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EZRA SAVAGE AS MAN AND GOVERNOR

A Unique Figure in Politics and Place Is the Man From
the Custer County Ranch Whom a
Political Accident Placed in the Chief Executive Chair

When the republicans in state convention in 1900 were casting about for men who would stand as candidates for state offices and lead what seemed to be a hopeless cause, Charles H. Dietrich of Hastings, a bluff, good-natured, non-professional man was hit upon for governor. His selection indicated the mood of the convention for they were men close to the people who made up that entire ticket.

Each of the nominees was called to the stage of the auditorium to show himself to those who had named him and to say what he chose. Most conspicuous of all was a tall, spare man with long, curling locks, a perfect example of poise and self-confidence. His words were brief but expressive. Tired delegates, half asleep, aroused themselves and listened, and smiled at the humor. The speaker said in part:

"On behalf of the faithful few of Custer county I want to thank you for the honor you have conferred on one of them. You have made but one mistake and that was in not naming me for governor. I had a good speech prepared, and rehearsed it the other day to Dietrich and he used part of it today, but forgot the better portions. I am with you in this fight to the finish. I have voted the republican ticket forty years and if I am permitted to live that long will support republican principles for another forty."

This was the characteristic speech of Ezra P. Savage, candidate for lieutenant governor. The unexpected happened, and the entire republican ticket was elected, together with a narrow majority in each house of the legislature. It became Mr. Savage's duty to preside over the deliberations of the upper house. This office he filled with painstaking care, and none there was who could take exception to his rulings or his attitude on any proposition, regardless of where his personal interests and feelings lay.

By a peculiar freak of fate, that none could foresee, Dietrich was elevated from the governor's chair to a seat in the United States senate. It then devolved upon Savage to take the gubernatorial position, or resign. For five days there was doubt as to which would be the first to quit his position, Governor Dietrich or Lieutenant Governor Savage. After due deliberation Savage finally consented, but with reluctance, to stay by his post and little more than a year from the date of his first nomination he left his farm in Custer county and moved into the executive mansion of the state of Nebraska.

Generous, frank, open-hearted and confiding, his troubles were soon to begin. He had been suddenly thrust from the private life that he had always known into a position, the center of public gaze. The curious watched his every move, the envious sought to find fault with every action. This was something unknown to him. He began to squirm. He still squirms.

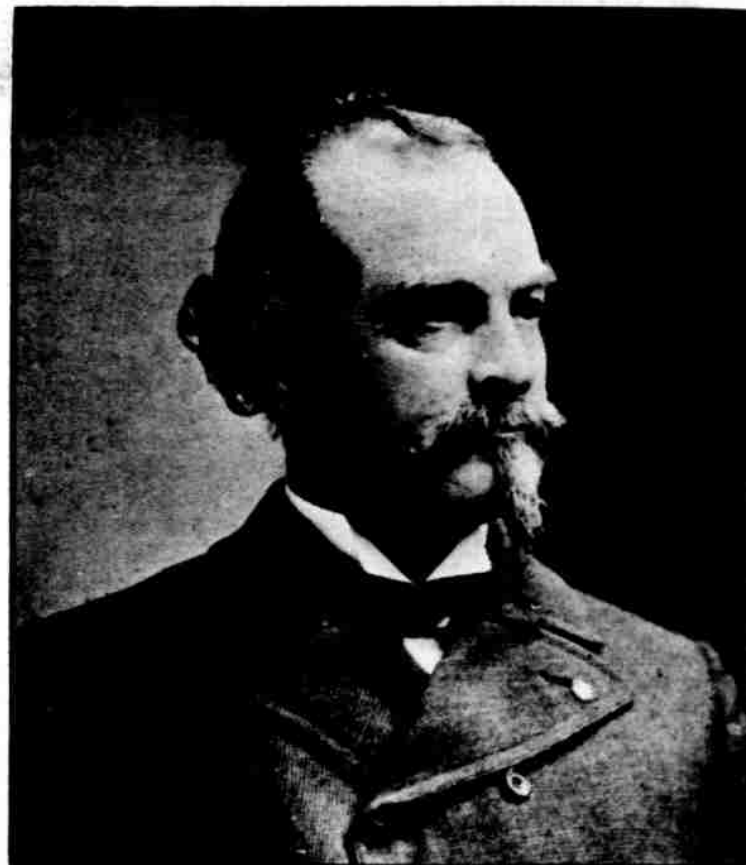
The influences that had made Dietrich senator were the same that had

supported unsuccessfully D. E. Thompson. During the entire ninety days of conflict, not once was Savage's opinion consulted. He felt keenly the slight, and that was one of the reasons for his aversion to succeeding to the governor's chair. When he did finally consent to remain by the ship, it was but natural that the powers that had counselled Dietrich should be given a secondary place. Savage was independent, and his administration has been of that order.

