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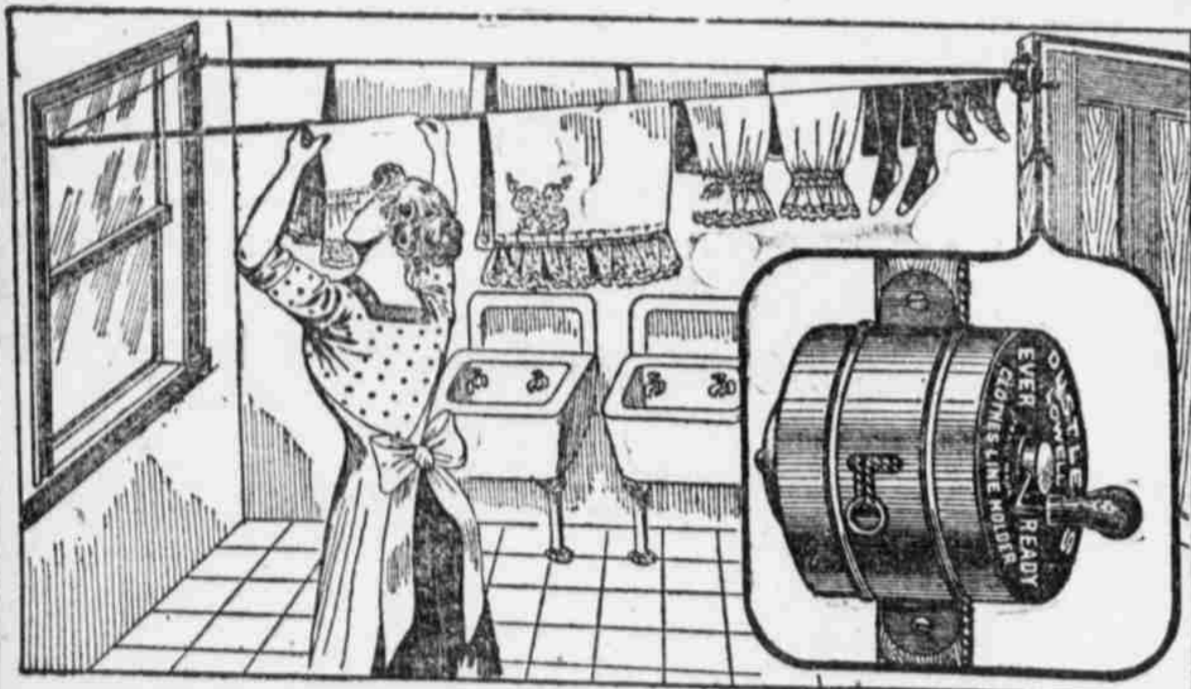
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ADDRESS, THE COMMONER, LINCOLN, NEB.

Election of Postmasters

By Congressman Stephens of Nebraska

In view of the numerous inquiries and criticisms on my plan for allowing the people to choose their own postmasters, I wish to state for the benefit of those interested in this great reform, that the plan is working admirably and that the people are intensely interested in exercising this privilege. We have now held seven elections in all where the people held open elections, or democratic primaries or caucuses. In every instance there has been a good man chosen for postmaster and in most instances the vote cast has exceeded that cast at any general election. Even when a democratic caucus or primary has been held the vote practically equals the total usually cast by all parties at a general election. For example at the last election for postmaster where the voting was restricted to democrats upon the request of the five candidates there was about 200 votes cast. The local press described it as a most enthusiastic election and says that the streets were blocked by the people and business practically suspended while the people were busy picking a man to serve them as postmaster. In closing, however, the author of the article, who was a defeated candidate, stated that the plan was very unpopular and that many thought if their congressmen did not have backbone enough to appoint a postmaster without bothering the people with it, he didn't have backbone enough to serve the people as congressman. Certainly a candidate who receives less than ten votes out of a total of about 200 has a right to feel that the people can not be trusted to attend to their own business. But they surely show plainly what they want, and if the people did not want to be bothered with this little matter of choosing their postmaster they would not block the streets coming out to an election.

Down in Hooper they liked elections so well they held two of them and some wanted a third whirl at it, but I protested. The democrats held a caucus and the republicans later on held a mass meeting. Everything went off in fine shape and the critics of the plan have had great fun lying about it. The democrats held a caucus and elected Mr. Fritz unanimously. The caucus was the only poorly attended meeting of the seven due to a stormy night, but since there was no other democratic candidate another election was not necessary. Mr. Ring, the present republican postmaster and a good man was a candidate for re-appointment and since many democrats wanted him named I had agreed to recommend Mr. Ring in case a democratic caucus recommended him to me. The democratic caucus did not do so, but instead unanimously recommended Mr. Fritz, whereupon Mr. Ring, through two or three friends called a mass meeting and naturally democrats refused generally to attend it. Even this meeting, called for the specific purpose of nominating Mr. Ring, gave Mr. Fritz who was not a candidate before the meeting fifteen votes. No less than twenty-five newspapers have printed the account of this mass meeting and the fact that Mr. Fritz received fifteen votes to Mr. Ring's one hundred and fifty and that I refused to appoint the people's choice, and not one of them mentioned the fact that a previous democratic primary had elected Mr. Fritz unanimously, and that republicans are barred from being candidates under the rules.

I mention these details to correct the record and to show that the

people are as much interested in electing their postmasters as they were in electing a president last fall, and where such interest prevails good results must follow.

Another critic advances the idea that my plan of electing postmasters is against the latest ideas of government which is a tendency toward the short ballot—the election of fewer officers instead of more. If he had considered the subject closely he would have seen that the election of postmasters is the short ballot idea in a nutshell. It is the shortest ballot possible and the candidates are known to every voter. The evil that argues for a short ballot is the long list of candidates, for instance, that the average voter does not know, and which is elected as a rule by guess. Whatever merit the question of a short ballot may have, it applies forcibly to the election of postmasters from among their friends and acquaintances, whom they know almost as well as they do members of their own families, just whom are they competent to elect? They elect new mayors, members of the legislature, and state officers, and they do not come in contact with these officers once a year, whereas they deal with the postmaster daily. Does the fact that they must meet the postmaster daily and stand for everything he does, good, or bad, dis-

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