

PITCHFORK BEN TILLMAN AND THE EMERGENCE OF SOUTHERN DEMAGOGUERY

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DEMAGOGUE is a slippery word that, like populist, loses its original power of definition through broad application. Rather than teacher or leader of the people, the word connotes one who panders to emotions and prejudices of the baser sort. In common parlance a demagogue is one who whips up passion for the wrong side. The recent publication of *The Oratory of Southern Demagogues* raises anew the question of how historians of rhetoric should use the concept of demagoguery and provides interpretive keys for attaching meaning to the term. Appropriately cautious in generalizing, the editors still identify three traits of the southern demagogue. First, they were arrogant men whose rhetoric "often reeked of omniscience." Second, they were "felicitous promoters" who "often appeared" more interested in the "seductive power" of promised reforms "than in the issues themselves." Finally, they practiced a "highly domineering discourse" that despite some political value in one-party states nonetheless "tended to stifle any constructive exchange of ideas."¹

These three traits serve a valuable descriptive purpose and provide keys for identifying important features in the discourse, but they do not seem necessarily to move us closer to what makes figures

like James K. Vardaman or Eugene Talmadge uniquely demagogues or southern other than by region. Although this omission may have occurred consciously through the editors' laudable decision to allow each orator to stand on his own historical terms, nonetheless I intend to use the case of Benjamin Ryan Tillman in order to make an argument which generalizes the nature of southern demagoguery. Such an undertaking requires an acknowledgement that the term demagogue is one of judgment. There can be no restoration of its etymological purity. It is an epithet applied by one group operating from certain ideological assumptions to leading advocates of another group differently disposed. As such, it lends itself to the schoolyard *tu quoque*; "so's your old man." This outsider-insider phenomenon must be accounted for in any assessment of demagoguery.

Before stating the method to be used, a general estimate is needed of what constitutes a southern demagogue as that term is used in this essay. At the very least, those to whom the term applies should be understood as men coping with the vicissitudes of a clearly defined era in the South's history. Southern demagoguery traces its origins to the 1880s and the aftermath of Reconstruction at which time the unsettling effects of an industrializing nation on a regional and agrarian economy were most keenly felt. For the next three generations demagogues strutted the political stage until World War II and telecommunications man-

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¹Cal M. Logue and Howard Dorgan, eds., *The Oratory of Southern Demagogues* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), pp. 9-11.

dated a new style. All that remained was a shrill echo of the old style in the racial politics of the fifties and sixties until an assassin's bullets struck George Wallace and silenced the echo itself. Now the southern demagogue is something to be remembered, often wistfully, as good-old-boys-turned-essayists announce that "one of the more notable aspects of the South's assimilation into America's corporate civilization has been the vanishing of all those splendidly gargoylish, uproarious old razor-back demagogues of the South's age of tribal politics—The Vardamans, the Longs, the Tillmans, the Ross Barnetts."²

But sentiment for the glandular South should not obscure the reputation these men carved in their time. They were outsiders who became insiders but who could not assimilate their new status and remained forever strangers in a familiar land. At least three factors conspired to keep them outside even when they had gained access to the machinery of state. First, their constituents who reveled in their rhetoric discovered little change in their own status. As outcasts in the new industrial order, access to political power for them became more an opiate than a cure. Small farmers, small merchants, and mill workers who remembered being small farmers swelled the crowds but could not shake Roosevelt's designation that they and their region were "the nation's number one economic problem."³ Second, the same president who recognized their plight also symbolized the fact that the power to do something about misery was federal, not state.

²Marshall Frady, *Southerners: A Journalists Odyssey* (New York: New American Library, 1980), p. 326.

³"It is my conviction," the President said, "that the South presents right now, in 1938, the Nation's No. 1 economic problem." National Emergency Council, *Report on Economic Conditions of the South*, (Washington, 1938), p. 1.

