

MR. CLEVELAND'S LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE.

THE Republican newspapers have been long anxious to see Mr. Cleveland's letter accepting his renomination, and have latterly been inclined to chide him for delay in writing it. They now have it in full, and there yet remain two months in which to analyze it. We venture to predict that they will not like it. We suspect that they could have endured a still greater delay in the production of it. No campaign document of the year will make so strong an impression, for although the arguments presented do not differ in any marked way from those of other debaters on the same side, they are stated in a very felicitous manner for reaching the ear of the common people, and the rostrum from which they are delivered is, of course, the most commanding of all. Mr. Cleveland's statement of the issue presented by the free-whiskey clause of the Republican platform is perfectly fair, and his comment upon it appeals powerfully to the common sense of the people.

"The implication," he says, "contained in this party declaration, that desperate measures are justified or necessary to save from destruction or surrender what is termed our protective system, should confuse no one. The existence of such a system is *entirely consistent with the regulation of the extent to which it should be applied* and the correction of its abuses. Of course, in a country as great as ours, with such a wonderful variety of interests, often leading in entirely different directions, it is difficult if not impossible to settle upon a perfect tariff plan. But in accomplishing the reform we have entered upon, the necessity of which is so obvious, I believe we should not be content with a reduction of revenue involving the prohibition of importations and the removal of the internal tax upon whiskey."

Here is the issue of the campaign in a nutshell. We have a protective system. No party, nobody, considers it perfect. The Republican party in 1884 promised to revise it and correct its inequalities. But after neglecting this duty for years, and after preventing anybody else from doing it, the party has taken the ground that the existing tariff is a sacred thing, and that its protective features cannot be amended at all except in the way of increasing the taxes. The duties on particular articles may vary all the way from 10 to 100 per cent., but these inequalities can only be corrected by lifting the lower ones to the level of the higher—never by reducing the higher in any degree whatever. Rather than reduce any such tax, let tobacco and whiskey be made free.

This position is so absurd, so utterly nonsensical, that it needs only the touch which the President gives it to show us what it really is. It is like one of those ancient mummies that have the semblance of the human form till somebody breaks the crust and lets in the air, when the whole thing collapses and turns to dust. The President says that the existence of the protective system is entirely consistent with steps for its adjustment to the present exigency of a surplus revenue. "Nothing of the kind," says the Chicago platform. "The existence of a protective system is con-

sistent only with increased rates of duty and a repeal of the whiskey tax."

There are some situations in politics which upset the gravity of impartial witnesses, and this is one of them. It is impossible to add anything to its comic features. It is possible only to point out the incongruity of things in a few plain words, and leave the rest to the common sense of plain people. This is what the President has done in his letter of acceptance. More than this it would have been useless to attempt. "It is a condition and not a theory that confronts us," he said in his message to Congress. How the Republican party would meet this condition is stated in the Chicago platform. "We would meet it," say the Republicans, "when it becomes flagrant and unbearable, by adding to the taxes on the necessities of life when imported from abroad, and by repealing those on intoxicating drinks when produced in our own distilleries." There is the cap-sheaf of your protective system. There is its crown of glory. Mr. Cleveland holds up this crown of glory as a spectacle for mankind, and says that he is content to abide by the judgment of the American people upon the principles of his message, as contrasted with those of the advocates of dearer food and clothing and cheaper drinks.

TARIFF REFORM A MORAL ISSUE.

WITH one or two exceptions, the religious newspapers are pretty consistently refraining from taking any part in the canvass. This is due, they tell us, not to the disastrous nature of their fooling with political questions four years ago, but to their clear conviction that there is no moral issue involved in the coming election. In 1884, they say, there was such an issue—the personal character of the candidates. Then they felt called upon to speak out. But now that it is a mere question of economic policy, a choice between opposing theories of the tariff, they think there is no reason for their impairing their religious influence by assuming a partisan position.

Far be it from us to quarrel with this conclusion. There are the best of reasons why the religious press, as such, should abstain from partisan activity. But we cannot at all admit that the reason offered is one of them. It is an altogether antiquated and inadequate conception of morality that is unable to see that the pending issue of tariff reform is, in large part, a moral issue. To deny that it is, smacks of what may be called the lurid school of moralists—we mean the men who feel an appeal to their moral instincts only when it is a clear case of heaven against hell. For them to be able to recognize right and wrong on the two sides of a battle, it must be an Armageddon. Right must be enveloped in a heavenly halo, or they do not know it, and wrong must be wrapped in sulphurous gloom, or they will not be sure of it. This is very largely, we suppose, the attitude of the Prohibitionists. They are men who, so to speak, pine for a moral issue—and they want it to be one that they can see a mile away. Since

the Republican party has ceased to stir their enthusiasm, as it did in the days when it stood for human liberty, they have been casting about for a new cause to awaken their passionate devotion, and they have apparently found it. They regard it as the height of absurdity to talk about a question of custom-house regulations, as they call it, being a question largely moral.

