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A Tribune of the People

Comparatively few men in any generation possess the power to mold public opinion, while the number who attain national prominence in that capacity is small indeed. But such a man was Jonathan Prentiss Dolliver.

Reared in the democratic atmosphere of the frontier and experienced in the hard work of earning a living, he understood the problems and the needs of the common people. He became a close student of political, social, and economic questions and through wide reading of history, biography, literature, and science he stored his mind with information which he used with remarkable facility. It is said that as a young man he often copied especially striking passages from his reading upon large sheets of paper which he pinned on the wall of his room until by continual attention he had made the thought or expression his own. Perhaps it was because of such

application that he was able in later years, apparently without effort, to say the most fitting thing at the right time. A deep sense of honesty and fair dealing, together with such high intellectual ability and his mastery of the art of public speaking, made him the political spokesman of the people of Iowa, brought him fame, and won for him the leadership of the progressive Republicans.

Jonathan P. Dolliver was born on February 6, 1858, near Kingwood in what later became the State of West Virginia. When only seventeen years old he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from the University of West Virginia. Then followed two years of school teaching in Illinois, with an intervening year spent in a law office at Morgantown, West Virginia.

It was in 1878 when he and his brother, Robert H. Dolliver, decided to seek their fortunes in the trans-Mississippi West. After carefully considering possible locations, they reached the conclusion that Fort Dodge, Iowa, held the best prospects for them. Upon reaching Iowa they were admitted to the bar, a formality which was aided by presenting a letter of recommendation from an old Sunday school teacher and "setting up the oysters to the legal lights of the examining committee".

The Dolliver brothers had spent most of their available funds for books and transportation, so that they arrived at Fort Dodge with little more than enough to rent an office and "hang out a shingle".

Clients came slowly, for the law business was not prosperous in Iowa at that time. Their surplus money was soon exhausted and, being unable to pay for board and lodging any longer, the brothers moved their personal belongings to their law office, where they kept house for themselves. During these early years in Iowa, it was not uncommon for the future Senator to work out his poll tax on the public highways. Robert H. Dolliver soon withdrew from the law partnership to enter the ministry, but Jonathan continued the struggle alone until ultimately success crowned his efforts. Appointment to the position of city solicitor of Fort Dodge materially improved his fortune.

Dolliver's first law case grew out of a controversy over a horse trade and, though he lost the decision of the court, his eloquence attracted attention. The door of opportunity opened before him and he launched out on a career which eventually brought him national fame. He began to receive invitations to speak at various political and patriotic gatherings throughout the county.

So well did he acquit himself on these occasions that his reputation spread beyond the borders of his county and he was brought to the notice of such prominent Republican leaders of the State as ex-Governor C. C. Carpenter, of Fort Dodge, J. S. Clarkson, editor of the *Iowa State Register*, and Charles Beardsley, former editor of the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*. One day Mr. Clarkson and Mr. Beards-

ley called upon the young orator at Fort Dodge and were so favorably impressed that they invited him to act as temporary chairman of the Republican State convention in 1884.

This was Dolliver's golden opportunity and he made the most of it. His keynote speech, delivered before the convention on August 20, 1884, won renown beyond the boundaries of Iowa. As a result of this speech Dolliver was summoned by the Republican national committee to aid in the speaking campaign in behalf of James G. Blaine, the Republican candidate for the Presidency in 1884. Wherever he spoke he was hailed as "the silver tongued orator from Iowa".

By a strange coincidence, Albert J. Beveridge of Indiana, later a colleague of Dolliver in the United States Senate, was in Des Moines and heard the famous keynote speech. Beveridge was at the time a college student who was spending his vacation in Des Moines selling books. Of the incident he said, "I went to that convention, and standing on the outskirts of the crowd, which occupied every inch of space back of where the delegates were seated, listened in wonder to this amazing address." It was a speech "whose every word was so tipped with the fire of genius that in a day it made him a notable figure in contemporaneous American politics."

Up to this time Dolliver had held no political office other than that of city solicitor of Fort Dodge. Encouraged by the success which had come to him

and urged on by his friends, he sought the Republican nomination for Congress from the tenth Iowa district in 1886, but lost after a hard fight. Two years later, however, with the added prestige of having again served as temporary chairman of the Republican State convention in 1888, and having acted as delegate-at-large to the national convention the same year, Dolliver was nominated on the one hundred and tenth ballot in the district convention at Webster City. He was duly elected and, beginning his Congressional career as a member of the Fifty-first Congress, he served continuously as a member of the House of Representatives until December, 1900.

His record in the House shows that he was a regular Republican, ready at all times to support the policies of his party. Though he seldom sought opportunities for debate, he was often called upon by the party leaders to present the Republican arguments, which he invariably did in an effective manner. He was a member of the House Committee on Ways and Means, and as such helped to frame the Dingley tariff. Probably his most notable speech during his sojourn in the House was in defense of that tariff bill.

By 1900, Dolliver had attained sufficient prominence to be seriously considered for the Vice Presidential nomination by the Republicans. But when he learned that Roosevelt was willing to accept that nomination he refused to allow his name to be pre-

sented. At his suggestion, Lafayette Young, who had prepared a nominating speech, modified his address so as to make it serve Roosevelt's candidacy. Thus Dolliver lost the Vice Presidency and with it the Presidency, for the death of President McKinley would have brought him the honor which fell to Roosevelt.