Amid the howlings and grumbings

claims, and he stood firm, even though the complaints of those cut off from their raids on the state treasury rolled from Norfolk to Beatrice and back again.

Affability, sympathy, sincerity and combativeness are the governor's chief characteristics. Where justice lies, in the governor's judgment, there he will be found. He is human, however, and occasionally his conclusions may be influenced by bias. Strong in the infallibility of his own judgment, he will tolerate nothing like interference or



GOVERNOR EZRA PERIN SAVAGE.

of discontented appointees he compelled certain officials in charge of state institutions to remove their families and keep them at their own expense. For years the custom had been to maintain them at the institutions at the expense of the state. The governor stood firm, however, despite the bitterest of protests, and established a precedent that has saved many hundreds of dollars to the state, and one that will be hard for his successors to break down. Against the importunate objections of state officials and employes whose duties compelled them to do considerable traveling, he declined absolutely to approve their vouchers calling for certain sums for car fare when he knew that they traveled on free transportation. Governor Savage was convinced that he was on the side of right, he knew that he was saving money to the tax payers of the state by cutting off unjust

dictation. One of the surest ways to get him to do a thing is to tell him that he must do just the contrary. An evidence of this was given in the appointment of J. E. Hays, state oil inspector, which was announced one Monday morning. The day before two daily state papers had published without executive authority that the appointment of J. M. O'Neal, Hays' competitor, was an assured fact. Of this the governor said:

"I thought this was an attempt to force me to appoint O'Neal. I won't be driven, so I just turned about and appointed Hays at once."

The position of influence occupied by the man who makes suggestions to the governor cuts little figure with him. There have been men who have for years occupied positions of power in the republican party, yet their advice has been as unheeded as that of

lowliest. Justice, sympathy and pugnaciousness, these are the qualities that usually move the governor in his actions. Only occasionally has he been accused of acting for political reasons. One of these momentous events was the pardoning of Joseph Bartley. It is said that Savage had the promise of the leaders of the Burlington, Northwestern and Union Pacific politics that he should have their influence for renomination should he commute the defaulting ex-treasurer's sentence. The governor has never denied this assurance, although usually prompt in repudiating any suggestion of a political deal. But in addition to the politics of the situation there was the sympathetic side, together with the fighting spirit aroused by the resolution of last year's republican convention to the effect that "we demand the immediate return of Bartley to the penitentiary."

Any inference that the governor has acted from political motives arouses him to the height of wrath. When he asked one day last week the reasons for the appearance of a certain criticizing article, several leagues from the truth, he was told:

"That's politics. The article may not be true but it is politics as it is played. If you are so sensitive over a little criticism like this, your heart will be broken before the convention by some of the charges that are being conjured up against you."

"If this is politics," said the governor, arising from his chair, and gesticulating emphatically with his right hand, "you may state that I am out of it. I want nothing to do with anything so unfair and unjust."

"May I say that you are out of the race; that you don't want the nomination again, just because a lot of envious critics see proper to say false and malicious things of you? That would be retreating in the face of the enemy."

"No sir, I'm not out of the race. I'll be found fighting in the front rank as long as I'm able to stay there. If I'm carried from the field beaten, I'll go back to my little farm without any deep regrets. I'll have the consciousness of having fought to the best of my ability."

Sensitive to the extreme, easily offended and just as readily aroused; a fighter who never avoids a conflict, and neither asks nor gives quarter; independent, self-reliant and headstrong, resenting intrusion from whatever source, regardless of persons; conscientious and honorable; unknown to diplomacy, and ignorant of the game of politics—such is Governor Savage, and these are the elements that hold him in the center of the stage by himself. About him there is no machine except of his own creation, and that weak and ludicrous in the eyes of acute politicians.

"I have a little farm in Custer county, secured from the government. It is free from incumbrance and if the people can't justify my actions in office I can retire to my home and live in peace the remainder of my days conscious that I did my duty as I understood it," he said to me in conclusion of an interview this week.

C. E. MATSON.