

## THE ISSUES OF 1896.

### I. A REPUBLICAN VIEW, BY THE HON. THEODORE ROOSEVELT.



THE next Presidential campaign will be remarkable, if for no other reason than because in it the Democratic party will have to ask retention in power upon the ground that, if so retained, it will undo most of what it has done during the years that it had free governmental control. A party always bases much of its claim to public support upon the shortcomings of the the opposite party; but the Republicans may safely leave the tale of their foes' shortcomings to be told by their foes themselves. Next year it seems as if the Democracy would achieve the distinction of running, at one and the same time, both on the issue that it will hereafter keep the promises which hitherto it has failed to keep, and also on the issue that it is perfectly safe to trust it, because it never has kept its promises, and does not intend to, and therefore need not be taken at its word by any man who fears a convulsion in our financial or economic policy.

This last must certainly be the attitude it will take on one of the great questions before the country—the tariff. The majority of Democrats are sincere believers in a low tariff looking toward free trade. However, few of them venture openly to champion free trade as a present-day possibility, and, as a whole, they have united only in demanding that vague entity known as «tariff reform,» which may mean anything or nothing. Undoubtedly, however, at the last election the great majority of Democrats understood tariff reform to mean a sweeping and general reduction in import duties, and the great majority of their leaders gave fullest and frankest expression to this view. The bitter disappointment they felt over what they deemed their betrayal by some of the Democratic leaders in Congress is too fresh in mind to need more than an allusion. No denunciation of the Fifty-third Congress by Republicans can compare in violence with the denunciation heaped upon it by leading Democrats everywhere. Much the most serious argument advanced against a policy of high tariff is that it puts a premium upon the sacrifice of the general welfare to the selfish

interests of particular individuals and particular businesses or localities, and the most forceful plea advanced for a policy of low tariff is that it does away with this scramble of greedy and conflicting interests. Yet the tariff bill of 1894 was passed amid scenes more scandalous than had attended the passage of any previous bill. Never before was the general welfare so contemptuously disregarded in dealing with special industries. Never before did United States senators appear so openly as the guardians of, and attorneys for, those peculiar aggregates of capital which are commonly styled «trusts.» The result proved the truth of the statement made by the brilliant Republican leader on whom there fell in the House the chief burden of opposing the passage of the tariff bill. Mr. Reed, in denouncing the queer measure which finally received the sanction of President Cleveland's signature, said that «protection was proper as a principle, but infamous as a preference.» The Wilson-Gorman Bill was described with exact nicety in this condemnation. It was largely a protective measure, for protection was yielded to certain industries in varying degree as a matter of preference and bargain and sale, but not as a matter of principle. It was a free-trade measure in spots, also; for here and there, where an industry had no special champion in Congress, or where it flourished in a district in which it was hopeless to expect Democratic votes, the duties were greatly reduced; but wherever an industry possessed a sufficiently formidable champion, and was willing to pay the price, it had little to fear. There were entirely disinterested believers in free trade, or in a low tariff, in both the upper and the lower house; but in the actual event the power rested with their foes. One group of senators might demand much and another little. One might represent the immense wealth of the sugar trust, while another stood for the iron manufacturers, and yet a third merely for a single business interest, such as the manufacture of collars in some given town. But they all got what they wanted. The result was a law which nobody defended and everybody condemned, and which the majority of Democrats ridiculed and disliked even more than did the Republicans.

It is needless now to recite the events of last year's election. The Democratic party had been in complete power for the first time since the civil war. The Senate, House, and President—all had been theirs. They had passed their own tariff bill; they had done whatever they deemed proper on the question of finance; and the result was that the country went through such a time of business disaster as it had not seen since 1857. As to the exact causes of the depression men disagreed; but they were all agreed that the tariff agitation and its outcome played a big part therein. Some contended that the bill was iniquitous because in so many directions it kept and even increased the protective duties. Others saw in its free-trade provisions a menace to the prosperity of American workingmen. But they were all agreed in condemning it. Accordingly, at the polls in 1894 the Democrats received an even more crushing defeat than had befallen the Republicans four years previously. The result did not make entirely clear what the American people did want, but it left no kind of doubt as to what they did not want.

On the tariff, therefore, the Democrats enter the next campaign handicapped by the fact that they repudiate their own handiwork. All of their leaders who are entitled to receive respectful attention denounce the Wilson-Gorman Bill, and promise to supplant it by another. They cannot take any other position. They are traitors to their own principles unless they denounce as treachery to these principles the work of their own hands. All they can promise is further agitation, further change and unrest, with all the attendant misfortunes of such change and unrest to the business community and to the world of workingmen. The Republicans, on the other hand, stand for a policy of commercial rest. They wish to continue the protective policy. They have no desire to carry the principle to unreasonable extremes. All they intend to do, if they have the power, is to remodel the present law wherever it is absolutely necessary to do so in the interests of impartial justice, so that all sections and all industries shall be treated alike.

