bivens MSS, Duke University Manuscript Division. In his letter Blease promised his friend Bivens that he would "see what can be done for your negro" in the way of a pardon.

using at his discretion the power made available to him.

Some newspapers, notably the State, attempted to imply that Blease's wholesale emptying of the prison fostered crime in the state. Similarly, it was intimated that corruption in the state government was stemming from the Governor's office. In short the opposition was making an effort to show that Bleaseism led to lawlessness. Other actions of the Governor also seemed to reinforce this thesis, especially regarding the liquor problem and lynching.

Liquor and its evil influence on the state had been one of the main issues of the campaign. Not only was there corruption within the few remaining county dispensaries, but also wide-spread traffic in illegal liquor over the state. "Blind Tigers," as the illegal barrooms were called, were abundant in many South Carolina towns, even within sight of the capitol. Blease made some effort to enforce the liquor laws, although he never recommended any changes in the laws. He publicly ordered local officers to enforce laws under the threat of removing them from office. Meanwhile, he appointed a large number of constables all over the state to stop the illicit trade in liquor. Despite these measures the sale of illegal liquor continued and Blease was blamed for failing to halt it. His constables did little to enforce the laws and the fact that they were paid by the counties was a source of local resentment.

Blease was accused not only of being lax in enforcing the law, but of undermining it as well. He was no temperance leader himself and professed that he enjoyed a drink occasionally. According to some reports he was seen in Blind Tigers and "under the influence" at the state house. Furthermore, he pardoned many liquor law violators because they were personal friends. Other charges of the governor's involvement with liquor corruption would be used in the election of 1912. In the main it appeared as though Blease's attitude concerning liquor was not conducive to respect for the law.¹⁷

By the same token some argued that Blease's racial attitudes tended to encourage lawlessness. Although few men in public office in South Carolina would dare disagree with Blease's ideas of white supremacy, his views on lynching brought consternation to the state and national press. Blease had borrowed his philosophy on lynching from Ben Tillman as he had other ideas. For Blease, only one crime justified lynching: the rape of a white woman by a Negro. Then and only then would the Governor condone the action of lynch mob. In fact he claimed he would lead such a mob himself if the opportunity arose. Blease was

¹⁷For a complete account of the liquor problem during Blease's administration, see: R. D. Burnside, "The Governorship of C. L. Blease," 104-135.

only reciting what Tillman had popularized, but the idea well suited the prejudices of many South Carolinians who believed that the sanctity of white womanhood, racism, and the fear of miscegenation were sufficient justification for lynching. Blease understood these prejudices sufficiently to exploit them.¹⁸

Blease's stand on white supremacy was essentially a reformulation of an old pro-slavery argument. The Negro race was simply inferior to the "pure-breed Caucasians." Nature eliminated "social equality," and any attempt to change the inscrutable laws of nature and God would be the highest of all sins. Blease often professed himself an advocate of the popular adage of "keeping the Negro in his place." The "place" was of course definitely subordinate to that of the white. To insure this status, the Negro must be frequently reminded of his position in society and any attempt to approach equality must be severely punished.

Blease believed as did Tillman, the "foulest social disaster" which could possibly occur was the "mongrelization" of the white and black races. Rape was the method by which Negroes sought racial equality in shattering the color line.

¹⁸For Tillman's racial views see: F. B. Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 393-407. Blease's views may be found in R. D. Burnside, "Racism in the Governship of Cole Blease," The South Carolina Historical Association, Proceedings, 1964, 43-57.

Such a heinous violation of Southern womanhood could not be tolerated. Both Tillman and Blease justified lynching for rape. As was often the case with Blease, he merely copied the idea from Tillman, but offered his views on the subject. In fact it was one of Blease's favorite themes. Soon after he was elected, Governor Blease announced that he would never order the state militia to protect a Negro rapist from a lynch mob. He believed that by refusing to call out the militia, Negroes would consider the consequences before attacking a white woman. Since rape represented an attempt at racial equality through miscegenation, Blease contended that lynching was indeed justifiable punishment for a Negro rapist.

Senator Tillman had presented his views on race and lynching to the nation during several speaking tours throughout the country. In 1912 Blease attracted the attention of the national press on the same subject at the Richmond Governor's Conference. When asked by one of the governors if his advocacy of lynching was in violation of the federal and state constitutions, Blease echoed Tillman's words by saying:

Whenever the constitution of my state steps between me and the defense of the virtue of the white woman, I will resign my commission, tear it up, and throw it to the breezes and march to the defense of her honor and virtue. If the constitution causes my state to

blush and allows her women to be forsaken, then I say to hell with the constitution!¹⁹

That the perfervid response of the Governor was genuine is more than suggested by actual incidents in which the governor was called upon to order troops out to stop a lynch mob. Blease did just as he had promised-- nothing. After "Citizen Josh" Ashley had led a successful lynch mob in October, 1911, Blease assured his old friend that he had done the right thing and had nothing to worry about. On other occasions Blease flatly stated that he would pardon anyone convicted on charges of lynching for rape, but doubted that a white jury existed in the state that would make such a conviction. At least eighteen lynchings occurred during the four years of Blease's governorship, and not once did he attempt to use his power to stop them.²⁰

¹⁹A. J. McDelway, "The Governor's Conference," The Survey, XXIX (December 21, 1912), 347-348. The exact wording of Blease's emotional outburst is disputed; during the controversy that followed the statement, Blease went so far as to issue a copy of his speech to the General Assembly in a special message. Blease maintained that he was misquoted or misrepresented concerning his beliefs on lynching. His enemies only stated that he was in favor of lynching without telling why. For more information on the Governor's Conference see: "Blease Among the Governors," Literary Digest, XLV (December, 1912), 1164-1165; "From Calhoun to Blease," The Independent, LXXIII (July-December, 1912), 1383-1384. Tillman had also used the term "to hell with the constitution" on the same issue. See: F. B. Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 396.

²⁰C. L. Blease to Josh W. Ashley, October 16, 1911, Governor C. L. Blease MSS, South Carolina Department of Archives and History; New York Times, November 13, 1911; ibid., January 17, 1915.

During his first administration Blease had done everything in his power as Governor to live up to his campaign pledges to reward his friends and political supporters, and to chastise his enemies. And his enemies reacted accordingly, declaring that Blease was the worst governor of the state since the scalawag, Franklin J. Moses. James C. Hemphill, former editor of the Charleston News and Courier, expressed the common attitude of the state's conservatives in a letter to Dr. Samuel Mitchell, president of the University of South Carolina: "What an ass he [Blease] is to be sure and how fortunate the other states in the Union are not to have a blackguard like this as governor."²¹ In 1912 the conservatives had little understanding of the "queer things Blease has said and the queer things he has done."²² While they believed him "utterly unfit for the office which he disgraces," Coley was more popular than ever with the poor whites. In their opinion he had fought bravely against the aristocrats, "niggers, and nigger lovers." In doing so Blease had proven that "'e ain't scared o' nothin'."²³ Although liquor may have been the deciding issue in the 1910 election, in 1912, as it would be for many years, the issue was Cole L. Blease.

²¹J. C. Hemphill to Samuel C. Mitchell, January 4, 1911, J. C. Hemphill MSS, Duke University Manuscript Division.

²²Richmond Times-Dispatch, March 16, 1911.

²³Ibid., July 8, 1911.

CHAPTER V
THE ELECTION OF 1912

The campaign of 1912 followed the same pattern as that of 1910. Rather than offer a constructive reform program as an alternative to Blease, the conservative machine tried to meet him on his own ground by continuing the tactics used against Blease in the previous election. The newspapers and his opponent attacked almost everything Blease had said or done, but Blease proved himself once again a professional at ridiculing the accusations of his enemies and defending his actions.

But there was one error which the conservatives would not repeat. This time they would unite behind a single candidate to defeat Blease in the primary. Before the close of 1911, conservative forces already had a candidate to rally behind. While many anti-Blease men, most of them old Tillmanites, were talking about running, Ira B. Jones, Chief Justice of the state Supreme Court, emerged as Blease's opponent. Strongly opposed to Blease after the appointment squabble, Jones sent his resignation as Chief Justice to Blease on September 11, 1911, to be effective January 2, 1912. On September 12, he announced his intention to run against Blease in the primary and "put

an end forever to politicians of this type."¹

Jone's political career was in some ways remarkably similar to Blease's. Both were born in Newberry, both were college-educated lawyers and excellent debaters, and both had entered politics as Tillmanites in 1890. Jones, however, was seventeen years older than Blease and, like Tillman, had grown conservative with age. Years on the bench had removed him from active participation in state politics and some felt that he would not be a match for Blease on the stump. Nonetheless, the conservative machine decided to back Jones.²

In language and appearance Jones was soon easily identified with the conservatives. He also alienated the masses of voters with his "burning desire to redeem South Carolina from Bleaseism." The conservatives seemed to believe that all Bleaseites were liars, thieves, and scoundrels, the same attitude that the aristocrats had held in regard to Tillmanites. As one Jones supporter put it, "A large majority of the most intelligent and decent citizens of the state will, if they vote at all, vote for Jones, still as you well know a majority of the voters are

¹Richmond Times-Dispatch, September 20, 1911.

²Clarence N. Stone, "Bleaseism and the 1912 Election in South Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review, XL (January, 1963), 57.

not intelligent and have little or no regard for decency, and the latter class almost to the man will vote for Blease."³ This refusal of the conservatives to recognize and to react to the political and social realities set the tone of the campaign. It was to be the rich, wise, and the well-bred against the poor. Rather than allow the masses of poor whites to participate in state politics and service their interests, the conservatives sought to eliminate them altogether by tightening the primary qualifications. The effort to purge the Democratic club rolls fizzled, fortunately for Blease and his supporters. Senator Tillman, still somewhat influential, could not bring himself to endorse such a reactionary measure. Many also feared that such tactics might give the general elections more meaning and raise once more the spectre of Negro participation in state politics.

Jones' anti-Blease campaign was based on the slogan: "Bleaseism leads to anarchy." His platform was centered around "law and order" to gain the support of the middle and upper classes. He emphasized the point that Blease had interfered with the court system, granted huge numbers of pardons and paroles, and vetoed almost every act of the General Assembly. Jones further argued that Blease fostered

³Richmond Times-Dispatch, March 13, 1912.

lawlessness since the governor had publicly advocated the lynching of Negroes. If elected, Jones would bring about "law and order, good government, good roads, and good schools."⁴

Jones implored the people to "vote as you pray" for "decency, home, sobriety, salvation of youth, law and order, and respect for women." He further implied that all Blease men were crooks or ex-convicts.⁵ Meanwhile Blease still claimed to be the working man's friend, who was not backed by any corporation. Pro-Blease advertisements and handbills scoffed at "wise-looking old fossils or diplomasized molly-coddles," and praised the "uncounted common folk to whom life's daily burden is hard and heavy."⁶ One advertisement, allegedly paid for by workers, declared: "There are so many people who have the idea that we cotton men people and poor farmers are fools and are an underclass of people, but we know Jones is against the poor men."⁷ Crowds grew larger and larger as the candidates stumped

⁴Charleston News and Courier, March 7, 1912.

⁵Taken from a Jones political advertisement which appeared in the state newspapers a few days before the election. Greenwood Index, August 24, 1912, in Tillman Scrapbooks, B. R. Tillman MSS, Clemson University.

⁶Pro-Blease handbill in Tillman Scrapbooks.

⁷Charleston News and Courier, August 25, 1912.

the state. Though there were three entrants, Blease and Jones drew all the attention.

Blease had no difficulty branding Jones as an "aristocrat," a representative of the monied interests and an opponent of the interests of the people. Jones repeated often that he was not an aristocrat, but he seemed to convince very few voters. As the stump campaign opened in June, it appeared that Blease would make a fool of Jones with little effort. Blease was at his absolute best on the stump campaign as he kept Jones on the defensive by issuing diatribes against all that the ex-Chief Justice had done in the past and ridiculing everything that Jones said.⁸

"Corporation Jones" as Blease called him, was also accused of favoring "social equality." Because Jones had not voted for a bill to segregate railway passenger cars when he was in the General Assembly, Blease labeled him a "nigger lover." Jones futilely tried to deny the charge, but the stigma of one who believed in crossing the color line was on him. At Bamberg, Blease confronted the audience with these statements: "You people who want social equality vote for Jones. You men who have nigger children vote for Jones. You who have a nigger wife in the back yard vote for Jones."⁹ In many Bleaseites' minds anyone

⁸Wallace, History of South Carolina, III, 431. Wallace flatly stated that, "Jones on the stump was a failure."

⁹Newberry Herald and News, July 16, 1912.

associated with Ira B. Jones was a "nigger lover."

On several occasions Jones ventured into racist demagoguery against Blease by accusing him of being a man "who loves the nigger pretty well." Jones pointed out that most of the prisoners Blease had pardoned were Negroes, and therefore he had shown his love for them, and in addition, Blease had allegedly made some flattering statements about the state-supported college for Negroes. Blease answered the first charge by applying his philosophy of Negro inferiority to his pardoning record: "We cannot apply the same rules to this inferior race that we do the superior. Negroes are a class by themselves, . . . their morals are not as high as white."¹⁰ Negroes were like little children who did not know right from wrong, and should be forgiven for their mistakes by a responsible white person. Their low morality caused Blease to doubt that rape could be committed against the Negro; consequently, this assumption influenced his liberal use of executive clemency. In regard to the state college at Orangeburg, Blease replied that upon taking office he had removed the president of the college, vetoed appropriations to the school, and now wanted the institution for "baboons" closed.¹¹

¹⁰House Journal, 1912, 73.

¹¹C. N. Stone, "Bleaseism and the 1912 Election," 60; Newberry Herald and News, July 19, 1912.

If indeed there were any real issues in the campaign, race was the most important. Tillman had said that "he [Jones] is absolutely a child in Blease's hands,"¹² referring to this stump campaign, for at that time Blease was unequalled in the state as a demagogue. Before the third stop on the tour, however, it appeared that Blease, not Jones, was on the defensive. Jones' apparent failure had called forth other methods for defeating Blease.

The liquor question, which had been the main issue in 1910, was used again in 1912, but in a different way. The State Dispensary System, though legally dead since 1907, played a prominent role in the campaign. Governor Ansel had appointed a special commission to close out the business of the Dispensary and this commission was still operating when Blease became governor in 1911. During its existence it had recovered large amounts of money lost by the state through the dispensary system. Many lawsuits were launched and an Atlanta law firm, Anderson, Felder, Roundtree, and Wilson, was employed by the state to handle some of the cases. Many of Blease's friends were faced with court action when he assumed office in late January, 1911. Blease called on the legislature to appoint a committee to investigate the commission and claimed he believed that the state was being swindled by the commission

¹²Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 495.

more than it had been by the dispensary. Thomas B. Felder, one of the Atlanta attorneys, was singled out by Blease as actually being an agent for the liquor companies.¹³

Felder gave the anti-Blease forces real inspiration for the coming campaign with his profane remarks about Governor Blease. After the General Assembly appointed a committee to investigate the dispensary and the closeout commission, Blease refused to authorize the committee and appointed his own team of investigators. It was soon apparent that the governor's committee was out to get Felder. A former member of the State Dispensary Board and one of Blease's friends testified that Felder had tried to bribe him in behalf of the liquor companies. Felder sent open letters to the state newspapers denying the charges and most of all attacking Blease's character. He referred to Blease as a "plunderbund," a "mental and moral pervert,"¹⁴ and a "miserable miscreant . . . not even fit to be governor of a nigger colony."¹⁵ Felder had no facts to offer that would prove corruption on the Governor's part, but overtly implied that a man of such moral character was certain to be involved.

¹³For full details of the liquor controversy, see, R. D. Burnside, "The Governorship of C. L. Blease," 104-135.

¹⁴Newberry Herald and News, March 24, 1911.

¹⁵Columbia State, March 26, 1911.

Meanwhile, the Governor's committee ended the state contract with Felder's law firm and demanded that he supply documented evidence for his charge of corruption of Blease. Felder refused, stating that the committee had no legal power and that he would at the proper time give proof of his allegations. The committee was indeed powerless and was dissolved in March, 1912.

By this time the General Assembly had begun its 1912 session and had overridden the governor's veto for the legislative commission that the executive had originally demanded. The legislative commission appeared to be less interested in investigating the old dispensary than it was in proving that Blease had been involved in corruption. Many of the witnesses before the commission took the opportunity to slander Blease as much as possible, but could offer no proof of his guilt. As the campaign drew closer, the anti-Blease forces became desperate to uncover evidence that the Governor was corrupt. In June the commission moved to Charleston to hear Mayor John P. Grace, former Bleaseite, testify that the corruption in his county dispensary system could be traced back to the Governor's mansion. Again, however, no proof of the charge was forthcoming.¹⁶

¹⁶Grace later got into trouble during the campaign by telling a "Negro story" on Blease. Grace claimed that Blease had attempted to rape a young Negro girl. At

By now the campaign was well under way and the only course of action left to the anti-Bleaseites lay with Felder. Blease had sought to have Felder extradited for libel, but had failed. The Atlanta attorney claimed he was afraid to enter South Carolina since Blease had offered a two-thousand-dollar reward to anyone who would "get Tom Felder two feet this side of the Savannah River." According to Felder, Blease would then have him killed and would pardon the murderer.¹⁷ In order to hear Felder, therefore, the commission decided to move to Augusta. The Governor aired his opinion on the affair by saying:

This guttersnipe, stinking, filthy commission which has been trying to find something on me are going to crawl on their bellies to Augusta to take the testimony of a scoundrel who is afraid to come to South Carolina.¹⁸

Felder appeared before the committee and promised, "I will show by records that Cole L. Blease is not fit to sit in a convention of buzzards and the absolute testimony will be presented to prove it."¹⁹ Felder again renewed

Spartanburg a group of infuriated Bleaseites mobbed him when he tried to tell the story. Strange as it may seem, Grace would later become a Bleaseite once again. His manuscript collection at Duke University appears to have been purged of any important political letters.

