

TRIUMPHANT PLUTOCRACY

The Story of
American Public Life
from 1870 to 1920

By
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Formerly United States Senator
from South Dakota



Printed by THE ACADEMY PRESS
112 Fourth Avenue, New York City

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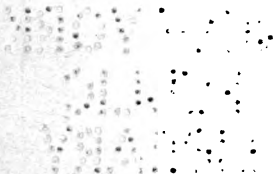
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TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
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Published January 1, 1922.



XVII. CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW

The Union and Central Pacific Railroads, from Omaha to San Francisco, had been constructed by a company organized by Ames, of Boston, and his associates. They had succeeded in getting Congress to give a land grant consisting of the odd numbered sections of land—for a strip ten miles wide on each side of the main track from Omaha to San Francisco. Besides that the Government had appropriated money enough to more than build and equip the entire road. In return for this money the Government was given a second mortgage on the property.

The road never paid any interest to the Government, but allowed it to accumulate. They established freight rates that were confiscatory, as far as the public was concerned. For example, on goods shipped from Omaha to Nevada they charged the rate from Omaha to San Francisco and then added the local rate back, from San Francisco to the point in Nevada. The same was true in Utah, except that in Utah the Mormon Church furnished one of the directors of the road and received favorable rates, so that their entire influence was with the railroad and its system of exploitation.

In 1896, the Government's second mortgage was about to mature, and the people controlling the Central and Union Pacific railroads put them in the hands of a receiver and then appointed a re-organization committee. In the meantime a through line had been created by a combination between the Union and Central Pacific from San Francisco to Omaha, the Northwestern Railroad from Omaha to Chicago, and the New York Central Railroad from Chicago to New York. The reorganization committee was appointed for the purpose of swindling the Government out of its entire claim by foreclosing the first mortgage and by separating the Union Pacific from all its branch lines. This reorganization

committee included Marvin Hughitt; the President of the Northwestern Railroad and Chauncey Depew, President of the New York Central Railroad. It was, I think, in connection with my efforts to head off this robbery that Chauncey Depew's name first appears in the Congressional Record.

So complete was my exposure of the rascality that the promoters were unable to carry through their scheme. My stand naturally aroused the hostility of the New York Central and the Northwestern Railroad interests.

Nor were these my only offenses against the sacred railroad privileges. I have already related the essential facts concerning my fight on the railway mail pay, during which I showed that the Government paid the railroads for carrying the mail ten times as much per pound as the express companies paid the railroads for carrying express on the same train, in the same car, under almost exactly identical conditions, and that the New York Central Railroad in particular received from the Government, for carrying the mail between New York and Buffalo, a sum sufficient to pay the interest at six per cent upon the total cost of building and equipping a double-tracked railroad from New York to Buffalo. Finally I moved to reduce the railroad mail pay by 20 per cent, and introduced a bill providing for government ownership of the railroads and the fixing of passenger rates at one cent a mile, which I proved would be possible if all passes and other forms of free transportation were eliminated.

It was to guard against such dangerous tendencies that the New York Central Railroad sent Chauncey M. Depew to the Senate in 1898. Depew was not sent to represent the State of New York, or the people of the United States, but to protect and foster the interests of the railroads in general and of the New York Central in particular.

Depew had been in the Senate a little less than sixty days when he found occasion to attack me. I reproduce his entire speech of February 7th, 1900:

Mr. DEPEW: "Mr. President, on the 31st of January, the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. Pettigrew), in the course of his speech on the Philippine question, made the following remarks in reference to the president of the Philippine Commission, President Schurman, of Cornell University. He said:

" 'Mr. Schurman, in his Chicago interview (and this is the only authority I will read which is not vouched for by official documents) August 20th, 1899, said:

" ' "General Aguinaldo is believed on the island to be honest, and I think that he is acting honestly in money matters, but whether from moral or political reasons I would not say." (Oriental American, Page 99.)

" "The fact of the matter is that he tried to bribe the insurgents, as near as we can ascertain, and failed; they would not take gold for peace.'

"The speech of the Senator from South Dakota was brought to the attention of the president of Cornell, and I have from him the following letter, which I will read. I do it for the purpose of having the Record corrected by his statement:

" 'Cornell University, Office
of the President,

Ithaca, N. Y., February 3, 1910.

" 'Dear Senator Depew: I see, from page 1362 of the Congressional Record, that Senator Pettigrew, speaking of myself, says:

" ' "The fact of the matter is that he tried to bribe the insurgents, as near as we can ascertain, and failed; but they would not take gold for peace."

“ ‘Had this preposterous statement’ been made anywhere else I should not have paid any attention to it; but as it has been made in the Senate of the United States, I desire to say to you that it is absolutely without foundation.

