SECTION OF

THE HICKORY DEMOCRAT

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OSCAR W. UNDERWOOD FOR PRESIDENT

MATCHLESS LEADER OF A UNITED DEMOCRACY—WORTHY OF A UNITED SUPPORT

THE PROGRESS OF A SANE YOUNG MAN

By Samuel G. Blythe.

(*Saturday Evening Post*, December 30, 1911.)

It was hot in Washington on Wednesday, the second of August last—so hot you could fry an egg on the pavement at Ninth and F if so be your taste ran to fried egg *à la* asphalt; and it was even hotter than on that torrid corner in the glass-ceilinged chamber of the House of Representatives.

Only a few wilted statesmen were present at noon, and the chaplain languidly besought that they should be purified from all guile and let it go at that. It may have been there was a feeling that some of those statesmen—reposing coatless and within the zones of influence of the electric fans in the various committee rooms—should have their guile removed too; for no sooner had the chaplain concluded his thirty seconds of prayer than the absence of a quorum was suggested. The heated statesmen came pouring in from all sorts of places, shoving themselves sulkily into their coats, and answered to their names as the roll was called. Two hundred and thirty-three of them responded, each asking his neighbor: "What's up?"

It wasn't long before they all found out. After Mr. Burke, of South Dakota, had corrected the Record to show he voted in the negative on a certain proposition instead of answering "Present," Oscar W. Underwood, the Democratic floor-leader, and by the same token the majority floor-leader, was up. Also, Oscar W. Underwood was cool. Two hundred and thirty-two statesmen were moist to the point of saturation and heated to the point of liquescence; but Underwood was cool. Not a bead of perspiration gemmed his brow; not a sag was in his collar and his shirt-bosom preserved its pristine gloss.

Underwood Center of a Dramatic Scene.

He had a newspaper in his hand; and as he rose the gasping patriots on both sides took notice and shoved up their temperatures a degree or so by clapping vigorously.

"The gentleman from Alabama is recognized," said the Speaker, leaning forward eagerly as if he knew what was coming.

"Mr. Speaker," began Underwood calmly, evenly, dispassionately and coolly—which is most important—"Mr. Speaker, I rise to a question of personal privilege." The Democrats applauded some more. The Republicans grinned. It was no affair of theirs, save as a show.

He asked that the clerk read from the newspaper he held in his hand, and sent a page-boy scurrying up to the desk with it. The clerk read in that sing-song manner in which all reading clerks read. It was a telegraphic dispatch from Lincoln, Nebraska, and it began: "The recent activity of Representative Underwood in defeating the attempt by Champ Clark and others to reduce the steel and iron schedule has met with the disapproval of W. J. Bryan."

The reading clerk paused here, as if to let the enormity of this sink into the parboiled perceptions of the perspiring patriots, and began again: "Today Bryan authorizes the following statement: 'The action of Chairman Underwood in opposing an immediate effort to reduce the iron and steel schedule reveals the real Underwood. Speaker Clark and other tariff reformers tried to secure the passage of a resolution instructing the Ways and Means Committee to take up other schedules, including the iron and steel schedule; but Underwood and Fitzgerald, of New York, succeeded in defeating the resolution.'"

There was more of the statement, but that is enough to show its general tenor. It charged Underwood with being tainted with protection and having an individual interest in the iron and steel business, and was a very pointed and personal assault on one big Democrat by another. After the clerk had finished reading the statement there was a moment of silence. Underwood stood looking directly at the Speaker, who still half leaned across the big desk up under the flag. Then Underwood began speaking slowly, dispassionately, evenly and gravely.

Underwood's High Political Courage.

"The statements contained in that article are absolutely false!" he said. Instantly the entire Democratic side broke into a roar of applause.

"If the reflections that paper contains rested only on myself I should not take the time of this House to answer them; but the statements contained in that article are a reflection on the only body of Democracy that is in control of this Government, and as the representative leader on the floor of this House, of this majority, I should be untrue to my party if I did not rise here and stamp those utterances with the brand of falsehood!"

