

THE CAREER OF JACOB RICH

The death of Jacob Rich, which occurred at his home in Dubuque on September 11, 1913, closed the career of a man who during the period of his active life, from about 1860 to 1900, had borne a very influential part in the political affairs of the State of Iowa. He was of the type of men, however, whose services are likely to be overlooked or undervalued by historians of a later date who are personally unfamiliar with the life of the times. He was never conspicuous in the public eye as a candidate for office, he was not a platform speaker, and he had no taste for publicity. The only office he ever held, or sought, to which he was not appointed was that of Chief Clerk of the Iowa House of Representatives, to which position he was elected by a unanimous vote in 1864, when he was thirty-two years old. It was characteristic of him that what he wanted to have done was usually brought about by common consent. Such men do not occupy as much space in written history as others who talk more and are more combative but less persuasive. His place was at the council table, and no man of his time was more sagacious or influential there.

Jacob Rich was born of English parents in New York City on December 18, 1832, but from boyhood to manhood his home was in Philadelphia and he received his education there. His first choice of a profession was that of a physician, but after one year in a medical school the state of his health, always delicate, compelled him to alter his plans. He had intelligence of a high order, literary taste, and an aptitude for public affairs, all of which were qualifications for journalism and inclined him to that occupation.

He came west in 1856, and stopped first at Dubuque. The interior of Iowa was a very new country at that time. The population of the State was about 500,000, but most of it was in a fringe along the eastern border. The construction of the trunk lines of east and west railway was just beginning. The Illinois Central railway reached the east bank of the Mississippi River opposite Dubuque in 1855. On May 15, 1856, President Franklin Pierce approved a grant of public lands, voted by Congress, to aid the construction of four lines of railroad across the State of Iowa, to wit: from Burlington, from Davenport, from Lyons, and from Dubuque; and during that same year the Dubuque and Pacific Railroad Company broke ground.

In December, 1856, Mr. Rich formed a partnership with a Mr. Jordan and they established the *Quasqueton Guardian* at Quasqueton in Buchanan County. The first settlement in the county was here on the banks of the Wapsipinicon, gathered, as many settlements were in those days, about a water-power grist mill. The valley of the "Wapsie" was a beautiful country. When Mr. Rich went there the population of the county was about five thousand. Independence was a rival town and the county seat, and when it was settled that the railroad from Dubuque would pass through Independence instead of Quasqueton, the *Guardian* plant was removed to the former place and the paper became the *Buchanan County Guardian*.

Mr. Rich was appointed postmaster of Independence by Abraham Lincoln, and he speedily became one of the leading citizens of this young community. His contemporaries of those early years say that he was very popular, for, with all of his energy and decisiveness, he was always kindly, considerate and tolerant, above all pettiness, and his personal character commanded respect. He was slight and delicate in physique, fairhaired and even in mature life

almost boyish in appearance. As yet unmarried, and with keen intellectual interests, life in a small and remote town in those stirring times must have seemed rather dull for him. His partner, Mr. Jordan, enlisted in the army and died in the service. The winter of 1864-65 Mr. Rich spent in Des Moines as Clerk of the House and then, having sold the Independence newspaper, he went to Washington in 1865 as clerk of the Naval Committee of the Senate, of which Senator James W. Grimes was chairman. He was an active factor in State affairs at this time and a very strong supporter of the Grimes-Kirkwood-Allison wing of the Republican party against the Harlan wing.

Mr. Rich remained in Washington until 1869, through a period of intense political interest and excitement. The leading political and military figures of the war time were still there: it was the period of reconstruction in the Southern States, and the policies of the President, Andrew Johnson, were so unpopular that an open rupture with his party resulted. Mr. Rich was very close to the storm center, for in the impeachment trial the President escaped conviction by only one vote, with Senator Grimes voting in the negative. There never was a better illustration of the untrustworthiness of popular opinion when inflamed than is afforded by the Johnson case. Everybody is agreed now that the conviction of Johnson would have been a mistake; that it would have been just what Senator Grimes said of it, an act of revolution worthy only of some of the Latin republics to the south of us. But if Senator Grimes had committed an act of undisputed treason to his country the outcry against him in Iowa hardly could have been greater. Mr. Rich was a warm champion of Senator Grimes in his course and always maintained that the Senator was treated in a manner unworthy of the State.

In the summer of 1869 Mr. Rich started on a long cruise

with his friend, Captain John Grimes Walker (in later years, Admiral Walker, chairman of the Isthmian Canal Commission), in the old wooden man-of-war "Sabine", with a crew of Annapolis midshipmen. The ship was navigated by sails only, and the cruise was made for the purpose of teaching navigation to the midshipmen. They touched at the principal ports of Europe, and from there went to South America, returning home in the summer of 1870.