Thus, a group of men were swept into powerless positions by the powerless. Unable to alter the material facts, these men continued to do what they did best, to alter the psychological facts of life.

The third factor keeping them outside, and central to this essay, was impoverishment of another sort; to wit, southern demagogues seemed singularly without ideological moorings. Certainly outside the liberal-democratic mainstream and its conservative counterpart, these voices of the southern populace were equally absent the "cooperative-democratic vision" articulated by the genuine Populists.⁴ Thus, without any ideological base from which to mount offensive rhetorical strategies, they found themselves on the defensive, pitting local interests against each other or retreating to the politics of race. The southern demagogue, then, found himself in the van of a popular movement but with no ideological home to which his people might be led.

In developing this thesis of ideological alienation, the reader is justified in detecting a debt owed the turn historiography took in the fifties and sixties, especially that treating the abolitionists and their intellectual confrontation with the dismantling effects of Jacksonian democracy on American institutions.⁵ As with all parallels, caution is in order, and the experience of the abolitionists will be

⁴Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. vii-xxiii.

⁵See for example David Brion Davis, ed., *Antebellum Reform, Interpretations of American History*, John Higham and Bradford Perkins, eds. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); David Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered, "Toward a Reconsideration of Abolitionists"* (New York: Vintage, 1956), pp. 19-36; Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*, "Slavery and the Intellectual" (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 140-222; Donald G. Mathews, "The Abolitionists on Slavery: The Critique Behind the Social Movement," *Journal of Southern History*, 33 (1967), 163-82.

used only to illumine the conditions that gave rise to a new, more democratic, rhetoric in the post-Civil War South. What ultimately breaks down this parallel is the key to understanding what makes Benjamin Ryan Tillman a demagogue while someone like Wendell Phillips is honored as a freedom fighter and professional reformer. By applying insights from this scholarship to Pitchfork Ben Tillman who was precursor of the southern demagogue both in time and style, I hope to show not only how a demagogue emerges but why this emotionally laden term becomes redundant with the class of popular southern politicians described by Logue and Dorgan.

THE EMERGENCE OF TILLMAN

In Pitchfork Ben Tillman the South got not only its first demagogue of the Post-Civil War era but its archetype as well.⁶ Like most popular leaders he was not cut from the common cloth of the folk he led. Well-educated by the standards of his day, he owned and farmed considerable acreage in Edgefield County, South Carolina, and by the time he moved center stage in 1885 he could at least be listened to as the brother of Congressman George D. Tillman. Most people thought his principal liability was not having fought in the war, but though willing, his youth (he was seventeen when war ended) and an accident which left him blind in one eye kept him at home. He would earn captain's bars,

however, in the struggle to overthrow Reconstruction, as white South Carolinians organized themselves into military companies, called themselves Redshirts, and followed their military hero, Wade Hampton, in a bloody campaign to throw the rascals out.

Ironically, it was Reconstruction and its violent overthrow that set the stage for Tillman's later movement. Historians have long credited the radicals of Reconstruction with importing democracy into the state.⁷ The constitution of 1868 broadened the suffrage, increased the power of the electorate over officeholders, and committed the state to educating its citizens. Unfortunately the foresight of blacks, scalawags, and carpetbaggers went for naught, at least as far as blacks were concerned, when federal troops marched out of Columbia in 1877 and abandoned the state to its white masters. Even so, those whites who engineered the restoration of Conservative⁸ rule left the constitution in place and the democratic form it embodied. They even spoke the language of racial conciliation and accommodation. But, by enlisting the shock troops of Redemption and by winking at the violence of their minions, Wade Hampton and his lieutenants sowed the dragon's teeth of their own undoing. The conservative Redeemers tried to rule by racial accommodation, but their followers would not be made the equals of a race that kept them at least one rung from the bottom. The shock troops of Redemption figured that

⁶The principal biographical information on Tillman can be found in Francis Butler Simkins, *The Tillman Movement in South Carolina* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1926); Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman: South Carolinian*, Southern Biography Series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944); Lindsay S. Perkins, "The Oratory of Benjamin Ryan Tillman" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1945); and Diane Neal, "Benjamin Ryan Tillman: The South Carolina Years, 1877-1896" (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1976).