Within a month after the Republican convention, John H. Gear, the junior Senator from Iowa, died, and on August 22, 1900, Governor Leslie M. Shaw appointed Jonathan P. Dolliver to fill the vacancy. Dolliver's selection came without any effort on his part. He was able to say that all he had spent in attaining the position was the postage on the letter thanking the Governor for the appointment. In 1902 he was elected to the office by the State legislature for a full term in his own right, and was re-elected in 1907.

Up to the time when he entered the United States Senate, Dolliver had said or done nothing in public which would indicate that he was anything but a regular Republican. But it is evident that he was becoming dissatisfied with the policy of the party leaders who, he felt, were using the party not for the welfare of the people but for the special benefit of big business interests. That he was not in accord with their views on the tariff is apparent from the speech accepting the Senatorship which he delivered before the Iowa legislature in 1902. The design of a protective tariff "is to prevent our home indus-

tries from being overborne by the competition of foreign producers", he said. "But we are not blind to the fact that in many lines of industry tariff rates, which in 1897 were reasonable, have already become unnecessary and, in many cases, even absurd. They remain on the statute books not as a shield for the safety of domestic labor, but as a weapon of offense against the American market place itself."

As the tariff question did not come before Congress during Roosevelt's administrations, Dolliver had no opportunity to further voice his dissatisfaction. That he had determined, however, not to docilely follow the party bosses was shown in 1906 when he strongly supported the Hepburn Railroad Rate Bill. As a member of the Committee on Interstate Commerce he favored the measure though such powerful members as Stephen B. Elkins and Nelson W. Aldrich opposed it. On March 1, 1906, with the floor and galleries of the Senate chamber filled to overflowing, he delivered a brilliant speech in defense of the bill. No doubt this speech did much to aid the final passage of the act.

During the fight over this bill, Dolliver with difficulty kept from publicly attacking Senator Aldrich and his system. It was only the counsel of his close friend and colleague from Iowa, Senator William B. Allison, that restrained him. He told Allison that he could not tolerate the policies of the dominant faction much longer — that he felt he must declare

his independence of the group in the Senate who were attempting to legislate in the interests of big business. Allison, whom he venerated as a father, advised him to be cautious and, though admitting that conditions must be reformed, urged Dolliver not to break away until he should be gone, for he seemed to feel that he would not live long.

Out of respect for his colleague, Dolliver remained, at least publicly, in harmony with the party machine. But when Allison died in 1908, and Albert B. Cummins succeeded to the Senatorship, Dolliver felt free to follow his own convictions and what he thought was the will of his constituency. It was not an easy matter for him to break with his old associates but when the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Bill came before the extra session of the Sixty-first Congress early in 1909 he could hesitate no longer. He then openly aligned himself with the handful of "insurgents", including Senators A. B. Cummins, R. M. La Follette, M. E. Clapp, A. J. Beveridge, Knute Nelson, and J. L. Bristow who finally voted against the bill.

During that entire session of Congress, Dolliver threw his whole energy into the fight against the Payne-Aldrich tariff. As a special object of attack he selected the cotton and wool schedules in which Senator Aldrich was deeply interested. He worked diligently, amassing all the information possible, and he even employed experts to instruct him concerning the manufactures. On the floor of the Sen-

ate he debated for hours at a time. These speeches against the tariff of 1909 were the most brilliant of his career, for he was then in the full maturity of his powers, and he was fighting for a cause to which he had fully committed himself.

While his declaration of independence lost him some supporters, it gained for him many new friends and it brought to him a personal satisfaction he had never known before. His feelings at the time are illustrated by an incident related by Senator Beveridge. The two men occupied neighboring houses in Washington and were accustomed to walk to the capitol together. On one occasion Dolliver stopped to converse with an aged negro and after the walk was resumed, Dolliver remarked, "for the first time in my life I have determined to be intellectually free. That old, gray-haired negro to whom we were talking a moment ago was not so much emancipated physically 50 years ago as I have been emancipated intellectually within the last year and a half."

The strenuous efforts which he exerted in the vain attempt to prevent the passage of the Payne-Aldrich tariff injured his health. When the second session of the Sixty-first Congress adjourned in June, 1910, he confided to close friends that overwork had almost broken him down and that he intended to take a rest. But circumstances would not permit relaxation, for he found it necessary to defend his course of action before the people of Iowa. When he

should have been at his home under a doctor's care, he appeared before the Republican State convention to speak in defense of his insurgency. Though he afterward made a few speeches throughout the State, this convention address was his last important speech. It was a fitting coincidence that his brilliant career which began as temporary chairman of the Republican State convention in 1884, should have practically closed as permanent chairman of a similar gathering twenty-six years later.

Too late to save himself, he forsook the political arena and returned to his beloved home in Fort Dodge. There, surrounded by his wife and three children, the end came suddenly. Without warning, on October 15, 1910, his heart, which he had so long overworked, stopped beating. He died peacefully, as he had lived, with a smile on his lips.

Senator Dolliver's death was recognized not only as a loss to the State, but to the whole nation. His friends and political opponents, insurgents and standpatters, Republicans and Democrats, vied with each other in tributes to the memory of the dead orator and statesman. "In Senator Dolliver", wrote Theodore Roosevelt in *The Outlook*, "not merely the State of Iowa, but all the people of the United States, have lost one of the ablest, most efficient, and most sincerely patriotic public servants that we have seen in recent years in public life."

ERIK MCKINLEY ERIKSSON