

# TRIUMPHANT PLUTOCRACY

The Story of  
American Public Life  
from 1870 to 1920

By  
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from South Dakota



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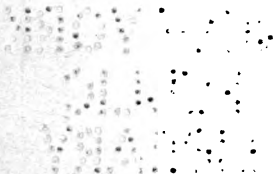
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TILDEN FOUNDATIONS  
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## XII. POLITICS.

Like most American boys I had been brought up to believe that the United States had a government of the people, by the people and for the people. My first real impressions to the contrary were obtained during my early experiences with Dakota politics. There I learned how the machinery of government is manipulated in the interest of those who are behind it and I learned something about the manipulators.

"Carpet-bag officials," as we used to call them, held the important offices in Dakota, while it was still a territory. The governors and other territorial officers were appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate at Washington. Frequently these appointees lived thousands of miles from the territory in which they were appointed to serve and in many instances they had never set foot in these territories until they arrived to take up their official duties.

A territory is entitled to a "delegate" in the House of Representatives. The delegate has a seat, but no vote. He may sit on the floor; listen to the phrase-makers of the House; watch the proceedings; introduce bills; appear before committees to urge the interests of his territory and perform such committee work as the House may choose to assign. The delegate may also advise as to the appointment of local people such as postmasters and, in some instances, if he is in political sympathy with the President, he may secure the appointment of a citizen of the territory to a Federal post such as the land office. That, however, is very unusual.

In 1880 I was nominated for the position of delegate by the Republicans of the territory of Dakota, which at that time embraced what are now the two states of North and South Dakota. It had an area of about 150,000 square miles, with about 30,000 or 35,000 Indians included in its population. When I

went to Dakota in 1869 there were only 14,000 people in the whole territory outside of the Indian population, but in 1880 railroads were building all over Dakota and the population was increasing with great rapidity. After my nomination, I entered actively into the campaign, visiting the small towns and making speeches.

Meanwhile President Hayes had appointed as governor of the Territory of Dakota a citizen of New Hampshire named N. G. Ordway. During the summer preceding the election, Ordway came out to Dakota and took possession of the office. Ordway had been for twenty-years Sergeant-at-Arms of the House of Representatives, but in 1878, when the Democrats got control of the House, he was ousted from his position. Bill Chandler, who was factotum of the Republican Party for New Hampshire, secured Ordway's appointment as Governor of Dakota so that he might go out there, have the state admitted into the Union and then become one of the Senators. I watched the Governor's actions with a great deal of interest. His attitude towards the people of Dakota was extremely patronizing, and he talked about the people of Dakota as though, in his eyes, they were simply children entitled to his benevolent consideration. I soon found out that he was preparing to carry out the political program that had been mapped out for him. For example, he was reported as being engaged in filling a car with the products of Dakota with the idea of sending it through the eastern States as a means of inducing the emigrants or settlers to come out to Dakota and enter lands on the public domain.

Finally he announced that he had arranged with the railroads to carry this car without charge and had selected certain Dakota citizens to accompany it. It was also stated that the Governor had secured some of the very finest samples of corn, pump-

kins, oats and other agricultural products from western Iowa and eastern Nebraska, placed them in the car and proposed to represent them as the products of Dakota. When questioned about this he said, "Of course, Dakota is new, and agriculture is not far advanced, but we all know that we can produce just such products, and therefore it is proper to represent that we have produced them, in order to induce the settlers to come to Dakota and enter land." And this episode disgusted me, and in some of my speeches I made fun of the Governor's antics and alluded to him as the "Sioux Chief," because having pronounced the word "Sioux" as Siox, and alluded to the town in which I lived as "Siox Falls."

After the campaign was over I went to Yankton on some business, and Newton Edmunds, who had been Governor of Dakota before I went to the Territory, and who in 1880 was a banker at Yankton, called on me at my hotel and advised me to see Governor Ordway before I left town. Edmunds told me that the Governor was very much offended at the allusions I had made in my speeches, and had said that unless I came and apologized, he would not issue my certificate of election as a delegate in Congress.

I immediately told ex-Governor Edmunds,—he was a man of excellent parts, of fair ability and strict integrity,—that if that was Ordway's attitude I would rather reaffirm what I had said about him, and that under no circumstances would I call upon him, but would leave it for him to decide whether to perform his duty as Governor and issue the certificate of election, or to betray his office in order to punish a political rival. I added that I rather thought his failure to perform his duty would not keep me from getting my seat in the House of Representatives. Before the 4th of the following March, when I would take my seat in the House, I received my certificate of Election from the Governor without comment, but

