

The Commoner.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

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MASKED BATTERIES

In discussing newspapers in a recent interview, Mr. Bryan mentioned some of the papers which call themselves democratic, but which can be relied upon to support any republican policy in which the financiers of the country are interested. He expressed the wish that the law might compel a disclosure of the names of the men who really dictate the editorial policy of papers. Among these papers the New York Times was mentioned by name. The Times refers to this comment and attempts to defend the papers which speak as corporations without a known personality behind the corporation. It says:

"We regard that, and Mr. Bryan ought to regard it, as a real negligible detail. The vital question is, Do these papers tell the truth; do they preach sound doctrine; and do they, in their daily exhortations, seek to set the feet of the democracy into paths of safety? These are the important things; if a newspaper is sound, then Mr. Bryan may leave the supposed dictator of its policy to his money grubbing in the dust-holes of Wall street, for, though it may cause him daily anguish, how the poor wretch shows his wisdom in committing to more competent hands the filling of its columns!"

The Times, instead of disclosing its owner, or the dictator of its policy, presents this puerile defence of the newspaper which fires its daily round from ambush. So it makes no difference at all who controls the paper! Suppose it should appear that the Times was owned by John D. Rockefeller (of course, this is only a supposition), would its defence of trusts have as much weight as if it were owned by some one not at all connected with the trusts? Suppose it were owned by the officials of the National City Bank? Would its defence of every Wall street scheme have the same weight as if it were owned by some one who could view the subject disinterestedly? Suppose (and this may not be a supposition) it is owned by a man who habitually votes the republican ticket and is in constant communication with the republican leaders, would its advice to democrats have as much weight as it would if it were owned by a man whose fidelity to democratic principles was unquestioned? If the Times was a defendant in a suit at law, would it consent to have the witnesses against it concealed in an adjoining room? Would it allow the witnesses to talk to the court or jury through a speaking tube, relieved from the scrutiny of a cross-examination?

The Times says that the vital thing is, "Do these newspapers tell the truth; do they preach sound doctrine; do they, in their daily exhortations, seek to set the feet of the democracy into the paths of safety?" The Times talks as if the readers of the newspaper accepted its utterances as if they were utterances of a voice from heaven, whereas a more intimate acquaintance with that editorial oracle might show that the voice was anything but heavenly, and that the inspiration came from an entirely different direction.

The Times assumes that the dictator may be "money grubbing in the dust-holes of Wall street," while his agent, the editor, is filling the columns of the paper with competent hands. But suppose the editor is numbered among those who boast that they can write as well on one side of a question as on the other, and suppose he is told to write on the capitalistic side of every question—to defend the gold standard and a bank currency, to argue that trusts are a natural development and necessary to public welfare, to justify imperialism and glorify government by injunction—hasn't the reader a right to know the influences which control and the interests that guide the editorial pencil? The defence made by the Times is in itself a sufficient condemnation

of the so-called impersonal, but more often subsidized, newspaper representative of some plutocratic interest or group of interests.

A Southern Opinion.

The Times-Democrat of New Orleans may fairly be considered the best representative of democratic sentiment in the south. The Courier-Journal formerly held the premiership in southern journalism, but it forfeited the place by its apostasy in 1896. The honor then fell to the Atlanta Constitution, but that paper by its advocacy of colonialism and by its surrender of the democratic position on other questions "in the interest of harmony" is leaving the leadership of the southern press to the Times-Democrat, and this leadership is being well sustained. Its editorials are strong and clear, and they draw a proper distinction between the Hamiltonian ideas, which prevail among the republicans and gold democrats, and the Jeffersonian views which prevail among the believers in the Chicago and Kansas City platforms. Its manner of dealing with the present situation is well illustrated in its recent editorial on "The Touchstone of Democracy," which will be found on another page. Its summing up is accurate and comprehensive: "If the country prefers republican policies the reins of power should be intrusted to republican hands; if democratic remedies are desired, a democratic doctor should be called in. Let us have no more quacks who give bread pills and poison by turns without thought of the patient's disease. The practitioner of this kidney is but the undertaker's advance agent."

