

rule, to retain that consciousness of a disinterested administration of public trust, which is essential to perfect tranquillity of mind.

On this question, as on other questions relating to official conduct, Jefferson was eminently sound.

THE MEANING OF BIMETALLISM.

A reader of THE COMMONER asks for a definition of bimetallism, and specifically inquires whether the Kansas City platform demands that the government shall maintain the parity between gold and silver.

Bimetallism is the name given to the monetary system under which gold and silver are used as full legal tender money at a fixed ratio, and admitted to unlimited coinage. The Kansas City platform declared in favor of the free coinage of silver as well as its unlimited coinage, the reason being that free coinage is now accorded to gold and was formerly accorded to both metals. Under the bimetallic system the two metals are treated exactly alike. A charge sufficient to cover the cost of coinage would, however, be entirely consistent with the bimetallic system. Mr. Carlisle favored such a change in 1878, when he denounced the gold standard, but such a charge would create a difference between the coin and the bullion value of the coin. If, for instance, the government charged one cent for converting bullion into coin, the coin would necessarily lose one cent by melting and the bullion value would, therefore, remain one cent below the coinage value.

Bimetallism does not depend upon any particular ratio. We first had bimetallism in this country at the ratio of 15 to 1, and afterwards at the ratio of 16 to 1. Other nations have had bimetallism at different ratios, as, for instance, France, at the ratio of 15 1-2 to 1. The ratio of 16 to 1 was specifically named in the Chicago platform and afterwards in the Kansas City platform, first, because that was the legal ratio existing between the metals when demonetization took place; second, because it is the ratio at which the standard silver dollars and gold coin now circulate; third, because the advocates of bimetallism believe that the opening of the mints at that ratio would create a demand for silver

which would make an ounce of silver, whether melted or coined, worth \$1.29 in gold the world over; and, fourth, because, if a new ration were desired, it would be impossible to select it intelligently without first opening the mints at the present ratio in order to measure the effect that free coinage would have upon the price of silver bullion. When the Sherman law of 1890 was enacted it was thought that it would utilize all the silver available for coinage, and under the stimulus of this law-created demand silver rose to \$1.21 an ounce, not only here, but all over the world.

It was necessary to name a specific ratio because advocates of the gold standard had for several years been securing office on indefinite or ambiguous platforms, and then, when in office, had been betraying their constituents. It became necessary to make the platform specific in order to protect the voters from fraud and deception. That necessity is still present; a general demand for bimetallism would amount to an abandonment of bimetallism because gold democrats would secure nominations on such a platform, and then, if elected, would, as they have in the past, act with the republicans to maintain the gold standard.

As to the second question, namely, whether concurrent circulation of the two metals is essential to a bimetallic system? To answer this in the negative without further explanation might lead to misunderstanding. The concurrent circulation of the two metals, while desirable, is not absolutely necessary to the maintenance of the bimetallic system, but the bimetalists believe that the parity would be maintained in this country at the ratio of 16 to 1. We had bimetallism from 1792 to 1834, during nearly all of which time gold was at a premium because our mint ratio, compared with the mint ratio of France and some other countries, undervalued gold. When in 1834 the ratio was changed from 15 to 1 to 16 to 1, silver was then undervalued, as compared with the ratio of France and some other countries, and, therefore, silver went to a premium and remained at a premium until it was demonetized. During both these periods we had bimetallism, and it was possible to coin gold or silver without limit as to amount into full legal tender money at a fixed ratio of 16 to 1, and this belief is founded upon two arguments: first, that the monetary use of silver would absorb all the silver available for coinage at our mints, thus raising the bullion price of silver to \$1.29 an ounce; and, second, that no gold nation is now coining gold and silver

at a ratio more favorable to gold than ours. If any large nation opened its mints to the free and unlimited coinage of gold and silver at 15 1-2 to 1, it would get some of our silver and silver would go to a premium. If, on the other hand, any large nation opened its mints to the free and unlimited coinage of both metals at the rate of 16 1-2 to 1, or some higher ratio, it would be apt to get some of our gold, and gold would go to a premium. But, under existing or probable conditions, there would be no difficulty in maintaining the parity at the ratio of 16 to 1. If there was any force in the argument made for thirty years that the parity was more difficult to maintain because the production of silver was increasing more rapidly than the production of gold, the parity ought to be more easily maintained now, since the production of gold is increasing more rapidly than the production of silver.

Two ways of maintaining the parity have been suggested. One is to put silver upon an equal footing with gold, make it a legal tender equal with gold, and enable it to do all that gold can do—this is the bimetallic plan. The other plan is to make the silver dollar redeemable in gold, but this plan converts silver into a credit money and greatly impairs its usefulness. It really makes gold the standard and silver subsidiary to it. When one metal goes to a premium it does not all leave the country. It circulates at its premium value and still contributes to the volume of money just as silver did from 1834 to 1861 and just as both gold and silver did from 1861 to 1879. If under bimetallism one metal goes to a premium the people can do whichever they prefer, viz., they can either change the ratio or bear with the inconvenience of the premium.

Some bimetallists whose devotion to the cause cannot be doubted have expressed themselves in favor of a change in the ratio, provided it is shown by experience that the parity cannot be maintained at the ratio of 16 to 1. Others have refused to discuss this proposition; first, because a discussion of other ratios might be construed (not fairly, but unfairly) as an admission that the parity could not be maintained at 16 to 1; and, second, because the power to legislate remains with the people, and they are always at liberty to make any changes which to them may seem best. Under our form of government no unchangeable system can be established. If the people try the gold standard and do not like it, they can change it; if they try the double standard and do not like it, they

can change it; if they try one ratio and do not like it, they can try another.

In answer to those who express the fear that the parity cannot be maintained, but give no reason for their skepticism, the advocates of bimetallism express the belief that it can be maintained and give their reasons for it. Neither side can prove its position by a mathematical demonstration, but experience and argument support the bimetallists.

QUESTIONS FOR DEBATE.

THE COMMONER in a recent issue suggested the propriety of organizing debating societies throughout the country for the discussion of public questions. Since the editorial appeared a number of letters have been received asking for information and inquiring about questions for debate. Such a club is not difficult to organize. All that is necessary is a brief constitution containing one article giving the name of the club, another stating the purpose and terms of membership, and a third naming the officers and describing their duties. The by-laws should fix the hour and place of meeting and dues, if dues are necessary.

In country precincts meetings can be held at the school house or at private houses. Often literary clubs meet at the houses of the members, each one taking his turn, but sometimes when one house is commodious and centrally located it is used as the regular meeting place. Where the club meets at a private house it is well for the by-laws to provide that no refreshments shall be served, because all members may not be in a position to serve refreshments, and as no one cares to do less than his neighbor, some embarrassment might be caused if refreshments were served at one place and not another.

As to questions for debate, the following are submitted by way of suggestion:

I. Resolved, That the United States should permanently hold the Philippine Islands under a colonial form of government.

II. Resolved, That the United States should permanently hold the Philippine Islands as an integral part of this country, extending to the inhabitants the protection of our constitution and giving them the promise of ultimate citizenship and full participation in elections, national and local.