

FOR 1891

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NEW WEST REPUBLICANISM

As Voiced by Senator Walcott, of Colorado.

AGAINST THE FORCE ELECTION BILL

An Eloquent Appeal by a Vigorous Young Republican Leader.

The last days of the old year engaged the United States senate in debate of the federal elections bill. As is well known, the republicans are not united upon the measure. In the first session of the present congress the bill passed the house by a strict party vote. In the senate its consideration was defeated by Senator Quay and a few others. The president and other party leaders still urge the measure against the chairman of the National Republican committee and other leading republicans in the senate, and a few in the house.

The old New England leaders, such men as Hoar and Aldrich have made able and exhaustive speeches for the bill. But the senator who made the greatest hit and attracted most attention from fellow-members, gallery and in the press reports was the young senator from Colorado, in opposition to the bill. It was his second speech in the senate and Wolcott made a hit. His first speech was for free silver and won him great renown as representing the new west republicanism, which on financial and economic policies sides with the south rather than with New England. He voiced this feeling in a powerful manner on this occasion.

THE SPEECH.

He spoke only twenty-one minutes, and in that time told both sides some plausible and well-seasoned political truths. He refuted the sectional and partisan attacks of the South on the bill, but showed that he opposed the bill on loftier grounds, than those based on party passion and sectional prejudice. He regretted to differ with able men of his party, but to him there was no alternative, as he opposed the bill from considerations for the welfare of the whole country. He showed that many more important measures were being neglected and forced out of the position their importance claimed, by this bill. The nation stood in the shadow of financial disaster, prices were again shrinking and merchants falling for want of a suitable currency, and he called it a travesty on duty to sit here and spend time discussing changes in an election law which has stood without change for twenty years.

But it was not on account of the importance of other measures or lack of time that he opposed this bill, but it was because he was AGAINST FEDERAL SURVEILLANCE. "The bill, Mr. President, should not become a law because it involves federal interference and espionage in other than national elections, and such interference is contrary to the spirit of our institutions and an obstacle to the right enjoyment of liberties. If a measure could be framed making the day of election of members of congress separate and distinct from any local elections, and the officers appointed to supervise such election could be so limited in their powers and tenure of office as to secure impartiality in the exercise of their functions, I should favor it, but any federal meddling with state elections is, to my mind, intolerable. We are told of the great good the present law has done in the larger cities and that state officials have frequently worked in harmony with the federal officers at elections. All this may be true, but I think it does not offer a sufficient argument for the law. Take the city of New York with thousands of ignorant and criminal and venal voters.

REFORM WILL COME.

"It is, to my mind, better that its local and state elections should be attended with fraud and dishonesty than that they should be kept pure by federal interference. Even in the city of New York there are infinitely more good men than bad, more men who want honest elections than there are men who want dishonest elections, and while for the time local interests suffer, in the end the decent men band together, animated not only by motives of good citizenship, but by a desire to protect property interests, and by united action they secure good government, or as near an approach to it as can be had in great cities. Public opinion is al-

ways not finally right, but finally controlling, and federal surveillance only weakens the citizen's sense of responsibility without permanently eradicating the evil.

"We tried the remedy of federal interference in Denver, the capital of Colorado. We tried it last in 1888 at the suggestion and under the management of a democratic district attorney and a democratic marshal. The law was administered by a judge who is so exceedingly fair and impartial that he is invariably opposed to both sides. [Laughter.] In that community, the capital of the state of Colorado, composed of people noted for their probity and uprightness on election day as well as every other day in the year, we had federal supervision of the election two years ago. No change was made in the result and there could be no change because it was an honest election. And yet, Mr. President, I do not believe that in the city of Denver there was a citizen who loved his state who did not in his heart resent the presence at the polling places of these federal marshals to supervise this exercise of the high function of suffrage respecting the matters which affected his commonwealth. And in the last congressional election, by the united and expressed wish of both political parties, we did away with federal supervision and managed our own election fairly and impartially and uncorruptly.

IT WOULD STIR UP STRIFE.

"The friends of the bill, Mr. President, assume it to be in the interest of the colored man when its enactment could bring him only harm. It would be idle to say that the government could not enforce this law. It would be equally idle to claim that it ever would, in fact, be enforced. The people of the United States want no more civil strife, and against the united opposition of the white population in the Southern states, any attempt to enforce it would mean practically a conflict between the state and national authorities. The old ill-feeling would be resumed, and while all, as a party, were fighting to protect the colored voter, the old days of terrorizing would come again, and the weaker race would be the sufferer. It is true that the very foundation and corner-stone of our republic is the right of suffrage and the protection of every citizen entitled to vote in equal enjoyment of that right; yet I must risk adverse criticism by suggesting that at this time, in the present economic condition of the South, and with the present general ignorance of the colored race, for which it is nowise responsible, there are many things more important and vital to the welfare of this nation than that the colored citizens of the South shall vote. There has been a lack, I fear, of ingenuously on both sides of this chamber. The democratic opponents of this bill would have lost nothing had they publicly admitted what is everywhere claimed for them in private, that in certain Southern states where the colored population outnumber the white, the colored voters, owning comparatively none of the taxable property in the community, are led and controlled by a few irresponsible men, and would, if permitted to exercise the right of suffrage secured to them under the constitution, destroy all safeguards to property and work irreparable injury to the best interests of the commonwealth, and that for these reasons they are circumvented of their rights. This would be at least an intelligent reason for opposition to the measure.

IGNORANCE CANNOT RULE.

"On the other hand it occurred to me that when the senator from Louisiana (Mr. Eustis) asked the senator from Oregon (Mr. Dolph) the other day what his state would do if the Chinese had the franchise in Oregon and outnumbered the whites, the answer seemed somewhat evasive. I cannot speak for Oregon, and yet I give it as my solemn opinion that in Colorado, where mountains inspire only freedom and love of justice, where the republican party has as large a majority in proportion to population as Kansas and Nebraska in their lucid years, if such a condition of affairs existed as the senator stated, and if that vote was opposed to the lucid and intelligent white vote, then in some way and by some method, I know not how, the white vote would govern.

But it by no means follows that the congressional representation should be based otherwise than on the vote cast, and the existing state of affairs at the South offers no good reason why the conditions should not be equalized by law as that a vote in the North should have the same value for purposes of political representation as a vote in the South. I am not informed that in any southern state there is any inclination to legislate against the colored man, or that, except in the question of suffrage there is serious friction between the races.

"So far the views of the two races have been radically opposed to each other. The time will surely come, in my opinion (if we do not seek to foment trouble) when the white voters of the South will be hardly as [Concluded W. fourth page.]

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