Yet tariff reform is a moral issue of a most positive and commanding sort. We may even say that it is so on whichever side of the question a man takes his position—provided he takes it honestly; for every honest and intelligent voter, next November, will believe that he is voting for national prosperity. But national prosperity means national improvement in morals. No teaching of scientific ethics is more clear than just this intimate connection between the physical condition and the moral state. Thus it has been shown, for example, that suicide varies with the food supply. The introduction of gas in the streets of London was followed by an immediate decrease in public crime. We have to distinguish here between morals and religiosity. In times of national distress the churches are more resorted to, it is true, than in periods of prosperity. From this fact it has been inferred that a commercial panic, like that of 1857, is a great quickener of morality because it is of church attendance. But this is to overlook the immense increase of crime, which is always the other pole of the social movement originated by public calamity, and also to be blind to the true influence of a series of prosperous years in raising the standard of comfort and of intelligence, in ameliorating manners and putting a premium upon good habits. The surest way of hitting the moral is to aim at the physical, and the citizen who is really persuaded that the prosperity of the country is to hinge, very largely, upon the result of the voting two months from now, may be certain that the morals of the people will be affected in the most important ways.

In fact, if we admit that the reasoning of the advocates of tariff reform is sound, we cannot well deny that they have ground for entering into the contest with the loftiest moral enthusiasm. It is conducive to morality to have public measures rightly named and clearly understood by the people. A part of the work of tariff-reformers, in the present campaign, consists in exposing hypocrisy and deception. They are helping to fix the label "favoritism," "class legislation," "bounty system," on the thing that has falsely been called "protection." They stand for economy in national administration, and economy is a public virtue and a source of private morality. They are striving to restore our true political ideal of equality before the law, instead of the present system of legislation for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many. They are working to prevent, in the most direct way possible, the creation of permanent class distinctions in this country, and of persistent social antagonisms. They labor for simpler and directer political

methods, for the better distribution of wealth, for a more steadily expansive business success, and for a more constant employment and contentment of laboring men. And it is no wonder that they feel all their moral earnestness enlisted in the struggle to secure such worthy ends, since they are well assured that that way lies a higher degree of social well-being and a better public morality.

If proof were still wanting that this "grovelling dispute over taxes," as it has been called by a moralist of the lurid school, has in it the power to stir the moral nature, it might be seen in the more striking party changes which it is causing. Every election brings desertions from one side or the other. There are always the mercenaries who jump the way they think the cat is going to, and the men who "vote for Kane." There are plenty of them in this campaign, no doubt. But the remarkable thing about it is the great number of unselfish and thoughtful men between whom and their party this tariff question has thrust a sharp sword. To break up old party associations and attachments is no easy thing for such men. It means a violent wrench for them. It means reproach and, often, obloquy. They dread these things, and they brave them only under the imperative command laid upon them by conscience.

ONE-CENT LETTER POSTAGE.

ONE of the measures to which the Republican party stands committed by its platform is the reduction of letter postage to one cent an ounce. The proposal is an attractive one, but, considering its origin, it should be scrutinized with care. The dominant element in that party is determined above all things to maintain the tariff. To this end it is willing to remit the tax on whiskey, and to this end it is willing to favor any expenditure of money that is likely to prove unremunerative. At present it is necessary to raise by taxation a sum estimated at \$4,000,000 a year, and really considerably more, in order to meet the deficit in the revenues of the Post-office. It is obvious that if this deficit can be increased by a reduction of postage, the tariff will be so much more secure. Such a result would be entirely consistent with a policy that aims to deceive the people as to the real cost of their government. It would be merely offering as a gratuity what must be paid for by increased taxation—a process always economically wasteful and generally politically corrupting.

The New York *Tribune* has recently undertaken to defend this measure upon two grounds. It declares that cheap postage means the rapid diffusion of intelligence; and that as the Republican party is the party of intelligence, it naturally favors cheap postage, while the Democratic party, as the party of ignorance, opposes it. This argument, however grateful to the intelligence of the readers of the *Tribune*, can hardly be regarded as conclusive. The question involved is, whether those who use the post shall pay for the service what it costs and when they get it, or whether they shall get it for less than it

costs, and let the deficiency fall on the revenue raised by taxation. To allow a man to send a letter for one cent when it costs more, and then to tax him to make up the loss, is properly not to cheapen postage, but to make it more expensive by the amount lost in collecting the tax.

