

# AN OPEN LETTER

TO

## GENERAL J. B. WEAVER.

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The triumph of either Republicanism or Democracy, at the ensuing Presidential election, will mean prolongation of the centralized power of money, with all its attendant disasters to the country. Divest their national platforms of insincere devotion to popular rights, and where can be found one practical promise of relief from the burden and scourge of individual and national indebtedness?

Monetary reform is the sole germinating principle of the Greenback party, yet you dispose of that vital problem, in your letter of acceptance of the nomination for the high office of President, tendered you by the recent National Convention at Chicago, by a proposition, I respectfully submit, as barren of relief as if you had said: "I leave the money question for solution by the incoming Congress." The prominence given to the question of industrial emancipation, not only in your letter of acceptance, but in all authorized expositions of the aims of our party, is but the outgrowth of its initial aim. So, as to most of the reforms you so cogently urge, and which would logically result from the attainment of its supreme purpose, because they are but the minutiae or adjuncts of a great monetary reform.

If victory ever perches (as I am certain it will) upon the standard of the Greenback-Labor party, it will be due alone to the supremacy it gives to money, next to Christianity, as the most important factor in civilization. Semi-acquiescence in the barbaric or delusive financial theories of the old parties, is temporizing with the honest convictions of the Greenback party, which holds that all fiscal wisdom was not born of royalty, when it espoused gold and silver, nor was the most enlightened system of civil government devised when royalty enunciated the "divine right of kings to govern."<sup>2</sup> If bank notes are typical of commercial wants, they are also illustrative of the conveniences of paper money, which was honest in conception and origin, but soon became fraudulent in practice.

There can be no compromise between aggressiveness and submission, any more than there can be between truth and error, or right and wrong. A victory upon such terms will be as fruitless as defeat. Present defeat has no terrors for those who are devoted to principle. Seeming acquiescence in error never made a convert to truth.

Before briefly reviewing your utterances as to the vitalizing principle of our party, I take leave to call your attention to a reported interview with you, by a correspondent of the New York Herald, in which he interrogates you as follows: "It has been said, General, you are not in full accord with the theories of Greenbackism," to which you replied, "I am not an unlimited inflationist, by any means, and in that respect I am in accord with the conservative element of our party." Now, your answer gives color to the assumption that a portion of the Greenback party have accepted a flippant and derisive phrase, applied by demagogues, machine politicians, and a subsidized press, to all who espouse the Greenback faith. If there is a member of this great party who can appreciate the significance of the word "unlimited," and has not self-respect enough to hurl back the jeering phrase, as false in essence, and false in intentment, he would be excusable in replying that such inflation is far preferable to unlimited contraction and destruction. Upon this single issue, the Greenback party might go before the country, with an approximation to truth, and the records of past legislation for its support. There is abundant evidence at command that the circulation of Treasury notes, with all the legal tender attributes of money, amounted, in 1865-'66 and part of '67, to the sum of \$1,930,000,000—when we were the most prosperous people on earth.

Your career in Congress leaves no room to doubt your devotion to the material interests of your countrymen. Your high purposes are attested by your

vigilant zeal in behalf of that measure of justice—the “Soldier’s Bill;” your persistent advocacy of which, no doubt, led the Convention at Chicago to call you to a higher sphere of action. Yet it is not to be overlooked that your letter of acceptance of that call, does not fill the measure of your country’s hopes in relation to the money question. I quote your language, “The annual surplus revenues, and the idle coin now in the Treasury, and that which must continue to accumulate, if the silver law approved February 28, 1878, shall be honestly enforced, are ample to pay every dollar of the seven hundred millions, both principal and interest, within the next six years. There is not the slightest excuse for funding the bonds except to perpetuate the debt as the basis of iniquitous banking monopoly.”

If all the surplus revenue derived from internal taxation—from the proceeds of sales of the public lands—and from import duties were appropriated as you indicate, from what source will you derive future appropriations for rivers and harbors, and for many other and perhaps not less important demands upon the public treasury? You do not indicate any mode for carrying out the righteous provisions of the “Soldier’s Bill,” unless the bill itself, which I have not seen, provides the mode. The purchase of bullion for coinage, leaves a very insignificant margin for the increase of money, unless such purchase is effected by an increase of the bonded debt, against which I know you are unalterably opposed. While the purpose is laudable and just to the tax-burdened people to discharge so much of the National debt as may presently be due in lawful money, why not to that extent make immediate provision for payment in full legal tender Treasury notes? This would be a practical illustration of the “conservative” principles of the Greenback party, and at the same time restore to the people, to that extent, part of their money destroyed by government, or worse still, converted into interest-bearing debt.

Then, again, if you were to advocate the issue of such Treasury notes, in volume sufficient to pay the annual domestic expenditures of government, to be continued as long as it shall be necessary to restore the lost and destroyed paper issue of the banks, added to the paper money of the Government, and at the same time to keep pace with the daily increasing uses for money, resulting from augmented wealth, a liberal

enhancement of the wages of industry and increasing population, the chief demand of the Greenback party would soon be conspicuously visible in the revived prosperity of the country, and in the improved condition of the people.

