

James Wilson

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JAMES F. WILSON.

The election of James F. Wilson, Senator-elect of the U. S. Senate, was a perfect ovation. Here follows his early history: Born in Newark, Ohio, he was left an orphan at ten years of age, by the death of a good father. Left with other younger children, he did all he could to help a widowed mother and her family, working at everything a boy was able to do. At fourteen years of age, he went to the saddler's trade, and, while faithful to his employer, he used nights to study, often not sleeping over three hours out of the twenty-four. Rev. Dr. Duncan taught him Latin, he reading Cicero and other authors in that tongue, with proficiency. A teacher of that place taught him mathematics. Distinguished lawyers lent him law books, and everybody favored the growing youth and young man.

He was admitted to the bar, and married his present estimable wife, and removed to Fairfield, Iowa, then a small village, where he practiced his profession with success. He was early elected to the House of Representatives of Iowa, where he rose to be chairman of the judiciary committee; he held the same position in the constitutional convention, under which we now live. Soon he was elected to Congress, the lower house, and early rose to be chairman of the judiciary committee, till he resigned his seat in Congress. It is credibly reported that he declined a seat in the cabinet, his ambition being to become a constitutional lawyer of the Websterian sort. How well he has succeeded, his compeers, very few of them his equals, may best judge.

His aspiration to the Senate for the long term was simply in furtherance of his main design—to become a statesman of a high order, and to help settle the questions of our government not yet established by law. And he will be well capable and highly qualified to do it.

His example is worthy of all praise, and may be quoted for every hard working young man. He stands forth a self-made man, having wrought out his own fortune to his present state and standing, at home and abroad. He is comparatively young, only fifty-three—just the number of acres in his farm, in the suburbs of Fairfield. He has constructed a large fish-pond, eighteen feet deep, so that fish can live through the winter. A smaller pond he has made to water his select stock, so that by turning a faucet he can supply his herd. He makes his own gas of gasoline, cheaper than the city can furnish it, at the distance which he lives from town. But he pays all town taxes, and warms his house with steam from his own furnace. Thus independent, he still consents to serve his adopted State on the wide theatre of a United States Senator, a worthy successor of Grimes and Kirkwood. May he long live to serve his constituents in Congress.

It is amusing to see Mr. Wilson ride triumphantly into the United States Senate. One candidate after another dropped out of the list, till WILSON stood alone in "solitary grandeur." This may seem the laudation of a friend of many years in Iowa; but it is merited praise. His late lectures on public occasions, partly literary and partly relating to bible subjects, discover a very nervous style, very precise diction, and every way an earnest and eloquent man, going "straight forward" to his aim. He well illustrates

Webster's definition of true eloquence: "It's in the man, in the occasion, and in the subject." His printed papers are worthy of study by young men. May God raise up more defenders not only of government, but of general truth.

It would be improper, in a periodical of this sort and space, to speak of his family, a precious wife and three children, dear to him as the apple of his eye. Nor can the writer forget, when leaving their hospitable mansion, how a can was offered him, and he has it now to use, when sickness and other cause will allow its contents to be opened to guests.

Mr. Wilson no longer practices in any but the higher courts of the State and of the United States. Of his merits as a special pleader, the writer cannot speak from observation, but his general repute is well known. Still comparatively young, he is destined to rise in the world of statesmen.

REMINISCENCES OF DAVENPORT.

In 1840, the editor of this periodical tarried a few weeks in Davenport, and, with Mr. Strong Burnell, visited Antoine Le Claire, at his home, then the old "Council House." The city was very small. An eighty acre lot could then have been bought very cheap. The pecuniary crash of 1837 had then reached Iowa. No money, no credit, no hope of business prevailed. Mr. Le Claire was then building his first hotel, and that almost swamped his credit, although afterwards business revived and the place grew. There was not probably more than five or six hundred actual settlers.

The Indians came prancing down on the prairie, to visit Mr. Le Claire, and rode in a circle in front of his house. They got a barrel of flour and a large kettle. The women, headed by an aged, gray-headed Indian, were bringing sticks and brush from the bluffs above to boil the porridge, which the lubberly men were making, thus reversing the order of civilization. The Sacs and Foxes were after their annuities—to visit their old haunts and friends, Le Claire and Col. George Davenport, the latter on Rock Island. The men and squaws were paddling their bark canoes across the rapids to see the Colonel.

Now, how changed is everything! A great city stretches over the then prairies and bluffs, where wild men, birds and beasts revelled. Some incidents of that early visit may be added. A young man, by the name of Gates, on a Wednesday was seen building a skiff. He and others attached a mast and sails to the small craft. On Sunday they went down to launch and sail their boat. The wind was strong and the waves ran high. A negro waiter at the hotel where Gates boarded, ran down to the brink of the river and entreated him and those with him to not venture into the current, as they would certainly be drowned. They persisted, three of them. No sooner than they had reached the boiling current the boat upset, and, by the action of the wind and current, the boat continued to go over and over. Gates, being a good swimmer, let go of the boat to swim ashore. But he soon sank and never rose nor was heard of more. The writer of this article was called upon to improve the sad event on Sabbath evening. He

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