

# Aldrich, the Tariff Czar

Sources of the Rhode Island Senator's Remarkable Power in Getting Votes to Revise the Tariff Upward.

A Specialist Who is at Home in Secret Conference, in Committee Room or on the Floor—Practical, but No Theorist.

By JAMES A. EDGERTON.

WHAT is happening to the tariff bill? Answer—Aldrich is happening to it, and that is plenty. If Payne should now meet his pet child he would greet it as a stranger, as much of a stranger as Payne himself seemed to his friends after he had lost his whiskers. How has Aldrich worked this transformation? He has the votes. If he has not enough in his own party he reaches over and picks off a few Democrats. How does he get these votes? Ask somebody on the inside, and he probably won't tell you. I don't know how he gets them, but he gets them. Maybe he uses bait or a chloroform bottle or a club or a fish net, or maybe he is Svengali in disguise and a majority of the other senators are Trilby's. Sherlock Holmes might tell how he does it, but nobody else seems to know, or if anybody does know he does not want to commit himself and keeps as quiet about it as—well, as quiet as Aldrich. Aldrich is so still that the interstellar silence would sound like a boiler factory compared to him.

It is rather a striking spectacle that confronts the American people in this year of our Lord 1909—striking and edifying! Here is one man apparently stronger than the whole United States. Last year a great national convention was held and in its platform adopted a plank favoring tariff revision, which everybody supposed would be revision downward. The other party was for even a stronger

tatorial; not from his position in the party, for outside of being "boss of the senate" he has no great standing as a party leader. I never heard of his going on the stump in a national campaign nor indeed of his having had any part in the canvass at all. What, then, is the source of his mysterious control of the senate and of all fiscal legislation? What is behind this man, who is repeatedly charged with being the real ruler of the United States? Is it John D. Rockefeller, with whom he is connected by marriage? Well, the richest man in the world might help some, but Aldrich bossed the senate before his daughter wedded Rockefeller's son. These are but incidents. They do not explain him.

### Many Years in the Senate.

And now, having found the things that do not make Aldrich powerful, perhaps we can determine some of the things that do. One is that he has been in the senate twenty-eight years. In a general way seniority regulates promotion in congress, as in the army and navy, and it has produced the same unsatisfactory results in all three. The senseless system is now being abrogated in the military, but it still obtains in congress. Its iron hand on the upper house was recently pictured by Senator Beveridge in the Saturday Evening Post. By mere weight of age in the service Aldrich has gravitated to the head of the finance and steering committees.

Another strength of the Rhode Island senator is that he is a specialist.

home in the secret conference, in the committee room or on the floor. He is plausible and often convincing in debate. But he shows to best advantage when marshaling his votes on roll call.

Roughly stated, these constitute the secrets of Senator Aldrich's power—length of service, specializing on tariff and finance, being the alleged spokesman of certain powerful business groups and mastery of legislative methods. I hope I have stated the case fairly. I have tried to keep out my own personal bias, but we are seemingly powerless anyway, and it does no good to call names.

A year ago it was said that Mr. Aldrich would retire at the end of his present term, which closes on March 4, 1911. The ostensible reason given was his age, which will then be seventy. The real reason was said to be that he saw a growing revolt against his leadership and would retire before overthrow. Throughout the extra session that revolt has been strong in evidence, but not strongly enough materially to affect results. But with the headway that it has gained in his own party there is no predicting what size it may assume in the elections two years hence. The significant remark in Secretary MacVeagh's Chicago speech to the effect that the president as leader of his party might find it necessary to "change its majority and control" was generally understood to refer to Aldrich and others of his kidney, so that if he does step aside it will only be out of the path of the storm. But all of that will be too late to affect this tariff bill. On that it is now fairly certain that the Rhode Island senator will have his way. Nor is it probable that the president will veto it, however deeply he may feel on the subject. The general view is that he will get the best he can and let it go at that, believing that to prolong the agitation at this time would but disturb business. That will by no means end the matter, however. The wounds left in this fight will be long in healing, and that talk of changing the "majority and control" may prove no idle threat.

### Sturdy Band of Fighters.

We can all thank Senator Aldrich for one thing. His course has brought into being one of the sturdiest little bands of fighters that ever raised the banner of revolt in what they believed a righteous cause. Whatever may be our individual opinions of the tariff itself, there can be nothing but admiration for that dozen of young Republicans, including La Follette, Cummins, Dolliver, Beveridge, Burkett, Brown, Bristow, Clapp, Nelson, Borah and others, who have risked their political all in a battle to keep faith as they saw it. The country may find it worth looking at these two pictures—on the one hand Aldrich, entrenched by years, wealth and votes, and on the other these young men daring to make a losing fight for principle—a losing fight now, but is it not written that in the end it will win?

That will be after the days of Aldrich, when he is safe in his cyclone cellar of retirement. He has the present fight cinched, and that is enough. After him the deluge. The future can take care of itself.

### Very Simple Liver.

What manner of man is he? One of the smooth, diplomatic and secret sort. There is little to tell of his life, less of his habits. He does not drink or smoke, lives in the simplest manner, is white of mustache and gray of hair, ruddy of face, muscular, of medium height, and his most notable feature is a pair of piercing eyes. He began life as a grocery clerk, got into the Providence council, next into the assembly, then into congress and finally into the senate. That is the whole of the story, so far as the public knows, though there are whispers of Aldrich having controlled the public utilities of Rhode Island, from which he made millions. Henry Beech Needham tells a story in this connection of how Marsden J. Perry, Aldrich's partner in the traction business, once got an option on a lot of horse car lines in Providence and peddled it around New York, but without success. Then he bethought himself that Senator Aldrich's name might prove an "open sesame" to certain gentlemen interested in sugar.