While it cannot be claimed on any sound principle of political economy, that population measures the monetary wants of an active and enterprising people, no other mode of approximating that want has ever been tested. With the view of ascertaining, with reasonable certainty, the exact amount of money—not in circulation—but in the keeping of all money depositories, and of every private citizen, I suggested a simple mode of arriving at this important statistical information to the Superintendent of the Census. It met with the same reception that any other inquiry would meet, addressed to any department of the Federal Government in relation to the money supply of the country. It was wholly ignored, and hence we must conclude that all monetary and statistical wisdom is concentrated in the heads of the several departments of the Government at Washington.

Thirty years ago the subject of finance was subordinate to many topics claiming legislative action, because the relations of property and money was not so glaringly and oppressively disproportioned as at present. All species of property, and more particularly ~~bonds~~ *lands*, have lost the high worth they then possessed. When all virtue becomes concentrated in money, as the most valuable of earthly possessions, it is certain to seek refuge in safes and vaults, and then it becomes as much lost to the country as if sunken in the depths of the ocean, or converted into ashes by consuming flames. Hence, it is difficult to ascertain the precise amount of money in actual circulation. If it really be three hundred millions, it would give \$6 *per capita*. If it should actually reach four hundred millions, it would afford the pauperizing sum of \$8 *per capita*. Savages of the forest, who are pensioners upon the Government, and pay no taxes, would revolt if such a meagre stipend was doled out to them, while civilization blushes and bows its head in humiliating confession that republican government is a failure! The much vaunted revival of business resulting from so-called resumption, and from the free coinage of gold and silver, is as mythical and unreal as the alchemist’s transmutation of iron and tin into gold.

The surplus revenue, upon which you seem largely to rely for the extinguishment of the seven hundred millions of the lawful money bonds, I am warranted in assuming, from the increasing proportions of foreign importations, is likely to become very insignificant in the future. That surplus, it appears from a circular from the Treasury Department now before me, was, in round numbers, nineteen millions in 1878, and but seven millions in 1879, and it was doubtless less, if the balance be not the other way, for the fiscal year just closed—so that your theory for extinguishing that debt, even by the use of all the coin that flows into the Treasury does not seem to rest upon a very promising basis. If this debt were payable in coin, it would not only be justifiable, but “conservative” in the Greenback party to urge the purchase of bullion as you seem to do, as the proper medium of such payment.

No truism in political economy can be more forcibly elucidated by mere statement than that which you enunciate in the sentiment, that “The two great agents of commerce are money and transportation.” Our domestic commerce must be more than a hundred fold in excess of our foreign commerce, restricted as the former is in its chief agency, because nine-tenths of it is effected upon credit, aided, to a considerable extent, by simple barter. Real permanent prosperity can never be assured to the people until government provides an ample representation of the entire property and wealth of the country, including labor as well as lands. This will be a new dispensation in finance, implying cash payment in every business transaction—the overthrow of the credit system, and the easy command of money with a very slight burthen of interest.

Our entire volume of circulating money is scarcely equal to twenty-five per cent. of the average annual *per capita* taxation. The gold and silver coin is not equal to three per cent. of that taxation, while the earth does not yield one per cent. of the world's indebtedness. If facts like these do not embody cogent and conclusive reasons for the existence and prospective success of the Greenback party, then bigotry and prejudice have usurped the domain of common sense.

You characterize the origin of our party as a “labor movement.” You slightly err in this, because it was the destruction of the medium for compensating labor, that induced the working-

men's organization to seek the folds of the Greenback party as their only true friend.

What can “send the impulse of vigorous life” to the heart of industry but *money*, which alone is the animating spur to enterprise? To what end shall we throw around labor additional guarantees of governmental protection and encouragement, without money to assure to it a meet reward? Better, far better, make the national debt a perpetuity than hold in vassalage to individual indebtedness, millions of our countrymen, who are now struggling for emancipation. The shadows of paralyzed hope are casting gloom where only sunshine should rest—upon the homes of the weary toiler.

I regret that General Cary, of Ohio, feels it his duty to transfer his allegiance from our party to the Democracy, (but only for the present, as I gather from his recent speech at Cincinnati,) because he maintains that “popular government out-ranks all questions of finance.” I take issue with him upon this point. Just laws and provisions for all the monetary exigences of political society are superior in dignity to *any form of government*. The form may be illusive, while the *spirit* will be found alone in its laws. Money is as much the creature of law, as law the creature of political association. The maintenance of popular government is not assured by profession, but by practice. General Cary commends the Democratic party because of its efforts to smother the fires of sectional hatred, in which I cordially concur; while the Greenback party practically illustrates their purpose, in the same direction, by nominating for office distinguished citizens from the widely-separated North and South. He deserves applause for his fearless independence in announcing adherence to all the precepts of the Greenback party, but I cannot commend the wisdom of withholding his present support, particularly as he makes no issue with us, upon any of its projected reforms.