⁷See Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965).

⁸In using the terms Conservative, Conservative regime, or Conservative-Democratic, I am following the usage of the time. In the late days of Reconstruction and the early days of Redemption, South Carolinians steered clear of the label Democratic, for it still smacked of treason, and used the term Conservative instead.

if the new democracy and white supremacy were not compatible, given the black majority in South Carolina, then they would keep the democracy and throw out the blacks, even if the old ruling elite had to go with their former slaves.

The beginning of the end of the Conservative regime in South Carolina started in August, 1885, and was heralded by a call from the up-county *Greenville News* for a "new deal" in state politics.⁹ Eight years had passed since the ouster of the radicals and appeals for white solidarity behind the old leadership seemed less imperative. Moreover, by this time Francis Warrington Dawson, editor of the powerful *Charleston News and Courier*, had emerged as the Warwick of South Carolina politics, much as Henry Grady was becoming in Georgia.¹⁰ Amidst calls for a "new deal" and with Dawson, a non-officeholder, pulling the strings on state government, Ben Tillman made his first appearance.

The occasion was the summer convocation of the State Grange and the State Agricultural and Mechanical Society, a gathering which as usual was to attract "intelligent and representative farmers." The customary essays on fertilizer, grape culture, and tobacco planting were dutifully attended but a storm was about to take the Bennettsville meeting and as in most storms, little advance warning was given. All that the farmers knew was that the brother of congressman Tillman was rumored to have something unusual to say. On the second day of the convention, after being assured by the commissioner

of agriculture that farmers were not growing poorer though "they did not prosper as they should," the sweat-soaked assembly was greeted by "a long and rambling speech containing many hard truths, mingled with a great deal of dry humor."¹¹

For the first time these farmers were not being addressed by a state chemist, a commissioner, or some professor. Like them Tillman was a farmer "whose appearance was a mixture of the plain and the uncouth and whose one eye flashed ominously."¹² After the typical self-effacing apologies of a speaker who must assert his humble origins, Tillman launched into an arraignment of the traditional evils of the southern farm system and a not-so-traditional charge that politicians and "lawyers in the pay of finance" were the root of the problem. He flailed the South Carolina College for ignoring the farmers' needs while using their money to train lawyers and scholars whom Tillman equated with "drones and vagabonds." He scolded the farmers for allowing themselves to be duped and told the story of the poor farmer who finally made it to the state legislature only to emerge a year later a politician, "the contact with General This and Judge That and Colonel Something Else" having awed and corrupted him. Tillman concluded with a call for resolutions aimed at improving the education and the representation of farmers. Though four of his five resolutions failed to pass, Tillman left Bennettsville confident that "the farmers did the listening, the politicians the voting, and that explains why the resolutions failed to pass." After all, he had not gone there "to pass resolutions but to explain to the

⁹Reported in the *Charleston News and Courier*, August 20, 1885, hereafter *News and Courier*.

¹⁰See E. Culpepper Clark, *Francis Warrington Dawson and the Politics of Restoration: South Carolina, 1874-1889* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1980); and S. Frank Logan, "Francis W. Dawson, 1840-1889: South Carolina Editor" (MA thesis, Duke University, 1947).

¹¹*News and Courier*, August 5-8, 1885. See also Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben*, pp. 92-95, and Simkins, *The Tillman Movement*, pp. 54-60.