Underwood continued. He asserted he had asked the committee to take up the iron and steel schedule first because he comes from an iron and steel district, and appealed to his Democratic colleagues on the committee to support his statement, which they did. He said the committee had deemed it wiser to take up the woolen and the cotton schedules first because the iron and steel schedules had been cut in the Wilson, the Dingley and the Payne Bills—and wool and cotton had not been revised for many years. Mr. Kitchin, of North Carolina, corroborated what Underwood claimed; and Underwood further proved his case, explaining his connection with the iron and steel business—he is a stockholder in a company that makes pig iron—and having a telegram read from Mr. Bryan, dated April twenty-third, to Ollie James, in which Mr. Bryan asked James to convey his congratulations to Underwood.

"Mr. Speaker," said Underwood, "Mr. Bryan did not say I was protectionizing the Democratic party when I brought in the free-list bill. Not until I differed with him on the woolen schedule did he have one word of criticism so far as my conduct was concerned. * * * I had to write a woolen schedule that would protect the revenues of this Government, and because I did so and did not obey the command of the gentleman from Nebraska, Mr. Bryan, he is endeavoring to make the country believe I am not an honest Democrat in favor of an honest revenue tariff."

There was some more of the speech, but not much. It was delivered earnestly, but without heat and without an attempt at oratorical flourish. There was no frenzy of denial, no protesting of innocence, no beating about the bush. A sane young man made a sane denial—and proved his case. That was all there was to it—except one thing.

Underwood a Presidential Possibility.

That one thing is this: When Underwood finished that statement and sat down, amid the applause of the House, the State of Alabama had a candidate for the Democratic nomination for President. Underwood didn't know it; nor was it the fact that he had assailed Mr. Bryan that made him a candidate. Assaults on Mr. Bryan are as common as Mr. Bryan's assaults on other people—and about as effective. What gave the State of Alabama a presidential candidate was this: Here was a man with the highest type of political courage—independence. Here was a man who did not attempt to palter with a situation, and a delicate one politically, but met it calmly and proved his contention. Here was a man who, as floor-leader of the House majority, was endeavoring to do what seemed best for the Democratic party and the country, and not for the benefit of any individual or the theories of any individual; and the country applauded and began to ask: "How about this chap Underwood? He seems to have stuff in him."

Of course the Bryanophobes seized upon the circumstance to laud Underwood, and equally of course the Bryaniacs would have seized on the circumstance to laud him had he praised Bryan. That isn't the point. The personal equation of it was negligible. The mere fact that Underwood rose to a question of personal privilege and denounced Bryan meant nothing in the sober thought of the people; but the independence with which he did it, the calm and convincing manner in which he made his proof, the fact that the entire majority supported him—coming as it did after an arduous session of Congress, in which this same Underwood had displayed qualities of leadership and generalship and saneness that had caused a wakening of interest in him among the people—pushed that good opinion which had been formative to form, and naturally put Underwood in the light of being available for the Democratic nomination for President.

Hence, unless conditions change very materially before the Democratic National convention is held, Alabama, first on the rollcall, instead of yielding to some other State farther down the list when it is time to place favorite and favored sons in nomination, will send an orator to the platform in her own right and present for the consideration of the delegates the name of Oscar W. Underwood, of Birmingham, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee in the Sixty-second Congress and floor-leader of the Democratic majority in the House.

Underwood's Long Legislative Experience of Great Value.

A great many men wise in public affairs have held that the Fathers who made the Constitution would have builded even better than they did if they had included in that document a provision that no man is eligible to the presidency in this country unless he has served a certain length of time in the legislative branch of the Government. It was urged for Mr. Taft that he was extraordinarily well qualified for the presidency because of his long experience in Governmental matters. Granting that Mr. Taft had long experience in the executive end of the Government, he was wofully deficient in knowledge of the legislative end; and this has been apparent all through his term. So with Mr. Roosevelt. The tragedy of the death of Major McKinley will hold his name high among the names of our Presidents; but, considering him critically, no historian at all familiar with the facts can deny he was an expert President, a capable President, a President who could secure results, a President who knew how to deal with the Congress which makes the laws he must execute, because of his long experience and service in the House.

