

The Commoner.

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Vol. I. No. 47.

Lincoln, Nebraska, December 13, 1901.

\$1.00 a Year

The President's Message.

President Roosevelt's first message to congress contains much that can be commended by members of all parties. After paying a high compliment to his predecessor he discusses the question of anarchy at some length, and proposes certain remedies which The Commoner will discuss hereafter when those remedies are embodied in bills presented for consideration of congress. He pays a deserved tribute to agriculture and emphasizes the importance of the preservation of the forests. His recommendations on the subject of irrigation are especially good. He seems to fully appreciate the magnitude of the subject and the limitations which he suggests are eminently wise. It is to be hoped that congress will heed his advice and in all legislation bear in mind that "the only right to water which should be recognized is that of use," and that "in irrigation this right should attach to the land reclaimed and be inseparable therefrom." His comparison between the granting of "perpetual water rights to others than the users" and the "giving away of perpetual franchises to the public utilities of cities" is just and timely. His indorsement of the Monroe doctrine is emphatic and comprehensive. His remarks on the labor question indicate that he has a clearer conception of the laborers' struggles and difficulties than some previous presidents; his plans, however, for the amelioration of the condition of the laboring man are open to discussion.

The democrats will dissent from his high tariff remedy—the laborer has been suffering from the administration of that remedy for about a quarter of a century. There is virtue, however, in the president's advocacy of the eight-hour law, and of regulations to prevent over-work and unsanitary conditions. He failed to condemn government by injunction and the blacklist, both of which have caused much injustice to the wage-earners.

The president's recommendations on the Chinese question are welcome; they will insure a prompt extension of the Chinese exclusion act. While many of the republican leaders lean to the cheap labor side of the Chinese question, there will be enough republicans ready to act with the democrats to make futile any attempt to open our doors to Chinese emigration.

The president has stated his position with clearness on the general subject of emigration and on the subject of civil service, and he pledges his administration to make the appointments in the army and navy depend upon merit and not upon personal, political or social influence. He gives considerable attention to the size of the navy, and urges a considerable increase in the naval strength of the nation.

His recommendations upon the subject of the merchant marine and on the subject of interstate commerce are not specific. He wants to see the American merchant marine "restored to the ocean," but he does not definitely indorse the ship subsidy bill, which gives the interpretation which republican leaders have placed upon the republican platform. While he favors an enlargement of the scope of the interstate commerce law in the interest of the patrons of the road, his language raises a suspicion that he is also willing to concede to the railroads the pooling privileges for which they have contended for several years.

In discussing the tariff question the president

assumes what is not true, namely, that "there is general acquiescence in our present tariff system as a national policy." He recommends a limited system of reciprocity, but wants it distinctly understood that we must not concede anything that is really of any value to us. No one can read that portion of his message without being convinced that the reciprocity idea will be entirely subordinated to the interests and demands of the beneficiaries of a high tariff. In fact, he says as much when he declares that "reciprocity must be treated as the handmaiden of protection," and, therefore, like a handmaiden, subject to discharge on short notice.

The president follows the republican platform, and recommends the creation of a new cabinet position to be filled by a representative of the commercial and industrial interests. It will be remembered that the democratic platform advocated the creation of a department of labor, with a cabinet officer in charge. The difference between a representative of commerce and industry (already represented to a large extent by the secretary of the treasury, who is closely associated with the bankers, by the secretary of state, who is in contact with our consular representatives, and by the attorney general, who has for years been intimate with the great corporations) and one speaking for and representing the great wage-earning classes of the United States ought to be apparent to anyone.

The president's recommendation in regard to an isthmian canal also follows the republican platform, and leaves out all mention of the route to be followed. There is a widespread opinion that the Panama canal project has been used by the railroads to prevent the digging of the Nicaragua canal. The message indicates that the president appreciates the importance of the canal, and this gives us some room to hope that even though he does not specifically indorse the Nicaragua route, he will not permit the railroads to further delay the inauguration of this great enterprise.

The president makes no reference to the Boer war. Whether he has been so occupied with public affairs as not to have learned of the struggle going on in South Africa; whether, having learned of it, he considers it a matter of trivial importance; whether he sympathizes with the Boers, but is prevented by allegiance to his party from giving expression to that sympathy, or whether his sympathies are with England in her efforts to extend her empire, all these are left to conjecture.

Scant attention is given to the money question; less than three hundred words are used to set forth the president's position on a question which the republican papers declared to be paramount in the last campaign. Below will be found the only reference to this important subject:

The act of March 14, 1900, intended unequivocally to establish gold as the standard money and to maintain at a parity therewith all forms of money medium in use with us, has been shown to be timely and judicious. The price of our government bonds in the world's market, when compared with the price of similar obligations issued by other nations, is a flattering tribute to our public credit. This condition it is eminently desirable to maintain.

In many respects the national banking law furnishes sufficient liberty for the proper

exercise of the banking function, but there seems to be need of better safeguards against the deranging influence of commercial crises and financial panics. Moreover, the currency of the country shall be made responsive to the demands of our domestic trade and commerce.

Does this mean that the president does not favor the proposed measure making the silver dollar redeemable in gold, or does it mean that he is going to adopt the plan followed by the gold standard advocates in the past and prevent as far as possible the discussion of financial measures? He does not mention the branch bank or the asset currency? Does it mean that he does not favor them, or that he prefers to have them sprung upon congress and rushed through before the people have a chance to understand them? If measures are necessary to protect the people "against the deranging influence of commercial crises and financial panics," why not present such measures for the consideration of the people? If the currency should be made "responsive to the demands of our domestic trade and commerce," why not outline a plan so that the public generally can examine and discuss it? Everybody reads the president's message, but comparatively few people know anything about the bills presented. We shall see, as time passes, whether the currency question occupies as small a place in congressional consideration as it has in the president's message.

The president's recommendations on the postal system will be discussed at another time when they can be considered more fully.

The two subjects specially emphasized in the president's message are the trust question and the Philippine situation. On another page will be found those portions of the message which relate to these two subjects. These extracts are given in order that the readers of The Commoner may judge for themselves whether the comments to be made are justified. A perusal of the president's utterances on the trust question will convince any unprejudiced reader that the president has heard from the trust magnates since he made his Minneapolis speech. His famous phrase in regard to the shackling of cunning is reproduced, but it is so diluted with warnings, cautions and fears, as to be scarcely recognizable. It is evident that the president has been deeply impressed by the doleful prophecies and threatenings of the monopolists. He is willing to admit that the consolidation of capital which is going on is a process which has aroused much antagonism, but he feels it necessary to add "a great part of which is wholly without warrant." He borrows the phraseology of trust-defenders when he asserts that "the average man, the wage-earner, the farmer, the small trader, have never before been so well off as in this country and at this time." The inference is natural—that the trust evil is not really serious, if industrial conditions are as favorable as the president asserts. He borrows the epithets of the trust magnates when he warns the country against "ignorant violence," against "the ignorant or reckless agitator," against "crude and ill-considered legislation" and against "appeals, especially to hatred and fear." It is doubtful whether any one as badly scared as the president seems to be is in a proper frame of mind to calmly consider an effective anti-trust law. He gives the benefit of the