¹²Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben*, p. 92.

farmers how they are duped and robbed."¹³

AN EMERGING RHETORICAL STRATEGY

During the next five years Tillman would hone the approach taken at Bennettsville into a successful rhetorical strategy of mass appeal. He had an intuitive understanding of the requirements for successful agitation in the newly emerging southern democracy. Tillman constantly baffled his enemies. Every move he made seemed sure to be counterproductive; yet his popularity only grew. Employing the sting of negative altercasting, he abused his followers to their face, calling them ignorant, imbecilic, backward, apathetic, and foolish. He assailed his enemies with a tongue so outrageous that many believed only the demise of the code duello kept him alive. He never won a factual dispute, at least as far as the state's press was concerned, and he seemed to have no real program beyond the establishment of a separate agricultural college (which he proved willing to lay aside if there were serious cost objections) and the call for a reorganization of the state agricultural department. All the other issues he raised from time to time were either not uniquely his own or were pushed with whatever inconsistency seemed demanded by the occasion. Despite all this, his movement grew and multiplied, thriving best when the issues appeared contrived, contradictory, or without foundation.

Tillman was learning in the emerging southern democracy what northern abolitionists discovered in the wake of Jacksonian democracy, that reform was not a

matter of devising programs but nursing grievances. Tillman was becoming a "non-programmatic radical," a label Robert D. Marcus attached to Wendell Phillips.¹⁴ Absent a program he had nothing to defend and everything to attack. By denigrating his followers in the most outlandish terms he not only made them laugh but more importantly engendered a sense of helplessness, made them feel powerless before the dominant class. In denouncing the Agricultural Society and the Department of Agriculture, he left little doubt that existing institutions were of no consequence in the solution of the ills which beset the farmer. Slowly but surely, Tillman was transforming the impotence of the farmer to achieve his goals into a condemnation of the social order which allowed him no avenue in which to do it. Existing institutions were buttressed by lawyers, merchants, and politicians. What was needed was for the seventy-six percent of the population who tilled the soil to assume control of these institutions and reform would flow like water from a spring. Tillman needed no program; he needed grievances, and there were enough of those around to fuel a Midianite war of extermination between "us" and "them."

Just as the social ferment of the 1830s

¹⁴Marcus was responding to the notion advanced by Elkins in *Slavery* that American abolitionists were anti-institutionalists. Marcus said that what may have been true of William Lloyd Garrison was not true of abolitionists like Phillips. They did not reject institutional means of redress so much as they set out to find a new institution, in this case an institution of reform whereby people would emerge dedicated to professional agitation. The term "non-programmatic radical" does not mean that Phillips gave no thought to plans and policies. It suggests that his understanding of the requirements of agitation led him to mute the discussion of systematic programs in favor of heightening the awareness of grievance. Phillips gave a lot of thought to the nature of public opinion in a democratic society. See "Wendell Phillips and American Institutions," *Journal of American History*, 56 (1969), pp. 41-58.

¹³*News and Courier*, November 19, 1885, and Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben*, p. 95.

and 1840s forced a group of American reformers to devise ways of responding to the vicissitudes of public opinion, so too did the break-up of conservative regimes in the South following Reconstruction invite new strategies for reaching people. The principal difference between the two lay not at the level of strategy but at governing assumptions, the rhetorical vision of the abolitionist being magnified by what Gunnar Myrdal styled the American Creed,¹⁵ while the southern demagogue was tied to the millstone of white supremacy. But at the level of strategy, as strategy had to respond to the participants in the new democracy, there remained an important kinship between the abolitionist and the popular southern orator. Both realized, as Phillips put it, that "agitation is an important, nay, an essential part of the machinery of the state" and that what was required was a new kind of reformer, in fact, a professional reformer.¹⁶