JOHN S. ROBINSON

The democrats and populists of Nebraska are called upon to mourn the untimely demise of ex-Congressman John S. Robinson, who recently succumbed to an attack of appendicitis. Mr. Robinson served two terms in congress, and was an ideal representative, clean in private life, industrious, able, incorruptible and faithful to every trust. He leaves to his widow and children a more valuable legacy than money.

Democracy Defined.

Mr. William O. McDowell, of New York, president of the Cuban-American league, was asked at the close of one of his lectures: "What is the correct conception of democracy?" He replied: "It is an aspiration—a determined purpose—hoping for, struggling for, fighting to the death for, Liberty—the equal well-being of all men. It is a religion built upon a creed that asserts the natural dignity and birthright equality of all men. It is the golden rule, the ten commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the American Declaration expressed in a single word."

The word "democracy," it will be seen, has a meaning deep and broad. It is derived from the Greek and means the rule of the people, and the rule of the people, resting as it does upon the doctrines set forth in the Declaration of Independence, can only be preserved by the cultivation of a profound and universal respect for human rights.

Both aristocracy and plutocracy are constantly at war with democracy and the democrat must be not only vigilant and active, but he must know that his own security rests upon the protection of the equal rights of all.

JOSEPH W. FOLK

The following sketch has been sent in by a friend of Hon. Joseph W. Folk, city attorney of St. Louis, whose persistent prosecution of hoodlars has developed an astonishing amount of corruption and given him a place in the confidence and esteem of an increasing number of people:

"Joseph W. Folk was born in Brownsville, Tenn., on October 28, 1869. He comes of a distinguished southern family, always democratic. After graduating at Vanderbilt university he engaged in the practice of law for three years in his home town, Brownsville; then in 1893 he removed to St. Louis, where he entered into the active practice of his profession. He took a lively interest in political affairs as a public-spirited citizen, and was a warm supporter of the democratic national ticket in 1896. In September, 1900, a committee of prominent democrats waited upon him with a request that he accept the democratic nomination for circuit attorney. Mr. Folk replied that his practice was confined to the civil branch of the law, and that he could not accept. When the committee reported this, it was instructed to return and say to Mr. Folk that the convention would nominate him any way and that if he declined it would have to be before the convention. Of course, under these circumstances, a second declination was impossible, but Mr. Folk cautioned the old-time "bosses" of the party that he recognized no politics in criminals. "He who violates the law," said Mr. Folk, "is not a democrat, neither is he a republican—he is a criminal and must be treated as such." The "bosses" regarded this as mere political buncombe—at any rate, it did not deter them from giving Folk a unanimous nomination, and from then doing what they could to elect him. In November, 1898, St. Louis had cast a republican majority of nearly 10,000 and it was not supposed in November, 1900, that Folk could be elected. In this, however, both friends and foes were surprised; he was elected by a handsome majority, and immediately upon taking office in January, 1901, he gave evidence of his sincerity by prosecuting election crooks and repeaters, regardless of the political party in whose interests their frauds had been committed. When certain notorious democratic "Indians" were given penitentiary sentences a great outcry was made by an element of "practical" politicians, and a demand was made upon Mr. Folk to confine his prosecutions of election fraud cases to republican "Indians." A refusal to comply with this demand aroused against the circuit attorney the bitterest animosity of some of the most potent politicians in the St. Louis democracy, an animosity which became intensified a hundred-fold when later on Mr. Folk actually prosecuted and convicted the head boss of the party, the man without whose support few men in St. Louis during the last quarter of a century have dared aspire to a democratic nomination. Corruption had been rampant in the city for many years, but so prominent and powerful were the beneficiaries of that corruption, no circuit attorney had dared assail them. Mr. Folk has shattered this stronghold of corruption, and has laid bare more official bribery than was ever before disclosed in the history of the world. It was freely predicted, when Folk secured a three-year penitentiary sentence for the millionaire head of the democratic "machine" in St. Louis, that the powerful influences back of the millionaire hoodler would crush the daring official. It is said now by the incensed followers of the "boss" that the prediction has been verified and that Mr. Folk can never receive another nomination, however humble, from a democratic convention. A different view is held by others, but however this may be, it is certain that outside the ranks of "practical" politicians, among the great mass of honest citizens, republicans as well as demo-