The wrongs perpetrated by the Government upon the material interests of the people, are as criminal in sound morals as if it had applied the torch of the incendiary to millions in value of their destructible property, because its financial policy seduced the people into enterprises that failed of success, only because government annihilated a large volume of currency, or perverted it from its legitimate uses as money. The ruin would not have been as far-reach-

ing in its consequences if it had not at the same time, by the same diabolical line of policy, shorn lands, the chief source of all wealth, of millions of their former market value. Its chief fiscal agents and petted political economists, in and out of office, admitting the universal prevalence of financial disaster, had the brazen effrontery to attribute the same to an "irredeemable currency" and to individual extravagance and improvidence! Finding such insults to truth, not very convincing to common sense, they next resorted to the glaring fabrication that the country has more money now than at any previous period, and more than the people can judiciously or profitably use! And for proof of this, they point to the low rate of interest which money commands in Wall Street, New York! That contracted locality may be an accurate fiscal barometer for its *habitus*, but it no more measures the monetary wants and supply for the people at large, than the enormous value of the lots it occupies measures the per acre value of the vast territory within the Union. When money becomes a *drug*, in the parlance of newspaper reporters, in every section of the country, it is to be hoped that property, as the acquisition of industry, will assume its proper rank.

If the gold and silver which we annually unearth, is an accurate standard for measuring the world's demand for money, or an honest basis for the world's paper circulation, so is an ordinary flour sieve an adequate instrument for lifting and measuring the volume of water in one of our great internal lakes! The aptitude of political parties to adhere to their traditional usages, whatever may have been the necessity or even expediency of their origin, is without doubt a formidable obstacle to new methods, and a great hindrance to progressive improvement. "The teachings of Confucius have fossilized the inhabitants of the Celestial Empire" for unnumbered centuries. Hence, silver, with a large addition of baser subsidiary metals, will continue "honest money," with the Chinese as long as time shall endure.

I make a brief extract from a letter recently addressed by the undersigned, to the *Chicago Express*, in relation to the fiscal plank of our national platform.

"The origin of the Greenback party, as its name imports, is found alone in the monetary destitution of the country. But for this all-pervading, pauperizing, non-progressing national curse, there would now be in existence no such organization as that which is destined to shape the future policy of the general government. But in what terms has

the pivotal aim of this now powerful party been commended to general approval, signaling the only means of effecting monetary reform? It enunciates the demand "that the bonds of the United States should not be refunded, but paid as rapidly as practical, according to contract." It is silent as to the medium in which they are to be paid, and then disposes of the whole vital, ever-living and crowning purpose of the Greenback party, by declaring that "legal tender should be substituted for national bank notes, the abolition of the national banks, and the unlimited coinage of gold and silver."

"Substitution of legal tenders for national bank notes is not an increase of one dollar to the much-needed circulation. Free coinage of gold and silver only imports that the owner of bullion shall coin the same, and circulate the coinage as money when he conforms to the provision of the general government in relation thereto. This provision for free coinage of gold and silver will not add to the money of the country one dollar *per capita*. It will not, in the space of twenty years, more than supply the place of the accidental loss and waste of money during the last fifteen years, and the continuing loss in the future. \* \* \* Shall Greenbackers be frightened from the dictates and prophecies of common sense by the phantom cry of inflation? Shall they not declare their purpose annually to inflate money rather than contribute to the inflation and perpetuation of individual and national debt?"

In conclusion, General, I may add, that the positions taken in this letter present no question which can suggest a Constitutional doubt. The "legal tender" decisions of our highest judicial tribunals, State and Federal, transfer to administrative policy all future discussions of the power of Congress to afford monetary relief to the country. I have such unbounded confidence not only in the sincerity of your devotion to popular rights, and in your strict adherence to the spirit of our institutions, as to satisfy me that you will never, in the event of your election to the Presidency, interpose the veto power to defeat the will of the people, when expressed in the proper legitimate channel, although such legislation may not be in strict accordance with your conviction of policy or expediency. Hence, if the views of Congress shall, in the future, coincide with those I have feebly urged for the last ten years, and to a limited extent expressed in this letter, I cannot doubt your readiness to sanction them by Executive approval.

Instead, therefore, of your brief exposition of the high and holy financial aim of the Greenback-Labor party, abating my ardour in the advocacy of that purpose, I feel it to be a duty I owe my fellow citizens to redouble my humble efforts to enlarge the sphere of your usefulness, as the most effective mode of achieving the final success of our righteous cause, and which will be found in the adoption of an "American Monetary System."

JAMES M. LAIDLLEY.

CHARLESTON, W. VA., July 22, 1880.