APPLYING THE STRATEGY

Tillman's understanding of the strategic requirements of agitation is clearly illustrated in his relationship to Francis Warrington Dawson, the man Joel Williamson called "the political cat's paw" of the Conservative regime.¹⁷ Unfortunately, none of the works on Tillman and South Carolina have examined the rhetorical implications in the correspondence between Tillman and Dawson nor what that exchange reveals about Tillman's application of a rhetorical strate-

gy.¹⁸ As editor of the *Charleston News and Courier*, Dawson was to South Carolina what Henry Grady was to Georgia, a political kingmaker. Dawson became a kingmaker, in part, because he was a skilled manipulator of competing interests. He identified himself with no particular faction and alienated none. He became restive only when he perceived the revered Wade Hampton and his followers to be ruling by right of their gray eminence rather than by dint of political vision and action. And when Tillman burst upon the scene, he did not take the farmer for granted. Like many other Conservatives, Dawson conceded the grounds for grievance and most of the farmers' demands. Dawson's strategy, if it could be called that, for he did not think he had anything to fear, was to convince the antagonist that there was plenty of room for change within the system. At first Tillman proved receptive to Dawson's sympathetic overtures, but with the same instinct that made him a radical without a program, he soon understood that the editor could kill him with kindness. He was beginning to see the repressive side of tolerance and to realize that the fortunes of his movement depended far more on resistance, than acceptance by the established interests.

Over the next year Dawson moved the *News and Courier* into overt support for the separate agricultural college idea and

¹⁵Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), the relevant sections being ch. 1, sec. 13; ch. 21; and append. 2, sec. 3 and 4.

¹⁶Quoted in Marcus, "Wendell Phillips," p. 46. Marcus said that Phillips was out to transform the business of reforming institutions into a "profession." Dawson would later use the term "professional agitator" as one of opprobrium in reference to Tillman, *News and Courier*, August 14, 1888.

¹⁷Williamson, *After Slavery*, p. 401.

¹⁸At the time Simkins wrote his biography of Tillman the correspondence between Dawson and Tillman was not available. William J. Cooper, Jr., had access to the letters while writing *The Conservative Regime: South Carolina, 1877-1890*, Johns Hopkins Studies in Historical and Political Science, ser. LXXXVI, no. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), but Cooper viewed the relationship more for what it revealed about a possible political alliance than for what it said about Tillman's developing strategy, p. 178. The present essay is an elaboration of the author's first interpretation of the correspondence in *Francis Warrington Dawson*, pp. 166-81. The letters between Tillman and Dawson, May 11, 1886-January 20, 1888, can be found in the F.W. Dawson Papers, Duke University Library, cited hereafter as Duke.

struck up a correspondence with Tillman designed to draw Tillman into the fold. Expressing some dismay that the movement seemed to have gone "far and away beyond" its original purposes, Dawson still could not "bear the idea that any two men who want to do good to South Carolina should get apart, or stay apart." Tillman proved to be equally adroit, laying the responsibility for some "strange somersaulting" on Dawson's subordinates while the editor had been in Europe. Tillman then averred that he had told his supporters that "'Dawson is away and I will not believe he will fight me when he gets back.'" ¹⁹

Out of this polite fencing came an agreement that the two should meet, and after some negotiating about location (Dawson preferring to meet at the Edgefield Courthouse in Tillman's own county) they finally agreed upon the Globe Hotel in Augusta, Georgia, just across the river. ²⁰ While the meeting was an honest effort to review the issues, the fact of its occurrence, once revealed, set political rumors flying thick and fast. Many felt that the June 2 meeting in Augusta actually shaped the Democratic convention which had been called for August, 1886. In truth, the two men did not arrive at anything like a combination for a slate of officers, and the men they supported, both together and separately, fared poorly. But that did not stop the *Augusta Chronicle* from laying the whole outcome of the convention on the doorsteps of the Globe Hotel. "What they talked about on that clear night," mused the paper, "no one knows, but the rumors growing out of that conference have shaped this convention and changed the personnel of the state ticket entirely." ²¹

¹⁹Dawson to Tillman, May 13, 1886, and Tillman to Dawson, May 11, 1886, Dawson Papers, Duke.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹*Augusta Chronical*, August 5, 1886.