¹⁷"A Governor Accused," The Outlook, CI, (July 27, 1912), 650-651.

¹⁸Columbia State, July 12, 1912.

¹⁹C. N. Stone, "Bleaseism and the 1912 Election," 62.

his charges of Blease's involvement in dispensary graft, and created a national sensation when he declared that he had conclusive evidence that the Governor had sold pardons. William Burns, a detective hired by Felder, had obtained a "dictograph recording" from a lawyer who had bought a pardon for a "safe blower" from Blease. The lawyer later claimed to be drunk at the time of the recording and would not substantiate the charge, nor could any other witnesses. Even if there had been actual proof the commission had no power to act on it. Its purpose had been to investigate the dispensary and in no way could it definitely implicate Blease.

The Governor dismissed the proceeding as a "damnable conspiracy" and resented "the manner in which this cowardly character, thief, and debaucher and pimp has attempted to injure the chief magistrate of the state with the assistance of this committee."²⁰ On the stump he produced affidavits testifying to his innocence of the charges, demonstrated the lack of evidence, and easily proved that many of the charges were clearly false. Again the conservatives had failed to discredit Blease.

Also on the stump Blease continued to refer to himself as a Tillmanite and claimed to be the political heir

²⁰New York Times, July 21, 1912.

of Pitchfork Ben. During Blease's first administration, however, Senator Tillman had disapproved of many of the governor's actions. In turn, Blease had shown little inclination to pay heed to Tillman's advice and wishes. As Tillman's biographer wrote:

Blease knew he had a constituency among whom the name of Benjamin was not always magic. He dared to be independent, even ignoring the senator's request for the formation of a new county, scolding him for holding two offices at the same time, and openly declaring that Tillman's support was not essential for his re-election.²¹

By the time Jones had announced his candidacy, Tillman had decided that Blease should not be re-elected. He had come to believe that Blease was morally unfit to be Governor. His advice to Blease to stop drinking, to stop talking so much and to clear up the charges of corruption went unheeded. Tillman also heard stories about Blease's gambling and chasing after women. After making this decision, Tillman did not publicly condemn Blease, for the Senator was also up for re-election in 1912. Although he expressed his concern over Blease's unworthiness in many private letters, a public statement against the Governor would alienate many old Tillmanites. Many of Blease's enemies were his own and he did not want to side

²¹Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 493. For a more detailed account of the formal break between Tillman and Blease, ibid., 493-500.

with them; so rather than risk his own defeat, Tillman planned to remain neutral in the gubernatorial contest and hoped that Blease would lose the election.

Before the campaign was well under way, Tillman saw the futility of the conservative tactics used against Blease. He disapproved of their slanderous methods, and even admired Blease on the stump. He grew to realize that Jones would be defeated by his lackluster performance alone. Simultaneously, Tillman was being pressed by both sides to endorse one of the candidates. In his letters he had spoken for and against both men. Now both sides had obtained letters that contained some remarks complimentary to their candidate. The Jones supporters insisted that Tillman had endorsed the ex-Chief Justice and the Bleaseites maintained the opposite. Tillman was forced to take a stand.²²

Three days before the primary election, Tillman made public the full text of one of the letters concerning Blease. In it he denounced Blease as a man who had betrayed his state and abused the power of his office. He concluded, "I hope for the credit of the State, he will be beaten."²³ Blease had been pitchforked.

²²Some of the letters and telegrams may be found in the Tillman Scrapbooks.

²³Charleston News and Courier, August 24, 1912.

Blease was quick to label the pronouncement as an "infamous eleventh hour stab" and alleged that he had been betrayed by Tillman because of the Senator's "insane jealousy." Blease dismissed the matter as having no effect on the coming election and attributed it to the fact that the old Senator's feeble mind "has become more diseased of late than it was when I had my last talk with his confidential physician."²⁴

In the final days before the election, Tillman issued more statements on the incumbent governor: "The people two years ago elected a man governor who 'ran amuck' and displayed so little realization of his high opportunities that it makes me sad and angry to be told as I have been more than once that Tillmanism leads to Bleaseism."²⁵ Tillman continued by contrasting Tillmanism as a "genuine democracy, and the rule of the people," with Bleaseism as factionalism, partisanship, and the self-aggrandizement of Cole L. Blease.²⁶ Privately, Tillman feared that his opposition to Blease would prevent his re-election to the Senate.

On the other hand Blease seemed confident of

²⁴Ibid., August 23, 1912.

²⁵"Tillman Bids People Beware," handbill in Tillman Scrapbooks.

²⁶Ibid.

victory throughout the campaign. He had kept his promise to make "that Jones gang sweat blood." Before the election Blease expressed his optimism in a letter to one of his friends:

Everything is moving along nicely: good news coming in from all sides; keep up your good work and tell all the boys to be at the polls on the 27th and stay there and see that we get a free ballot and fair count; that is all we want, for we got the Jones gang beat and are going to keep them beat.²⁷

The election results proved Blease's prediction to be true, but the "Jones gang" decided that they were not yet beaten. A record number of votes were cast in the primary, causing many Jones supporters to believe that there were too many votes cast. They lost no time submitting an official protest to the State Democratic Executive Committee. The committee declared the results of the election invalid until a recount and an investigation were held. The process was to be slow and arduous, and for over a month after the election the South Carolina Democratic Party had no nominee for Governor.²⁸

Both sides accused each other of fraud. The Jonesites accused the Bleaseites of stuffing the ballot

²⁷Cole L. Blease to John D. Bivens, August 10, 1912, John D. Bivens MSS, Manuscript Division, Duke University.

²⁸Because of the disputed returns, varied counts of the vote exist. It seems safe to say that Blease received over 72,000 votes, Jones over 66,000 and John T. Duncan over 2,000.

boxes and other irregularities at the polls. In turn, during the investigation the Bleaseites accused the Jonesites of attempting to juggle the votes after they had been cast. Such division within the party became dangerous as the days wore on. Tillman warned John Gary Evans, Chairman of the State Democratic Committee, of the danger involved if the situation continued:

. . . while it will be a bitter dose to have Blease as governor . . . , I see no earthly power that can prevent Blease from running independently in November and sweeping this state, for a great many Jones men do not stomach cheating or such high handed proceedings as are going on. The dawling and fooling of your sub-committee place the entire state democratic party in jeopardy.²⁹

Finally the investigating sub-committee filed its report on October 1 and Blease was still the official nominee. Although many cases of irregularities were cited in the report, no evidence of fraud was established. The unusually high number of votes was attributed to the strong interest in the race. The conservative effort to defeat Blease had failed.

In November Blease was officially elected with no opposition in the general election. The mill workers had again rallied to their champion, and the state prepared for two more years of Bleaseism.

²⁹B. R. Tillman to J. G. Evans, September 12, 1912, J. D. Bivens MSS, Manuscript Division, Duke University.

CHAPTER VI

THE SECOND ADMINISTRATION, 1913-1914

Governor Blease began his second term with an air of optimism. He was pleased with his first administration, with his second statewide political victory, and, most of all, with himself. In his 1913 inaugural address he spoke of the "wonderful prosperity" the state had attained during his first two years as governor. Despite the warnings that "if Blease was [sic] elected, the state would be financially ruined," investments in cotton mills and agricultural production had increased tremendously; more northern capital had come into the state than ever before. Blease was also happy to report that there was no corruption in any state office and the state's budget was balanced.

Although South Carolina appeared to be in better condition than ever by the Governor's account, he recommended a number of improvements that were necessary if progress were to continue in the state. Blease began by calling attention to the educational system of South Carolina. The state colleges were still spending too much money. More funds should be appropriated for the common schools. Since the legislature refused to cut the allotments to state institutions of higher learning, the governor

proposed a special one-mill property tax for the public schools. The state colleges were worthy institutions according to the Governor, but if the legislature would not improve the public schools none of the "country children" would ever be able to attend them. Naturally Governor Blease reiterated his belief that white taxes were for white schools only, and such would be the case with the new tax.

Blease not only criticized the state appropriations for higher learning, but also recommended that the entire system of state institutions for higher learning be changed. Each state college should specialize in certain areas, rather than "all the state colleges teaching all these things." For example, Clemson College should be the only state college with an agricultural department and all funds for agricultural development and education would go to that school and no other. This would avoid "extravagances" by eradicating duplicate programs in separate state schools.

The Governor specifically demanded that the legislature place Clemson College under complete state control and change its name to Calhoun College. This in itself was nothing new or unusual, for earlier efforts had been made to name the school after John C. Calhoun, who had originally owned the land on which it was built. Thomas G.

Clemson, Calhoun's son-in-law, had willed the property to the state along with an endowment to build an agricultural college. One of the terms of the will allowed the majority of the board of trustees to be independent from the state government. Tillman, who had been active in stimulating Clemson to leave his estate for the school, was one of these independent trustees. Blease had often scolded him for "dual office-holding" and perhaps he hoped to receive credit for the institution that Tillman had been instrumental in founding. Whatever Blease's reasons, the legislature would ignore his demands concerning Clemson College and the departmentalizing of the state colleges.

Continuing his tirade against the "big" evils in the state, Blease again stated that he was opposed to any cotton mill mergers. If his support of the improvement of the common schools, at the expense of the "rich man's" colleges appealed to the lower classes, the claim to stop the financial interests in their high-level plans also gave the workers and cotton farmers inspiration. In regard to the mergers the Governor flatly stated that they were only "an effort to absolutely control the price of cotton and to control the price of labor in all cotton mills and control the vote of the cotton mill people." Blease also asserted that "men were dismissed from their jobs for not voting as their bosses," but offered no proof for his statement.

Of course, the greatest evil in the governor's mind remained in the form of the state prison hosiery mill. Blease again urged the legislature to abolish that "tuberculosis incubator." If no action were taken he implied that he would continue to utilize his power of executive clemency to force the legislature to action. In short, the governor was repeating his threat to pardon all the prisoners who worked in the mills and farm the rest out to county chain gangs if the legislature refused to act.

Rarely missing an opportunity to raise the race question, Blease offered several recommendations to keep the Negroes in their place. The education of Negroes was naturally a serious threat to white society, but the grave "menace which can be averted" was the acquisition of land by Negroes. Whites should refrain from selling land to the blacks, or else the day would come with the Negro being on an equal economic plane with the whites. Blease's logic in this case seems to have been that if Negroes cannot always be deprived of life and liberty, at least something should be done to prevent them from acquiring property.

Another potential danger to white supremacy was the organization of secret Negro lodges. The governor urged the General Assembly to enact legislation to disband these lodges immediately. Such measures could avert a future conflict between the races.

In conclusion Blease boasted of the state's progress in all areas during the past year. Cotton prices were high, a bumper crop of corn had been harvested, new textile mills had opened, and there had been a "magnificent increase in manufacturing activities." Rather than ruin the state financially, Blease boasted that he had stimulated the "wonderful prosperity" of the state. "In every phase of South Carolina's economic life, the year 1912 will rank as the best year of all that have gone before," exulted the governor.¹

Throughout Blease's second administration, he continued to gain notoriety with his controversial statements and programs. He wasted little time in advising the General Assembly by means of his special messages. Several were waiting for the legislature the day after the governor had taken office. Continuing to press for a severe libel law, a series of messages dealt with Blease's statements at the Governor's Conference of the previous year. He sent the legislators transcripts of his remarks made at Richmond in order to correct the many misquotations and "infamous and foul editorials." Blease argued that he had advocated lynching only in the event of a criminal assault by a Negro on a white woman. In regard to this matter he commented:

¹Senate Journal, 1913, 29-52.

There will be no need for a trial, and there ought not be any need of it in any civilized community. If we can't protect our white women from a black fiend what can we do for our country's civilization and for man's uplift? . . . I assure you that whenever a black brute lays his hands upon a white woman, the sooner his dead body is placed six feet underground the better for the virtue and womanhood of the Southern States and of South Carolina.²

As for the "infamous and foul editorials" Blease replied, "I care nothing for the criticisms of Cubans, mixed breeds, negroes or negro lovers. However, I want the decent element of South Carolina to see what I said, and to let them pass judgment on it themselves."³

The Cuban mentioned by Blease was probably W. E. Gonzales, editor of the Columbia State and bitter opponent to Blease. Other messages were also concerned with Gonzales. One implied that if no libel law were passed, there was the strong possibility of the death of a certain newspaperman. Blease's particular hatred for the editor of one of the state's leading newspapermen also caused him to oppose Woodrow Wilson. During the campaign Wilson had visited South Carolina and had stayed with Gonzales rather than with the governor. It had only been necessary for Gonzales to endorse Wilson for Blease to oppose him. When the Democratic candidate for the Presidency chose to ignore the

²Ibid., 58-73; 61-72.

³Ibid., 59; New York Times, June 16, 1913.

encumbent Democratic candidate for Governor and allied himself with the opposition, that added insult to injury.⁴

As a result, Blease rarely had anything good to say about Wilson's administration. He even refused to allow the South Carolina militia to march in Wilson's inaugural parade since there was a chance that Negro soldiers would precede the state's militia in the procession. He was severely critical of Wilson's policy during the Mexican intervention. In Blease's opinion the United States should have annexed Mexico, and would have if Wilson were not a coward. The Governor's hostility toward the President continued throughout his administration. This attitude would later cost Blease dearly in his political career, but he never altered his opinion of Wilson. The judgment that "Wilson is a good school teacher, but a poor president,"⁵ characterized Blease's feelings for the President.

Blease openly stated that he expected no favors from Wilson's administration, but he also killed two federal projects in the state by his own spite. In one

⁴G. B. Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1943; Vol. IV, A History of the South, ed. E. Merton Coulter and W. H. Stephenson (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 9.

⁵Quoted in Burnside, "The Governorship of Coleman Livingston Blease," 273.

case Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy, toured the Naval facilities at Port Royal and remarked to William Gonzales that federal funds could be available to renovate and to enlarge the port on the condition that the area's illicit whiskey trade be ended. Blease interpreted Daniel's stipulation as an attempt to slander his administration and reacted accordingly. He described Daniels as "a very small man" who was completely incompetent for a cabinet post. As for the federal funds, Daniels could keep them "or stick it in his ears, as may best suit."⁶ Needless to say, South Carolina received no federal funds for port improvements.

Another incident embroiled the Governor with the Secretary of War, Lindley Garrison. Early in 1913 Garrison ordered that certain low-country units of South Carolina militia be deactivated since they were not up to standard. Blease violently countered that to do so was impossible because the militia was needed to protect the white population. In the low-country, whites were a minority and the white militia was considered to be the only deterrent to a black insurrection. After a short wrangle Blease agreed that the militia units in question would be mustered out on the condition that new ones would be organized without delay to replace them. Garrison was assured that his problems

⁶Ibid., 274.

with South Carolina's Governor were over, but he was wrong.

In 1914 Garrison was searching for a site for a summer training camp to serve four southeastern states including South Carolina. After consulting the members of Congress from South Carolina and the state adjutant general, Garrison announced that the Isle of Palms, (which had housed military installations since the Revolutionary War), had been selected by the War Department. Blease was enraged. No one had consulted him and his approval was necessary for the site. In his mind an effort had been made to by-pass his authority, and unless an apology was forthcoming, Blease would not approve the site. Garrison replied that if the Governor delayed the matter further the site would be moved to another state. It was. Blease then announced that no troops would be allowed to travel through South Carolina to the new site in Georgia and called Garrison a "pug-nosed Yankee."⁷ Another victory for the champion of states' rights? Some in South Carolina thought so.

Other issues during Blease's second administration could be considered in a similar light. According to one's point of view, either he succeeded marvelously or made a

⁷New York Times, January 19, 1915; Columbia Record, April 22, 1914.

fool of himself. In the field of education Bleaseites later would show several major accomplishments under Blease's administration. The two great achievements were the passage of the special school tax and the establishment of the State Medical College at Charleston. Both were measures recommended by Blease and were used in later campaigns to illustrate the great educational progress under Blease.

The Governor's proposed state-wide one-mill property tax was a major issue in the 1913 session of the General Assembly. After a lengthy and heated debate a compromise bill was passed which diverged widely from the measure the Governor had proposed. Blease had wanted the tax revenue placed in a general fund to be distributed by the State Board of Education. In this way the poorer counties could receive more money than was possible through local levies. Instead, the tax bill enacted by the General Assembly provided that the counties retain one-half of the income from the tax and the other half would be dispersed by the State Board of Education not just among the poorer rural schools, but also among high schools, libraries, and graded schools. Blease was furious. In his veto message he called the bill an "abortion" and objected to the fact that the rural schools would not receive the funds they needed. The legislature overrode his veto and enacted the bill. It was

the first direct tax exclusively for public schools in the history of the state.

Blease continued to fight for the one-mill tax for rural schools, but the General Assembly had little desire to pass more property taxes. In 1914 the one-mill tax for schools was not renewed, but the legislature did make direct appropriations from the general tax fund for public education. This was a new measure since educational funds had previously come from the dispensary fund. Without following Blease's specific recommendations, the legislature had given more assistance to the public schools. Although the governor had vetoed the tax bill of 1913, he later would claim credit for the one-mill tax.⁸

Similarly Blease vetoed other measures pertaining to education, yet apparently was able, in his mind, to make political capital from his actions. Appealing to the strong sense of individualism in the lower classes, the Governor vetoed a compulsory education bill in 1913. Calling the bill "a humbug snare, a farce,"⁹ Blease argued that it was the parents' responsibility and not the state's to decide whether or not their children received

⁸Burnside, "The Governorship of Coleman Livingston Blease," 201-204.

