

Even those papers which have criticised the House for not doing more than it has done, after witnessing the proceedings of the anti-Republican Senate, are rapidly reaching the conclusion that the House has done, or is likely to do in essential directions, all that had the slightest chance of securing the approval of an anti-Republican Senate and a Democratic President; indeed, far more than will receive such approval; and that it would have been unwise to go further in proposing Republican measures of vital importance with the certainty that they could not become laws, and with the probability that the hostile reception which such measures would encounter might increase the distrust that already exists in the country.

NELSON DINGLEY, JR.

III.

THE Venezuela question was the first subject of engrossing interest to occupy the attention of the Fifty-fourth Congress. Both Houses have been sharply criticised for what has been called their precipitate action in immediately passing the bill which was carried through the House by unanimous consent on the day following the receipt of the President's message. Undoubtedly the action of Congress was influenced somewhat by party considerations, but, in the main, I think both Republicans and Democrats were guided in their course chiefly by purely patriotic motives. As to the influence of party politics, I think it operated no further than this—the Republicans suspected the President somewhat of precipitating the question upon Congress by his aggressive message for the purpose of bolstering up the waning fortunes of his party and were determined not to be outdone by him in patriotic fervor, while the Democrats naturally felt that it would never do for them to block the course of a Democratic President. It must be borne in mind that the subject had received the most careful consideration of the Executive, that it had been most elaborately discussed with Lord Salisbury, and that negotiations had arrived at such a stage that there seemed no possibility of ending the matter by diplomatic negotiations. The reasons that specially influenced us in our action were that the President simply wanted means for ascertaining the truth in a matter of momentous importance, that, while the course

proposed by him involved most serious hazard how it would be received by Great Britain, yet it seemed to be the only feasible course not necessarily involving war, that it committed Congress to no policy, that it would be simply impossible to refuse the request of the President and that, as there had already been developed a most serious difference between the two countries, we would be weakening our own side by exhibiting to Great Britain a divided front. It is a curious fact that, when the bill was brought into the House and unanimous consent asked for its consideration, the only gentleman who seemed to find much difficulty in suppressing an objection was Mr. Boutelle, of Maine, who, to use his own language, had been "accused in times past of being somewhat of a jingo." Undoubtedly within a very few hours afterwards, when it was seen what intense excitement and what irreparable injury had been wrought by the apparent danger of war, many a member of the House wished that he had had the pluck to do what Mr. Boutelle was so much tempted to do, and call a halt. And this, too, especially on the part of those who felt that there could be no greater public calamity than a war between the United States and Great Britain, that it would be a disaster of unspeakable horrors, and who, moreover, felt a great deal of sympathy in the main reason put forward by Lord Salisbury for declining arbitration, that it involved "the transfer of large numbers of British subjects, who have for many years enjoyed the settled rule of a British colony, to a nation of different race and language, whose political system is subject to frequent disturbance, and whose institutions as yet too often afford very inadequate protection to life and property": a reason which Lord Salisbury suggested would induce the United States to "be equally firm in declining to entertain proposals of such a nature." At least I can speak for myself in this regard. But at last have we not been fully justified by the result? The most serious consideration after the first storm of excitement had passed away was that the British Government would feel compelled to refuse recognition in any way of our Venezuela Commission and in fact might very well consider it as an act of aggression. But this one obstacle to a peaceful solution of the quarrel has disappeared in Lord Salisbury's hearty consent to afford the Commission all the aid that his government can give towards arriving at an ascertainment of the facts.