I was told by friends in Yankton that the Governor remarked when he issued the certificate that he guessed I might as well have it, as I would not amount to anything in Washington; I would be nothing but a wall flower, he said, while he would control the patronage ordinarily granted to a delegate from a territory. When I finally reached Washington, I found that South Dakota Post Office appointments were being made on the Governor's recommendation. At least one had been confirmed at an Indian Agency. I at once insisted that the Postmaster General remove Ordway's appointee and put in his place a man whom I recommended. The Postmaster General was reluctant to do this because Ordway had been very prominent in republican politics and knew all of the leading men in the nation. He had also been the representative of the predatory interests, the railroads, the public utilities generally, the contractors, etc., about Washington, and he had acted, while Sergeant-at-Arms, as their go-between in the purchase of votes and the control of the lawyers who made up the bulk of members in the House of Representatives. Of course, the "bribe" always took the form of a "fee." Because of his intimate acquaintance with their deals, Ordway was feared by the politicians, and the Postmaster General finally refused to comply with my request.

The Post Office Department relies upon a delegate to recommend certain things that should be done in the territory that he represents, and I told the Postmaster General that I certainly would take no part whatever in trying to promote and protect the interests of the Government with regard to mail routes, etc., or ever visit his department again unless I was accorded the full recognition which belonged to a delegate, and so the matter rested until Congress convened. When Congress met I went to Senator Platt, of New York, with whom I was well acquainted,

told him of the controversy that had arisen over South Dakota patronage between N. G. Ordway, as governor and me as delegate and asked him to have the Postmaster General recognize me as the Representative of Dakota instead of N. G. Ordway. Platt at once said, "Yes, you are entitled to that recognition. The Postmaster General is from my State. I suppose I endorsed him for the position, but Ordway has been to see me about this matter and he is a very powerful factor in Republican politics, besides being very competent as a political manipulator. Now, you are a young man and he is a man of great experience; why don't you get together?" I told Senator Platt that was very difficult because of the Governor's statement that he would not issue my certificate of election unless I would apologize to him for what I had said about him, my reply was that I would never do it.

In a day or two, however, Senator Platt asked if I would receive and talk with the Governor if he called upon me. I told him I would, and thereupon I made an appointment through Senator Platt for Ordway to see me at my hotel the next evening.

The Governor arrived in due time, I took him to my room and he opened the conversation by saying that he was an old and experienced politician and had been in public life for many years; that I was a young man just starting out, but that I gave great promise for the future, and that he was anxious to form a political alliance with me to take control of the political affairs of the Territory of Dakota. He then proceeded, by way of argument and advice, to say that if I would consult him about all my appointments as delegate he would consult with me about his appointments as governor, and that by thus combining our influence and working in harmony, we could become so strong and influential as to elect

each other to the United States Senate, when the territory of Dakota was admitted as a state.

After he had completed his argument I said, "Governor, this is the first time I have ever met you. I was not impressed by what I knew of you before this meeting. We are here with the idea of perfecting some kind of an alliance by which we can work in political harmony. As things stand now, that would be very difficult. I have a suggestion, however. Suppose you go back to Dakota and attend to your duties as governor, while I look after the duties of my office here, in such a way as to promote the welfare of the people of Dakota. If you will do that, and use your office to promote the interests of South Dakota and its people, without consulting me at all, you will become so popular with the people and so strong politically that you will easily be the most prominent man in the territory. If you make a good, honest and capable Governor, and I make a good, honest and capable delegate in Congress, the time will not be distant when we will naturally work together,—our common purpose being the welfare of the people."

The governor did not take to that advice. He had never done anything that way and probably did not understand what I meant. He seemed to conclude that I talked that way because I wanted to make money, so he started on another tack.

"You know," said Ordway, "I, as Governor, have the right to appoint the Commissioners of every new county that is organized. These commissioners can locate the county seat of the county, and therefore there is always great competition among the citizens of a county to secure these appointments so that they can locate the county-seat town. You know there are a great number of new counties being organized every year all over Dakota. Now, if you and I will go in together, we can so manipulate



the organization of these counties as to get part of the land upon which the county-seat is located, or else we can make the people pay high who have land on which they want the county seat located.

"Besides that, there is something even bigger. People want a new capitol city for the territory. By uniting together we might easily arrange to move the capitol from its present location at Yanktown to some more central location, and make a fortune out of building the new city."

I let the Governor go on developing his whole scheme, together with his method of achieving it. He seemed very enthusiastic and acted as though he were well satisfied with himself and with the impressions that he had made. But when he had finished, I said: "The Territory of Dakota is about 400 miles square, but it is altogether too small for both of us. Either you will have to get out of it or I will. I will never have anything to do with you but will fight you as long as you remain in the territory. You are the most miserable corrupt scamp that in my brief career I have ever come in contact with."

The next morning I called on Senator Platt and told him, in detail, just what had occurred. Platt made no comment except to say that he would have the Postmaster removed that Ordway had had appointed, and would ask the Postmaster General to put in whomever I recommended.