⁹House Journal, 1913, 1430. Senator Tillman also opposed the compulsory attendance bill, but on the grounds that it would increase the danger of social equality by educating the Negro.

an education.

In 1912 Blease had vetoed a medical inspection bill for school children on the same grounds. During his second administration, the executive vetoed two more medical inspection bills. The veto messages denounced the bills as invitations to immorality. Governor Blease promised that if the bill were passed over his veto, he would pardon any father who killed a doctor for violating his daughter's modesty. A medical examination was also an individual's prerogative that could not be forced on any person or his children. Again, Blease appeared to many as a hero of individual rights.¹⁰

The Governor also clouded over important issues in education with racial prejudice. The danger of social equality in schools was brought before white society. Blease condemned the use of white teachers in Negro schools and repeatedly urged the legislature to enact a law forbidding such practices. In 1913 a Bleaseite assemblyman introduced such a bill in the legislature, and a heated debate followed. The Bleaseites and their leader accused anyone opposed to the bill of being in favor of social equality.¹¹

¹⁰House Journal, 1912, 1089-1092; Senate Journal, 1914, 1022-23; See also, Burnside, "The Governorship of Coleman Livingstone Blease," 216-217.

¹¹The bill was introduced by C. D. Fortner of Spartanburg.

Another favorite target of the governor was the University of South Carolina and its president Samuel C. Mitchell. Possibly Blease had never forgotten the incident of his college days. A feverish battle developed over Blease's accusation that Mitchell diverted Peabody funds from Winthrop College to South Carolina State College. Thus Mitchell was just another "nigger lover." Eventually Mitchell resigned under fire from the governor to become president of the Medical College of Virginia. The Bleaseites rejoiced while others in the state were shaken at the loss of a fine educator.¹²

Also in 1913 Blease recommended that the state acquire the Medical College of Charleston and place it under the control of the University of South Carolina. This was a favorable proposition to the legislature, which soon acted to secure the school. As a result the Medical College of South Carolina came into existence. In the area of higher learning it was Blease's only praiseworthy and non-partisan proposal during his four years as governor.¹³

The General Assembly had begun to co-operate with the executive in other areas as well by 1913. Although a

¹²Daniel W. Hollis, University of South Carolina, Vol. II, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1951-1956), 249-262.

¹³Wallace, History of South Carolina, IV, 965.

majority of the legislators were anti-Bleaseites, they enacted several of the Governor's recommendations concerning prison reforms. A 1914 law, enabling counties and judges to sentence more prisoners to road work crews and county prison farms, made it unnecessary for Blease to commute many prisoners' sentences from the state prison to the road gangs. At the time the measure was a practical one. Earlier, acting upon another suggestion from the Governor, the legislature enacted that electrocution replace hanging for capital crimes. Finally in 1913 the legislature abolished the prison hosiery mill as a health hazard to inmates. Apparently this was a great victory for the Governor since he had advocated such a measure from the beginning of his administration.¹⁴

Superficially it would appear that the conservative General Assembly had reconciled itself to Blease. In all probability such was not the case. For one thing there was little danger that Blease would be so foolish as to attempt an unprecedented third term as governor. It was fairly certain, however, that he would remain active in politics, and that at least there would be a Bleaseite candidate for governor. Furthermore, Blease did have a considerable constituency. So the old conservative faction had to cope

¹⁴Ibid.

with him in some way. Twice it had attempted to defeat him by employing his own tactics and had failed. Now at last they had come to realize that "Blease, the personality, represents Bleaseism, a condition."¹⁵ The only way to get rid of Blease was to eradicate some of the discontent on which he thrived. Thus, by enacting the least offensive and the most beneficial measures that Blease had proposed, the conservatives sought to lessen social unrest of the lower classes with at least token measures of moderate reform. Meanwhile the assault on Blease, the personality, did not cease.

In some ways the strategy worked. By enacting prison reforms the legislature removed Blease's justification for his use of executive clemency. If he continued his policy of excessive pardons, voters might wonder why. Blease would demonstrate how he could discredit himself by the use of the pardon.

One example which strained the credibility of the governor's use of the pardon occurred in March, 1913. Harrison Neeley, Cole's Negro chauffeur, was fined \$3.75 for driving thirty miles an hour on the main street in Columbia, a twelve mile per hour zone. The Governor responded by pardoning the chauffeur. Columbia Police Chief

¹⁵James C. Derieux, "Crawling Toward the Promised Land," The Survey, XLVIII (September, 1922), 178.

Clint Cathcart stated to the press that he did not think Cole had the power to pardon in a city Recorder's Court. This infuriated Blease, who claimed that the Columbia police were his political enemies. If they continued to persecute Neeley, the Governor would have no choice except to take over the police, and place the city under martial law. A few days later, the matter still unsettled, Neeley was fined again for a speeding violation. Naturally Cole pardoned Neeley again. Chief Cathcart asked that both the fines be paid and repeated his belief that the Governor had no power to pardon in city court.

Cole's first reaction was to threaten to pardon everyone who asked him for pardon in city court. In the end, however, Blease settled on what he considered to be a better punishment for the city. He merely appointed three extra liquor constables to the city. The city and the county had to pay their salaries and Blease promised to add another every time his chauffeur received a traffic ticket.¹⁶

This incident, in addition to Blease's continued pardoning of convicts in large numbers after reforms had been passed by the General Assembly, detracted from his professed concern for prison conditions. Any sincere desire of the Governor to improve prison conditions was almost totally overshadowed by the excessive use of pardoning

¹⁶New York Times, March 9, 12, 1913; See also, Columbia State, March 8-12, 1913.

power to satisfy his own personal desires. It was a mistake that would contribute to several future political defeats.

If the occasion demanded it, the General Assembly co-operated to a degree with the Governor as in the "cotton panic" of 1914. The outbreak of World War I had severely limited the international cotton market. With the major European purchasers at war, the price for a bumper crop of cotton dropped from 12 cents a pound in July to 5 cents a pound in August. In South Carolina as well as other Southern states, agitation began in many quarters to attempt some method of price stabilization. Many requests for a special session of the General Assembly were received by the Governor, but Blease was hesitant to comply. In his mind there was a good reason.

Cole had already lost to E. D. Smith in the primary of the Senatorial race, but the Bleaseite candidate, John G. Richards, in the gubernatorial race had been able to make the second primary. The day before the election Blease announced that he would consider the vote in the second primary as a referendum for a special session of the legislature. If Richards won, then there would be a special session. Richards lost, but Blease decided to call the legislature into session anyway to meet the crisis.¹⁷

¹⁷Columbia State, September 3-5, 1914.

True to his style, the Governor welcomed the legislators with a lengthy harangue. In great detail he bemoaned his recent defeat, complained of the "abuse and vituperation" he had received as Governor and candidate, and promised to continue as the champion of the common man. Finally he made specific recommendations to meet the emergency: prohibit the sale of all property under lien or mortgage; extend time limits of tax payments; reduce the interest rate to six percent; restrict all cotton acreage; initiate a state warehouse system for cotton.¹⁸

As radical as these proposals were for conservative, individualistic South Carolina, some legislators were prepared to take even more drastic measures. Debate over restriction of acreage ranged from demands for no restrictions at all to the popular idea of the total elimination of the 1914 cotton crop. Finally the General Assembly acted to restrict acreage to one third of the 1914 crop and established a state warehouse system. Blease signed both the bills readily, but still complained about his relations with the legislature. Nonetheless they had worked together to attempt to solve the problem, and neither worried if the solution was popular or constitutional. At the

¹⁸House Journal, 1914 Extra Session, 12-117; most of the laws passed by the Extra Session were repealed by next year when prices became stable. Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 436.

time they seemed necessary. Blease had provided leadership and direction in a time when it was required. As D. D. Wallace stated, "This was cool and statesmanship conduct while thousands of conservative men had lost their heads."¹⁹

Such was the governorship of Cole L. Blease. He was not as bad a governor as his opponents declared him to be, nor was he as good as he and his supporters said he was. His accomplishments, however, were shrouded by his mistakes. Excessive use of executive clemency veiled his true concern for prison reform. Vetoing appropriation and education bills and opposing the state colleges tainted the establishment of the Medical College and his fight for the improvement of rural schools. Notoriety, personal vendettas, favoritism, and antagonism toward the Wilson administration were also mistakes; not to mention the fact that Blease offered little as Governor to the people who had elected him. During both his terms Blease acted as though he was still campaigning on the stump. To him the process of obtaining political office seemed more important than fulfilling the functions of the position. The administrations of Blease were only secondary to his gaining election in his next campaign. The mistakes he made in office, however, would cost him dearly in future campaigns.

¹⁹Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 436.

CHAPTER VII

DEFEAT AND MORE DEFEAT, 1914-1922

Often Cole declared that it had been his ambition as a boy to become governor of South Carolina, and that he aspired to no higher office. But Blease had a propensity for saying one thing and doing another. Even in his first administration the Governor admitted that he would be pleased to represent his state in the Senate with Ben Tillman. During his second administration he visited the Senate Chamber in Washington and picked out a seat for himself. It was almost a foregone conclusion that Cole Blease would be in the race for the Senate in 1914.¹

"The campaign of 1914 exhibited a repetition of the coarse personalities of 1912."² So said D. D. Wallace, and such in fact was the case. No real issues were involved, only a conflict of personalities on the stump and behind the political scenes. Blease's opposition was formidable: "Cotton Ed" Smith, Langston D. Jennings, and William F. Pollock. All four were accomplished demagogues,

¹Columbia State, January 28, 1914.

²Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 434.

but possibly the deciding element in the election was the political maneuvering of Pitchfork Ben Tillman. In 1914 Tillman did not hesitate to work for Blease's defeat, thanks to the increased hatred between the two men.³

The issue which most antagonized Tillman was the forced resignation of James W. Babcock as superintendent of the state insane asylum. The episode began when Blease accused Dr. Eleonora Sanders, one of the first women doctors in the state, of insubordination and conduct unbecoming a lady. Dr. Sanders had been working in the asylum laboratory at night in the company of a Dr. Cooper, who had been dismissed from the asylum. Although the doctors worked together in the presence of nurses, Blease charged that the two were secretly using the laboratory for immoral purposes. When Blease demanded that Dr. Babcock dismiss Dr. Sanders, he refused, and upheld Dr. Sanders as a dedicated worker. More than that, Babcock submitted his own resignation effective if and when she were dismissed. Blease then turned his wrath on Babcock. This enraged Tillman, who was a good friend of Babcock. When the controversy continued, both the doctors resigned. Later the

³The split between the former friends had reached a new low in 1913. Tillman stated that "Cataline among the Romans and Aaron Burr among the Americans are the only other two men I have ever read of who were equal to Blease in bamboozling the people." New York Times, January 22, 1913.

name of each was cleared, but Tillman was now prepared to prevent Blease from becoming his junior colleague in the Senate with every resource at his disposal.⁴

At the same time Tillman had no great love for Ellison D. Smith, the incumbent. Smith was believed to have been a Haskellite in 1890 and had won his Senate seat without Tillman's endorsement. As an alternative, the old Senator attempted to persuade several of his faithful lieutenants to run against Blease. John L. McLaurin, A. F. Lever, and John Gary Evans politely declined the invitation. Eventually Tillman reconciled himself to Smith's candidacy since "it would be unspeakable disgrace and disaster to the state to send him Blease to the Senate."⁵

Another weapon advocated by Tillman to be used against Blease was that of tightening primary voting requirements. Some of the state's Democrats wanted to apply the same strict regulations that deprived the Negro of the franchise in the general elections. Such a measure would have been disastrous for Blease. A large number of his white supporters would have easily been disqualified by

⁴Burnside, "The Governorship of C. L. Blease," 267-271; Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 501.

⁵B. R. Tillman to J. L. Sims, August 20, 1914. B. R. Tillman MSS., Robert Muldrow Cooper Library, Clemson University.

the property requirements or the literacy test. But the Democratic Party was not prepared to cast the poor white aside. Some changes were made in regard to enrollment and residency. One had to enroll on the party rolls with his own hand and was required to have lived in South Carolina for two years, six months in the county and sixty days in the precinct. When the Bleasites protested that they were being disfranchised, the party added rules forbidding property or educational requirements. No definition of party membership was given in the law passed the next year. This allowed the Democratic Party, as a private club, freedom to exclude the Negro. Nonetheless these were important measures which would insure against double voting and other fraudulent methods at the polls. It was also hoped that many Bleasites would be ignorant of the fact that it was necessary to enroll their names as voters.⁶ Tillman and the other anti-Bleasites were pleased with the new rules.

Another effective tactic used by Tillman was repeated reminders to the White House and to the voters that Bleas was hostile to Wilson's administration. The remarks made by the Governor in regard to Wilson had done nothing to increase his popularity. The President was well-liked

⁶Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 433.

in South Carolina for he had lived in the state for a while as a boy. A group of Columbia citizens had purchased his boyhood home there and offered it to Wilson to use whenever he desired. On several occasions Tillman advised the White House of Blease's corruption and general immorality. He confided to Wilson that if Blease were in the Senate he "would be a very big thorn in his side and far more painful than I ever was to Roosevelt, for Blease would be more unscrupulous than I ever was." The voters should also realize that such a Senator would "have absolutely no influence with the administration."⁷

Because of his ill health, Tillman could not confront Blease on the stump, but he did send many letters to individuals and to newspapers. In comparing the records of Tillmanism and Bleaseism, the Senator enumerated the achievements of his Reform Party. Tillman said one need only look at Blease's outstanding record: "his blind-tiger record, his race-track gambling record, his whorehouse record."⁸ Repeatedly, Tillman railed at Blease's immorality and called for his defeat.

As Tillman manipulated political strings in the background, the candidates prepared for the stump campaign.

⁷Quoted in Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 502.

⁸Quoted in ibid., 501.

Jennings and Pollack had been persuaded by Tillman to attack Blease on the stump and let Smith stay out of the fray as much as possible. Of course "Cotton Ed" Smith was a demagogue of no mean ability himself. Blease harangued Smith, Negroes, and the rest of his "enemies," while Jackson and Pollack castigated Blease. "Cotton Ed" attempted to remain aloof from such goings-on by defending his record in the Senate and giving stump audiences his own unique repertoire.

Ellison Durant Smith had his own special appeal to South Carolina voters. Purely and simply, it was cotton. Smith came to a stump meeting riding on a wagon piled high with cotton bales and pulled by mules, garlanded with cotton. As his brass band blared "Dixie," a procession of farmers accompanied him to the meeting place. Placards announced the arrival of "The Farmer's Friend." Upon his turn to speak, Smith arose and took a cotton boll from his lapel. Holding the boll skyward for all to see, he praised the virtues of the fiber: "My sweetheart, my sweetheart, others may forget you, but you will always be my sweetheart!"⁹ So Cotton Ed would carry on at great length dwelling on the glory of cotton and all the marvelous success he had in

⁹Quoted in Allan A. Michie and Frank Ryhlick, Dixie Demagogues (New York: Vanguard Press, 1939), 265.

working to raise its price.

Blease was quick to point out the folly of electing a man who had only one notion. "His name is Ellison Durant Smith, and he sho' do rant, cotton, cotton!"¹⁰ quipped the Governor. Expressing open contempt for Smith's Senatorial record, Blease claimed that the Junior Senator was just an agent for cotton mill executives and aristocrats. Furthermore, Blease hinted that Smith was dealing in cotton futures. The most serious charge made by Blease was that Smith was derelict in his racism. Only after he had learned that Blease would run against him had Smith introduced bills to repeal the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments. Neither had Smith done anything about Negro employees working for the federal government. All this, according to Blease, was because Smith had been a Haskellite. If Blease were elected to the Senate, he promised to insure the repeal of both amendments, the passage of a Jim Crow railroad passenger car bill, and rid the civil service of all Negro employees.¹¹

Blease's stump speeches also repeated many themes on which he had earlier spoken. Lynching as the punishment

¹⁰Burnside, "The Governorship of C. L. Blease," 288.

¹¹Unmarked clipping in Tillman Scrapbooks, B. R. Tillman, MSS., Clemson University.

of rape, the threat of racial equality, his political enemies, the abuse he received from the press, and the other usual Bleaseisms; all received much attention from the Governor.

Smith never wilted under Blease's charges as Jones had in 1912. On the stump Smith did not always make an effort to refute the accusations, but when he did the incumbent calmly dismissed the condemnations as absurdities. Anyone who knew him should know better. In short, Smith chose to ignore Blease's rantings. Instead Smith told the audiences of all the wonderful work he had done to raise the price of cotton. When the cotton panic came in the middle of the campaign, the Senator left immediately for Washington. Upon his return to the stump tour, he announced his efforts to obtain federal loans for the farmers, as proof of his value or a representative of the agrarian voters.¹²

Smith could also entertain on the stump as well as Blease by recounting stories of his poor childhood on the farm; or by telling of his mother who, even in poverty, had sought to rear him as a good Christian man. On several occasions "Cotton Ed" aroused the laughter of the audiences against Blease. When the Bleaseites exuberantly carried

¹²Burnside, "The Governorship of C. L. Blease," 299.

their champion from the speaker's platform, Ed exclaimed,

I have attended many a funeral in my life, but this is the first at which I have ever seen the pallbearers a-whooping and a-hollering. And this is truly a political funeral, for I am going to bury Cole Blease so damned deep that when he does dig out, he'll scratch out in Hell face foremost.¹³

One of Smith's favorite promises during the campaign was to take "the ease out of Blease." Once Cole spoke about his early boyhood days when he worked in his father's livery stable, and Smith interrupted him by saying that he was going to send Blease back to the stable where he belonged.¹⁴

The Senator was able to perform his own act unhampered by Blease since the other two candidates showed little interest in being elected. They only wanted to insure the defeat of Cole L. Blease. William P. Pollack and Langston D. Jennings had made no real pretense of winning the election. They had only entered the campaign a few weeks before the stump tour. They did not want Smith's election nearly as much as they wanted Blease's defeat. Their sole strategy was to discredit Blease in every way they could, and by combining their attacks on the Governor, the two became known as "Mutt and Jeff." The prospective

¹³O. L. Warr, "Mr. Blease of South Carolina," The American Mercury, XVI (1929), 30.