HON. O. W. UNDERWOOD.

Underwood's Varied Public Service.

Now, when you talk of a man as a receptive or an aggressive candidate for a presidential nomination you tot up his qualifications; and, no matter whether Underwood's name ever gets before the convention or not, no matter if it receives no votes save those of Alabama, the fact is he is highly qualified so far as the mechanics of the Government is concerned. He has served in the House of Representatives for seventeen years. When he took his seat, in December, 1895, he was thirty-three years old. He was placed on the Committees on Public Lands and Expenditures on Public Buildings. In the Fifty-fifth Congress he was promoted to the important Committee on Judiciary, and in the Fifty-sixth went to Ways and Means. He was on Rules and the Irrigation of Arid Lands in the Fifty-seventh Congress, on Appropriations and Irrigation of Arid Lands in the Fifty-eighth, and in the Fifty-ninth went back to Ways and Means, where he has since remained, arriving at the chairmanship in the present or Sixty-second Congress, when the Democrats gained control of the House.

In all these years he has been a quiet, systematic, steady worker—not demonstrative, not flashy, but studious and industrious; and the mere reading of the names of the committees on which he has served will show how wide his experience has been. He has touched all phases of the legislative side of the Government and mastered them. So far as the mechanics of this Government is concerned—the knowledge of how to do the things that must be done—there is no man in Congress who is the superior of Underwood. And, without laying myself open to the charge of booming Underwood, the more knowledge of the mechanics of the Government that is brought to the White House by its four-year resident the better things will be for the country at large.

Underwood's Methods Like McKinley's.

Somebody asked me once if I didn't think Underwood is a good deal like McKinley, in many ways. Laying aside whatever criticisms there may be of McKinley, the fact is as I have said—he was a most expert and effective President because he knew how to do things. I think the comparison fairly apt. McKinley was a Republican and a protectionist—and Underwood is a Democrat and a believer in tariff for revenue; but the two men had many traits in common. McKinley was, and Underwood is, a student of tariff economics. McKinley got his results by compromise, by conciliation, by smoothing difficulties away, by a polite consideration of the claims of others, by being willing to give and take, by suaveness and civility that masked a real determination—and so does Underwood. McKinley recognized the vast complexities of the legislative machine and knew how to harmonize difficulties that were pressing; knew how to straighten out tangles and avoid pitfalls—and so does Underwood. McKinley knew when to recede and when to advance, and when to stand stock-still in a position—and so does Underwood. When McKinley talked of the tariff, for example, he knew what he was talking about—and so does Underwood; but McKinley was, and Underwood is, tolerant of the opinions of others, and is ultimately concerned in getting what seems best for his party. I make no comparison here of the men other than a comparison of their methods. McKinley was effective—and so is Underwood. These are the reasons why.

Underwood's Leadership Beset With Tremendous Difficulties.

Underwood's position when the Sixty-second Congress was called into special session by President Taft last April, for the purpose of passing reciprocity legislation, was a position of tremendous difficulties. He was made chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. He had been second to Champ Clark on the Democratic minority of the committee in the Sixty-first Congress, in which the House had a Republican majority and passed the Payne-Aldrich tariff law; and third in the Fifty-ninth Congress, when the House was also Republican and when he was ranked on the minority side of this committee by Champ Clark and Bourke Cockran. Cockran was out of Congress when the Democrats came into control of the House and Clark was made Speaker. Without protest, Underwood succeeded to the chairmanship of the committee.

Underwood was in the House, though not on the Ways and Means Committee, when the Dingley tariff was made, and he was on the Ways and Means Committee when the Payne-Aldrich law was constructed. Though the Congress had been called into session for the specific purpose of passing reciprocity legislation, to which the Democrats were favorable, the House was Democratic mainly because of the dissatisfaction of the people with the Payne-Aldrich tariff law, the election that made the House Democratic being the first opportunity the people had to express that dissatisfaction tangibly.