“ ‘Very truly yours,

“ ‘J. G. SCHURMAN.

“ ‘Hon. Chauncey M. Depew,
United States Senate,
Washington, D. C.’

“Now, Mr. President, at the time this speech was being made, President Schurman was in this city upon business connected with his report and the report of his commission on the Philippine matter. He was at that very hour in conference with the President at the White House, and therefore competent to be summoned.

“It seems to me that the alleged facts which have been brought forward by my friend, the Senator from South Dakota, in order to substantiate his contention that the President of the United States is a tyrant and that Aguinaldo is a patriot fail in the important consideration that his alleged facts never turn out to be true.

“He has summoned the two witnesses who were more competent than any others to testify on the question of the original understanding had with Aguinaldo and of the position of the Philippine people, one Admiral Dewey and the other President Schurman, the president of the Philippine Commission.

“Any evidence, any statement, in regard to this matter made by Admiral Dewey would be received at once by the people of the United States without further question and the same can be said of any

statement made by the president of Cornell University.

“But instead of presenting his evidence by calling the witnesses themselves, he calls others for the purpose of proving what they have said.

“With Admiral Dewey here in the city, his house well known, himself the most accessible of men, he reads, as proving what Admiral Dewey has said and what his position is, an alleged proclamation of Aguinaldo, translated by an unknown translator and published without any certificate of its authenticity in a New England newspaper; and instead of ascertaining, when President Schurman is in the city, what his views really are and what he really did say and what he really did do, he reads a report of an anonymous and unknown reporter in a Chicago newspaper. Admiral Dewey at once branded the statement affecting him as absolutely and unqualifiedly false, and now President Schurman repudiates the testimony attributed to him.

“I submit, Mr. President, that having, amid the mass of newspaper reports, of anonymous remarks, of testimony of no consideration and no value, subpoenaed the two greatest and most prominent witnesses in the country, he has done it in a way which discredits all the alleged facts which are presented on his side or the contention which Senator Pettigrew and his friends endeavor to make in behalf of Aguinaldo and in discredit of the President and of the Philippine policy of the administration.

“These facts, or alleged facts, cited by the Senator from South Dakota, are like the army of Aguinaldo. Whenever the United States troops appear, there is no army of Aguinaldo. And whenever the truth is let in, as Admiral Dewey and President Schurman let it in, these alleged facts vanish in thin air. The basis of their whole contention has no better foundation than the seat of the Aguinaldo gov-

ernment, which, as far as I can ascertain, is nowhere except in the hat of Aguinaldo."

To this I replied at once and showed by the Record that Mr. Schurman, president of Cornell University, who was the head of the commission that went to the Philippines, sent by the Government to try and pacify the islands, had offered Aguinaldo a Government position with a salary of \$5,000 per year if he would cease hostilities. I showed also that the commission had offered to pay a large bounty to any of the Filipinos who would come in and surrender their guns. Furthermore, I showed that Aguinaldo had never talked anything else but absolute independence and that he had talked with Dewey time and again on the point. Finally I charged the following facts as proved by the official records in regard to our conduct of affairs in the Philippine Islands:

I charged the suppression of information, the censorship of the press and tampering with the mails;

I charged that the press was censored, not because there was fear that the enemy would secure important information, but to keep the facts from the American people, and I proved it;

I charged that the President began the war on the Filipinos, and I proved it by Otis' report;

I charged that Aguinaldo, after hostilities had been inaugurated, asked for a truce, with the purpose of endeavoring to settle differences without further bloodshed, and that the administration answered: "War, having commenced, must go on to the grim end;"

I charged that Otis changed the President's proclamation to the Filipinos with the purpose of deceiving those people and concealing our real intention of remaining in the islands;

I charged that the Filipinos were our allies; that we armed them, fought with them, recognized their flag and surrendered Spanish prisoners to them; that despite these facts Dewey finally captured Aguinaldo's ships of war in September or October, 1898; that Otis,

on September 8, 1898, threatened to attack the Filipinos, and that we finally did begin the fighting;

I charged that we made a covenant with the Sultan of Sulu, by which the President agreed to sustain slavery and polygamy and pay the Sultan over \$700 a month for running Old Glory up over his slave mart every morning and taking it down every night;

Finally, I pointed out that we could not have a republic and an empire under the same flag—that one or the other must go down; that the attempt to govern any people without their consent was a violation of our theory of Government and of the Declaration of Independence; that all governments derived their just powers from the consent of the governed; that satisfying greed of empire by conquest had caused the downfall of every republic and every empire in the past.

To all of this the junior Senator from New York announced, with his incomparable after-dinner, spirited and effervescent logic, that these allegations were all answered and disposed of, because Dewey said that Aguinaldo's statement in relation to him was a tissue of falsehoods and Schurman declared that he did not offer Aguinaldo gold for peace.