¹⁴Ibid.

voters were reminded of every notorious act that Blease ever committed. The most frequently repeated charge leveled at Blease by the two was his excessive use of executive clemency. Cases were cited in which the Governor had pardoned dangerous criminals. Many lawyers had become prosperous by obtaining pardons for their clients. The real peril of the pardon policy, however, was the large number of Negroes released by the governor. Blease had blamed Smith for allowing Negroes to work for the United States Postal Service in South Carolina. Jennings replied, "Which do you prefer, a few mail clerks on trains, or more than 900 negro robbers, rapists, and murderers turned loose in the community?"¹⁵ They branded Blease as a man who had released crooks from prison and implied that he might be in league with them as well. Not only this, but if Blease were no friend to the Negro, why were most of his pardons given to Negroes?

Likewise, Jennings and Pollack emphasized Blease's association with the criminal elements of South Carolina: race-track gamblers, illegal liquor sellers, crooked lawyers, and the like. Certainly Governor Blease stood by his friends, but who were his friends? Could anyone doubt that the convicts who had been pardoned would vote for Blease?¹⁶

¹⁵Burnside, "The Governorship of C. L. Blease," 300.

¹⁶Greer Citizen, August 28, 1914. In Tillman Scrapbooks. B. R. Tillman MSS., Clemson University.

Finally the recriminations ended and the voting for the primary was held.¹⁷ The outcome proved a simple fact about the South Carolina of 1914: There were more farmers than cotton mill workers. Smith totaled over 72,000 votes while Blease polled over 55,000. None of the other Bleaseite candidates had won either. John G. Richards, Blease's candidate for governor, did manage to enter a run-off primary against Richard I. Manning, but lost by a wide margin. The national press rejoiced over Blease's defeat as a rebuke to "the most pernicious fomenter of sectional and racial antagonism for political profit now in the public eye."¹⁸ Some said the election had, "driven the last nail in Blease's coffin."¹⁹

Blease had lost the election, but he was still Governor for more than four months after the election. There was still time to make news. After his admirable leadership during the Cotton Panic, the governor's name was

¹⁷A few weeks before the election, a doctor, whose letter allegedly had asked for a pardon for a sick convict, claimed the letter was a forgery. The night before the investigation was to be held, the doctor was shot by an unknown assailant who shouted, "Coley won't be bothered with you tomorrow." Blease and his supporters came to be associated more and more with lawlessness after the incident. Wallace, Short History, 663.

¹⁸Literary Digest, XLIX (September 12, 1914), 448.

¹⁹Unmarked clipping in Tillman Scrapbooks, B. R. Tillman MSS., Clemson University.

not seen in the headlines until the final days of his administration. In keeping with his style, Blease left office with as much controversy as when he entered it.

After the Extra Session of the General Assembly, Blease was quiet for a few months, but made up for lost publicity during the last days of his administration. In the first week of January, 1915, the Governor went on a pardoning spree. Before his term had ended he issued full pardons to all prisoners who had been parolled or whose sentences had been commuted. Then in another gesture of defiance of the powers that be, Blease disbanded the state militia and ended his feud with Secretary of War Garrison.²⁰ His annual address remained to be given to the General Assembly. Blease took the opportunity to blame the legislature for the strife and partisanship that had plagued his administration:

If you had paid attention to what I said in my 1911-1914 special messages, you would have found therein many matters which are of vital importance to our people, and which if they had been enacted into law, would have given much relief, and in consequence the people of South Carolina today would not have been facing the very serious and in some cases disastrous situation which now confront them. . . . Blinded by political prejudice, instead of working for the best interests of the people, the majority refused to see anything good in any recommendation I might make.²¹

²⁰New York Times, January 10, 1915; January 12, 1915.

²¹Autographed copy of Blease's Annual Message to the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina.

Possibly this revealed how little qualified Blease actually was to be Governor. His special messages proposed virtually no reforms at all; nor would the recommendations he had made alleviate many of the state's pressing problems. The real irony of the situation, however, was that Blease might have thought his proposals would improve matters. No one will ever know.

After showing the General Assembly the error of their ways, Blease recounted the accomplishments of his administrations, such as the passage of the special tax for schools, the establishment of the State Medical College, and most of all, the abolition of the prison hosiery mill. "Blease and Blease's fight that wiped out this infernal death-trap," the governor proudly stated.

Then the Governor launched on "a course not taken by any other governor." In order to correct the "calumny and abuse, the misrepresentation and the willful and foul slanders that have been heaped upon me and my family, it is necessary that I do this." "This" meant a lengthy autobiography beginning with an account of his grandfather and continuing to the autobiographer. Even though he professed to care nothing about the criticisms of others, Blease wanted to leave an accurate record for the "fair historian

January 12, 1915, 3. In Tillman Scrapbooks, B. R. Tillman MSS., Clemson University.

of the future." He closed by stating that, "I have never done one single act that I am ashamed of. . . . I have never bowed my knees to any man or set of men." Again there was the strong possibility that Blease was speaking the truth.²²

Two days after his speech Blease sent his final message to the General Assembly: "I hereby resign as Governor of South Carolina."²³ This was the entire text. No explanation was given for the resignation. Charles A. Smith, lieutenant governor, became Governor for the shortest term in the history of the state: five days.

If Blease had resigned for the publicity, he was certainly rewarded. The national press rejoiced over his exit. On the Sunday after his resignation the New York Times ran a special full page spread on "Fiery Coley Blease." "He has been Governor," said the Times, "There can be no doubt about that, and he has been such a Governor as no other state in the Union ever knew before."²⁴ The article continued with an account of his governorship and attempted to analyze his rise to power. Several magazine articles about Blease gave similar accounts. All reports

²²Ibid., 3-42.

²³House Journal, 1915, 30.

²⁴New York Times, January 17, 1915.

came to about the same conclusion: Blease was nothing more than a political opportunist who used prejudice and ignorance to assuage his lust for personal power. He talked to the poor man, but did nothing for him when he was in office. For this reason Blease was a demagogue of the lowest sort. He was the type of man who could only do harm to his state and the nation. It was hoped that now Blease's political career would be over. The hopes were destined to be disappointed.²⁵

Coley retained his loyal mill-worker supporters even in defeat. Although the more progressive Manning initiated more legislation favorable to the masses of South Carolina, he was , because of his high-born origins, not popular with the lower classes. Five members of his family had been in the Governor's seat before he. As D. D. Wallace stated, Manning's upper class manner made "his ideas . . . more popular than himself."²⁶ His program was good, but his personality lacked color, and if nothing else, Blease had color.

Once more, as so often in the past, there were no

²⁵See, "The Resignation of Governor Blease," The Outlook, CIX (January 27, 1915), 156-157; and W. K. Tate, "After Blease: A New Program for South Carolina," The Survey, XXXIII (March, 1915), 575-577.

²⁶Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 437.

real issues in the election of 1916. Five candidates were in the primary race for governor. Manning was up for re-election, Blease was trying for a third term, while Robert A. Cooper ran as a compromise candidate. Two minor aspirants, John T. Duncan and J. M. Duchamps, were never really in the contest from the start. Cooper chose to sit back and let the Blease and Manning forces fight it out, confident that the two would discredit each other. Then the voters would become disgusted with Manning and Blease and, hopefully, vote for Cooper. Otherwise his platform was little more than a promise to improve the public school system.²⁷

Manning ran on the record of his first administration and his Bourbon virtue; his campaign slogan was: "Manning has made good."²⁸ On the stump tour he usually made his speech first, since he was the incumbent. Then he departed, if at all possible. Manning was ill-equipped to face Blease on the stump, but rather left the mud-slinging to his supporters who were not so much pro-Manning as they were anti-Blease. As in the past, most of the state newspapers, led by the Columbia State, attacked Blease without mercy. Although Tillman had gone so far as to declare that

²⁷Columbia State, August 13, 1916.

²⁸Ibid., August 28, 1916.

Manning was "the worst politician South Carolina had ever produced who became Governor,"²⁹ the old Senator hated Blease more and did what he could to insure his ex-friend's defeat.

On the stump, however, none of the other candidates were a match for Blease. His target was Manning and his Bourbon background. Taking his cue from Tillman, Blease shouted that "Dick Manning was the worst governor in the history of the state." Nine white men had been killed by Negroes during Manning's two years as governor. No Negro had dared do such a thing when he was in office, boasted Blease, because they knew what would happen to them. It was Cole's opinion that Manning was too weak to enforce the law. He also reminded the voters, time and time again, that Manning was an aristocrat. The social welfare bills passed during Manning's administration did not really benefit the people, but only resulted in higher taxes and more extravagance from the state government. Except for Cole's shouting that Manning was a liar and a coward, the stump tour was somewhat dull and uneventful.³⁰

The newspapers, however, gave Blease the full treatment. The Columbia State claimed that Manning's good

²⁹Quoted in Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 503.

³⁰Columbia State, August 27, 1916.

name was abused because of Blease's lack of "sense of fair play." The State's editorials on the other hand were sometimes abusive to Blease. A third term "would cause the first two to look as a tallow dip looks to an arc light." Criminals from the entire country would flock to the state. A Blease victory would be an endorsement of "to hell with the constitution." If Blease were elected "the majority don't want a governor, but a king--an absolute ruler of South Carolina." The State felt confident that Blease would be rejected and predicted long before the election that Manning would be the victor.³¹

The campaign ended, and unlike the previous election, it was peaceful "except for an old negro preacher who had slipped up on the amount of cider he could handle."³² Duchamps and Duncan received only a few hundred votes each. Cooper fared much better, polling over 25,000 votes. Over 41,000 Democrats cast their ballots for Manning, but Blease led all the candidates with over 63,000 votes. Blease did not, however, have the required majority, and a run-off primary was scheduled between him and Manning.

Despite the fact that Blease had the highest number of votes, the State was still confident that Manning would

³¹Ibid., August 25, 1916; August 15, 1916.

³²Ibid., August 29, 1916.

be elected. The editorial opinion was that Blease had gained nothing since 1914 and had merely held his own from that election. The quiet election, then, began to become noisy.³³

A few days after the first primary Cooper gave his endorsement to Manning. Bolstered by his new ally, the Governor proclaimed, "I started this morning to win the fight in the Second Primary and I am going to win it."³⁴ Manning was not much of a fighter himself, but his supporters were.

The state press lamblasted Blease during the two weeks before the election. No one was as enthusiastic about Manning as he was opposed to Blease. "No yeggmen have been freed by Manning, no foul mouth speeches, no pardons given," cried the editors. The State proclaimed that "There was never more involved in an election than this one." Which did the people prefer: Manning for a second term or Blease for a third?³⁵

Tillman publicly announced that the "liquor ring and barrooms are trying to buy the election. They want a man in the governor's office they can control, that they

³³Editorial, Columbia State, August 30, 1916.

³⁴Ibid., August 31, 1916.

³⁵Ibid., September 5, 1916.

might run the government." According to Pitchfork Ben, Manning would be reelected if Wilson were, as long as there was an "honest vote and a fair count." A vote for Blease was a vote for lawlessness. Tillman penned several articles about cases in which Blease had pardoned Negro rapists and a murderer who had killed "an old man defending his daughter's virtue."³⁶

William Watts Ball, former conservative editor of the Charleston News and Courier, saw the election as a choice between "government and misgovernment." "If I had a son in the pen," he added, "I have no doubt I would be a Bleaseite."³⁷

Election day came. Blease picked up only a few thousand votes from the first primary while Manning received almost 30,000 more votes than he had previously drawn. Still a change of only 2,343 votes would have given Blease the election. The obvious fact was that nearly five thousand more votes were cast in the second primary. The Bleaseites cried fraud, but Cole remained quiet. Manning made things worse by proclaiming a victory for law and order and announcing that "South Carolina is redeemed."³⁸

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Quoted in Lander, A History of South Carolina, 1865-1960, 55.

³⁸Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 442.

Tillman further alienated the Bleaseites by saying, "All the tin-horn gamblers, all the blind tigers, all the red light habitues, all the criminals and near criminals-- those who have been pardoned and those not yet caught and convicted--were for Blease."³⁹

A series of fourteen articles entitled "Bleaseism" appeared in the Greenville Piedmont before and after the second primary. The author attempted to analyze South Carolina politics with particular reference to Cole L. Blease. He described the condition of the mill workers who supported Blease, "not with any thought of establishing a reign of lawlessness, but in a sincere hope of bettering their condition by law." In the author's opinion this was really what Bleaseism was. Because of Manning's social legislation he was "a better exponent of Bleaseism than Blease himself." Yet no amount of legislation could win the mill workers over to Manning because of the role of emotion, sentiment, and personalities rather than sense and principles. Manning's genteel birth and his claim that "Bleaseites want to trample on the Constitution and wipe their feet on law and order," estranged him from the workers. Blease could take "a demagogic advantage of that class separation." Most Bleaseites were "simple-hearted, honest, earnest citizens" who resented being labeled as

³⁹Ibid.

criminals,⁴⁰ whether directly or by association.

Each faction no longer trusted the other. The conservatives branded the Bleaseites as criminals while the Bleaseites believed that they had been cheated and falsely slandered as malfactors. Rumors began that Blease might run as an independent in the November General Election.

William P. Beard, who had been Blease's bodyguard and was now editor of the Abbeville Scimitar, proposed that ballots be printed with Blease's name rather than Manning's for the general election. Beard's reasoning was that the ex-governor had really won the primary.⁴¹

Blease himself enraged many of the state's Democrats with a speech made a few weeks after the second primary. In a surprise move, Blease accepted an invitation to speak at Allen University, a Negro college in Columbia. Introduced as the "strongest white man in the state of South Carolina," the racist demagogue delivered a flattering

⁴⁰George M. Koester, "Bleaseism," Greenville Piedmont, September 7-October 6, 1916; in Tillman Scrapbooks, B. R. Tillman MSS., Clemson University. Some of the articles can be found in the scrapbooks of W. W. Ball, W. W. Ball MSS., Manuscript Department, Duke University.

⁴¹Abbeville Scimitar, September 15-November 1, 1916. Beard printed "Our Ticket" on the front page of the Scimitar, October 1, 1916. All candidates were the same with the exception that Blease's name was up for governor. The newspaper's epithet was "All Coon's look alike to me." Beard was later imprisoned for sedition during the First World War.

speech, "generously seasoned with superlatives,"⁴² to the students. He began by protesting that he had been misunderstood by the Negroes. "They say I am against the Negro. Nay, I am a friend of the Negro," seemed to be the thesis of his address. He declared that he had never insulted or wronged a "colored girl." He had always advocated black taxes for black schools, but the white school boards had cheated the Negro schools out of funds that were rightfully theirs. As a member of the democratic Executive Committee, he had voted to seat a Negro rather than a white man in a disputed Congressional election. If the all-white Executive Committee was as honest as he had been, Blease would have been elected in the last primary. His stump remarks had been made merely "to tickle the ears" of the white voters. Alluding to his pardoning of many Negroes, Blease wished that some day all prisons and courts might be abolished. He closed his address with the encouraging statement: "You're coming to higher things. They can't hold you back despite what I or any other man might say."⁴³

Democrats were appalled by the speech. The Columbia

⁴²Columbia State, October 5, 1916.

⁴³Most of the daily newspapers carried Blease's speech the day after he delivered it. Excerpts may be found in Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 443.

State accused Blease of conspiring to bolt the party and grab the Negro vote in the general election. The cardinal sin in South Carolina politics was to "turn against the white's party."⁴⁴ In effect Democrats believed that Blease had condemned the white man's party and had appealed to the black vote. The Greenville Piedmont called Blease "a hide skinner on the crude and vulgar stage of South Carolina politics."⁴⁵ The loss of faith was now complete.

Blease denied that he contemplated any attempt to bolt the party, but still claimed that he had been cheated out of his election. In late October the "Reform Party," as the Bleaseites called themselves, held a state convention. Blease announced that he was a victim of "whiskey, money, intimidation and fraud," but remained loyal to the regular Democratic Party. He was contemptuous of the Columbia State for accusing him of defection from the party. It had been the State which had supported the Haskellite bolters in 1890 and appealed to the Negro, not Cole L. Blease. Rejecting all charges that he threatened to bolt, Cole avowed: "I am not a candidate for any office now. I do not expect to be a candidate for any

⁴⁴Columbia State, October 13, 1916.

⁴⁵Greenville Piedmont (undated), in Tillman scrap-books, B. R. Tillman MSS., Clemson University.

office now. I do not expect to be a candidate for any office in the near or distant future."⁴⁶

By November W. P. Beard had proclaimed Blease as an independent candidate. Only a few ballots were printed with Blease's name and he continued to deny that he had anything to do with the movement. In the election Manning received over 60,000 votes while Blease polled only slightly more than 1,000. It is not known whether or not Blease was foolish enough to think he could win.

Manning's second administration was not nearly as successful as his first. By 1917 the era of "Progressive Conservatism" in South Carolina, as in the rest of the nation, had come to an end. Domestic issues were overshadowed by the entry of the United States into the first World War. A sizable minority of South Carolinians of German descent had naturally sided with Germany early in the conflict; some had protested when the United States declared war on Germany in April of 1917. All of the members of the South Carolina Congressional delegation had voted for the war except one. The dissenter was Representative Fred Dominick, Blease's law partner.⁴⁷

In May of 1917 a group of Bleaseites met in

⁴⁶Columbia State, October 25, 1916.

