

The Public

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EDITORIAL

Mr. Taft's "Confession and Avoidance."

President Taft's plea regarding his solemnly judicial condemnation of Mr. Glavis in his sweeping acquittal of Secretary Ballinger last September (vol. xii, pp. 920, 921, 985), can be valued best by considering what its probable effect upon public sentiment would have been if he had disclosed its facts at the time he decided the Glavis-Ballinger controversy. Suppose the President had stated then that Mr. Lawler—Secretary Ballinger's subordinate and his partisan in the controversy—had drafted the President's opinion in deciding the controversy, and that the President had adopted this draft as his own with such alterations as he now says he made in it, what effect would that explanation have had at that time? Wouldn't it have discredited the President's decision from the start?



A similar test applies to the President's admission that Attorney General Wickersham's opinion in the same controversy was written and filed after the President's decision, and was antedated so as to make it appear upon its face to have been written before and filed with the decision. Suppose this admission, stated precisely as the President states it now, had been endorsed upon the Attorney General's opinion and published with that opinion when it was first published. What would have been the effect upon public sentiment?

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Wouldn't the good faith of the Attorney General's opinion have been at once discredited?

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In connection with the inferences suggested above it should be borne in mind that the President delayed making his admissions until the facts had been otherwise disclosed. It should also be remembered that when at last he did make them, it was *because* they had been otherwise disclosed. This motive of his is not an inference; it is part of his admission. "References to the matter have crept into the record," he writes, in his extraordinary letter of the 15th to the Congressional investigating committee whose Standpat majority had long before decided not to call for the documents to which his belated admissions relate; and then he proceeds: "*For this reason*"—because references to the matter *had* crept into the record—"I deem it proper to write you and state with such accuracy as my memory permits what the facts are."

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Until references to the matter did creep into the record of the investigating committee, President Taft's friends—the accused Secretary, the accommodating Attorney General, and the Standpat majority of the investigating committee—had done their best to make a state secret of what President Taft now admits; and during all this time President Taft, like Bre'r Rabbit, "he ain't sayin' nothin'." But because references did creep in—"for this reason," as he expresses it—Mr. Taft has come into the open with what lawyers might call his "plea of confession and avoidance."

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It all goes to further confirm Senator Dolliver's characterization of President Taft as "a good man surrounded by persons who know exactly what they want."

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Gov. Folk's Democracy.

Gov. Folk's public declarations regarding democracy continue to ring true. He was interviewed a few days ago on the possibility of his being the Democratic candidate for President in 1912, and here is his answer as we find it in the Chicago Tribune of May 1:

It is gratifying if any of my friends think me worthy to be mentioned in connection with the Presidency of the United States. Beyond this, however, the matter has given me no serious concern. I am more interested in the success of real democratic principles than I am in my own advancement. Of course any political fakir might say that; but listen now to Folk's reply when asked what he

meant by real democratic principles. He is reported in the same interview to have said:

There is now in progress a fight over the question whether the interests or the people shall rule this nation. This question must be fought out first within the parties and later between parties. Those who see the general dissatisfaction with the party in power should not take it for granted that this necessarily will inure to the benefit of the Democratic party. Real democracy is growing everywhere. Whether the present Democratic party will ride on the crest of the wave or be buried beneath it, depends upon whether the Democratic party will be really democratic. It cannot be democratic by representing a class or by truckling to special interests. Privilege cannot, by capturing the name of the party and hiding behind it, deceive the people. The Democratic party never had a greater opportunity for service than now. This opportunity will be lost if the party merely occupies a position of negation without announcing affirmative and progressive principles.

Such declarations do not come from political fakirs. Nor do they sound platitudinous. To utter them, a man must believe in them. And then listen to this in the same interview in answer to a question as to what he thought of property rights:

No property rights should be inconsistent with public rights, and the former can be best safeguarded by preserving inviolate the latter.

Mr. Folk may not be the Democratic candidate. He certainly will not be if plutocratic Democrats control the convention, as some of the news from Ohio implies that they are trying to do. But declarations such as we quote above, place him high up in the list of eligible candidates for that rapidly growing democracy of both parties which demands a genuine democrat regardless of the party label he may hitherto have worn.

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The Oregon Government.

A high tribute to the Oregon system of popular government was paid by Senator Bourne in the Senate recently. He said that—Oregon has the best system of popular government in the world. The Australian ballot insures secrecy, prevents intimidation and eliminates bribery. The registration law protects the right to participate in government. The initiative develops the electorate and the referendum restrains the legislature. Brains, ideas and argument rather than money, intimidation and log-rolling are the standards of legislation. Senator Bourne said more that was reported in the dispatches, and still more that was not. But here is enough to justify a question for Oregon voters. Will they permit the interests to lead them up against such a government to overthrow it? Intentionally it is not likely, but unless they are very careful about that proposed Constitutional