The convention and the rumored combination did have one significant effect on the future of the state—it taught Ben Tillman a lesson. In the aftermath of the much publicized "combination," the Edgefield farmer wrote Dawson suggesting that it would "be advisable for you once and a while to give me or the 'movement' a punch." Tillman promised to "regard them as 'love licks,'" for he had reached the conclusion "that anything like an 'alliance' between us will kill both. That is, *we* can understand one another but we must *never*, NEVER, NEVER, meet again to arrive at such an understanding." ²² Tillman had learned that while Dawson might speak with an independent mind and while he might have numerous friends, the editor's journal was ultimately the organ of established interests. For an outsider to be embraced by the *News and Courier* meant certain death among the constituents who gave the outsider political life.

Over the next year Dawson continued to support Tillman and the separate college idea, even in the face of stiff conservative opposition organized by the powerful alumni of the South Carolina College. But Dawson was willing to stand by the maverick politician only so long as Tillman remained content to wage a limited war against the establishment. Once Tillman proved willing to move to upper limits in his struggle against the "raddlety-fog-mossites," Dawson called a halt. By the end of September, 1887, the *News and Courier* could no longer countenance the continued intemperance of its erstwhile friend, particularly when Tillman would not stop his endless charges of extravagance and corruption in the state government. In obvious exasperation Dawson wrote, "The government we have is not

²²Tillman to Dawson, August 24, 1886, Dawson Papers, Duke.

the most brilliant or the wisest in the world; but it is honest and it is safe." By December the editor was convinced that the Tillman movement had been seriously "weakened by want of shading and perspective in the speeches and letters of some of its leaders."²³ The growing alienation from Tillman forced Dawson into a reassessment of his position, and on the third of December the *News and Courier* joined alumni of the South Carolina College in their opposition to the separate agricultural college.

Stung by Dawson's desertion and by defeat in the legislature that winter, Tillman somewhat prematurely announced his retirement in the *News and Courier* and told Dawson privately "that the so called 'alliance' between us is ended."²⁴ For his part Dawson simply told his readers, "There will doubtless be another farewell and another and another. As he has not lagged superfluous on the stage, he can with good grace permit himself to come on the scene again."²⁵ And come again he did. With the death of Thomas G. Clemson, son-in-law of John C. Calhoun, came a large bequest to establish the agricultural college. As from the beginning, the separate college was but a symbol of the broader movement, and with the renaissance of the symbol, Tillman was prepared to take the larger case to the Democratic state convention set for May, 1888. The suddenly unretired agitator described the state government as a place where "putrefaction" had set in and called on the incredulous delegates to adopt a primary system of nominations and thereby end the abuses emanating from Columbia.²⁶

The *News and Courier* was delighted with Tillman's performance. Believing

that he had been given rope in plenty to hang himself, Dawson declared, "The best cause the world has known would be ruined by an advocate who has no sense of propriety and little self-control."²⁷ But Dawson was the man falling quickly out of step. He had only to recall the campaign which overthrew Reconstruction to detect the origins of this new rhetoric. But surely those were the tactics of revolution, or so he thought, and as Dawson counselled at the time, "a revolution must move backward."²⁸ Tillman, however, sensed better. He knew his audience, and while he did not win on the issue of primaries, he did succeed in having the state convention call for joint debates in each congressional district. These debates would afford the agitator (he would not become a candidate himself until 1890) a chance to stalk the candidates and to keep the grievances of the farmers constantly before the public. Veterans of the Redshirt campaign of 1876 would remember such tactics as "dividing time," a strategy whereby Democrats rode into Republican rallies, heckled the speakers, and demanded to be heard. These debates also gave Tillman a chance to challenge Dawson directly.