⁴⁷McPherson, History of South Carolina, 1865-1960, 56.

Columbia and condemned Governor Manning for discriminating against them in the appointment of draft board members. John P. Grace, editor of the Charleston American, condemned Congress for declaring the war. Blease reportedly agreed with Grace and began his own war.⁴⁸

At Pomaria, a small town with large population of German descendents, Blease made his first anti-war speech in July, 1917. He declared that the forthcoming "political war of 1918" was as important as the World War. "Dick Manning is the worst Governor the State ever had," he charged, "worse than Scott, Moses, or Chamberlain because they only stole money, but he is trying to steal the souls and bodies of your boys. They talk about a free America. I don't care what kind of America it is when I am dead and gone. Neither does your boy." He continued by declaring that the war was "an unwarranted sacrifice in the sight of Almighty God, of fresh young American manhood." Using pacifist rhetoric, Blease preached that the war was totally un-Christian.⁴⁹ "When Christ was on this earth, He taught, 'Blessed are the peacemakers.' Can any man show me where

⁴⁸Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 445. Grace's Charleston American was banned from the mails because of its anti-war editorials.

⁴⁹Columbia State, July 28, 1917. Excerpts from the Pomaria and Filbert anti-war speeches may be found in Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 447.

Christ ever said, 'Blessed are the war makers?' . . . I would rather be an outcast of Woodrow Wilson and a follower of Jesus Christ than be a follower of Wilson and an outcast of Christ. I was opposed to this war." In a final gesture of opposition to the war Blease proposed that if the German army ever invaded the state, South Carolina could whip it single-handedly. To soften his remarks somewhat, he added somewhat ambiguously, "Do not misunderstand me. We are in this war and it must be pushed to a successful conclusion."⁵⁰

These were strong words for a politician in South Carolina during the war. The speech placed Blease on the defensive for several years and ruined his chances for election in two campaigns. After being severely criticized by the state press for his Pomaria speech, Blease, a week later, made a similar but more cautious anti-war speech in Filbert, another small town with many citizens of German blood. Much of the address was given over to a defense of his earlier speech. Cole complained that his anti-war statements had been taken out of context.

Those who for a malicious purpose took a part of this report and condemned me for it, lied and know they lied. I said that I believed that President Wilson and the members of Congress, who voted for the war, would be responsible for every American life that

⁵⁰ Columbia State, July 28, 1917.

was lost in it . . . any man who says I have ever in word or deed showed treason and am not as good an American as they are, they are liars and puppies. Those who don't like it, darn 'em, let'em lump it!⁵¹

The whole controversy according to Blease was merely a ruse on the part of those who had stolen the election from him in 1916, to discredit him. His enemies were only trying to camouflage the real political issues of the state by "wrapping an American flag around themselves," and accusing Blease of treason.⁵²

The mistakes had been made. In 1916 Blease's record had been used against him and would be used again to help defeat him in 1918. The alleged bolt by the Bleaseites in 1916 and the anti-war statements were sufficient evidence to indict Blease in the 1918 campaign for the Senate.

In early 1918 the prospects for the Senatorial race were not at all clear. Blease was certainly going to run, but who would be his opponent for Tillman's seat in the Senate. Pitchfork Ben had announced that because of his age (71 years) and poor health, he would not be a candidate even in the face of popular demand. Tillman, his family, his friends, and his political allies felt that the aging, crippled man was no match for Blease. The choice of the anti-Blease forces was Congressman Asbury F. Lever, a good

⁵¹Ibid., August 3, 1917.

⁵²Columbia Record, March 30, 1918.

stump speaker with ten years experience in Congress. He had rendered much legislative service to farmers and was chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. Lever appeared to be the leading challenger against Blease, but Tillman changed the situation when he changed his mind about running.

Tillman came to the conclusion that Lever could not defeat Blease. The old Senator had also received many letters urging him to run for re-election. He was then chairman of the naval committee and believed he could serve the country and his state in wartime better than any new Senator could. Tillman had made his decision, so he began to work to force Lever to withdraw. First he had to convince many people that his health was good enough to enable him to continue his service in the Senate. He appeared before the state party convention and attacked Blease with the shout, "To hell with German sympathizers and thank God for Woodrow Wilson." Then he explained that he would not canvass the state because he was needed in Washington because of the war. Tillman went to great lengths to show that his age and health were not the reasons he would avoid the stump campaign.⁵³

Tillman realized that the key to winning the

⁵³Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 536-537.

wartime election was to gain the endorsement of President Wilson. After some confusion and delay in Washington, Tillman first received a promise from the White House that the administration would be neutral in the election. He then penned a public letter damning Lever as an agent of Manning and the ring politicians. In a surprise move, never fully explained, Wilson publicly asked Lever to withdraw from the Senate race and return to the House where he could not be spared. Lever complied, and Tillman rejoiced. He quickly asked the state press to suppress his letter against Manning and Lever. All the papers did so, except the pro-Blease Charleston American.⁵⁴

Again it seemed as though there would be no real issues involved in the election. Tillman had announced that he would not make the stump tour and later Blease disclosed that he would make only a partial tour. Nathaniel B. Dial, a successful businessman and Wilsonite, was also a candidate, but the real contest seemed to be between Tillman and Blease.

As an early and persistent tactic, Tillman opened fire on Blease's war position. Blease's pro-Germanism, wrote Tillman, "ought to be sufficient to damn him in the eyes of all sensible and patriotic men."⁵⁵

⁵⁴Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 450.

⁵⁵Quoted in Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 545.

Convinced that the Pomaria and Filbert speeches had already lost the election for his opponent, the old Senator gave it as his opinion that "Blease realizes now that he cannot wipe out those fatal, damning, disloyal ravings when he thought they would appeal powerfully to prejudice and ignorance." He further warned that Blease would attempt to squirm out of his own trap through the "shrewd manipulation of words."⁵⁶

In several open letters Tillman gave Blease no hope of winning. "All you have to do is throw his official record back at him." In addition to his allegedly traitorous oratory, it was evident that Blease could not overcome Tillman. "Blease wants to get in the Senate and he knows he can never be elected if he has to fight a determined and aggressive opponent who can be neither bull-dozed nor bamboozled by Blease's cheap, feather-legged bluster and his clap-trap methods of stump speaking."⁵⁷ Tillman naturally believed that he was such an opponent, despite his advanced years.

The Columbia State was really in a quandary after

⁵⁶Aiken Standard (undated); in Tillman Scrapbooks, B. R. Tillman MSS., Clemson University.

⁵⁷Unmarked clipping in Tillman Scrapbooks. B. R. Tillman MSS., Clemson University.

Lever withdrew. The contest was between Ben and Cole, both of whom the State had traditionally opposed. After some hesitation and fear that Blease, being younger, might be able to win, the State endorsed Tillman and rationalized: "It [the State] does not love Tillman more; but it loves Blease less; it doesn't want either, but is 100 times more for Tillman though."⁵⁸

Blease softened his words on the war when it became apparent to him that he had misjudged public opinion. He bought Liberty Bonds, donated a forty-acre tract of land for a military rifle range, and offered to raise a regiment of Bleaseites for the war effort. He complained that he had been misquoted and misunderstood. All he had meant was that, "No man wants the United States to back down or curl its tail and run, but if we can have an honorable peace without slaughtering our young manhood, who can object?"⁵⁹

The Bleaseite Charleston American contended that Tillman was so old and in such "pitiable condition" that he should quietly retire, whereas it felt that Blease was "alert, active, highly intelligent, in the full vigor of

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Columbia Record, March 3, 1918.

his manhood." The State's endorsement of Tillman was represented as a good example of the Senator's betrayal of the people who had elected him. "Our plebeian farmer has become an aristocrat and none but aristocrats find favor in his eyes. . . . [He] has deserted and widely departed from the principles upon which he was elected and of which he was supposed to be the most earnest and able advocate."⁶⁰

Meanwhile "Nat" B. Dial was confident that neither Tillman nor Blease would win. In his estimation Tillman was "too old and feeble" to make the campaign much less serve another Senate term, while Blease's attitude toward Wilson and the war had already eliminated him. As for Blease's talk of raising a regiment, Dial discounted the proposal as "mere twaddle."⁶¹ With only Dial and an even more obscure candidate, J. F. Rice, on the stump tour, "Nat" predicted that it would be hard for him to lose. Nobody seems to have paid much attention to him at the time.

The Senate race looked as though nothing eventful was going to occur. Lever had withdrawn early in the year, Tillman was not even going to appear on the stump, Blease was only going to speak at a few of the stump stops, and few voters seemed to care what Dial did. Cole had snorted

⁶⁰Charleston American, April 22, 1918.

⁶¹Columbia State, April 25, 1918.

"There's no use to have an election if we're going to have it stolen from us in 1916." Taking a cue from his pronouncement, some newspapers thought the whole election should be called off if nobody were going to campaign. So it appeared to be a dull Senate campaign even before it started.⁶²

Tillman's unexpected death on July 3 changed the entire election outlook. The leading opponent to Blease was gone. Now only Dial could challenge Blease for the Senate seat. Blease was confident he could win against the unknown Dial. With Tillman out of the campaign, he predicted his own victory since he was the only "representative of the masses of the people." A Bleaseite editorial pictured the opposition in terrible disarray after Tillman's death. "The Columbia State is in such woeful straits that it is about to be forced to support Mr. Dial, the former nemesis of the editor."⁶³ Anyway a favorite Bleaseism had always been to vote as one wanted, not as the newspapers said.

When Blease did make one of his rare appearances on the stump tour, he continued to talk about the war. Usually his claim was that he was for winning the war, but

⁶²Newberry Herald and News, June 14, 1918.

⁶³Columbia Record, June 28, 1918.

that the war should not cloud the state political issues, the most important of which was that Manning was "taxing the people to death." He would debate the war with anyone from Washington, yet Blease was not disloyal and would fight any man who called him a traitor.⁶⁴ To play down his remarks about Wilson, Blease declared, "When I am elected to the United States Senate, I am going to President Wilson and tell him here is an American Senator, and whatever is necessary to win the war, I am with him to the finish."⁶⁵ Several times, Blease renewed his offer to raise a regiment, showed receipts for purchase of Liberty Bonds, and reminded voters of his donation of a rifle range. Going even further, he promised to support and to campaign for a third term for Wilson if this were necessary to winning the war. Finally upon election, if Wilson so desired, Blease would resign from the Senate seat and lead his own regiment into battle.⁶⁶ The wiley Coley knew he had erred in the voters' eyes in regard to Wilson and the war, but with Tillman gone, he hoped the electorate had a short memory.

If the voters did have a short memory, the anti-Bleaseites would not permit them to forget one vulnerable

⁶⁴Newberry Herald and News, June 7, 1918.

⁶⁵Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 449.

⁶⁶Ibid.

word or deed by the former governor. Ex-Senator John L. McLaurin, a popular Tillmanite, campaigned and wrote public letters against Blease because he,

. . . desired to strip the mask from Cole L. Blease, expose him before the people as a self-seeking demagogue without scruple or honor, and disbar him from the councils of a free, clean, and intelligent Democracy. . . . He could have been a great leader and done great good. But he chose to prostitute his ability to gain an hour's applause and gratify an insatiable ambition for power.⁶⁷

McLaurin illustrated to what depths the character of Blease had descended. Many times Blease had pledged that he stood by his friends; he had even broken that vow. W. P. Beard, Blease's old bodyguard, had written McLaurin from prison where Beard was serving time for his anti-war activities. No one had ever been more loyal to Blease than Beard. As editor of the Scimitar, Beard had been encouraged by Blease to propose the independent ticket in the general election of 1916. In Beard's words, "Then he [Blease] got cold feet and left me in the lurch. Now he has deserted me." Beard's family had received no assistance from Blease, nor had Beard himself for that matter. According to McLaurin Blease abandoned his former friend because he was "no longer useful to him."⁶⁸

Blease replied to McLaurin's charges the day after

⁶⁷John L. McLaurin in the Columbia State, June 30, 1918.

⁶⁸Ibid.

they had been made: "Every friend I have in South Carolina knows that I discouraged any effort at a bolt in 1916." He also quoted many newspaper editorials which cited the allegiance of the Bleaseites and Blease to the party. As for Beard, he had printed the tickets against Blease's advice and had asked to be reimbursed. Blease merely refused. Often Blease had warned Beard about his seditious articles, but he would not listen.⁶⁹ The reply seemed to be insufficient. The question of Blease's loyalty to the party remained an issue, and doubt was raised over what happened to Beard.

The renewal of the bolt accusation breathed new spirit into Dial, who soon echoed the McLaurin charges. On the stump at Florence, Blease had dared anyone to call him a traitor. Dial told him to his face that he was "disloyal from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet."⁷⁰ Blease did nothing. The war, the bolt, and later the Allen University speech, were all haunting Blease before the election. He was truly on the defensive. Handbills appeared, with the taunt, "Vote for Blease and the Kaiser will smile." When the Columbia Record quoted Blease's Allen University speech as an example of his hypocrisy, the harassed candidate could only retort, "The

⁶⁹Columbia State, July 1, 1918.

⁷⁰Ibid., July 17, 1918.

biggest liar in the world is the Columbia State."⁷¹

The knockout punch was set up unintentionally by the Bleaseite Charleston American. The American had asked Wilson if it were true that Blease was an acceptable to him as Dial. The President's answer was published two weeks before the election: "Let me say that I have perfect confidence that the people of South Carolina will judge rightly in the senatorial contest, and I have not the least fear that they will believe Mr. Blease is or can be a friend of the administration. The record of his opinion is already written and it is a little late to expunge it."⁷²

For all practical purposes Blease had no chance to win after the Wilson letter was printed. The Charleston American tried to belittle the Wilson indictment by informing its readers that it really did not make any difference if a Senator did not get along with the national administration. Neither Tillman nor John C. Calhoun had any sympathy with their respective presidents while serving in the Senate. Why should Blease? Such a reationalization was futile, however, during the First World War in Wilsonian South Carolina.⁷³

⁷¹Charleston American, July 4, 1918.

⁷²Columbia State, August 20, 1918. Wilson's letter appeared in most of the daily newspapers in the state.

⁷³Charleston American, August 22, 1918.

As one commentator phrased it, "Mr. Blease vastly mistook the temper of the people, and reaped the natural reward of attacking the President and the war when such conduct could only hinder his success."⁷⁴ As a result of his grievous error, Cole suffered the worst defeat he had yet received in his political career. The colorless Dial received over 65,000 ballots, while Blease commanded only about 40,000, a number much lower than he had received in the two previous elections. The Blease vote probably represented his faithful following of mill workers, rather than any pacifist feelings toward the war.

The next year Blease considered running for the House of Representatives, but in the face of his unpopularity over the war, he decided not to be a candidate. Only after the world conflict was over and the "return to normalcy" had arrived, did Coley think it wise to be a candidate again. Intolerance and prejudice had replaced progressive reform. A contemporary description of Cole L. Blease illustrated the fact that he was still in the national news, in the prime of life, and ready to campaign:

He was, with a touch of consciousness, almost staginess, the typical leader of the democracy of the New South: ostentatiously large wool hat, dark rather fierce eyes, heavy black mustache, gaudy insignia on a heavy watch chain, a man who radiated or wanted to radiate a constant ferocity against the

⁷⁴Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 452.

irreligious, the impure, 'nigger lovers,' 'aristocrats,' 'pap-suckers,' Yankees, and intellectuals-- a son of the soil and of the mob with a chip on his shoulder.⁷⁵

The year 1922 gave Blease another opportunity for a return to public life. His sixth campaign for governor was typical of its five predecessors. The Blease platform had hardly changed in the past ten years, nor did the man himself when he offered it on the stump tour. Reduce taxes, abolish "useless" offices, and "extravagance" by the state government, provide better rural schools, increase pensions to Confederate war veterans, and prohibit the sale of harmful drugs: all these had been used by the candidate before, and they were just as meaningless now as they had always been. The only new promises were a "merit basis" for use of executive clemency, a home for orphans and another home for "women who have erred," and finally the "strict enforcement of prohibition."⁷⁶

In addition to the Eighteenth Amendment, another new amendment to the Constitution was given attention by Cole and the candidates. In regard to the Nineteenth Amendment, Blease conceded: "While I have always opposed woman suffrage, we now have it and as law abiding citizens

⁷⁵Ludwig Lewisohn, "South Carolina: A Lingering Fragrance," The Nation, CXV (1922), 38.

⁷⁶Charleston American, June 20, 1922.

we must support it."⁷⁷ In order to conform with the state's peculiar election system, Blease urged the women to enroll on the Democratic Club Rolls.

Usually he read the same speech at most of the stump meetings, but occasionally he took time to castigate what he believed to be the worst evil in the state: the tax commission. Headed by Ben Sawyer, whom Blease described as "a one horse bookkeeper," the Commission was composed of "Sawyer's Boston bookkeepers and Sears-Roebuck cigarette suckers and liquor drinkers" who "bamboozled the state out of \$16,000" by "smelling rat holes around the state house,"⁷⁸ Except for his harangues on the tax commission, the papers reported that Blease was "not in his usual fine fettle."⁷⁹ It should be noted that Blease said very little on the dangers posed by the Negro. Perhaps he was afraid that the Allen University speech would be brought up by his opponents. Whatever his reason, racism seemed to be oddly missing from his speeches.

Early in the campaign Cole called all the other candidates "young colts on the track"⁸⁰ while he was a

⁷⁷Ibid., June 21, 1922.

⁷⁸Ibid., June 27, 1922.