Shortly after his return he bought a one-half interest in the *Dubuque Daily Times*, and entered upon the most important work of his life. The fast mails were not then delivering Chicago papers over eastern Iowa before breakfast, and the *Times* had an important circulation throughout the northeastern part of the State — not large, perhaps, as newspaper circulations go nowadays, for the era of cheap papers had not come, but an influential circulation. It reached the leading men of each community. Mr. Rich was a gifted editorial writer, and in those days editorial-writing was taken seriously by both editors and readers. In some respects the daily newspaper may be performing its functions more usefully now than it was then, but the editorial page has certainly diminished in importance. Under Jacob Rich the editorial page was the most readable part of the paper. He had a well-informed, well-ordered, penetrating mind, and the faculty of clear and concise statement. There was much of controversy in the papers of that day, and Mr. Rich with his direct and incisive style, was particularly effective in discussions of that kind. He was averse to personalities, but appeared to advantage when pitted against an antagonist, for few men equaled him in cogent reasoning.

He now came quickly into a position of great influence in the Republican party of the State. William B. Allison, who had been six years in the lower house of Congress and at-

tained high rank there, voluntarily retired from that body March 4, 1869, to seek a seat in the Senate. His first contest was with Judge George G. Wright for the Grimes seat in 1870. He failed then but the Allison organization held together and gained a sufficient number of accessions to make it successful over James Harlan in the legislative session of 1872. Mr. Rich's genius as a political manager was revealed in these contests. He was placed at the head of the Allison organization, and to his methodical, painstaking labors, his tact, his judgment of men, and his personal influence, the victory over the Harlan forces in one of the hardest fought political contests in Iowa history was in great degree due. From that time on Mr. Rich was generally associated in the public mind with Senator Allison, as his confidential adviser and friend, as indeed he was. The friendship between these two men, however, had a broader and more certain basis than any political obligation or alliance. They were intimately and deeply attached to each other by feelings of mutual respect and regard as well as by common political views.

Mr. Rich was also an earnest and indefatigable champion of Senator Allison for the presidency of the United States. In 1888, when the latter's name was presented to the Republican National Convention at Chicago, Mr. Rich was a member of the inner circle which directed the movement. How near it came to success was never known by the public until the late George Frisbie Hoar of Massachusetts told the story in his autobiography. It is sufficient here to say that the opposition of one man, Chauncey M. Depew, diverted the choice of a final conference from William B. Allison to Benjamin Harrison. In 1896 Mr. Rich again did effective work in forming an organization to promote the nomination of Senator Allison for the presidency, but political conditions were so favorable to the nomination of

William McKinley that the choice of the latter was practically certain before the convention met.

As has already been indicated, Mr. Rich was never a man of robust health, and the strain of continuous work upon a morning newspaper was too much for him. In 1875 he sold his interest in the *Times*, and did not thereafter engage in any private business requiring close application. He was appointed pension agent at Dubuque and after the consolidation of several pension agencies in one office at Des Moines, removed to that city and remained in charge until after the inauguration of a Democratic President in 1885.

He was one of the organizers of the Iowa Trust and Savings Bank at Dubuque in 1884, and served upon its board of directors up to the last year of his life, when on account of failing health he asked to be relieved. He was connected with other important Dubuque business corporations, and his advice was as much sought and valued in business as in political affairs.

He was a man of exceptionally clear and practical mind, instinctively fair, candid, and free from prejudice. This was the secret of his powers of persuasion and of his influence over men. The position in which he excelled and in which he probably rendered the greatest party service was that of peacemaker, and his qualifications for this work lay in his ability to see all sides of a question and find a common ground upon which the disputants could come together. In this respect he was much like the statesman whom he admired so much — Senator Allison. His cool head, quick judgment, natural diplomacy, and power of convincing statement, were great factors in his influence, but his honesty, truthfulness, and sterling character gave a weight to his arguments that counted more than all else.

The presidential campaign of 1872 looked rather unpromising for the Republicans at first, owing to the bolt of an

important body of the party in what they called the "Liberal Republican" movement. In many respects the movement was quite similar to that of the so-called "Progressive Republicans" in 1912. It was an upheaval of discontent and rebellion in the party, prompted by various reasons, not all consistent with each other, and participated in by various more or less incongruous elements. Ex-Senator Grimes, who had resigned on account of a stroke of paralysis, and died in February, 1872, had no personal connection with the movement, but in a letter to Mr. Rich, which has become historic, he expressed some of the feeling and touched upon some of the controversies which were making trouble within the party. The letter appears in Dr. Salter's life of James Wilson Grimes under the date of January 9, 1870, but from the references to the purchase of the *Times* and to the Franco-German War it is certain that the date was later, probably January 9, 1871.