"In twenty-four hours the matter was closed, and in forty-eight hours we had four millions to check against," said the laconic Perry.

It has often been said that Mr. Aldrich has no sense of humor. Yet I have found two fairly good stories credited to him. Here is one of them:

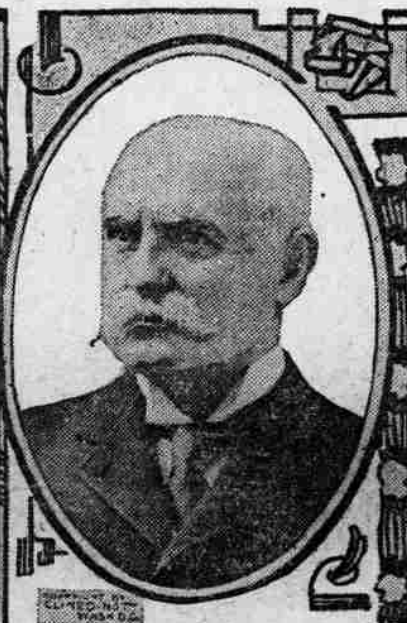
When abroad several years ago he visited a typical London music hall. A one act melodrama, called "The British Heart of Oak," was played by seven men and a young woman. The time of the melodrama was laid in the early years of the last century, and four of the players represented American soldiers.

These American soldiers were a ragged, scarecrow lot, for it was the idea of the melodrama to ridicule the American army. As the men came on the stage they were put through an examination.

"What was your business before you became a soldier?" they would be asked, and to this question one answered that he had been a tailor, another that he had been a cobbler, a third that he had been a cook, and so on.

The audience laughed uproariously at an army composed of men from such sedentary and confining trades, but in the midst of the laughter Senator Aldrich's American heart was rejoiced to hear a voice shout from the gallery:

"Hurrah! Great Britain licked by tailors, cobblers and cooks! Hurrah!"



Two Views of Senator NELSON W. ALDRICH, Chairman of Senate Committee on Finance.

and more immediate reduction. The campaign was made, and the candidate of the dominant party gave as his keynote this demand for a downward revision, his opponent, of course, going him one better. On that issue the first named candidate was elected and took his seat. Immediately he called a special session of congress to revise the tariff and in his inaugural address said in effect that revision meant reduction. In this stand he had not only the approval of his party as expressed at the polls, but well nigh the unanimous support of the press, resolutions from associations of farmers and business men, practically all organized workmen and at least one great group of manufacturers. The popular branch of congress, in which tariff legislation must originate, brought in a bill that, to some extent at least, revised the schedules downward. And now this one man, this senator from the smallest state in the Union, defies the president of the United States, who is also the head of his own party; defies the other house of congress, defies a large insurgent section of his party in the senate, defies the party platform, defies the press, defies public sentiment and by some means that are a mystery to the whole nation gets enough votes, either from his own party or the other, actually to revise the tariff upward. There has been hardly anything like it in American history.

### His Mysterious Power.

Where does he get his power? Not from his eloquence, for, while he is a fair speaker, there are a score of better orators in the senate; not from his popularity, for it is not one of his conspicuous assets; not from his education, for he never had much—started life as clerk in a fish store and outside of finance and the tariff has never been particularly studious; not from his wealth, for, although a millionaire, there are many other millionaires in the body with not a fraction of his power; not from his social qualities, for he cares little for society, has but a slight sense of humor and is inclined to be serious and die-

he looks after tariff and finance and doesn't bother his head with much else. He has studied these questions till he has them at his fingers' ends. Whatever concerns the bankers, the manufacturers, the railroads, the trusts—in a word, "the interests"—concerns Aldrich. There is no pretense about it. He is quite frank, he stands close to these people, spends much of his time in Wall street, knows what the world of high finance wants, is there as its mouthpiece, is politically independent since Rhode Island will send him to the senate anyway, knows the power behind him and can be defiant, and all the other senators with like affiliations follow their leader. Aldrich is no theorist. He is a "practical" man. His head is crammed with facts, and he marshals them in a plausible way. He has no qualms, no excuses, nothing but the determination to get what he goes after or as much thereof as possible. So far as known, Aldrich has no sentiments except for tariff schedules. For public criticism he cares not a whit. He has no delusions, no sports and no fads. He gravitates between Washington, New York and Rhode Island and permits no fuss to be made about his comings or goings. Perhaps nobody wants to make a fuss, but if any one does he is not encouraged.

### Great Marshaler of Votes.

Aldrich knows the legislative game, knows how to appeal to selfish interests of other senators, knows how to put up schedules for trading purposes, knows how to seem to concede or actually to concede at one point in order to preserve a more vital one, how to incorporate legislative jokers, how to use his power as head of the steering committee, which gives him the sentence of life and death over bills and thus makes him able to hold senators in line; how to threaten if necessary, how to wield the party whip, how to bring outside pressure to bear, how to persuade, for he can be most persuasive—in fact, how to use all the wheels within wheels that go to turn the government machine. His business for more than a quarter of a century has been to learn these things. He is at

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