

THAYER ON GRANT AND BRISTOW.

Written for THE COURIER.

In a very interesting letter in the syndicate articles going the rounds in Sunday newspapers, signed by Rufus B. Wilson, headed "Political Backnumbers," a sketch is given of Benjamin H. Bristow, who was secretary of the treasury under Gen. Grant, which does not represent his true attitude towards Grant, in regard to the prosecution of the whiskey ring.

The first ever heard of Bristow outside the boundaries of Kentucky was when President Grant appointed him United States district attorney for the state of Kentucky. After a time the same friendly hand took Bristow to Washington and made him solicitor general of the United States, in which office he remained until promoted to the office of the treasury.

The writer of the letter, Mr. Wilson, says when Bristow was made secretary he began to lay plans to destroy the whiskey ring. The truth was he began to lay his plans to capture the presidency. His rapid advancement from a third rate Kentucky lawyer to the second rank in the president's cabinet had turned his head, or to use a common expression, it had given him the "big head." He thought only one more step would take him to the presidency. He had the misfortune to have a lot of fool friends, as many another a public man has had, who have well nigh ruined them, and they well nigh ruined him.

It was in 1875. Gen. Grant's term would expire on the 4th of March 1875. A general feeling had begun to manifest itself in favor of Grant for a third term. This excited the hostility of the friends of other aspirants for the presidency and schemes were set up to head off Grant. Slander and destruction were rife. The attempt was made to involve the administration in the whiskey frauds and more than that, the deliberate effort was made to smirch the reputation of Gen. Grant by connecting him with the alleged frauds. It was a deliberate conspiracy to destroy him politically and thus prevent his being a candidate for the presidential office for a third term. Blueford Wilson of Springfield, Ill., had been taken up by Grant and made solicitor of the treasury. These two men, Bristow and Wilson, had been raised up by him through obsecurity to elevated positions, had been made far more than they could ever have hoped to be, and yet blinded by the ignis fatuus of higher office, they, viper like, turned and tried to blacken Grant's reputation.

Bristow had not been long at the head of the treasury department before the plotters began to organize the conspiracy. The papers began to announce the formation of Bristow clubs in different sections of the country, instigated from Washington; Bristow was to be president, Blueford Wilson was to be attorney-general. It was to be a reform administration. None but the righteous were to be associated with it. No politician need apply for membership. The whiskey frauds were to be the means by which these ends were to be accomplished. The prosecution of the whiskey rings was all right, but the attempt to use it for base political purposes with the hope of injuring Grant, was all wrong. It was a dastardly attempt to rise to power by most unjustly blackening the reputation of another. In this case it was doubly damning, for the reason that the conspirators had been warmed and nourished into political life by their victim. At that time I was governor of Wyoming. Circumstances had put the evidence of this conspiracy in my possession, clear and incontestible evidence, I had suspected this conspiracy; so had others, but the difficulty was to prove; it that had unexpectedly fallen to me—how I cannot explain without violating confidence. I knew Grant ought to know what I had learned, but how to get it to him, was the question; he was in Washington, I in Cheyenne. I would not trust it to letters.

The re-union of the Army of the Tennessee was soon to take place at Des Moines. I being a member it was my intention to be present. I felt confident that Grant would attend, as he had organized that

army and had been its first commander and for more than two years afterward he was present, and it was on this occasion that he delivered that memorable speech in favor of free schools which attracted widespread attention throughout the country. He was never known to make a speech; a bow and thanks were the usual extent. When we saw his name on the program, down for a speech, there was querying as to what he would say. When he was introduced to a crowded audience in the opera house he drew from his pocket some half dozen half sheets of closely written notepaper and read the speech which became memorable.

On leaving Des Moines he started on a trip through Nebraska and Wyoming to Salt Lake and then to Denver. He was accompanied by his wife, his son, Col. Fred Grant, and wife, Gen. Babcock, his private secretary, and Mr. Borie, his first secretary of the navy and wife; and invited me to accompany them. The trip lasted just a week; then the opportunity came for communicating what I desired to make known to him, but there was some hesitation on my part, for I knew that one of the hardest things in the world for Grant to do was to distrust one to whom he had given his confidence and elevated to positions of honor and trust. He abominated deception and hypocrisy and wanted to believe that his friends were as free from these vices as himself.

It occurred to me to sound Mrs. Grant in regard to the matter which interested me and which related to her husband's interests, thinking possibly her attention might have been drawn to the same subject, as she was a lady of excellent intelligence and clear observation.

Therefore the subject was broached to her by me and the main feature of the plot presented. She became deeply interested, and after my statement was concluded, said that she had noticed some things which did not to her seem quite right, but that her husband when she had mentioned them to him, could not distrust the parties. She then said: "Governor, I ask you to present this matter to my husband just as you have to me." I replied by saying that it was a rather delicate matter to attack to the president one of his cabinet ministers, he might not be inclined to receive it kindly. She said he would. I added, "we will talk further about this to-morrow;" my object in delay was to give her an opportunity to present the matter to the president, as I felt sure she would. The next day she met me and expressed a more decided wish that I would communicate the whole matter to her husband, saying she knew he would receive it as a favor on my part. I then acquainted him with the facts, giving him full information. He listened attentively till my conclusion, but said nothing, except that he had a suspicion of something of the kind though nothing tangible.

The next day he left Denver with his party for Washington, and I returned to Cheyenne. The papers were then teeming with accounts of whiskey frauds; the very air was filled with all kinds of mysterious insinuations and rumors implicating high officers of the government, just as there have been recently in the sugar scandals—everything was exaggerated—stories without foundation were put in circulation. It began to be whispered around that these charges are being brought very close to the head of the government. Everything that that the insane Bristow and his co-conspirators could do was done to smirch Grant. The United States attorney for the district of Missouri was in the plot; he did his best to involve the president in his toils; he caused Gen. Babcock, the president's private secretary, to be indicted for alleged participation in the whiskey frauds. Others were indicted. The trial came off in November at St. Louis. Babcock was acquitted. I was in the president's office in the White House when Babcock entered to bid him good by, saying he should leave that afternoon for St. Louis to stand his trial. Grant took Babcock's hand and simply said in a low tone, "Goodbye," but not another word, I knew though, that he was bearing up under a heavy load of sorrow. He believed Babcock innocent but he felt the humiliation and disgrace of having his private secretary indicted and tried for a heinous crime, and knowing too that the plotters were aiming at him; but he bore up under the

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