Under our present system of tariff taxation, the burden of a deficiency in postal revenue falls heaviest upon those who write the fewest letters. Letters are written chiefly by business men and by persons of wealth and leisure. The mass of the common people are not great letter-writers. Their simple affairs do not require much correspondence, and their incessant toil does not admit of it. For the Government to carry letters at less than cost is to make the poor pay for a convenience used especially by the well-to-do. It is true that such a convenience indirectly benefits all classes, but the same is true of every appliance that encourages intercourse. Railroads lead to the rapid diffusion of intelligence and of wealth, but that is no reason why those who travel should not pay their fares, or why those who send freight should send it for nothing.

The other argument by which the *Tribune* supports this measure is, that the deficiency that it will create will be temporary. If this were true, it would settle the question, for all that is demanded by justice is that the Postal Department shall be self-supporting. A large profit is obtained from this source, it is true, by Great Britain, but this profit is obviously a tax, and such a tax would be so unpopular in this country that it is idle to consider its merits. If letters can be carried for one cent an ounce without loss, the country will unquestionably demand that they shall be carried at that rate, and the demand will be complied with under those circumstances at least as readily by the Democratic as by the Republican party.

The argument, however, is not valid. It proceeds upon the assumption that since a reduction in the rate of postage has usually been followed by such an increase of business as to make up the loss of revenue, therefore the reduction of letter postage to one cent an ounce will be followed by this result. But it is easy to see the fallacy of this. Up to a certain point, in almost any industry, a larger business can be done at relatively less expense, and therefore at a lower rate. Beyond that point the ratio of expense to business is comparatively steady. If the rate is fixed too low, the more business increases the greater the loss in doing it. These truths are so elementary that it would hardly be worth while to state them were it not for a popular impression that there is something peculiar about the postal business, and that somehow it is impossible for its rates to be fixed so low that they will not pay its expenses. The reduction of rates has been so enormous as to furnish considerable support to this belief, but its absurdity can be shown by reference to a single fact. The rate of postage for newspapers and periodicals is now so low that they are carried at a loss, and this loss increases with the increase of this class of matter. According to the estimate of the Postmaster-General, it

now constitutes nearly one-third of the weight of the mails, while it brings in about one-fortieth of the revenue. If the other two-thirds paid the same rate of postage, the revenue of the Post-office would be about \$4,000,000 instead of \$46,000,000. Although the reports of the postal service do not furnish much information on the subject, it is yet possible to prove from them that a reduction of letter postage to one cent an ounce would probably bring it below the point where an increase of business brings an increase of profit. The revenue of the office is derived almost exclusively from stamps, and amounts to some \$45,700,000 from this source. The amount derived from second-class matter is positively known to be \$1,364,000. The amount derived from fourth-class matter cannot be definitely fixed, but we may adopt the official conjecture that it is \$2,000,000. As to third-class matter, it is impossible to be accurate, but, from a variety of circumstances, it is probable that \$5,000,000 would be an exaggerated estimate of its amount. Postal cards produce \$3,570,000. Putting the total, of these items at \$12,000,000, we have remaining about \$33,700,000 as the revenue derived from first-class matter.

The expenditure of the office is about \$52,000,000 yearly, and of this we may say roughly that \$25,000,000 is on account of transportation and other expenses that vary directly with the amount of business, and the rest is on account of salaries and wages. If, now, the rate of postage were reduced as proposed, and in consequence the amount of first-class matter doubled, the revenue would stand at the same figure as at present, \$46,000,000. Estimating the first-class matter as constituting one-half of the present weight of the mail, the transportation account would then be \$37,500,000. If the salary account remained the same, the total expenditure would be \$64,500,000, a deficit of nearly \$19,000,000. If the amount of first-class matter quadrupled, the revenue would rise to about \$80,000,000, the transportation account to over \$62,000,000, and, even on the extravagant supposition that the salary account was not increased, the deficit would be about \$10,000,000. Reasoning from the past rate of increase of the salary account, the deficit would be far larger, and would increase with the increase of business.

While these estimates are largely conjectural, they may be depended upon sufficiently to justify the conclusion that one-cent letter postage, at the present cost of transportation, and with the present rate of postage on second-class matter, would be an expensive luxury. The *Tribune* suggests that Republican orators would do well to remind their hearers that a Republican Congress would mean one-cent postage. We trust that the suggestion will be acted on, feeling sufficient confidence in the intelligence of their hearers to believe that they will reflect that one-cent postage will have to be paid for in taxes, that these taxes come principally out of the earnings of poor people, and that well-to-do people will get the principal benefit of the change.