That was our first contest. After that, from time to time, as long as I remained in the Senate, Depew went out of his way to attack me. He took the death of Mark Hanna (1904) as a favorable occasion. In the course of a funeral oration, delivered over the remains of Hanna, who had been the factotum of the Republican party and the principal partner of Aldrich as the representative of the corrupt financial interests in the Senate, Depew made the following statement:

“Quite as suddenly as he grew to be supreme in political management Senator Hanna became an orator. He had been accustomed in the boards of directors of many corporations, where the conferences were more in the

nature of consultations than arguments, to influence his associates by the lucidity with which from a full mind he could explain situations and suggest policies or remedies. He did not dare, however, except on rare occasions, to trust himself upon his feet. We, his associates, can never forget the day when a mighty passion loosed his tongue and introduced into the debate of this body an original and powerful speaker. It was June, 1900. The presidential campaign for the second nomination and canvass of President McKinley was about to open. Senator Pettigrew, an active and persistent laborer in the ranks of the opposition, was seeking material in every direction which would benefit his side. Without notice he suddenly assailed Senator Hanna in his tenderest point. He attacked his honesty, truthfulness and general character. He accused him of bribery, perjury, and false dealing. Hanna's reply was not a speech but an explosion. It was a gigantic effort, in his almost uncontrollable rage, to keep expression within the limits of senatorial propriety. He shouted in passionate protest:

"Mr. President, the gentleman will find that he is mistaken in the people of the United States when he attempts, through mud-slinging and accusations, to influence their decision when they are called upon at the polls next November to decide upon the principles that are at issue and not the men. When it comes to personality, I will stand up against him and compare my character to his. I will let him tell what he knows; then I will tell what I know about him."

"The new-born orator carried his threat into execution by a dramatic and picturesque speaking tour through South Dakota, in

which, without mentioning Mr. Pettigrew or referring to him in any way, he took away his constituents by convincing them that the doctrines of their Senator were inimical to their interests and prosperity. The titanic power the Dakota Senator had evoked was his political ruin."

I have given my version of this story in some detail in another chapter (Chapter 21, "A Lost Election"); I need merely say at this point that Mark Hanna's "Explosion" was produced by my calling the attention of the Senate to a report submitted by the Ohio legislature to the Senate Committee on Elections in which careful and detailed data was produced showing that Mark Hanna had been directly implicated in buying his way into the United States Senate.

I read from the majority report of the Committee of the Ohio State Senate, which showed that Mark Hanna purchased the vote of a member of the Ohio legislature for the sum of \$20,000; \$10,000 to be paid down and \$10,000 after he had voted. The testimony disclosed that Mark Hanna had personal knowledge of this purchase and was a party to it and sent the money from Columbus, where the legislature was in session, to Cincinnati to be paid to the purchased member of the Ohio legislature. The testimony also showed that Mark Hanna was negotiating for the purchase of two or three other members of the legislature and through this system of bribery and corruption he succeeded in getting his seat in the Senate of the United States.

I then read the minority report of the Committee on Elections in the Senate which went into the subject fully and disclosed the facts. The Republican members of the Committee on Elections in the Senate—and they were in the majority—simply alluded to the testimony laid before them by the Ohio State Senate and refused to investigate, and gave as a reason that the Ohio State Senate had not sent a man

down there to prosecute the case. In other words, Mark Hanna was such a factotum in the Republican party in all its councils that it did not disturb the Republicans at all, as so many of them were used to using money to secure their election. Besides, Mark Hanna at that time was Chairman of the Republican National Committee.

Depew says:

“Mark Hanna’s reply was not a speech, but an explosion. It was a gigantic effort, in his almost uncontrollable rage, to keep expression within the limits of Senatorial propriety. He shouted in passionate protest:

“‘Mr. President, the gentleman will find that he is mistaken in the people of the United States when he attempts, through mud-slinging and accusations, to influence their decision when they are called upon at the polls next November to decide upon the principles that are at issue and not the men. When it comes to personality, I will stand up against him and compare my character to his. I will let him tell what he knows; then I will tell what I know about him.’”

And this is Chauncey Depew’s idea of oratory. In other words, the Bowery response, “You’re another!” Hanna admitted that he was all that I said he was, but that he could show I was a little worse, which convinced me that Chauncey Depew was a phrase-maker of but little intellect, to balance considerable avoirdupois.

For Depew’s part in this whole transaction his name ought to go down in history and he should put a halo on his own statue which he has already erected and presented to his native town in New York. I should suppose it would be appropriate to have a

dove come down from Heaven and perch upon his shoulder and say: "I am from the boodle crowd in New York who run the Government of the United States, and this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."