⁷⁹Ibid., June 28, 1922.

⁸⁰Ibid., June 29, 1922.

proven thoroughbred who would win easily. There were five "young colts" who sought to "displease Blease:" Thomas G. McLeod, John T. Duncan, George K. Laney, J. J. Cantry and William Coleman. Most were younger than Blease and not nearly so well known as he. McLeod appeared to be the strongest challenger to Blease, while the others sought to discredit the old campaigner as much as possible.

McLeod conducted a safe and lackluster campaign. He spoke in favor of the Nineteenth Amendment, saying he was a "ladies' man for twenty years under the control of a Dillon county woman. Some of you men know what I mean."⁸¹ Laney appealed to the veterans and assumed none of them would vote for Blease. When accused of being a Bleaseite, Laney vehemently denied it and attributed the accusation to a rumor begun by a "cowardly cur."⁸² John Duncan was outstanding in his opposition to Blease. He admitted, however, that Blease was not the only villain in state politics; there were "damned rascals on both sides." Duncan thought Blease was the worst though, and "had done enough to damn him to purgatory."⁸³ He was so low that "even negroes wouldn't vote for him" during the bolt of

⁸¹Columbia State, July 27, 1922.

⁸²Charleston American, June 28, 1922.

⁸³Columbia State, July 27, 1922.

1918. Duncan called Blease the worst enemy left in the United States after the war.⁸⁴ Not only was Blease a traitor to his country, he had also betrayed the Democratic Party. He had attempted to appeal to Negroes in the bolt of 1918, he had consistently opposed President Wilson, he had had curiously strange political dealings with Joe Tolbert, the Republican patronage boss of South Carolina, and he had reportedly rejoiced at the election of Harding over Cox. Duncan harassed Blease so much that "a man of gut would knock Duncan off the platform if it were not true," but Cole did nothing. The Bleaseites in Darlington, however, booed, hissed, and howled at Duncan, whereupon he shouted for "a bale of hay to feed these jackasses." At Manning they left the meeting, but in Edgefield Duncan called all Bleaseites "liars or liquor sellers," and then "an Edgefield citizen was seen to approach the platform with his knife down, announcing his intention to cut the throat of Duncan." After a brief scuffle, the assailant was arrested and order was restored to the meeting.⁸⁷

The Columbia State, as in previous elections, spearheaded the editorial opposition to Blease. It reprinted Blease's anti-Wilson and anti-war speeches as well as

⁸⁷Charleston American, June 24, 1922.

letters tying Cole to Boss Joe Tolbert. One open letter stated that three murderers who had been pardoned by Blease had all committed murder again. Handbills asked, "Do you believe in trials by jury? Does Governor Blease?" The big issue of the day for the voters was the treachery of Blease to the Democratic Party. If he rejoiced at the election of Harding, the State pondered, how could he have voted for Cox?⁸⁸

The election day came. As was expected with six candidates for governor, none had received the required majority. Blease led all candidates with almost 72,000 votes, McLeod received almost 62,000, and Laney polled over 20,000. The second primary would be between McLeod and Blease.

Laney and Duncan pledged to vote for McLeod. Advertisements asked, "Shall South Carolina Endorse Harding?"⁸⁹ The Columbia State predicted that the second primary would be the same as in 1916. Blease would gain a few votes, but McLeod would rally to win. Baxter McLendon, a popular

⁸⁸Columbia State, August 22-25, 1922. In response to charges that he was disloyal to the party, Blease commented: "I am an American first, last and all the time, and I want in all offices from President on down, whether they be Democrat or Republican or what, men who are first of all for America." Columbia State, August 22, 1922.

⁸⁹Ibid., September 2, 1922.

evangelist in the state, endorsed Blease. Yet religion could not neutralize the political stigma of disloyalty attached to Blease. The State quoted the Pro-Blease Yorkville Enquirer as saying no matter what the outcome of the second primary, "The General Election remains to be seen."⁹⁰

Cole had tried too much of the same old Bleaseism and could not remove the doubt that he had created by his words and deeds. Some said he had committed "political suicide" years earlier. Blease was denied a third term as governor when McLeod defeated him by over 15,000 votes. No bolt materialized in the general election. If Blease were going to win another election, he would have to try a new tactic. His standard methods had failed in four state-wide elections.

⁹⁰Ibid., September 8, 1922.

CHAPTER VIII
THE SENATE YEARS, 1924-1931

In 1924 Cole L. Blease began his third campaign for the United States Senate. Because he had not won an election since 1912, he decided to change his image. This time he chose to be the ringmaster of the summer political circus known as the stump campaign. The other candidates could resort to name calling if they chose, but Coley was going to stay out of the fracas. In his own words, "I am not running against anybody. I am in to make a clean cut campaign on issues."¹

His platform was calculated to appeal to moderate Democrats. The main planks were: economy in the federal government; strict enforcement of the federal Volstead [Prohibition] Act; a guarantee of state's rights and an end to the "mad orgy of centralization of government in Washington;"² federal aid to education, provided Congress does not stipulate "who shall and who shall not attend schools in South Carolina;" the pledge of a good education for every white child; and, finally, the most important

¹Columbia State, June 11, 1924.

²Ibid., July 14, 1924.

plank according to Blease, a "return to family prayer."³

Gone were the old rantings, the accusations, the harangues, the personal attacks. His campaign was conducted on such a high plane of moderation and dignity that many people spoke of "a new Blease."⁴ Early in the campaign one up-country newspaper observed that there was "nary drop of liquor" on the stump tour, which made the campaign unique. Not only was there no drinking, but also "a non-pyrotechnic Cole Blease. Long the storm center of politics, Blease is now noted for his lack of use of vituperation, concentrating his energies on the main issues of the campaign."⁵

As the "new Blease" exhorted crowds to, "Get down that family Bible!" the other candidates fought (at times quite literally) in traditional South Carolina style. In addition to Blease, Nat Dial was running for reelection to his Senate seat, and Congressman James F. Byrnes and J. J. McMahan also wanted the office. Dial had not been outstanding in the Senate during his term and had in fact antagonized some voters. He had voted against liberal pensions for veterans and later injured himself further politically by accusing the national Democratic Party of courting socialism and Bolshevism. Certainly his remark that Coolidge was a better Democrat than many in the party did

³Greenville News, August 8, 1924; August 20, 1924.

⁴Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 463.

⁵Greenville News, July 13, 1924.

him little good either.⁶

Byrnes took it upon himself to criticize Dial in every speech he made. Dial had created some controversy when he declared that he favored open immigration laws. The prejudice against immigrant labor of many low income workers in the state was easily turned against Dial. The quarrel between Byrnes and Dial was so fierce that on several occasions they almost came to blows. At Florence one took a poke at the other and a fist-fight seemed ready to erupt. Who should intervene, but the grand peacemaker: Cole L. Blease! When the two called each other liars, none other than Blease settled their dispute. McMahan was almost as intemperate as Byrnes when it came to deriding Dial. A McMahan-inspired quarrel resulted in both McMahan's and Dial's arrest in Gaffney for disorderly conduct. Earlier, Blease had also stopped a fight between McMahan and Dial in Greenwood.⁷

Occasionally, one of the candidates would remind the stump audiences of one or more of Blease's earlier disreputable speeches or conduct. Coley always remained calm and usually ignored any charges against him. His composure was in sharp contrast to that of the other contestants who

⁶Ibid., August 20, 1924; Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 462.

⁷Columbia State, June 29, 1924; August 24, 1924; Greenville News, August 10, 1924.

were constantly abusing each other in violent fashion. As for his past record, one newspaper speculated that it had either been "forgiven or forgotten." The notoriety of the past was given little publicity or justified to some extent. For example the Greenville News predicted that Blease's once infamous opinions on the war would have no effect on the election. "It should not, every day they (the electorate) realize more and more that he was right."⁸ Although the News was located in a textile city, it did not have a reputation as a pro-Blease paper. Such was the case in many counties where the "New Blease" made many converts by expounding "Americanism, the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the religion of Jesus Christ, decency, good citizenship and anything that will build the best in South Carolina."⁹

Such lofty and meaningless rhetoric gave Blease a commanding lead in the primary election, but not a majority. His vote and that of the runner-up James F. Byrnes accounted for only half of the ballot cast. The Columbia State conceded that Blease had stayed aloof from disputes on the stump and had conducted a moderate campaign, but immediately after the first primary the State endorsed Byrnes in the

⁸Greenville News, August 11, 1924

⁹Columbia State, June 14, 1924.

run-off election. The example of the State was followed in the editorials of the other leading daily newspapers. Most believed that he would lose in the second primary despite his change. It would be a repetition of many previous elections in which Blease led in the first primary only to be soundly defeated in the second. Advertisements by the "Democrats of '76" reminded voters of Blease's more recent betrayals of the party: his Allen University speech, his anti-Wilson statements, his attempted bolt in 1917, and his friendship with Joe Tolbert, the Republican patronage boss. Other advertisements and articles sought to discredit Blease with his past political record rather than his present political conduct.¹⁰

On the other hand Blease contended that he was not running in the past, but the present. "During the campaign I have made no attacks upon any of my opponents. South Carolinians believe in a clean campaign and that is the campaign I have made."¹¹ Others agreed with him. One editor thought that "Blease's big lead surprized everyone. He had no camp-followers, no booster trips, no bag of booty to be distributed among his henchmen and seemed to take no

¹⁰Ibid., August 27, 1924; September 3, 1924; September 9, 1924.

¹¹Ibid., September 8, 1924.

special interest in the campaign. His methods were entirely different from those of his earlier days and they evidently bore him fine fruit."¹² When Benjamin R. Tillman, Jr., endorsed Blease for the Senate, A. F. Lever, James Byrnes' campaign manager, reminded voters that the Senior Tillman had been strongly anti-Blease. Afterwards handbills appeared endorsing Blease, and signed by ministers, were circulated and Lever claimed: "It was a negro preacher who endorsed Blease." Blease merely replied, "Preachers do not have to print circulars to prove my religion."¹³

Other papers showed their amazement over the "New Blease." "He was a lamb where he had been a lion, and one with a big roar at that," said the Charleston News and Courier. Not only had he been "a peace maker between the other candidates," but he also was "much more dignified than any other of the candidates." Still many of the adulatory comments were qualified with doubt that Blease could win.¹⁴

The day before the election a circular of mysterious origin was distributed in the state. The handbill offered

¹²Greenville News, September 5, 1924.

¹³Columbia State, September 7, 8, 1924.

¹⁴Unmarked clipping in James F. Byrnes Scrapbooks, J. F. Byrnes MSS., Clemson University.

positive proof that Byrnes had attended a Catholic school during his boyhood. The document definitely appealed to religious prejudices and was passed out by Bleasites. Whether or not Blease personally had anything to do with it was unknown. Byrnes believed that that leaflet alone accounted for his defeat by Blease the next day.¹⁵

The vote was heavy, but close between the two candidates. Blease won by a mere two thousand votes out of almost two hundred thousand cast. A great number of South Carolinians were astonished at Blease's victory.¹⁶

Much editorial ink was spilt attempting to explain how the impossible had occurred. Many expressed the opinion that the failure of a large number of Dial supporters to vote had given Blease the victory, but the large number of votes cast is enough to show the faulty logic for such an explanation. Other arguments along the same line contended that it was apathy that elected Blease. He had lost so often in the past that the prevalent thought was, "We can always beat Blease and my vote is not needed."¹⁷ Again the

¹⁵J. F. Byrnes, All in One Lifetime (New York: Harper Brothers, 1950), 53.

¹⁶Columbia State, September 10, 1924; New York Times, September 10-12, 1924. Byrnes asked for a recount in Spartanburg and Richland counties where he had lived. A change of a few thousand votes would have given him the election, but a few days later he withdrew his request and conceded victory to Blease.

¹⁷Greenville News, September 12, 1924.

large total vote discounts that theory. The obvious reasoning was that few hard core Dial supporters would have voted for Byrnes, considering his extreme hostility towards Dial on the stump. If they had not voted, it would have helped Byrnes more than if they had.

An explanation closer the truth was that Cole L. Blease had run the most appealing campaign of all the candidates, including Byrnes. Coley had avoided controversy by relying upon safe, moderate electioneering. He had abandoned his old demagoguery and appeals to passion and prejudice, with the possible exception of the indicting "Catholic circular." All in all, the shock of his election was not overwhelming. One editorial grunted that he had been a failure as governor, but, "What else may be said, he has always kept his political promises."¹⁸ Considering that Cole had not made very many promises during the campaign, perhaps it would not be difficult for him to fulfill them in the Senate.

Of the very few bills that Senator Blease introduced in Congress, the first were in fact designed to keep his promises. Several times he drafted bills to repeal the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and to provide for complete segregation of interstate railroad passenger cars. None of the bills ever even went past the committee level,

¹⁸Ibid.

but Coley could say he tried.

Blease really did not believe, however, that legislation was the key to his success in the Senate. Neither did the Congress or President Coolidge. As one author said: "The one aim of both the executive and legislative branches of the government seemed to do nothing."¹⁹ So Cole was right at home in Washington in 1925. Because there was no work to do, he could talk and talk.

Of all the new Senators elected, the New York Times pronounced Cole L. Blease as "the most picturesque, a master of invective, an orator of the fiery type, . . . a dangerous enemy when he wants to be."²⁰ Blease categorically announced that he was completely opposed to the League of Nations and the World Court. He also promised: "I shall work in harmony with my Democratic colleagues, but will not be bound by the code of any man who calls himself a Democrat. I know no boss or bosses. I will vote for what I think is best for the country and my state."²¹ Actually Cole's vote was never as effective a weapon as his mouth. He usually voted against the caucus if only to prove his

¹⁹Ernest F. Bates, The Story of Congress, 1789-1935, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936), 402.

²⁰New York Times, March 1, 1925.

²¹Ibid.

individualism. He found the Senate tradition of filibustering to his liking and made it his favorite pastime in Congress. Since the League of Nations had already been defeated, Cole could (and did) filibuster for hours on the World Court.

In the 1926 debate on the World Court, Cole held the floor for many hours, spouting opinions on the race problem, his political career, evolution, Confederate heroes, Prohibition, Woodrow Wilson and a variety of Bleaseisms. Rarely did Coley read a speech. His remarks were usually extemporaneous. Twice cloture was voted on Blease on the World Court debate alone.²² He bitterly resented cloture in both instances. In order to punish his fellow Senators for what he believed to be an abridgement of his freedom of speech, Cole offered another filibuster:

I know this is not pleasant to some Senators. It was not pleasant for me on the World Court matter when they put cloture on me, but I said then I would make some people pay for it and I am doing it and I am going to keep it up.²³

If he could have his way, all the debate would cease. The whole thing could be settled in a day if the World Court was defeated. According to Blease such action

²²Franklin L. Burdette, Filibustering in the Senate, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), 146-168.

²³Congressional Record, 69 Congress, 2 Session, 5492.

would "save a lot of waste of time, money, and gas."²⁴ His main reason for opposing the World Court was his fear that the American judge might have to sit next to a "nigger" judge. Often Blease would read a list of judges on the court and comment, "To this list add a nigger from Haiti, Liberia, and Santa Domingo, along with the Cuban, the Jap, and the Chinese, and ask yourself how you would like to be tried by these mixed breeds."²⁵ The worst that could happen would be that "the destinies of Southern women and Southern men would be thrown into the lap of a black man."²⁶

It is difficult to assess how influential Blease's stand against the World Court was, but he certainly tried his best to prevent the court's acceptance by the Senate. His best, however, was little more than filibustering. He knew little else to do, but talk.

I would to God I had the power to stand here without eating a bite or taking a drink or sleeping a wink until twelve o'clock of the fourth day of March, 1931, if it would keep this iniquitous, infernal machine from being put on the American people.²⁷

Certainly Cole L. Blease rejoiced at the ultimate defeat

²⁴Blease's Weekly, December 10, 1925.

²⁵Ibid., September 9, 1926.

²⁶New York Times, January 28, 1926.

²⁷Ibid., July 24, 1926.

of the Court.

Cole was rarely bound by the Democratic caucus on any vote in the Senate, but as for filibustering, if anybody asked him, he was only too happy to oblige. One observer of the Junior Senator from South Carolina stated:

When a senatorial filibusterer is in need of assistance, he has only to wink at the Hon. Coleman Livingston Blease, LL.B, his eminent colleague from the sovereign State of South Carolina. Immediately he is afforded an opportunity to shift his weight from his legs to his haunches, and to suck loudly a cough drop or swig surreptitiously from his flask, while the Senator from South Carolina horns in. The purpose of the filibuster or the personnel of its conductors makes no difference to Coley. He leaps to the assistance of a hoarse and wobbling enemy as quickly as he aids an exhausted friend.²⁸

If the World Court was Cole's favorite topic in foreign affairs, then Prohibition was his pet subject in domestic affairs. Blease professed strong support of Prohibition as long as it was strictly enforced; "but if a friend of mine tonight should ask me up to his house for a drink tonight, I'd be delighted."²⁹ The trouble with Prohibition was that the Volstead Act was by-passed by the rich, but not the poor. "Prohibition?" queried Blease, "Why any man who thinks this country has Prohibition is an ignorant fool! The only man in this country that has prohibition is the poor devil who has not the money to buy

²⁸O. L. Warr, "Mr. Blease of South Carolina," American Mercury, XVI (1929), 25.