Upon inquiring with regard to the Governor and his career as Sergeant-at-Arms at the House, I found that when the Democrats had got control in 1878 and had removed Ordway from the position as Sergeant-at-Arms, they had appointed a Committee to investigate the conduct of the office of Sergeant-at-Arms under Ordway's regime. The conduct of the investigation was in the hands of Glover, who, I think, was from Missouri. I thereupon secured from Glover a copy of the testimony taken by the Committee and

of the report that the Committee had made to the House. The testimony showed that Ordway was the person who carried the funds that were used to persuade the members of the House to grant privileges to the few in order that they might rob the many. That custom has been continued ever since at Washington in both Houses of Congress. While I was in the Senate, Aldrich of Rhode Island, who was Senator, held this important post. He died worth, I believe, twenty millions. Others have done similar work. There always are in Washington certain agents of big business, employed to look after the attorneys in both houses who are there to represent the great industrial, financial, and transportation corporations—the real government.

I also wrote the Chairman of the House Committee that investigated Ordway and he sent me the following letter which I published with a copy of the testimony taken by the Committee:

“La Grange, Mo., July 24, 1881.

“Hon. R. F. Pettigrew, M. C.

“My Dear Sir:

“Your letter of the 17th came duly to hand. You refer to N. G. Ordway, ex-sergeant-at-arms of the house of representatives, and at present governor of Dakota territory, and ask, ‘If he ever answered the damaging evidence taken before your (my) committee to your (my) satisfaction.’ I answer emphatically, No! It was impossible for him to make satisfactory answer. I have no hesitancy in giving it as my opinion, in view of all the evidence developed against him, that he is one of the most *corrupt* and *unprincipled* men that ever *disgraced* and *degraded* the public service of this country. I am convinced that he never sought or held an office with a view

of being satisfied with its honors and its legitimate emoluments, but to *prostrate* it to the worst *jobbery* and *fraud* for money making.

"It would seem simply impossible for N. G. Ordway to hold an official position and not *taint* and *disgrace* it. He belongs to a class of office seekers that infest this country now by thousands, that should be *doomed* to *destruction* by the efforts of all honest men of all parties. I am, sir, very respectfully your obedient servant,

"J. M. GLOVER."

Had the Republicans continued in power, Ordway would have continued to operate in the House. When the Democrats came in, they decided to have one of their own men do his work. Consequently they staged an investigation which cost Ordway his job in the House, but which, far from destroying his public career, left him free to launch new schemes among the men on the frontier.

After our meeting in Washington Ordway went back to Dakota and tried his hand at being governor. He entered into a scheme to move the capitol, and secured the passage through the Legislature of a bill establishing a Capitol Commission to go about and receive bids for the location of the capitol and its removal from Yankton. His purpose, of course, was to locate the capitol somewhere in about the center of the southern half of Dakota. Alexander McKinsey, who lived in Bismarck, in the center of the north half of the Territory, was a person having very many times the ability of Ordway and was far his superior in integrity,—a man of very many powerful parts. He had managed to capture Ordway's Capitol Commission and to locate the capitol at Bismarck, which is now the capitol of North Dakota.

Ordway got nothing out of that scheme, but he was actively organizing new counties all over Dakota

and the air was full of rumors of scandals. Finally, he received \$10,000 in money to appoint a Commissioner in a county where the county-seat location was of considerable importance. This performance was so scandalous and barefaced that he was indicted for bribery and corruption by a Grand Jury of one of the counties, and his case came up before Territorial Judge Edgerton, who had been appointed through the influence of Senator Davis of Minnesota. Edgerton was an honest man—more honest than is the rule among lawyers. I do not believe he could have been persuaded by money to violate his judicial oath or do any act not in strict accordance with the duties of his office.

The Governor was evidently very much alarmed. He employed Senator Davis, of Minnesota, who had been responsible for having Edgerton appointed judge, to defend him. Davis was not a criminal lawyer, but in those days the fee of \$10,000, which Ordway offered Davis, was rather tempting, so Davis went out to Dakota when the case was called, and told the judge that it should be dismissed because the only punishment that could be meted out for crimes committed by a Governor was an impeachment and removal from office. The judge ruled that such was the law and the case against Ordway was dismissed. The episode convinced Ordway that even 160,000 square miles of territory was too small an area for both of us to live on and so he left Dakota and came back to Washington.

However, in 1882 Ordway made the greatest fight of his life to defeat me for the Republican nomination for delegate in Congress. North and South Dakota were already divided as the people of each half had come to believe that when Dakota ceased to be a territory it would be admitted as two separate states into the Union. In this campaign North Dakota put up a candidate, John B. Raymond, who was

the United States Marshal, a young man of excellent principles, who had been appointed by the President and sent out from some eastern state. Raymond carried most of the Counties of North Dakota, and they endorsed him for my position.