Tillman wasted little time in calling Dawson out. On the twentieth of July at Hodges Depot in Abbeville County, the Edgefield farmer delighted his audience declaring the principal villain in the conspiracy against open government to be "some buzzard who had escaped from the market house in Charleston and gone into the *News and Courier* office, where it was spewing its slime all over me."²⁹ Tillman realized that the time had come when there was more to be gained from Dawson's opposition than from his coop-

²³*News and Courier*, September 22 and December 1, 1887.

²⁴Tillman to Dawson, January 20, 1888, Dawson Papers, Duke.

²⁵*News and Courier*, January 26, 1888.

²⁶*Ibid.*, May 19, 1888.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸*Ibid.*, December 16, 1878.

²⁹Simkins explains, "At that time buzzards were allowed to hover around Charleston's famous market and eat the refuse," *Pitchfork Ben*, n. 127.

eration, and the lion of Broad Street obligingly fell into the trap. Dawson immediately went to Greenville in hopes of confronting his defamer, who unfortunately had not been invited, and the editor had to content himself with some homily on how the people might discern between "the true reformer and the false."³⁰ In the meantime the *News and Courier* issued calls for Tillman to come to Charleston and for the farmers to abandon their errant leader in favor of the Farmers' Alliance. The paper even promised to become the organ of the Alliance in South Carolina, making the somewhat ironical claim that the Alliance had prudently shunned politics.³¹

Tillman soon answered Dawson's call, joining the statewide canvas as it moved to Charleston. With torchlights casting an eerie glow over the throng gathered in Washington Square, the various candidates presented their qualifications and were received with polite enthusiasm. The audience was clearly waiting to hear what the agricultural Moses would say, and they were not disappointed. With Dawson present, Tillman threw himself into a performance that foreshadowed the demagogue of the South's future. In the midst of cheers, laughter, and shouts of "Let'er go Gallagher," he alternately abused and amused his audience. At one point he referred to an assistant editor who in Dawson's absence had been carrying the commentary on Tillman's antics. With flashing eye and snapping jaw, Tillman cried that he knew the "'big buzzard was away, but there was a little buzzard down there who wanted to spew a little slime over me.'"³² Apart from this digression, farmer Tillman steered clear of direct reference to Dawson and stuck

to his stock indictment of state government.

When asked later why he had not rebutted Tillman's speech, Dawson claimed that the visiting speaker gave no personal insult and thus any comment on his part would have been superfluous.³³ In fact, Dawson was quite content to let matters stand, confident that Tillman's shrill invective would be the instrument of the farmer's downfall. Dawson's confidence was unfounded, for unknown to him the "hard-fisted Democracy" had listened all too attentively to the political pariah from Edgefield. Not long after the August third rally, petitioners were beseeching Tillman to return to Charleston to help them secure "a full, free and fair party vote" and an end to "ring rule." The *News and Courier* was singled out as arch-villain.³⁴ Dawson was stunned. He knew there were complaints, but had he not called on the malcontents to prove malfeasance, and had not they remained silent? Had he not time and again called on them to work within the party apparatus, and had they not shown indifference by failing to attend ward meetings? Now Dawson felt justified in rebuking the petitioners for impugning the integrity of all the good and honorable men who served Charleston. It was his pet response for those who dared challenge the ruling elite. But this time, after invoking the names of the Simontons, the Jerveys, the Dibbles, the McCradys, the Lessesnes, *ad libitum*, he concluded by pointing to the gravest fault of all. This time the complainers had gone outside Charleston for counsel, and not to a Hampton, or Butler, or Izlar, or Bratton, but to a "professional agitator—who is looked upon with distrust, if not aversion, by the respectable people of the whole State."³⁵

³⁰*News and Courier*, July 25, 1888.

³¹*Ibid.*, July 12 and 13, 1888. The Alliance was the forerunner of the Populist Party.

³²*Ibid.*, August 24, 1888.

³³*Ibid.*, August 29, 1888.

³⁴*Ibid.*, August 14, 1888.

³⁵*Ibid.*

