

CHAMP CLARK'S LETTER

Mr. McKinley in the Role of Weathercock.

AMAZING CHANGE OF FRONT.

Caused the Passage of the Porto Rican Tariff Bill.

A MALIGN INFLUENCE AT WORK.

Propaganda Content of Republican Congressmen—Claim That Congress Possesses Power of British Parliament—Dolliver Whooped Up For the Imperialists—Bailley's Masterly Argument.

(Special Washington Letter.)

Amazing things are happening in this Capital City. In his December message to Congress President McKinley used this emphatic language, declaring unequivocally in favor of free trade with Porto Rico:

"The markets of the United States should be opened up to her products. Our plain duty is to abolish all customs tariffs between the United States and Porto Rico and give her products free access to our markets."

Now, it must be taken for granted that that was a well considered opinion, and that it was a proposition on which he proposed that the Republican party should stand and on which he himself would stand.

Nevertheless it is an open secret that it was Mr. McKinley's personal and official influence which caused the passage of the amended Payne Porto Rican tariff bill by the closest vote. The president changed his base, but for some unaccountable reason, did not communicate his reasons for the change in the constitutional manner, but by buttonholing and importuning members in private. People will want to know why he changed. Don't you know?

A Malign Influence.

The Washington Post, Independent, in commenting on the above paragraph by the president says:

"If it was our plain duty three months ago to give to the products of Porto Rico free access to our markets, it is our plain duty today. The president summarized the ethics of the situation. Our obligation has been in nowise lessened since the message was written."

"What malign influence has intervened to baffle the president's rightness and original intent we do not care to conjecture. Of course, it is not unknown that certain domestic industries supposed to be of greater or less political importance have, through their various organizations, importuned Congress to withhold altogether or at least to modify Mr. McKinley's solemnly announced programme. Those organizations are afraid, or pretend to be afraid, of the sugar, tobacco and fruit products of the little island. Everybody knows that, were Porto Rico cultivated to its utmost capacity, and were its entire harvest shipped to New York, fruit free, within two months the result would be absorbed without the smallest perceptible disturbance of our domestic equilibrium or the most infinitesimal effect upon the markets. It is a little island, an island of great fertility, to be sure; but its aggregate output would not agitate Philadelphia and Chicago alone, to say nothing of the rest of this vast country. And Porto Rico might easily thrive and prosper and develop without harming the very greediest and most selfish of our organized commercial interests."

"President McKinley, in his message, spoke for the honor, the loyalty and the righteousness of the American people, and the members of the majority in Congress who, in spite of the party whip, are supporting the president's position have exhibited a courage, altruism and a noble Christianity which entitle them to the reverence of the American people. They have stood for the right, for justice and fair dealing, and have thrown all thought of selfish advantage to the winds. Braver men never stood in the path of Thermopylae. Truer patriots never invited martyrdom."

"If anything more caustic than that has been written since the days of Juvenal, I have failed to see it. I advise stump speakers who read these letters to cut it out and paste it in their hats for future reference and use. It is good ammunition, sure as you live."

Power of Congress. The debate on the Porto Rican bill ought to open the eyes of all lovers of liberty in America without regard to political affiliations as to the settled purpose of the Republican leaders to bet at naught and disregard the constitution of the United States.

Over and over again Republican congressmen asserted that Congress possesses all the powers of the British parliament. Let's see if that is true.

What power has Congress? Just what the constitution gives it and not one whit more. What is Congress? The creature greater than the creator? Who will have the gall to affirm a proposition so utterly preposterous? Yet in effect that is what they do assert when they declare that the American Congress possesses all the powers of the British parliament. What power does parliament possess? Supreme power. No British monarch has dared to veto a bill passed by parliament since the reign of William III, usually called the King of Orange. The British constitution is a myth. There is no such thing. There never was. Parliament has as much right to abolish the monarchy tomorrow as it has to pass a revenue bill. Has Congress the authority to abolish the republic? Who will so assert in so many words? Yet Messrs. Hopkins et al., Republican congressmen, leaders in Congress, boldly assert that Congress is endowed with the same powers as the British parliament possesses. If that be true, what the deuce did we have the Revolutionary war for? Were we simply swapping masters? Exchanging parliament for Congress? Trading a devil for a witch? Congress has the same powers as the British parliament, has it? How does it happen then that courts in this country declare acts of Congress unconstitutional sometimes—especially in the income tax cases? Where is the court to declare an act of parliament unconstitutional? No where. It can't be done. It is impossible, for there is no British constitution to be violated. But the iteration and reiteration of the proposition that Congress possesses the unlimited power of the British parliament ought to wake the people up, if they either intend or hope to preserve the remnants of their liberties.

which are deemed inconsistent with our present national character and a hindrance to expansion shall be ignored and allowed to become a dead letter or whether the problem shall be dealt with more directly by a reconstruction of the constitution to suit it to the changes that have come about during its honored existence of more than a hundred years.

