

Silver Question.

SPEECH

OF

HON. E. N. FUNSTON,

OF KANSAS,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

Saturday, June 7, 1890.

The House having under consideration the bill (H. R. 5381) authorizing the issue of Treasury notes on deposits of silver bullion—

Mr. FUNSTON said :

Mr. SPEAKER : In my opinion no question of greater importance than this one has been before this House since the great questions growing out of the war were settled. Along by the side of the principles of human rights and the maintenance of the Government, lies its financial system. Our fathers believed this and ingrafted into the Constitution a clause conferring upon the General Government the right to coin money and regulate the value thereof.

The importance of the exercise of this constitutional power at this time seems to have impressed itself on the mind of every gentleman in this House. I know of no one who thinks nothing should be done. I can not regard it as a party question, nor do I regard this bill as a caucus measure of the Republican party, for at the meeting of the Republicans of the House to consider this bill it was understood and so expressed that the meeting was nothing more than a conference, and was not intended to bind any one.

The bill evidently is a compromise between the East and the West, and, following the rule of all other compromises, is unsatisfactory to very many. And in fact, Mr. Speaker, after listening to this discussion for two days, I have come to the conclusion that were all who have apologized for the bill in favor of recommitting it to the committee with instructions to bring in a free-coinage bill, we would have a free-coinage measure passed by this House before another week. I, for one, am

ready and willing and shall at the proper time vote to recommit this bill, with instructions to bring in a free-coinage measure; and if gentlemen on this side of the House who have been apologizing for this bill will vote with me we will have free coinage. [Applause on the Democratic side.]

Gentlemen on that side of the House need not applaud, for I recollect when you had an opportunity to pass a free-coinage bill your master, Mr. Cleveland, stood over you with a club and dared you to do it, and you did not. [Applause on the Republican side.]

Now, Mr. Speaker, the alarming condition of the business of the country, arising not by reason of the tariff nor overproduction, as has been claimed on this floor, but by reason of an insufficiency of currency, demands that the mints be thrown open and every ounce of available silver be coined into standard dollars. The people are expecting this; they are demanding this; and mark my word, the man from the West who stands out against it will forever have hung his political "harp on the willow tree."

The people of the West and South and Northwest have taken up this question in earnest and they mean that every man in this body from these sections who opposes free coinage shall be made to feel their power at the polls. Mr. Speaker, I am opposed to this bill and shall accept it only when I have found it impossible to get anything better. The principles of it are wrong. It reduces silver from the rank it holds as a coin and stores it away as a commodity on which money is to be issued at its value in gold.

Could anything be more humiliating to the friends of the silver dollar than to see it divested of all its functions as money, and then stored away in the basement of the Treasury, dishonored and disgraced? That we are to have \$4,500,000 in paper put in circulation monthly is the pay we are to receive for accepting these humiliating terms.

But why this bill at all? I am confident the people would be better satisfied with the present law if the full amount of four millions, as provided for by that law, were put in circulation. Why not revoke altogether the sentence of condemnation against silver and lift it out of its disgrace, place it upon the same footing with gold, and send it out among the people as currency measured by its own value, instead of being measured by gold? Gentlemen talk about it being a dishonest dollar, a 72-cent dollar, and so forth.

By what authority does any one make these charges? One dollar in silver may not contain 100 cents in gold, but it does contain 100 cents in silver. One dollar in silver will purchase as much of the necessaries of life as a dollar in gold, and as much as it would at any other time during the last hundred years. One dollar in silver to-day contains as much pure silver as it did in 1794, when it was made the coin of the

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country. It has never varied in its weight of silver, while gold in 1834 was changed in weight to make it conform to the value of the silver dollar. and thus, if precedent be law, showing that silver should be the measure of value.

Much of the time during the life of the Government the silver dollar has possessed a greater intrinsic value than the gold dollar, and it was only when legislated against and deprived of its functions as money that it and gold parted in value to any great degree. And why should not silver go down under such circumstances? If by an act of Congress its use as tableware could be prohibited its value would go still lower, and if its use for all purposes could be destroyed it would have no value whatever.

Things are valuable only for the purposes they serve. Restore silver to its normal condition as a currency by the side of gold and gold will have less value because of its reduced purposes, and silver will become more valuable because of its additional purposes, and thus the two coins approach each other so nearly in value that there would be no observable difference.

And now, Mr. Speaker, if the charge be true that the silver dollar is worth only 72 cents, I am puzzled to know how the gentlemen who make that charge are to explain to their constituents the justice of forcing the borrower to pay 100 cents for every 72 cents borrowed.

Either these gentlemen do not believe what they say about the lack of value in the silver dollar or else they are deliberately, and with a full knowledge of the facts before them, deciding that every man who has borrowed a hundred dollars shall pay for the same \$138. Gentlemen who are so concerned about the 72-cent dollar can take either horn of this dilemma and it will leave them in a very uncomfortable position before their constituents. As for myself, while I admit there is a difference in the intrinsic value of the two coins, I deny there is any difference in their purchasing power.

Therefore, should I be compelled to vote for this bill as the only thing I can get, I will have no such ugly inconsistencies to account for. And now, Mr. Speaker, granting, for the sake of argument, that the gold dollar is more valuable than the silver dollar, can any one point out the justice or law for demanding of the debtor that he shall pay his debts in the most valuable coin. Should he not have the same right to say which dollar he may pay in as the man from whom he has borrowed?

And are we constantly to go on fitting up the less valuable coin to correspond with the more valuable one or should we not here and now declare that the dollar of our fathers is good enough for us? And if there is to be any change in either to correspond with the other let us follow precedent and make the change in the gold.

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But we are gravely told that we must have the world's money; that England and Germany have a gold standard.

Why should we follow England and Germany in preference to co-operating with the balance of the world in the use of silver? With England especially we have no special interests. She is free trade; we are protection. The world owes her five thousand million dollars, and we owe the world vast sums. Her interests lead her to demand payment in the dearest money; our interests lead us to pay in the cheapest. She buys but little of the products of our farms and nothing of our factories. She is our competitor and rival in every part of the world, and, in fact, if she were sunk into the sea America would be but little worse off. Our interests lie with the bimetallic countries of Central and South America and Mexico. Their trade will be worth millions to us when developed, and our medium of exchange with them, if that is of any importance, should be the same as theirs. When we have captured their trade we need bother ourselves but very little about whether or not our currency is the same as England's.

And after all, Mr. Speaker, it is but little difference to us what may be the currency of the balance of the world. Their money ceases to be money when it reaches our shores, and the same is the case with ours when taken abroad. All foreign money the world over is bullion and is so treated, and it makes no difference what stamp or weight it has, it is traded in as bullion.

Therefore, the weight or value of our coin can have nothing to do with our trade with foreign countries. It is of far greater importance to us that we adopt the most convenient medium of exchange among ourselves, and in quantity sufficient to transact the business of the country.

Our first duty is to look after our own people in their relation to each other. When we have done that it will be time enough to take our bearings to the balance of the world. Let us build up and foster our own industries, cherish and love our own institutions, coin our own dollars of fine American silver, and we will have but little occasion to bother ourselves about what the balance of the world is doing.

And now, Mr. Speaker, in closing, I desire to say I shall vote to recommit this bill with instructions to bring in a bill for the free coinage of silver, and should I be defeated in that I shall do whatever I may judge to be the next best thing for my constituents.

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