²⁹New York Times, April 5, 1929.

liquor and everyone knows it."³⁰ Several times Blease exhorted the Senate to pass a dry law that would provide for equal punishment for rich and poor. Once Cole dared the Senate to enact such a law because he knew, "Senators can get any brand liquor any time they want it."³¹

What irked Senator Blease most was the foreign diplomats' immunity from the Volstead Act. "These foreigners get drunk and debauch our women." An American woman with a foreign diplomat could be arrested for possession of illegal alcohol, while the diplomat would be escorted back to his embassy. If such were the case, Blease asked, "Why hasn't the cotton mill boy who works from daylight to dark six days a week to bring prosperity to the South--yes and the Northern mill-owner--the same privilege to have a little flask in his pocket as some little half nigger from a foreign country."³² Instead the poor boys had to pay high prices for bad liquor from bootleggers who were protected by corrupt law officers.

If Prohibition were not going to be repealed, it should be impartially enforced. If neither could be accomplished, then Blease proposed a compromise: "I would change

³⁰Blease's Weekly, January 28, 1926.

³¹Ibid., January 16, 1926.

³²Ibid., January 16, 1926.

the Volstead Act so that we could have a pure beer. If Coca Cola is allowed to be sold and to be poured into the stomachs of the little children of this country, I do not see how anyone would be opposed to good pure beer."³³

Again all that Blease did in regard to Prohibition was talk about it. As the New York Times phrased it, "Mr. Blease, an anti-prohibition prohibitionist, is mainly valued for his qualities as an entertainer."³⁴

A good way, thought Senator Blease, to tell the folks back in South Carolina what he was saying, if not doing, was to have his own newspaper. Especially since "favorable comment from all over the nation regarding Senator Blease" was never "published in the anti-Bleaze press of South Carolina." Actually Bleaze's Weekly, as the paper was named, printed very little "favorable comment from all over the nation." It contained mostly articles written by Blease, new and old Blease speeches, opinions by the Bleaseite editors, and a few adulatory letters from Bleaseites. Blease made a number of proposals of what he would do, "if I controlled Congress," but he only wrote bills for a few of the ideas.

Some of the plans that Blease talked of were

³³Bleaze's Weekly, December 10, 1925.

³⁴New York Times, February 1, 1927.

reduction of taxes, strict enforcement of Prohibition, increase of tariff, restriction of immigration, consolidation of federal government departments, increased veteran's benefits, regulation of railroad rates, and a variety of measures to insure white supremacy.³⁵ On the latter, Cole took ample action in the Senate. In addition to his bills to segregate railroad passenger cars and to repeal the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, he offered bills forbidding interracial marriage. "We should declare in favor of preserving our white races and stop idiots, fools, and morons from marrying Negroes."³⁶ In fact Blease believed that a Constitutional Amendment should provide:

The marriage of a white person with a negro or mulatto shall be unlawful and void. Congress shall provide by law for the punishment of parties attempting to contract such marriage, and for the punishment of the officer of the law or minister or other person qualified to perform the marriage ceremony, who shall attempt to or perform such ceremony.³⁷

Several of Blease's remarks concerning Negroes were so offensive that they were omitted from the Congressional Record. One deleted speech was about Mr. Hoover entertaining the wife of a prominent Negro. Blease penned a

³⁵Bleasant's Weekly, December 10, 1925.

³⁶Ibid., May 27, 1926.

³⁷Yorkville Enquirer, January 13, 1928.

poem called, "Niggers in the White House," which was so obnoxious to his fellow Senators that no trace other than the title is to be found published anywhere.³⁸ Possibly Blease's racist bills and pronouncements on the Senate floor and in his newspaper endeared him to many of his white constituents, but many national publications lamented him as a disgrace to the Senate and the country.

Blease's Weekly collapsed in a year's time despite its own prediction that it was "destined to grow into an important state weekly newspaper."³⁹ Its circulation was always small, and in order to increase subscriptions the publisher sponsored a contest. Over \$13,000.00 worth of prizes was offered for the sale of subscriptions. The state was divided into ten districts and an automobile was to be given to the person who sold the most subscriptions in his district. Lesser prizes were also offered. Perhaps the expense of the prizes bankrupted the paper. Although the journal was a "sheet of fire," the New York Times believed it to be doomed to failure, "for how could Blease's Weekly compete with Blease's Daily, Blease's Hourly, and Blease's Minutely?"⁴⁰

³⁸New York Times, June 18, 1929. Blease was quoted as saying the poem was not published because it may "give offense to niggers."

³⁹Blease's Weekly, December 10, 1925.

⁴⁰New York Times, August 16, 1926.

In 1928 the nomination of Alfred E. Smith for the presidency by the Democratic Party caused some consternation in the South. Anti-Catholic prejudice was strong in South Carolina, and so was feeling to retain Prohibition. Equally powerful was the fear of crossing party lines. Blease said that he believed the nomination of Smith had been a mistake, not because Al was Catholic, but he was the "product of a corrupt organization" and expected Negroes to vote for him. Cole further thought that William E. Borah would have been a better nominee for the Democratic Party. In 1927 when President Coolidge's announcement that he would not run for re-election, Blease drew from the comment that it was "the slickest political move ever made on the national chess board."⁴¹ When Herbert Hoover was nominated, however, Cole quickly decided to endorse Smith. According to the Junior Senator from South Carolina, Hoover was more of a threat to white supremacy than was Smith. Blease had hated Hoover from the time he desegregated the Department of Commerce. Therefore, "Hoover has no chance to carry any Southern State." Upon his announcement, one South Carolina newspaper reporter talked to Cole:

Most of the interview was devoted to talk about niggers and he held up niggers of all colors and kinds. Senator Blease has been dominating this state for so long by virtue of picturesque oratory that he is justified in

⁴¹Ibid., August 4, 1927.

believing that when he shouts niggers to South Carolinians and orders them to vote for Smith, South Carolina will obey. As a matter of fact, it probably will do so.⁴²

Blease's endorsement really had very little to do with South Carolina's vote for Smith. Like Smith or not, the state's Democrats had no choice but to vote for him. Blease was correct, though hardly clairvoyant, in his calculations that South Carolina would go for Smith. The iron-clad loyalty oath of the Democratic Party required that the voters pledge to support national, state, and local party nominees. Rather than divide the white man's party, many South Carolina Democrats refrained from voting altogether. Nobody dared vote Republican, so why vote if Smith was a Catholic? The one-party system caused by a fear of the Negro race still shackled South Carolina in the 1920's. The Republican Party had little or no chance to make any headway in the state.

Cole Blease spoke the truth when he said: "There has been some talk of breaking up the solid South, which has always stood for white supremacy. Those who have been dreaming a happy thought of a respectable Republican Party in the South might as well wake up."⁴³ The Senate even

⁴²Yorkville Enquirer, July 10, 1928.

⁴³New York Times, April 11, 1928.

laughed at some of Blease's statements on the Southern Republicans. It was amused, for example, by his comment that "I think Mr. Coolidge received 1100 votes in my state. I do not know where he got them! I was astonished to know they were cast and shocked to know they were counted. I actually was, because I cannot imagine 1100 Republicans in my state. I do not believe it yet." The reason for his disbelief, Cole bragged to his fellow Senators, was that, "We keep the colored men from voting in South Carolina by our constitution. We do not allow him to vote in the Democratic white primaries and we never expect to let him vote in them, no matter what may be done here."⁴⁴

Despite his rantings over the Republican Party in the South, Blease defended Joe Tolbert, the Republican state party boss of South Carolina, against charges that Tolbert had sold postmasterships. Earlier Cole had made statements to the effect that every postmaster in the state had bought his job from Tolbert.⁴⁵ Although Blease voted for a bill enlarging the civil service, he said.

I do not believe in any civil service and never have. The civil service is the most damnable and iniquitous system for the appointment of government employees that has ever been perpetrated on a free people. I believe 'that to the victor belongs the spoils.'

⁴⁴Congressional Record, 69 Congress, 2 Session, 5362.

⁴⁵Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 463-464.

That is my doctrine and all of you feel that way,
but you don't have the nerve to stand up and say so.⁴⁶

Blease had never believed in giving anyone a political office if the person had not voted for him, yet he had contradicted himself by voting for civil service bill.

When Blease was not voting against the majority or his party just to show his individualism, he did note sensibly in the minds of some South Carolinians. He voted against reduction of federal income tax despite his own promises to do the opposite, against the Muscle Shoals dam project as a "long step toward socialism," against the McNary-Haugen Agricultural bill, because he believed it was an attempt to force federal price fixing. He did vote for the Kellogg-Briand Pact.

Because of his lack of seniority, Blease's work in Senate committees was unspectacular. Naturally he did not think much of seniority in the Senate. "Brains are worth more than seniority,"⁴⁷ testified the junior first-term Senator, ignoring that fact that many Americans believed that he had neither.

The only real accomplishments Blease could boast of during his term in the Senate were three in number. One was the passage of a bill for the establishment of King's

⁴⁶New York Times, May 25, 1929.

⁴⁷Ibid., August 11, 1926.

Mountain National Park. The second was the establishment of a new federal judicial district in South Carolina. This was secured when Blease threatened to filibuster eternally if New York received additional judges and South Carolina received none. Senator Bruce of Maryland commented that the Senate would be wise to give the judgeship to Blease since South Carolina had more bootleggers than any other state.⁴⁸ Third was a speech during a filibuster. Entitled "Destruction of Property in Columbia, South Carolina by Sherman's Army," the essay went to great lengths to prove once and for all that Sherman's men had first set fire to the city. Blease was so proud of his work as a historian that he had many copies of the verbose monograph distributed to the folks back home. Blease did not distinguish himself during his six years in the Senate, unless one considers his verbosity.⁴⁹

The truly outstanding feature of his Senatorial term was his vanity. Only a few Senators had longer autobiographical chapters in the Congressional Directory where Coley wrote of himself:

⁴⁸ Ibid., January 31, 1929.

⁴⁹ The three "accomplishments" are neatly listed in Blease's biographical sketch in Wallace, History of South Carolina, IV, 963-964. One autographed copy of his Sherman speech may be found in the James F. Byrnes Scrapbooks, J. F. Byrnes MSS., Clemson University.

The only governor or former governor elected by the people of South Carolina for his first term in the United States Senate. Only South Carolinian who has ever been mayor of his city, senator from his county, speaker of the house, president of the Senate, governor of the state, and United States Senator, elected by the people and served in more offices than any other citizen of his State up to the present date. Only one who has represented three of the State fraternal bodies in national grand bodies.⁵⁰

Another example of Blease's self-esteem is found in his words: "Wire anybody in the world and ask who is the Senator from South Carolina and I will set you up if the answer doesn't come back Cole L. Blease!"⁵¹ Not many Senators had their own newspapers, named for themselves. But Blease was a minority in his opinion of himself in the nation and perhaps in the state. Some thought Blease was unhappy in the Senate because he thought he was "a big toad in a small puddle."⁵² Several times while in Washington Blease was quoted as saying, "I would rather be in good old South Carolina."⁵³ Rumors in 1928 began that Cole was considering resigning in order to run for governor again. When questioned Blease replied that he had not thought of it, but, "I will frankly state that I would rather be governor

⁵⁰Congressional Directory, 71st Congress, 2nd Session, (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1929), 104.

⁵¹New York Times, August 11, 1926.

⁵²Yorkville Enquirer, March 30, 1928.

⁵³Bleaze's Weekly, June 3, 1926.

of South Carolina than to hold any other office in the world."⁵⁴ He added that he had no intention at all of ever running for governor in the future. Rather than "big toad in a small puddle," the New York Times' editorial staff thought of Blease as a man too small for his job. The reason he did not have the ability to become a good Senator was that he represented only too well "a new social stratum . . . only coming into its own and still raw in the making."⁵⁵ This "new social stratum" in layman's terms was simply "hillbillies," and Blease was nothing more than a well-dressed hillbilly.

For six years Cole L. Blease grew older in the Senate, but no wiser. His record there was less controversial than his conduct as governor, but then he did nothing notorious other than talk a great deal. Besides sponsoring a new federal judgeship and a national park, Blease did little to serve his state in the Senate. During the Great Crash of 1929 and the Depression that followed, almost nothing was said concerning the economic situation by Senator Blease. He seems to have ignored the problem altogether, possibly because he had little knowledge or understanding of the forces involved. If Blease's years as

⁵⁴Yorkville Enquirer, April 3, 1928.

⁵⁵New York Times, November 13, 1928; See also Wallace, History of South Carolina, II, 464 for a discussion of the subject.

governor had brought him fame throughout the nation, there was little to remember him by as Senator.

CHAPTER IX

OLD MAN BLEASE, 1930-1942

Despite the fact that Blease had done nearly nothing in the United States Senate, he was prepared to run for re-election on the basis of his record. Confident as usual of victory, Blease was now sixty-two years old and clearly past his prime. All of his opponents were younger and could conduct a much more vigorous campaign. Five candidates challenged him for his seat, the two most serious contenders being Leon W. Harris and James F. Byrnes. Harris castigated Blease at almost every stump stop, while Byrnes, learning from his defeat in 1924, chose to conduct a moderate campaign.

Harris charged that Blease was an agent for cotton mill executives. A later magazine article had quoted a mill boss as saying, "All he ever does is get the hands excited about liquor and niggers. Well, we'll drink the liquor and take care of the niggers. Coley will keep the hands quiet."¹ According to Harris, Blease's talk of

¹"Jimmy Byrnes," Life, XIV (January 4, 1943), 65. Surprisingly, virtually no mention of the Depression or the New Deal was made in South Carolina political campaign in the 1930's. Issues were purely local. Olin D. Johnston did, however, attempt, to run on Roosevelt's coattails for the United States Senate in 1938, but lost to Ed Smith.

establishing "local unions" for cotton mill workers was nothing more than meaningless rhetoric. Blease had "betrayed the workers" whom he claimed to represent. Associating Blease with Joe Tolbert, Harris called them "the gold-dust twins."²

Coley ignored Harris's strictures and asked audiences "Who else has ever done more for South Carolina in one term in the Senate?"³ The reason, Cole explained, that so few of his bills were passed and that he resorted to filibustering so much was that the South was now dominated politically by the North and the Republican Party. The national political situation for Southerners was so bad that "we will never have a President from the South unless we stick in a Vice President and trust God to do the rest."⁴ The filibuster was the best weapon that the South had for blocking any legislation undesirable to Dixie, especially legislation that might endanger white supremacy. Who could defend the South orally better than Cole L. Blease? Everyone should know by now that "negroes pray for Blease's defeat."⁵ It was for this reason alone that he ran for the

²Columbia State, August 22, 1930.

³Ibid., August 20, 1930.

⁴Ibid., August 21, 1930.

⁵Circular, Byrnes Scrapbooks, James F. Byrnes MSS., Clemson University.

Senate. As he said, "I have no personal ambition, but a desire to help the people."⁶ Everyone understood, of course, that Cole meant the white people. He made a habit of boasting at the end of each of his speeches that he would win the nomination by at least 25,000 votes.

Byrnes made no charges against anyone. He only promised to serve his state, the nation and the Democratic Party. Byrnes avoided controversy and name-calling as much as he had used them in 1924. He told voters that the election was in their hands. Byrnes trusted them to make the right decision and vote for the best man. Many newspapers, including the Columbia State, endorsed Byrnes as the best man for the office. The Greenville News reminded Democrats that religious prejudice and possibly fraud had deprived Byrnes of victory over Blease in the close election of 1924.⁷

Election day came and once again none of the candidates won a clear majority of the votes. A run-off was declared between Byrnes and Blease. Harris quickly endorsed Byrnes and things looked bad for Blease.⁸ Worried by Byrnes' strong showing, Blease expressed fear that his

⁶Columbia State, September 2, 1930.

⁷Greenville News, September 6, 1930.

⁸"Palmetto's Her," Outlook, LVII (September 10, 1930), 157.

opponent would buy votes or attempt some other underhanded manipulation in order to cheat Blease. Voting in the run-off primary was heavy. Blease was defeated by over 5,000 votes. The Columbia State rejoiced over the fact that "Senator Blease has been retired."⁹ The Charleston News and Courier offered the opinion that Blease had been defeated because he had "made the state look ridiculous" by his offensive utterances.¹⁰

As Blease had grown older, so had his supporters. The ranks of the state Democratic Party had swollen with younger men and women to whom the name Cole L. Blease held no magic. Once he had been able to acquaint himself personally with his supporters. By 1930 there were too many to know individually, but Cole still did command a large following.

Spitefully Blease nailed a note to his Senate office door on February 17, 1931. The message was to forward his mail to his home in Columbia for he would no longer be in Washington.¹¹ Already, however, he was making plans to return to the Senate. "Cotton Ed" Smith would be running for reelection in 1932 and Blease intended to challenge him for the office.

⁹Columbia State, September 10, 1930.

¹⁰Charleston News and Courier, September 9, 1930.

¹¹Columbia State, February 18, 1931.

Smith was firmly entrenched in the Senate. He had been there for twenty-four consecutive years and would be a hard man to beat. Blease was joined by two other candidates: Leon W. Harris and Ashton H. Williams, who were out to defeat the incumbent. The three combined to attack Smith with charges of nepotism, extravagance, and holding the same political office for too many years. Harris and Williams made a great issue of repealing Prohibition. On this subject Cole disagreed with them. Harris and Williams contended that Prohibition fostered gangsters, bootleggers, and crime in general. "I have yet to hear of abolishing the Ten Commandments because some one violated them,"¹² replied Blease. The people, not the politicians, should decide if a vote were needed for repeal. When asked if he were not being hypocritical on Prohibition since he was known to drink, law or no law, Blease answered, "I'm a drinking man, but doctors haven't let me have a drink for months."¹³ He also added that everyone should pray for the deliverance of drunkards, but after the statement some people wondered about his health.

Smith ran his usual campaign: celebrating the virtues of cotton and his valiant efforts on its behalf. Much attention was given to Smith's use of the radio in the

¹²Ibid., June 16, 1932.

