A. L. Bancroft Ho.

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SILENCED NEGRO VOTE

FALSE STORIES OF TERRORISM.

Republicanism Falling Away in Virginia Because of Mahone—He is Execrated by the People—Character of the Repudiated Debt.

(Special to the Chicago Daily News.)

Eastern Virginia, Aug. 14, 1886.

During election times there is always much talk and many editorials written about the silenced vote of the southern negroes, and particularly in Virginia, which is near enough the strongholds of Republicanism to attract considerable attention. While it is true that the political status of the negro is imperfect, like everything else on this planet, the stories of bloodshed and terrorism are mostly moonshine, although a great many sensible people believe in them, just as Dr. Johnson believed in the Cock lane ghost. The fact about the negro's condition is simply this: In his personal and property rights he is as secure as the white man, but as regards his political rights: he is outwitted whenever he is not outvoted by the white men of the south; nor, if one looks at the subject calmly, can any reason be found for overwhelming the south under the avalanche of ignorance which negro majorities would mean.

Nine-tenths of the morality, wealth, and intelligence of the population is among the whites, and the wit of man has never been able to conceive any scheme by which the morality, the wealth, and the intelligence of a community will not rule in the long run. For a time it may be whelmed under, but sooner or later it must be on top—and that is just the case at the south to-day. The idea of the negroes ruling the south is like making water run up hill. It is easy enough for the white people to maintain their supremacy. As for the romances of bloodshed, the southern men are too astute in politics to resort to any such clumsy means. All they have to do is to establish a complicated system of voting and levy a poll-tax, and the negro vote neutralized. Just observe how simple it is. The elaborate system of balloting being fixed upon, weeks and months before an election, the Democrats are organizing their vote. It means life or death with them and they work like Trojans.

The negroes, on the contrary, are at a loss for a motive to vote. Their lack of education and business qualification puts them out of the question for offices requiring brains, and their inability to give a heavy bond cuts them off from offices of trust. There are, however, a plenty of designing white men after the offices, and they are all struggling for the negro vote and cutting each other's throats in the effort to get it. Then there is a poll-tax. So to the negro this proposition is presented: He is required to pay $1 to vote for a man who cares nothing about him, can give him nothing, and from whose success no possible benefit can accrue to him. If he happens to have a candidate of his own color, he is resentlesslv driven from the field by white Republicans.

It costs the Republicans, therefore, more effort to get the negroes to the polls than it does the Democrats to keep them away. Arrived there, however, they find depositing their ballots a very difficult thing. All the intended complications are foreseen by the Democrats, whose solid phalanx is perfectly drilled, and comply to the letter with the requirements of a troublesome election law. Not a Democratic vote is lost. When the negroes come to depositing their votes they are challenged at every step. Confused, helpless, with nothing to gain or lose, they easily transgress a law cunningly contrived to entrap them, and a majority of the legal votes cast are Democratic. The short-sighted policy of the white Republicans in gobbling up all the offices has brought about this apathy on the part of the negroes. When the state was redistricted by the Democrats all the black majorities were thrown in two districts. In one of these there was a majority of 6,000 colored Republicans.

Here, if anywhere, the negroes thought they could elect their candidate. Among them was an educated and sensible colored man who was nominated time and again for congress against violent opposition of the white Republicans, but, although the negroes could nominate their man, they could never keep him in the field until election time. In vain the Democrats would offer large sums of money—once as much as $20,000 —to keep the colored man in the field along with the white Republican candidate, and thus win in a three-cornered fight. They were never able to do it, the terrorism exercised by the white Republicans over their colored allies withstanding even the almighty power of money. But, although forced to withdraw their man, the negroes also withdrew themselves, so that several times the Democratic candidate was elected, and never was the full negro vote got out Of course this is corrupt politics, but it is the way of politics to fall into corruptions every now and then, and it is more corrupt than methods practiced in New York, Cincinnatti, and even Chicago. Indeed, taking a philosophic view of it, society is forced to protect itself against universal suffrage by some method.