"Those who are inclined to the idea of a reconstruction by a constitutional convention at some time in the near future are influenced by the belief that the inevitable result of trying to overcome difficulties by avoiding or ignoring or by new and strained interpretation of things which conflict with present and future policies will be the development into a condition of having only an unwritten constitution, as has Great Britain, the written instrument becoming obsolete, and that we will have a new constitution in fact, though not of record. They feel that if we are to retain a written constitution the changes in it made necessary by new conditions should be made in writing in order to preserve stability of our institutions. Timidity which would cause some politicians to shrink from meeting the question frankly still admits of their ignoring a constitutional restriction which they have not the courage to remove.

A Danger Foreseen.

"A danger foreseen from a system of irregular and informal revisions of the constitution 'by general consent' is that emotional and hastily formed public sentiment, which can exist but for an hour, may be left without restraint and constitutional construction become merely a matter of compliance with the demands of the hour.

"The Populists, with a certain theory of socialism, propose what they term a system of 'initiative and referendum' for legislation, so that what shall be considered would be not the need and the wisdom of the law, but the momentary, unconsidered and possibly improperly secured expression of opinion at the polls.

"The 'initiative and referendum' method of constitutional construction might lead to disaster. It would certainly leave our system of government constantly in doubt. It would be dangerous alike to all classes. At one time the common people might be deprived of their liberties, at another the rich might be despoiled of their wealth. At all times subversion of government would be possible.

"Yet it is foreseen that this nation is not going to be forever held in restraint by the defects of its constitution or its lack of adaptability to new conditions and that if these defects are not corrected in the fearless and proper way, through formal revision, a situation is likely to develop in the very near future where the constitution will be held in contempt and the only recognized constitution will be the demand of the hour coming from any class of people who for the time being are powerful enough to enforce their will.

"As yet the suggestion of a national constitutional convention is made in a timid whisper under the breath, but it is occupying the minds of a good many, and it is likely to develop into a public agitation of the question within a comparatively short time."

Now, be it remembered what The Star is. It is a great newspaper published at the seat of the government. It is said to be a money maker. It has a very large circulation for so small a city. It is read by nearly every public man in Washington. It would not dare to print such an article if it did not think that it pleased Republican leaders. Such words uttered by a pot-house politician would not be worthy of attention or of remark, but appearing in a great daily paper of the dominant party, in the shadow of the capitol, they must furnish food for thought.

The Pride of Democracy.

Joseph W. Bailey of Texas closed the debate for the Democrats, and he made a constitutional argument worthy of the greatest constitutional lawyer in the best days of the supreme court. He is the pride and glory of the Democratic party.

Jonathan P. Dolliver of Iowa closed for the Imperialists. He dealt in skyscraping rhetoric, steered clear of logic and supreme court decisions, whooped up the boys as though making a stump speech on the prairies of Iowa, tackled Bailey only once or twice and for so doing got a thump on the solar plexus which neither he nor those who witnessed it are likely to forget to their dying day. His speech was a fine display of verbal pyrotechnics—worthy of a Fourth of July oration—merely that and nothing more.

If it with pleasure that I introduce to the readers of these letters a young Democrat who is destined to a high career if he lives, Hon. William Gordon Brantley of Georgia. He succeeded Judge Turner, who was recognized as one of the strongest men of his day in the house. My prediction is that Brantley will soon stand in the front rank among congressional speakers. His speech on the Porto Rican money trust was a masterpiece of logic, historical information and of eloquence. He not only occupies but fills the great place held by Judge Turner.

The substitute offered by Mr. McCall of Massachusetts in conformity with the president's message was lost by a vote of 173 to 159, a queer commentary on the current influences which control this administration.

Mr. Richardson's motion to recommit was lost by a vote of 172 to 162.

The bill as amended was carried by a vote of 172 to 161.

Powers of Vermont, Bromwell of Cincinnati and Tompkins of New York spoke against the bill and then voted for it.

A Question of Method.

"In dealing with the conditions that now exist there appears little difference of opinion as to what the facts are, and it is a question of method in dealing with the problem presented. Comparatively few men among the class responsible for government today, in either the legislative or executive branch, and perhaps in the judiciary, have much respect for the narrow restraints of the constitution. A suggestion of their existence with a right to be respected provokes outbreaks of impatience in every debate in Congress. The only open question appears to be whether the restraints

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