In South Dakota Ordway put up George B. Hand, from Yankton, who had been Secretary of the Territory. He was a man of ordinary intelligence, but he always agreed with everybody and was affable and suave. Hand made a poor showing. I carried almost every county in South Dakota and I had an overwhelming majority of the whole territory, but Ordway contested nearly every county that I carried. He did not try to contest the county in which I lived or the adjoining counties east and west of where I lived. He contested Moody County where my brother lived, although there were not over three members of the county convention against me, but those three felt that they had been beaten by fraud. The same practice was pursued in almost all the counties of South Dakota, so that the uncontested delegates from South Dakota, who were controlled by Ordway, united with those which Raymond had from North Dakota and made a majority in the preliminary organization of the Convention. They then selected a committee on credentials, a majority of whose members were my political enemies. That committee proceeded to seat all of the contesting Ordway delegates, knowing that my delegates would immediately form another convention and nominate me. This would have split the Republican party of the Territory into three parts and would have resulted in the selection of a Democrat.

I went to their candidate, John B. Raymond, from North Dakota, and said to him, "You know that Ordway is not a friend of yours, and that if he gets control of this convention he will not nominate you, although you have united with him against me as a

common enemy. Now if you will agree to have the Committee on Credentials seat the delegates who are elected and were fraudulently contested, I will go into the convention and withdraw as a candidate in your favor."

"If I do," Raymond replied, "you will have a majority of the whole convention and can proceed to nominate yourself." "Of course," I said, "you will have to take my word for that."

"Well," said Raymond, "if you will have McKinsey guarantee that you will do as you say—and McKinsey is the most prominent man in Republican politics in North Dakota and is my friend—I will take your promise and McKinsey's guarantee and do as you request."

McKinsey promptly agreed to the arrangement and I then assembled all of my delegates in a room at Grand Forks, a little town in North Dakota where the Convention was held, and told them what I had offered to do.

"In the interests of harmony," I told them, "and for the purpose of rebuking this corrupt carpet-bag Governor, I think it is the wise thing to do."

They were unanimous in accepting my view of the matter.

"All of you who were contested will be seated," I said, "and we will take control of the party machinery, but the success of the scheme depends upon our keeping it to ourselves. Now, there are 140 of you fellows. I don't believe there is a man among you who will tell."

They promised that they would not say anything and that they would carry it out.

The Committee on Credentials submitted their report to the Convention, with a minority report, in favor of seating my delegates. When the vote was taken, the North Dakota delegates voted unanimously in favor of the minority report. County after

county, as the roll was called, voted this way. Ordway himself came into the Convention, in great excitement, and rushed among the delegates, exclaiming, "You are voting wrong; you don't understand what you are doing; you are voting for the wrong report." But he made no impression.

After the vote was announced, I arose in the Convention and said, "In the interests of harmony and to prevent the disrupting of the Republican party in Dakota, I conclude that it is best for me to withdraw from the contest. I therefore do so and I nominate John B. Raymond as delegate to Congress and thus rebuke the miserable, contemptible and fraudulent scheme which had been perpetrated by our carpet-bag Governor, the 'Siox Chief.'"

The plan worked perfectly. Not a single one of the hundred and forty delegates had told what was to be done, and the Ordway crowd had no chance to prepare a counter offensive. Raymond was almost unanimously nominated as territorial delegate to Congress. Of course, a majority of my friends were placed on each of the party committees selected for the Country, and my friends were selected as chairmen in all cases. Ordway had had some measure of revenge. I lost my place in Congress, but gained control of the Party. The episode lost him both standing and popularity.

This story of political intrigue in a sparsely settled mid-western territory is not unique. It could be matched, in every essential detail, out of the political experiences of men in every state of the Union. That is why I tell it—because it is so general in its application. But more important than that, I tell it because it reveals some of the forces that were at work underneath the surface of the machinery of government.

There was ambition, of course, and trickery, and jealousy, and revenge; but beneath and beyond these personal traits there were the economic forces that

d. have played so large a part in shaping the Govern-  
x- ment of the United States. The men who exhibited  
m- the greatest abilities and who displayed the most  
nd faculties were selected and used as the tools and  
ng spokesmen of big business. Bribery and corruption  
were not crimes—unless they became too blatant.  
n- Ordinarily they were businesses in which the capital  
nd was furnished by the “interests” and the work was  
ty performed by officials sworn to uphold and defend  
h- the Constitution of the United States.

n- Later in my political experience I was to learn that  
nd the whole structure of our government, from the  
u- Constitution onward, had been framed by business  
r- men to further business ends; that the laws had been  
passed by the legislatures and interpreted by the  
courts with this end in view; that the execution of the  
laws was placed in the hands of executives known to  
be safe and that these things were more true of the  
national than they were of local and state political  
machinery.