Mrs. Underwood.

The Democrats had a majority of nearly seventy. They had not had possession of the House for sixteen years. They were politically hungry and politically thirsty. They needed sustenance. They thought they had a chance to elect a president in 1912 and get full swing at all the perquisites and prerogatives of the Government; and each man of the two hundred and twenty-eight Democrats was full of schemes for making this chance a certainty. They were all anxious to revise the tariff in order to keep faith with the people, but they had many plans for revision and many shades of opinion as to how it should be revised. They felt their power and importance. They were eager, avid, enthusiastic and none too prudent.

Underwood and the Democratic Party.

Underwood was made leader of these men. His task was to hold them in line, to keep them together, to get them at work intelligently and cohesively—to get results. He knew that the Democratic party, if it was to have any response from the people in its demand for the election of a Democratic president in 1912, must show the people it is trustworthy and fit for confidence. He knew of the varying opinions as to what should be done with the tariff; knew of the enthusiasm and lack of judgment, the partisanship, and even the fanaticism of some of his followers; knew they had been so long outside that the attainment of the inside position might lead to excesses in legislation. He chose his lieutenants well and went at the job.

His task is not yet completed. The President vetoed the tariff bills that were formulated in the House under Underwood's direction and intrinsically his, though changed in many particulars in the Senate and in conference. There will be more tariff legislation in the House in this session. The President has demanded it and the Democrats are willing to go at it again in their own way. What Underwood must do again is to hold his party in line to meet as complex a situation as he had to meet in the extra session that ended last summer—and never forget for a minute that there is a presidential election next year that undoubtedly will be largely decided upon the tariff question.

Judging the future by the past, he will do it. It is a situation charged with dynamite. Many of his Democratic colleagues are anxious for radical action in many ways. The Congress will not adjourn until just before the first national convention is held. The record of the present House will figure largely, not only as to the individual fortunes of Underwood but also as to the fortunes of whomsoever shall be nominated by the Democrats for president and that candidate's success at the polls.

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Underwood Opposes Initiative, Referendum and Recall.

He is an advanced conservative in his views of other legislation. For example, he does not favor the wide extension of the initiative, referendum and recall. His contention is that these measures have worked out satisfactorily in local matters where the people clearly understood the issues; but that in larger matters of national importance the Congress is better able to protect the interests of the people.

> "The people suffer far more from the failure to enforce existing laws than they do from the lack of proper legislation," he says. "The people should drive from the places of power and responsibility the unfaithful servants and elect those who will be faithful to the trust imposed upon them. The masses of people are far better judges of men than they are of measures, and are far more likely to select an honest man than an honest measure."

Underwood's Characteristics.

Underwood was born in Kentucky in 1862, was educated at the Rugby School in Louisville, and the University of Virginia, and was admitted to the bar in 1884. He went at once to Birmingham, Alabama, where he has since practiced law. He was first elected to Congress in 1894 and has been returned regularly since. He early took a hand in politics and served on State and district committees before he went to Washington. As I have shown, his experience in the House has been varied and his advance has been steady.

He is not a showy man, but a studious. He is not an eloquent orator, but a convincing speaker. His greatest speech was in opposition to the Payne-Aldrich bill when that measure was reported to the House of Representatives by the Republican Ways and Means Committee in 1909. He made several important speeches in advocacy of his own measures during the extra session of the House last summer, but none was so important or so exhaustive as that speech against the Payne bill. He spoke for several hours, took up the bill section by section and analyzed it from his information and convictions. This was one of the great speeches of a season of remarkable presentments of tariff doctrine on both sides of the House.

Underwood does not write his speeches. He says he cannot memorize easily, and never attempts to make a set speech or a speech where he follows copy exactly. His method is to collect all the available information bearing on his subject and arrange it in skeleton form. He sets it out by divisions, subdivisions and topics. He goes over these, rearranges, classifies, divides and subdivides. Then he may write portions of the speech, or he may not. At any rate, when he comes to talk he has nothing before him but a sheet of paper with his topics on it, and he talks without reference to notes or to authorities.