Right on the heels of the Venezuela matter, and growing out of it, came the Revenue and Bond bills ; and here an impartial judge must, we think, decide that the Republican majority in the House immediately dropped the rôle of pure and unadulterated devotion to public interest and lapsed very easily into that of coddling the fortunes of the Republican party. What was the situation that confronted Congress ? The President in his annual message, and the Secretary of the Treasury in his report, had set forth in the most emphatic terms the deplorable condition of the Treasury caused by the "endless chain" system ; that no sooner was the gold reserve strengthened by the sale of bonds than it would be immediately depleted by the presentation of greenbacks and treasury notes, making another issue of bonds necessary ; and they most urgently impressed on Congress the imperative necessity for retiring these demand notes, and thus putting a stop to the drain on the gold reserve and the imposition on the people of additional and unnecessary burdens by the sale of bonds. What they further most pointedly showed was that it was not simply money that was wanted—they had plenty of that ; there was then in the Treasury a surplus of over \$70,000,000, exclusive of the gold reserve—but it was a particular kind of money, gold, that the protection of the government credit and the national honor demanded. The President had showed that by the "exasperating withdrawals of gold" the gold reserve was substantially in no better condition than when the bond sales were first made. He stated that the conditions were aggravated by the financial crisis then upon us, and brought about by the Venezuela complication, and he almost begged that Congress would make at least a legislative "declaration" in maintenance of the national credit. In hot haste, the Republican majority in the House submitted their remedy for the situation in the shape of a revenue bill to raise by tariff taxation \$40,000,000 additional annually. Was there ever before such a performance ? The President said that he wanted no additional revenue, that there was already a surplus of over \$70,000,000—they gave him \$40,000,000 more a year ; he showed that it was gold alone that he wanted, and they gave him a revenue bill that notoriously produced not one dollar in gold ; he appealed for action that would relieve the people from the burden of further unnecessary taxation, and they immediately put

on the country an additional burden of \$40,000,000 a year; he asked for aid "to prevent in a time of fear and apprehension any sacrifice of the people's interests and the public funds or the impairment of our public credit," and they promptly responded with a bill for an increase of the tariff which they well knew his public record would impel him to veto. Again we ask—was there ever such a performance?

While the bond bill, which was introduced in the House the day after the revenue bill was passed, was not as objectionable as that bill, it had some serious defects. It substantially provided for the issue of three per cent. bonds, payable *in coin*, and redeemable by the Government after five years. In February, 1895, when the contract was made with the syndicate for the sale of \$62,000,000 of thirty-year four per cent. bonds, payable *in coin*, the President then informed Congress that it was a part of the contract that should Congress authorize the substitution of bonds payable in *gold* such substitution could be made, and that more than \$16,000,000 would be thereby saved to the government; and in his late annual message the President had re-stated this fact. Now here was legislation that, unlike the revenue bill, was aimed in the right direction, but could not possibly reach the mark. Why were not the bonds made payable in gold? Has it not been the invariable custom for the government to pay all bonds in gold, although by their terms made payable in silver as well? And why not authorize the issue of gold bonds, and thus get for the government the enormous benefit which would accrue? And what better "legislative declaration" in support of the national credit could have been made than this? But no; the Republican majority did not wish to inject the silver question into the discussion, and so with all these solid inducements leading them in one direction, they purposely took the other. And it must be borne in mind that, as to both these bills, by the rule under which they were considered, no amendments of any kind were permitted—they had to go through just as they were or not go through at all.

What has been the outcome in the Senate on these two bills? The Revenue bill, that was rushed through the House post-haste in order to give the government instant relief, has just been completely side-tracked by a decisive vote of the Senate, refusing even to consider it. As to the Bond bill, all after

the enacting clause was struck out by the Senate and an entirely new bill substituted, providing substantially for the free and unlimited coinage of silver at the ratio of 16 to 1. Clearly the judgment of the Senate coincides with the opinion of Senator Teller that it was never intended by the House that either bill should become a law and that they were proposed simply for the purpose of making "political capital."

The Senate free coinage substitute came to a vote in the House on February 14, and was defeated by the extraordinary vote of 215 to 90. If all the power and parliamentary skill of the Republican leaders in the House had been concentrated upon bringing about this result they could not have done a better day's work for the country, and yet it was the very question of all others that they dreaded, and tried their best to evade. They have literally blundered into the right. And what a wonderful commentary all this affords upon the boasted success of political *finesse* and manœuvering. The House, after struggling so hard to get away from the silver question, has, by means of it, achieved a great success, while the silver Senators, bent apparently only on advancing their cause, have invited the heaviest defeat it has ever suffered.

WM. ELLIOTT.

IV.

If a general election had been held on the first Monday of December, 1895, no politician will deny that the Republican party would have swept the country. The vote for Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Fifty-fourth Congress fairly indicates the strength of the two great parties on that day. Thomas B. Reed received 239 votes; Charles F. Crisp received 95 votes. The session is less than three months old. The recognized leader of the Republican party is as able a parliamentarian and as brilliant a politician as ever, and yet the tremendous majority of the House of Representatives over which he has had the misfortune to preside has proved itself unmanageable. It has broken away from him. It is divided into cliques ruled by fads and local prejudices. The Republican party likes to be called the party of high moral ideas. If we are to believe the dictionary in use among Republicans, the expression, "high moral ideas,"