A Democrat arguing with a Republican spoke of a ruse that had carried an election in a doubtful district. At all the Democratic meetings a cannon was dragged around, salutes were fired from it, and the report was industriously circulated among the negroes that the Democrats had a big gun, and —the rest was left to their imagination. On election day the polls were established on a blind alley ending in a cul de sac, and the cannon conspicuously mounted. The negroes would come, peer in at the head of the alley,

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anxiously examine the engine of destruction, and go away without attempting to vote. The Democrats carried the day, and it leaked out that neither powder, shot, nor gunners were on hand election day. It served its turn, though, and where is the man rash enough to say that voters so ignorant and so easily duped are worthy of the right of suffrage! How would the business men of Chicago like to have their taxes levied and their state and city governed by such concrete ignorance as this indicates! Not any more than the Virginians and they would find a way to circumvent it mighty quick, too, in spite of the talk about an entering wedge into the solid south.

Republicanism is steadily losing ground. Its alliance with Mahone and repudiation did more to alienate honest republicans than anything since the birth of the party. There is a class of northern republicans here who are the most valuable of settlers—sturdy farmers steady business men who have invested their capital here. They saw that Mahone meant to rule or ruin, and that the wrecking of the material interests of the state was nothing to him if he could get a mongrel legislature to elect him to the senate and keep him in power. Consequently these men were almost to a man anti-Mahone. When they did not vote the Democratic ticket they refrained from voting the republican ticket with Mahone at the head of it. Their sons, young men brought up among democratic surroundings, associating with democratic young men, dancing and flirting with democratic girls—for in Virginia the women and children are as ardent partisans as the men—began to turn democrats. They had a very good excuse in the hostility of all honest men to Mahone and so, year by year, the respectable, section of the Republicans is losing its youngest and best material, which is so much solid gain to the Democrats.

And now for Mahone. No man who ever walked the earth has been so execrated as he. The passionate loathing the people feel for him here is to be felt, not described. Of the man himself, he seems to have but one virtue, and that is courage. His schooling in villainy began early. His father kept a little tavern in this part of Virginia, and was a notorious cheat and card-sharp. It is said that before William Mahone was 15 he could win the jack-pot every time, and that when his father began to feel his liquor he always called William to take his hand. He had the reputation of a genuine hard case from his earliest youth, but the first the world heard of him was during the war. Then his gallantry and his singular power over men brought him forward. His consuming ambition is well known, but it takes a curious form. He not only hankers after political power, but he yearns after social recognition. This last means more in Virginia than anywhere else in this country, because the state was governed by a privileged class, which held within itself all power. From it were taken all the men to be honored with political preferment. Mahone was not one of these. They complimented him, associated with him, but whenever he wanted to be nominated for governor of the state, which was his highest ambition, he always saw himself shelved for the sake of somebody with sixteen quarterings and a big family connection at his back. Three times did he strain every nerve toward that honor which was to make him the equal of any man in Virginia, and three times he was defeated.

Then, being ready and unscrupulous, he seized the debt question on which to ride into power. It had vexed the state much. Briefly stated, it was incurred for internal improvements, of which West Virginia had got almost the sole benefit.

Unlike the obligations of South Carolina and other states which had had usurious debts fastened on them by state governments that were composed chiefly of jail-birds, Virginia's debt was honestly contracted and was justly owed. West Virginia, however in cutting loose from the old state, had quietly dropped her responsibility for her share, which was much the largest, and a constitution forbidding the assumption or creation of a state debt. The total immorality of this course was such that the whole state of Virginia believe that it was impossible that it could be maintained in the face of the comity of states, and a very respectable portion of West Virginia was in favor of assuming their just liabilities. Besides, the general government was in a measure responsible, as the separation of the state was made with a popular vote being taken according to law. Therefore the Virginians agreed that the prospects for a fair settlement were good, and meanwhile it would be best for the honor and interests of the state to assume the debt, although cruelly unjust, pay such interest as the state was able, and trust to earnest efforts and a sense of returning honesty on West Virginia's part. Here was Mahone's opportunity and likewise his pitfall. He foresaw that an out-and-out repudiation of the debt would bring him the support of a certain class of men, but he had no idea that men would fight for a principal which actually made against their pockets. And so the war begun. Perhaps Mahone himself hardly realized into what he was rushing. The state was riven asunder and society was convulsed.

Mahone got the countenance of the Republican party through Mr. Blaine who, however, denied it and tried to transfer the odium to the Arthur administration, which had found it saddled upon the party at Garfield's death. Mahone's time for revenge upon the people of Virginia had come—and he had the slights and insults of a lifetime to avenge. He understood the negroes thoroughly, which their shepherds from the north had never done. He