At present, however, the financial question bids fair to overtop the tariff in interest. If business had continued in its depressed condition, and if there had been a failure of crops in the West, the financial question would have been all-important, and the fight would undoubtedly have resolved itself into a straight-out contest for and against free silver, the Democrats championing and the

Republicans opposing unlimited coinage of the depreciated metal. The partial return of prosperity, however, has checked the free-silver craze. The Republicans have always been overwhelmingly against any form of «cheap» currency, whether under the guise of fiat paper or short-weight silver. All of the presidential candidates on the Republican side are and have been against it—Reed, Morton, McKinley, Harrison, Allison. The free-silver Republicans are important only because they are concentrated in a number of the Rocky Mountain States. These States are sparsely populated. They count for little in a party convention or in a national election, but they count for a great deal in the Senate; and it is this disproportionate representation in the Senate that has given the free-silver people any weight at all in the Republican party. With the Democratic party affairs are widely different. In most of the great Democratic States there is a very strong and real sentiment in favor of free silver. In some of these States the free-silver men are in the majority, and have complete control of the party machinery. In other States they form merely a large minority. In yet others the two sides are evenly balanced, which sometimes results in rather droll complications; as in Kentucky, where the Democratic convention compromised the matter by running a free-silver candidate on an anti-free-silver platform.

In very many of the Democratic strongholds—notably in the South and Southwest—the Populist organizations seriously threaten Democratic supremacy. The Populists really represent very little except an angry but loose discontent with affairs as they actually are, and a readiness to grasp after any remedy proposed either by charlatanism or by an ignorance as honest as it is abysmal. The Populist party, therefore, waxes and wanes inversely as prosperity increases or declines; that is, the folly of certain voters seems to grow in inverse ratio to their need of displaying wisdom. At present, affairs over the country seem to be on the mend, and the Populist party is therefore losing power. The Democratic attitude toward free silver, in turn, depends very much upon the Populists' strength. Wherever and whenever the Populists are a distinct menace to the government, the Democrats try to outbid them by declaring in favor of unsound finance; but as the Populists become weak, the mass of the Democratic statesmen grow ready once more to stand by their party, even should that party decline to announce itself as un-

restrictedly as they wish in favor of dishonest money. It seems likely, therefore, at present, that the Democrats will make no open fight for free silver; and as their leading men occupy every conceivable position upon this as upon all other public questions, it is quite impossible to foretell what any Democratic nomination will really mean.

The Republican party's attitude, on the contrary, is absolutely clear. It does not depend in the least upon whether the crops are good or bad, upon whether the business community is or is not in a flourishing condition. It does not even depend upon who is nominated. From Iowa east every Republican State has declared, or will declare, in some shape, against the adoption of a free-silver platform; and even west of Iowa the majority of Republicans, in all save the few rabid silver States, are against free silver and in favor of sound finance. Every Republican whose nomination is a possibility is against the free coinage of silver, and has proved his faith by his votes and actions in time past. President Cleveland, like ex-President Harrison, has shown himself a staunch friend of sound money. But in Congress, under Republican and under Democratic control alike, the great majority of the Republicans have been found ranged on the side of an honest currency, and the great majority of the Democrats have voted for that species of partial repudiation, the unlimited coinage of short-weight silver dollars. The Republican party, when assembled in a national convention, will certainly not declare for free silver. In my opinion it ought to declare unqualifiedly against it. But possibly the anti-free-silver men, knowing that they have the substance, will not refuse to give half of the shadow to the Rocky Mountain Republicans. Their presidential nominee will be a man who would veto any free-silver bill that passed Congress; their nominees for Congress itself will be men who would strenuously oppose such a bill. Refusal to be for free silver means, of course, that the party is resolutely against it; and the majority may rest content with this state of affairs, and spare the minority humiliation by refraining from denouncing in so many words the free coinage of silver. I should prefer that they did denounce it; but the denunciation is really a matter of small consequence when the attitude of the party is so clear, not alone from its present actions, but from its actions in the past. The Republican party, as a party is, as it always has been, unflinchingly against the free coinage of silver.

Probably the convention will declare a de-

sire for an international agreement to further bimetallism. Some of the anti-free-silver men, the extreme gold men, are as unreasonable in their fanaticism as any representatives of the Rocky Mountain mine-owners. These men violently oppose any scheme looking toward international bimetallism, and, indeed, at times seem to object to it almost as much as to free silver. Such conduct is mere foolishness. The financial question is far too complicated to permit any persons to refuse to discuss any method which offers a reasonable hope of bettering the situation.