The letter as given by Dr. Salter reads as follows:

It is a happy circumstance that you renew your professional calling so full of hope and faith. As you know, I do not share either your hope or faith. I do not pretend that the Democratic party is pure. Where it has unlimited sway, as in New York, it is unquestionably corrupt; but not a whit more corrupt than the Republican party in Philadelphia and Washington. It is the possession of uncontrolled power that makes every party corrupt, and almost every man. I notice that in your paper you cite, as evidences of corruption in New York City, that some men received pay as officeholders who never rendered any duty. Why, I know a dozen men who receive pay as clerks in the departments, who never entered them but on the last day of each month to receive their pay. No, no; power makes all parties corrupt, and there is nothing more essential than a change; especially is a change for the good of the country needed now. . . .

Was there ever such an outrage as the attempt to foist upon the country, in the interests of the corruptionists, the annexation of San Domingo? This purchase was on the carpet when I was in

New York last month two years ago, and I was advised with about it. A friend asked my advice as to investing money in the public debt, in buying up Baez, etc.; and I dissuaded him from it. I could not imagine that there was a man in America who had the slightest quantum of brains, or an aspiration toward statesmanship, who would ever think of the annexation of San Domingo.

The Iowa members-elect are not thinking men enough to study and comprehend the whole subject of revenue reform. They will say that we want one hundred and sixty-one millions, and must not take off anything; when, if they would take off one-half, they would probably get twice one hundred and sixty-one millions. I am a revenue reformer, and I am for raising all revenues from imports. I therefore insist upon the highest rate that an article can stand, so as not to prevent its introduction. They say it protects people at home by preventing importations from abroad. It is enough to make the de'il laugh with glee, to see the farmers of Iowa voting to support a high tariff, which doubles the cost of railroad-iron, spikes, chairs, locomotives, tenders, cars, etc., the effect of which is to double the cost of transportation of all that they produce, and all that they consume, and then hear them growl about the high rates of passage and freight; not for a moment reflecting that they by their votes impose these high rates of freight on themselves.

The country needs a terrible shaking up and shaking down, financially, politically and morally. The war and the easy way of making money have demoralized everybody in America, and we need a discipline as much as the French did at the beginning of their war, and we shall get it sooner or later.

The "shake-up" in politics came in 1872 and the "shake-down" financially in the panic of 1873. The spirit of the letter may be due in part to the harsh criticism to which Senator Grimes had been subjected by the leaders of the party.

The negotiations for the annexation of San Domingo were conducted by President Grant, and an exceedingly bitter controversy developed over the proposition. At this day it would seem to have been at least a defensible policy to have gathered all of the islands to the southeast of us under the American flag as opportunity offered. While

dissatisfaction with the high tariff policy of the Republican party undoubtedly contributed to the general discontent which brought on the Liberal Republican bolt, the nominee of the convention, Horace Greeley, was the champion par-excellence of protection.

Mr. Rich was himself a firm believer in the policy of protection. He managed the campaign of 1872 with entire success, and was recalled to the chairmanship of the Republican State Committee in 1878, when hard times made the Greenback movement formidable. He managed those campaigns with an expenditure of money that would seem ridiculously small in these days.

Mr. Rich was a conservative in his general attitude toward the emotional and spasmodic movements for the reorganization of society that are constantly forming and spending themselves, but his natural outlook was far from that of the habitual tory or reactionary. He was receptive to new ideas, an evolutionist from every standpoint, a believer in the constant and inevitable progress of society. He was in cordial sympathy with every effort to improve the condition of the people by educational means, to provide good government, and to protect the rights of the humblest citizen. One of his most vigorous local controversies in the later years of his life was prompted solely by the public interest, in opposing what he considered an unduly long franchise to the Dubuque street railway company, with the result that the term was cut down from seventy-five to thirty-three years. He also succeeded in adding to the ordinance a provision for lower fares for the benefit of workingmen during certain hours of the morning and evening.

The last important work to which his energies were directed was that of providing the city of Dubuque with a free public library. He was elected president of the board of

trustees upon its organization and was the leading spirit in the work, establishing the organization on a sound basis, including the securing of the gifts and endowments which caused it to be named the Carnegie-Stout Library. He served as president of the board of trustees to the time of his death.

Mr. Rich was married in 1877 to Miss Annie Smith, of Chicago, a union that proved most fortunate and congenial. Although not blessed with children the couple were in a rare degree suited to and happy in each other, and their home was a very attractive place to all who knew them.

During the last ten years of his life Mr. Rich was a constant sufferer, and for most of the time without hope of relief, but he bore his pains and enforced retirement with the most patient fortitude and philosophy, maintaining a genuine interest in public affairs, as well as in the wide circle of his personal acquaintances to the last. He was a sincere and devoted friend, a loyal and earnest partisan, and a patriotic, clear-minded citizen of his city, State, and country.

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