¹³"Jimmy Byrnes," Life, 65.

campaign. In 1932 the Senate election was the only state-wide primary held and crowds were smaller on the stump tour. Smith made a number of radio broadcasts from WBT in Charlotte. In each he reminded voters of his seniority in the Senate and promised to continue serving the people as he had for two decades. He was always confident of victory and predicted that Blease would run second.

Blease refused to make any radio broadcasts. Earlier he had explained, "I never listened to a radio but one time, and it was in such bad shape that I got disgusted and quit. I like to see a man when he is talking to me. I have never wanted to make a speech over the radio because I do not like it."¹⁴ While in the Senate, Blease had once commented on the radio industry by saying the whole business should be "gassed out." Possibly the Smith message reached more homes through his use of the radio.

Smith's prediction came true. He led all candidates with over a 100,000 votes and Blease was second with 81,000.¹⁵ Almost all the state newspapers endorsed Smith for the runoff election. On election day Smith made another radio address over WBT, predicting his victory. The second primary was held in September with Blease polling over 112,000

¹⁴New York Times, March 3, 1929.

¹⁵Columbia State, August 31, 1932.

votes. He had not quite held the votes he had amassed two years earlier. "Cotton Ed" had overwhelmed Blease by a margin of almost 35,000 votes. Cole had never been beaten so badly in his entire career. It was the last Senate race Cole L. Blease ever entered.¹⁶

Yet less than a year later Cole announced that he would run again for governor in 1934. He had always said that he would rather be governor of South Carolina than hold any other office in the world.¹⁷ He insisted that the people of the state had petitioned him to run, and, he added, "I love my people."¹⁸ Out of the seven other candidates in the primary, another man sought the support of "Coley's people." Olin D. Johnston was known as the "mill boy-lawyer." He had worked in the mills of Spartanburg since the age of eleven and managed to obtain a college degree and a law degree while actively participating in state politics. As something of a hero among mill workers, Johnston had lost an election for governor in 1930, but had gained valuable political experience and public exposure. When the campaign opened, most of the state's political observers believed the contest would be between the old hero of the textile workers and the new hero of the textile workers.

¹⁶Ibid., September 13, 14, 1932.

¹⁷New York Times, April 16, 1933.

¹⁸Columbia State, June 20, 1934.

Cole conducted a mild campaign centering around the promise of honest government. "When I was governor, no man or clique dictated to me and never will," vowed Blease. "Elect the man who not only can help you, but will help you,"¹⁹ implored the man who had never done much of anything for the state. He also promised to reduce taxes, eliminate crime, cooperate with the federal government, and "carefully investigate pardons." If he were governor again, no barrooms would be found in South Carolina during his administration. Furthermore, "Drunken drivers should be put in prison." Many times Cole emphasized, "I will again be governor of the state, I have not had and never will have any political boss."²⁰

One candidate, H. Kemper Cooke, a state senator and lawyer, chose to harass Blease. Cooke recalled how Blease had abused his power of executive clemency during office and had never done anything for the people of the state. "Blease has done one thing for you. He has fooled you fools," declared Cooke. "Neither Washington, Tillman, nor Hampton sought a third term." Cooke also badgered Johnston, calling him "King Olin the Dry," and "Little Olin the Fence Straddler."²¹

¹⁹Ibid., June 21, 1934.

²⁰Ibid., September 5, 1934.

²¹Ibid., August 11, 1934.

to choose between two men neither of whom they had approved in the first primary. Rather than endorse either, the Columbia State lamented over the choice between Johnston who was too young and a "radical," and Blease who was too old and a "reactionary." Johnston rejoined that he was a "reformer, not a radical." Campaigning almost without pause between the primaries, Johnston pushed his image of being the "worker's friend." "I am a laboring man myself and I feel I know the heartbeat of the working people." Although he might be young, Johnston asked "God for guidance to make me a great governor."

When questioned about his advancing years, Blease replied that his father "never had any sense till he was past sixty." As for being a "reactionary," Cole answered, "When I was governor, you were happy and had plenty to eat. Today we are bankrupt. . . . I have abused no person. In everything I have said and done I have at all times the best interests of the people at heart. With the help of God, South Carolina can be made a happy state."²⁵

H. Kemper Cooke, who had placed third in the first primary and had damned Johnston and Blease, publicly announced that Johnston was the lesser of two evils. "Cotton Ed" Smith, however, disclosed that he was going to vote for

²⁵Columbia State, September 5, 12, 1934.

Blease. Both men had influential supporters then and both asked God for assistance; both men had made strong appeals for worker's votes; but Johnston waged a more vigorous campaign and soundly defeated the aging Blease.²⁶

Coley had lost three statewide elections in four years, but he had made the run-off election each time. Encouraged by drawing over 100,000 votes in each defeat, Blease decided to run for governor again in 1938. Again Cole was the oldest candidate, this time in a field of eight campaigners. With his white suit, string tie, white hair and silvery mustache, Blease was "a perfect imitation of a Civil War colonel."²⁷ In his eighth race for governor Cole was remarkably dignified and restrained. Early in the campaign he predicted his victory. "They are all going to vote for Cousin Coley." Quietly he spoke of his concern over the rising state debt. Out of respect for his age, the candidates generally did not attack him. One of his rivals drew applause from the audience when he said, "Mr. Blease is a fine old man." Another amused the crowds by saying, "I'll vote for Mr. Blease fifty years from now, for if Mr. Blease is still living, he'll be running."²⁸

²⁶Ibid., August 30, September 9, 12, 1934.

²⁷"Jimmy Byrnes," Life, 65.

²⁸Ibid., August 3, 1938.

Once Cole showed some of his old fire when he was asked about the use of troops to evict sit-down strikers. "Hell no," declared Blease, "I wouldn't call out the militia in case of a sit down strike. We got enough Bleaseites to whip anybody in the state."²⁹ Usually Cole argued mildly that he was not too old to be governor and deplored the "woeful, willful extravagance in state government in recent years."³⁰ The other candidates verbally assaulted each other, but Cole relied on his experience to give him the nomination. "Read you Bibles," asked Coley, "then think carefully and sanely how you are going to vote on August 30."³¹

Finally the primary was held. The results were disastrous for Cole L. Blease, who for the first time in decades did not even make the run-off. He did manage to place third with only half the votes he had received in each of the three previous elections.³² Bitter at his worst defeat in years, Blease asserted that he alone had conducted a clean campaign by running "on his manhood and record." He had never seen so much money used to debauch

²⁹Ibid., August 9, 1938.

³⁰Ibid., August 21, 1938.

³¹"Carolina Jubilee," Newsweek, XII (August 22, 1938), 14.

³²Columbia State, August 31, 1938.

the white people of the state he said, as was used in the primary. "Whiskey, Coca-Cola, and other kinds of stuff were used, besides cash money." If all this evil political bribery did not stop, Blease believed that South Carolina would one day be for sale and only those with money could run for office. "I am going to cast my vote for white supremacy, for the protection of the virtue of white women of my state, and for Wyndham M. Manning. I haven't anything against any man or woman and thank God I can truly say, God bless all my people."³³

His endorsement of Manning was embarrassing for two reasons. Burnet Maybank defeated Manning in the run-off, thus depriving Blease of the satisfaction of throwing the victory to Manning. Even worse, Wyndham M. Manning was the son of Richard I. Manning, who had once been one of Cole's most hated political enemies. Defeated in four elections in eight years, Coley now retired permanently from the campaign trail.

Living in Columbia, Blease returned to his law practice for two years. His wife Lillie had died in 1934, and five years later, at the age of 71 he married Caroline Floyd Hoyt, who was many years younger than he. The marriage lasted only a year. Either he was getting too

³³Ibid., September 2, 1938.

crotchety in his old age or, as some rumor-mongers would have it, he was not as wealthy as his new wife had supposed him to be. In 1940 he was appointed by the General Assembly to a position on the state unemployment commission. The term was four years, but Cole did not live to finish it. On January 19, 1942, he died, following a surgical operation.³⁴

³⁴For his obituaries see Charleston News and Courier, January 20, 1942; Columbia State, January 20, 1942; New York Times, January 20, 1942.

CONCLUSION

For fifty years Coleman Livingston Blease was active in South Carolina politics. After the turn of the century the state's Democrats were called upon in almost every state-wide election to decide "whether or not Blease shall have high office."¹ He had been elected to the State House of Representatives, the State Senate, the Governor's office, and the United States Senate. In nearly every election he entered, he commanded a large and loyal group of supporters. Yet this same man did next to nothing to gratify his constituents during the three terms he was elected to high office. How was it possible for such a politician to retain the trust of his followers for so many years while providing so little in return?

First it is necessary to place Blease in his proper context. Ben Tillman had inaugurated a political revolution in South Carolina at the end of the nineteenth century. The Bourbons of the state had been challenged for political power and apparently defeated. Tillman disfranchised the Negroes and made the power of the ballot

¹George M. Koester, "Bleaseism," Greenville Piedmont, September 23, 1916.

available to the white masses. The one-party system and the all-white primaries were designed to prevent "black rule." Nonetheless Tillman still pandered to race prejudice and established the precedent of race-baiting in South Carolina politics. Despite these and other "reforms" in time it became evident that the old conservative ruling class had not been vanquished, but had in fact absorbed Tillman and his movement. The political tradition of the state had not been destroyed, but instead a modification had occurred. The primary system allowed more whites to vote than ever before in the history of the state, but only the means of election had been changed, not the actual philosophy of government.

On one hand Tillman's democracy on the stump campaign made it a virtual necessity for a candidate to be a demagogue by appealing to the emotions of the illiterate masses. On the other the perseverance of the traditional conservative political ideology meant that little reform would be attempted by elected officials. In some respects South Carolina political practices resembled those of the frontier Southwest as described by Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick. In their words "the great tradition of the political barbecue" of the Southwest tended "to focus upon the sense of ceremonial participation." Similarly, for the masses of white South Carolina Democrats the only democratic practice they exercised, or in many cases could

exercise, was voting in the primaries. After the election the majority of South Carolinians had little interest in politics. Again, Elkin's and McKitrick's observations seem appropriate:

. . . the end of the campaign largely marked the end of their concern with government. Whatever satisfaction the back-country politician had to render after getting into office must be understood in terms of the barbecue rather than of concrete local problems to be bargained and haggled over.²

In such a political environment the rhetoric of electioneering was far more important than performance after election. Linked to the persistent notion that the government was best that governed the least, this peculiar situation allowed politicians to court the votes of the lower classes without doing anything for them in return.

Blease emerged from these circumstances as the champion of the textile workers. Through personal contact and oratory, he won the workers' trust and became their spokesman. No other politician had ever done anything for the mill hands and at least Coley professed to care about them. He identified himself with them and significantly, they identified themselves with him. His enemies were their enemies. Just as they could do nothing to improve their condition, neither, so they believed, could Blease.

²Stanley Ilkins and Eric McKitrick, "A Meaning for Turner's Frontier, Part II: The Southwest Frontier and New England," Political Science Quarterly, LXIX (December, 1954), 577.

He provided the "ceremonial participation" for the mill hands at election time and continued the "barbecue" after his election to the extent that he harassed the establishment without tearing it down. The Bleaseites probably did not expect him to destroy the old order since it was obvious that their power and his was limited. Blease simply fulfilled his constituents' need for a candidate who would voice their hostility, bitterness, and fear. His success, when elected, was measured by how much he antagonized and shocked the traditional system, not by any standards of positive results.

By the same token Blease's political career can only be understood in negative terms. His appeal was based on what he was against, not for. His oratory consisted of negative reference symbols such as miscegenation, Negro equality, class privilege, high taxes and other alleged evils. Blease never went beyond haranging the symbols because if they were destroyed, no negative appeal would exist for him. His vision was limited to seeing himself as an agent of protest, not reform. He could not preach against sin if none existed.

Within Blease's political ideology another reason accounts for his failure to come to grips with social and economic problems. He presented himself as a politician who was outside the state Democratic machine. Unlike

Tillman, he neither took over the party, nor did he eventually sell out to it. The often repeated boast that he knew no "boss or bosses" was true. Blease remained his own man throughout his entire political career. By never compromising or bargaining with the established political order, had he proposed real reforms, they would have been defeated. Paradoxically he shared to a large degree the philosophy of government of the very class he despised and denounced. One finds little difference between Blease's thinking and the Bourbon theory of government as described by Francis Butler Simkins:

. . . the state should be content with a minimum of intervention in social and economic matters, discouraging in the meantime on . . . the cause of the Confederacy, on the time-honored doctrine of tariff-for-revenue, and on economy in expenditures and 'viewing with alarm' the encroachment of the Federal government upon spheres of action marked out for the state.³

Thus Cole not only was a product of his time and took advantage of existing conditions, but was also a captive of the political tradition of the state.

For a man whose reputation was one of crude immorality and conniving guile typical of a demagogue, Blease was also characterized by a naive honesty. He always tried to fulfill the meager promises he made on the stump when elected. As one of his close friends eulogized several

³Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, 79.

years after his death:

I cannot proclaim that Colie was one of our greatest statesmen or one of our eminent social reformers. That was the great thing about Colie; he was exactly what he held himself out to be--a politician in the true sense of the word who voiced the opinions, hopes, aspirations and prejudices of the people of our state.⁴

Blease himself would probably agree that his most outstanding ability and the chief reason for his political success was his power of rhetoric. By saying what his supporters wanted to hear and in a style they could understand, he almost spellbound them. Combining his knowledge of their feelings and thoughts with his natural gift of oratory, he never exceeded their level of thinking. Rather than enlighten the oppressed, he confirmed their alienation. In other words he simply thought the way they did.

How can a politician who rarely ever accomplished anything for his constituents be evaluated? First it should be remembered that Blease never proposed to do much, and if he had, the chances were slim that it would have been enacted. Cole was an artful campaigner, but the tactics of the campaign trail and political office are not the same. Blease never made the distinction; he acted like he was campaigning even when he was elected. His achievements must then be measured by indirect standards,

⁴Columbia Record, August 5, 1948.

Johnston was an adept demagogue himself who entertained audiences on the stump. Rather than speak on issues, he attacked corruption in the state highway department and "ringsters" who controlled state politics. Vying with Blease for the textile workers' vote, Johnston repeatedly declared, "I was a cotton mill boy and realize fully the life they lead and do not hesitate to say that I have great sympathy for them and shall see justice for them."²²

During the campaign, textile workers went on strike in several piedmont mills. In South Carolina these strikes were viewed as the work of Communists and "radicals." The Columbia State looked with disfavor on Blease and Johnston as mill workers' candidates. Johnston was accused of being a "radical" and "a dangerous man," while many respectable Democrats still thought of Blease as an unscrupulous crook. Blease denied any association with "ringsters" or gangsters. "I want what the people want," replied Johnston, "Is there anything radical in this position?"²³

After the votes were tabulated in the primary, once again a run-off was required. Blease and Johnston led the other six candidates. Cole trailed his opponent by almost 20,000 votes.²⁴ Once again the state newspapers had

²²Ibid., September 4, 1934.

²³Ibid., September 5, 1934.

²⁴Literary Digest, CXVIII (September 8, 1934), 6.

not legislation. Despite his official record, his influence on South Carolina politics cannot be easily underestimated. For thirty-two years candidates seeking the Democratic nomination for governor or United States Senate had to contend with Blease, one way or the other. To some degree nearly every politician in the state had to be some kind of a demagogue in order to compete with such opposition. If the office-seekers did not have to deal with him directly on the stump, they still had to try to win some support from his followers in order to succeed. Thus Blease had enlarged the white democratic movement begun by Tillman. The mill workers' vote became almost as important as the farmers'. In this way he was responsible for awakening the workers' political power. Unquestionably this was his most valuable contribution to the history of the state.

Unfortunately, Blease's accomplishment came at a high price. By doing nothing else for his "people," he helped perpetuate their lowly condition. In fact he did little more than aggravate their resentment and prolong their wrath in the wrong direction. Although they little realized it, the mill workers paid an excessive cost to have Cole L. Blease as their champion. But the black man was even more victimized. It is all too easy to damn Blease for his racism, but it would be a greater travesty to forgive him for it. Inescapably, the truth is that

Blease would have been a political nonentity if he had not been a racist demagogue. He cannot be blamed for creating racial prejudice in the state, but he deliberately cultivated and nurtured it for his own ends.

The ugliest aspects of his incendiary tirades against Negroes are the facts that his expression of hatred were totally unthinking and representative of a large number of white South Carolinians. The mill workers especially focused their frustrations in the form of violent aggression and intense hatred on the Negro. By its very nature, prejudice is irrational. Due to his own narrow intellectual and moral capacities, Blease could only reflect the prejudice. Indeed that was his most uncanny ability. The accuracy of Wilbur J. Cash's observation of Blease cannot be denied:

The man was a sort of antenna, as it were, fit to vibrate in perfect unison with their exact sentiment--in his every word and deed precisely to render what, given all the forces at play on them, they most secretly wanted: the making vocal and manifest of their slowly gathering melancholy for and resentment against their economic and social lot, without ever losing sight of the paramount question of race.⁵

By any standards Blease must be judged as one of the most offensive and detrimental of Southern demagogues. He was an extreme example of the politician who thrives on poverty, ignorance and blind hatred. As much as he was a

⁵Wilbur J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1941), 258-259.

product of his time, Blease contributed to the baser facets of his time. The longevity of his career was an indication of the persistence of grim and squalid conditions in South Carolina. Concurrently, the vociferous political career of Cole L. Blease contributed to obstructing the abolishing of those conditions. In his quest for fame and notoriety, Coleman Livingston Blease sacrificed the welfare of all South Carolinians, black and white. Through ignorant connivance he betrayed the public trust. The significance of his life was that he was able to accomplish the deed and bequeath its method as his legacy to the history and the future of his state.

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