The question of the free coinage of silver is not complicated at all. Very many honest men honestly advocate free coinage; nevertheless, in its essence, the measure is one of partial repudiation, and is to be opposed because it would shake the country's credit, and would damage that reputation for honest dealing which should be as dear to a nation as to a private individual. But the question of bimetallism stands on an entirely different footing. Very many men of high repute as statesmen and as students of finance, both at home and abroad, believe that great good would come from an international agreement which would permit the use of both metals in the currency of the world. No one is prepared to say that such an agreement would do harm. There is grave doubt as to whether the agreement can be reached; but the end is of such importance as to justify an effort to attain it. The people who oppose the move are, as a rule, men whom the insane folly of the ultra-free-silver men has worked into a panic of folly only less acute.

These good people have come to a condition where they are apt to confound names and things, and to forget the relative importance of words and of acts. A curious instance of this is afforded by their attitude toward ex-Speaker Reed during the last few months. Mr. Reed has occupied a position not too common among the public men of the country, because of his consistent and unflinching support of honest finance. His vote and speech have invariably been against every free-coinage bill, and against every other measure to depreciate the currency which has been introduced in Congress. When he was Speaker he actually, by the force of his iron will and commanding personality, stopped the passage of a free-silver bill through the lower house, and thus prevented its going to President Harrison. The President would have vetoed it; but the mere passage of the bill by Congress would have been a very serious shock to our credit, and

would have invited commercial disaster. Parties were very closely divided in the Fifty-first Congress, and the Democrats, with the exception of a bare handful from the Northeast, supported the measure. Half a dozen Republicans from the Rocky Mountains also supported it. But Mr. Reed, by sheer weight of personal influence kept the immense majority of his party firm, being heartily backed by Mr. McKinley and every other Republican leader on the floor. The two sides were almost evenly balanced. Indeed, for two days, the free-silver men seemed to have a majority of one. The Democrats, assisted by the few free-silver Republicans, exhausted themselves in the effort to pass the bill. All of their leaders—Mr. Crisp, Mr. Mills, Mr. Springer—put forth every effort to force through the bill, and, for the moment, even such usually consistent hard-money Democrats as Mr. Wilson of West Virginia abandoned their faith and turned in with the silver men. Not another man in the country could have barred the passage of the bill. But Mr. Reed did bar it. With indomitable resolution he stopped its passage for three days, until at last he rallied the bare majority necessary to kill it.

Finally, Mr. Reed voted for the gold-bond resolution rendered necessary by the peculiar terms in which President Cleveland couched his contract with the syndicate that took the United States bonds. Like very many men, both Republicans and Democrats, he did not approve of the terms of this contract, and he was not able to express the unmeasured approbation which its friends seemed to demand. The important thing, however, was his vote; and his vote was given, as it always had been, for sound finance. Not even the fact that the bulk of his party associates broke away from him and joined with the bulk of the Democrats in refusing to support the gold bond, swayed Mr. Reed. His personal dislike to the terms of the contract did not prevent him from casting his vote in accordance with what he deemed, on the whole, the best interests of the country. Yet the extreme gold people of the Northeast actually condemned his action, failing to see, what to a disinterested observer is self-evident, that his conduct proved conclusively that even in the most trying emergencies he can be relied upon to stand firmly for honest money. Truly the attitude of his critics affords another instance of «the infinite capacity of mankind to withstand the introduction of knowledge.» No man deserves more at the hands of believers in sound money than Mr. Reed; and

his views are the views of the great mass of Republican voters. In the next presidential campaign the Republican party will stand for sound finance, for honest money, and against the free coinage of the depreciated silver dollar.

It is earnestly to be hoped that the Republican party will also make an aggressive fight on the question of America's foreign policy. A policy of buncombe and spread-eagleism in foreign affairs would be sincerely to be deprecated; but a policy of tame submission to insult is even worse. In its foreign policy the present Democratic administration has offered a most unpleasant contrast to the preceding Republican administration. The very Democrats who have stood stoutest in warring against the great majority of their own party for sound finance have also been unpleasantly conspicuous in forcing their party to adopt a thoroughly improper and un-American tone in foreign affairs. Unfortunately, very many decent men in the country, and especially in the Northeast, are too timid, or too unpatriotic, to wish the United States to play the part it should among the nations of the earth. America must never play the part of a bully; but even less must she play the part of a coward; and it is this last most unpleasant part which, during the last two years of Democratic administration, she has once or twice come near playing.