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PLAIN WORDS ON BIG QUESTIONS

(Extracts from interview of Oscar W. Underwood, reported in Staff Correspondence of the *New York World*, Editorial Section, December 3, 1911.)

"There has been no attempt on the part of the manufacturers to give labor its share of the benefits derived from the tariff! They have kept all the profits."

* * *

"To protect profits is to protect inefficiency and to strangulate rather than to develop industry."

* * *

"I prefer to lower the tariff wall by taking bricks off the top of the wall rather than by dynamiting the structure at the bottom."

* * *

"The people have lost faith in the Republican party because it has not kept faith with them."

* * *

"If it (the Sherman Act) is enforced as a criminal statute it is an efficient instrument for preventing and punishing monopoly and restraint of trade."

* * *

HIS WIFE A REAL HELPMEET

Mr. Underwood has been helped and assisted by his wife. She is proud of him and has faith in his future. She takes the utmost interest in his work and his ambitions. She assumes full control of the domestic establishment and leaves him free from care and concern. It is rumored that she even lays out his clothes for him and ties his cravat. She seeks to aid him in his studies and work of research. She is bright, well educated, vivacious and full of life. Not beautiful, but attractive, wholesome and companionable. No wonder is expressed that Mr. Underwood's forehead and face are free from wrinkles. All the turbulence and nerve suicide connected with handling a flat are removed from him.—*New York World*, August 6, 1911.

THE UNDERWOOD BOOM

Uncle Joe Cannon is quoted as saying that "Congressman Underwood of Alabama has grown more in public sentiment recently than any other man in the United States."

Other leaders in both big parties are now taking notice of this able Southerner, who distinguished himself during the extra session of Congress as Democratic leader in the House.

Commenting upon the Underwood boom, the Birmingham *Age-Herald* says:

"The rise of Oscar Underwood is the marvel of American politics, and we may look for its culmination in the week of June 25 in the good city of Baltimore."

That this distinguished Alabamian is growing in favor in all sections of the country is plainly evident on all sides. Watch Underwood.—Columbus, Georgia, *Ledger*, reprinted in the Birmingham, Ala., *Age-Herald*, January, 1912.

DUTY HIGHER THAN AMBITION

Underwood Not Self-Seeking

"My Friends Must Do The Work," says Underwood.

Congressman Oscar W. Underwood, when asked if he would be a candidate for the Presidency, said:

"I think my friends are going to pay me the compliment of indorsing me and that they will present my name to the convention. I will be very proud to have their indorsement. No man could feel otherwise about it.

"But I have told them that what they do they must do by themselves. I have a man's work cut out for me down yonder," waving his hand in the general direction of Washington, "and I am going to try my best to do it. I am not going to neglect it to be a candidate for the Presidency or for anything else.

"For what my friends do I shall be grateful. But what is done my friends will have to do."—*New York American*, Oct. 15, 1911.

UNDERWOOD'S BOLD PROGRAM

Good Politics and Policy

The Underwood program contemplates sane reductions, not revolutionary, but framed so as to lighten the burden of the tariff without giving too violent a shock to important national interests.

This is a sensible program.

It is good political strategy and sound economics. Moreover, it is practical.

If such a program should be passed and vetoed by the President, Mr. Taft and the Republican party will have to face an angry nation with a third betrayal charged against them.

If Taft should approve it, his previous attitude and previous vetoes will leave all the credit for tariff reforms to the Democratic party, and will enable him to recover none of the advantage he has lost.

The failure of the tariff commission has deprived the President of even a legitimate excuse for further vetoes, and gives the Democrats ample reason for going ahead without waiting years for more reports of the same kind.—*New Orleans Item*, reprinted in the *Montgomery* (Alabama) *Advertiser*, Jan. 5, 1912.

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