We should build a first-class fighting navy—a navy, not of mere swift commerce-destroyers, but of powerful battle-ships. We should annex Hawaii immediately. It was a crime against the United States, it was a crime against white civilization, not to annex it two years and a half ago. The delay did damage that is perhaps irreparable; for it meant that at the critical period of the island's growth the influx of population consisted, not of white Americans, but of low-caste laborers drawn from the yellow races. We should build the isthmian canal, and it should be built either by the United States government or under its protection. We should inform Great Britain, with equal firmness and courtesy, that the Monroe doctrine is very much alive, and that the United States cannot tolerate the aggrandizement of a European power on American soil, especially when such aggrandizement takes the form of an attempt to seize the mouths of the Orinoco.

This does not mean a policy of bluster. No American President or Secretary of State, no American legislative body, should ever make a threat which is not, if necessary, to be backed by force of arms. Honorable peace is

always desirable, but under no circumstances should we permit ourselves to be defrauded of our just rights by any fear of war. No amount of material prosperity can atone for lack of national self-respect; and in no way can national self-respect be easier lost than through a peace obtained or preserved unworthily, whether through cowardice or through sluggish indifference.

The conduct of our foreign affairs under President Harrison was, on the whole, admirable. Our attitude toward Germany in the Samoan incident, and toward Chile later, raised our standard high. We behaved in each instance with great moderation, but with entire firmness, and in each our conduct was rewarded with excellent results. We preserved the same attitude toward the great European empire and the spitfire South American republic. In the latter case, indeed, it was only our timely firmness that prevented the Chileans forcing us into a position which would have certainly meant war. All of this stands in striking contrast to the behavior of the present administration toward Hawaii and Nicaragua, and in the dispute between England and Venezuela. The one failure of President Harrison's administration was in the Bering Sea case, and this failure was due to our over-anxiety for a peaceful settlement, and consequent willingness to yield what we ought not to have yielded. Had we taken the stand which was advocated by the Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Tracy, and which had already been advocated by Mr. Phelps when minister to England under President Cleveland, there would have been no war, the seals would now have been alive, and there would have been no danger of the extinction of the greatest industry of the North Pacific. We ought never to have agreed to an arbitration; but we did, and the present administration has, of course, made matters worse. It is not a page of American diplomacy upon which we can look back with pride; but it offers a most wholesome lesson. It should teach us to beware, beyond all others, of the peace-at-any-price men. It should teach us to be exceedingly cautious about entering into any arbitration. Above all, it should teach us the lesson of courteous but resolute insistence on our rights, at no matter what cost.

The Republican party will go into the next election as the champion of the only foreign policy to which self-respecting Americans can subscribe; and the Democratic party, on this issue, will either have to condemn without reservation its own immediate past, or

else must stand as the apologist of a policy of national humiliation.

More important, almost, than any specific measure or policy is the general attitude of the Republican party toward good government. A party is much more than its candidate or its platform. It is even more than the men who, in the aggregate, compose it at the moment; for it is a bundle of traditions, tendencies, and principles as well. Every act of an organized Republican body in any portion of the Union has some effect upon the general party welfare. Republicans, and specially Republican politicians, in and out of office, must, if they have the welfare of the party at heart, feel that a heavy responsibility rests upon them. They must take the right side on every issue that arises, local or State or National. It is a discredit to the whole party when Republicans put into office a scoundrel of any kind. It is a credit to the whole party when they work in any place disinterestedly for good government. They must feel this, and they must show that they feel it. Everywhere they must stand for law and order. The law-breaker, whether he be lyncher or whitecapper, or merely the liquor-seller who desires to drive an illegal business, must be made to feel that the Republican party is against him. Every ballot-box stuffer, every bribe-taking legislator, every corrupt official of any grade, must be made to feel that he is an outcast from the Republican party. The party must stand firmly for good government in our cities; and in many cases this good government can only be obtained by the sinking of partizan lines in municipal contests. The Republican party must stand by the civil-service law, National and State. Republicans of every grade must feel that it behooves them to see that their party representatives in every office are clean and honest men; and for the sake of the welfare of the party they must rigorously punish the scoundrels who use the party name to cloak their own base purposes. On the great national issues of the day—the tariff, finance, and foreign policy—the Republican party has all the advantage of position in the presidential fight upon which we shall shortly enter. All Republicans must be specially careful to strengthen this position by making it their duty to see that the dishonest and unworthy representatives of their party are punished, and to see that in every locality the Republican party stands for honesty, decency, and good citizenship on whatever may be the issue for the moment.

*Theodore Roosevelt.*