ADDRESS OF EX-GOVERNOR JAMES W. DENVER.

DELIVERED AT THE OLD SETTLERS' MEETING, BISMARCK GROVE, LAWRENCE,
SEPTEMBER 30, 1884.

Ex-Governor Charles Robinson, president of the meeting, in introducing Governor Denver to the audience of old settlers, made some remarks explaining the circumstances attending the appointment of Governor Denver as Secretary and acting Governor of Kansas Territory. It so happened that Governor Robinson was bearer of the information both to acting Governor Stanton of his removal from office, and to Governor Denver of his appointment to succeed to the office.

Having been appointed Secretary of Kansas Territory, assuming office December 21, 1857, General Denver became acting Governor at that date. He served as such till May 12, 1858, when he received the appointment of Governor. He continued in office as Governor till October 10, 1858, when he resigned.

Gov. Denver spoke as follows:

Mr. Chairman, and Old Settlers of Kansas: I appear before you to-day with diffidence. I am to give a narrative of events that occurred twenty-five years ago, and must speak from memory. I will speak of events as near as I can in their order.

I have addressed some audiences in Kansas before, but, as your president has informed you, under very different auspices from the present. Yesterday you had an address from Gov. Stanton, as to events transpiring in the Territory of Kansas up to the time he left. You have heard from Gov. Robinson the circumstances of my succession to Gov. Stanton. Nothing ever surprised me more than the information given me by Gov. Stanton, who handed to me the paper that Gov. Robinson had handed him that morning. I would rather have retired from public life than to have accepted that position. Not that I had any fear but what I could satisfy a reasonable people as to what my duties were and what their duties were, but it was perhaps difficult for them to understand me when they supposed that I represented an element hostile to them.

The events that brought about the removal of Governor Stanton I was not familiar with, except as I gathered them from general report and from the newspapers. That those troubles were serious, and that they were dangerous to the peace of the country, no one could doubt. Therefore my first resolution was, not to accept the appointment, as I told Governor Stanton, and which he will recollect. He informed me that I must accept; that I could not refuse; that the Legislature was to meet in a few days in regular session, and that if I did not accept it, there would be no representative of the Federal Government here. Under those circumstances, I wrote the President that I would accept the appointment upon condition that I
should be relieved as soon as the Legislature adjourned. I received information that that should be done. When the Legislature adjourned, I sent on my resignation. Answer came back that they wished me to hold on until bills then pending before Congress for the admission of the State under the Lecompton Constitution should be acted upon. That hung fire for a long time, and finally passed Congress with what was known as the English amendment, submitting the question to a vote of the people. Then I asked to be relieved. Again they asked me to remain here until that election came off. I remained, and that election resulted exactly as I supposed it would. I then asked to be relieved again, but they begged of me to remain until the October election, which I did. I then sent on my resignation, and left the Territory without asking permission. That is the way I came to leave here, although a great many supposed that I was compelled to go. The only scolding that I got for doing that thing was from the people of Kansas for going away, and from Mr. Buchanan for having resigned.

The Legislature convened shortly after I took charge of the government. You have heard something about the material composing that body. You have heard of their inexperience, their want of legislative knowledge; but I will add that they were honest in their desires to do what was right, I believe. Some of the members were disposed to resist everything that the Governor should propose, and in a short time it got to be that some of them thought it was a credit to pass any bill over the Governor's veto, if possible. All sorts of schemes were presented. One man was asking for the exclusive right to establish a ferry across a river, another for the exclusive right to build a bridge across a stream, another for town sites, another for a divorce. They were asking for everything you could conceive of, almost. I determined at the outset that I would not take part for or against any of the political factions or parties in the Territory. I did not belong to the Territory. I was not here as a citizen of the Territory; I was here as a representative of the Federal Government. I therefore took no part in the local affairs of the Territory, only so far as was necessary to represent the Federal Government. While I had my own views as to the great question that agitated the country, as to whether it should be a slave State or a free State, I did not propose to mix with it. Had I been a citizen of this State I never should have voted to introduce slavery into Kansas; but I did not consider that I had any business to interfere with that question; all that I had to do was to hold the balance evenly, administer the laws, and protect the rights of the people.

The Free-State men had entire control of both houses of the Legislature; and I might go on here and relate a good many circumstances that occurred during the session that would be very amusing, but it is hardly worth while to do it. Among the many wild schemes that were proposed, the wildest, perhaps, was that of the "Lawrence Water Company," by which the citizens of Lawrence were to be compelled to pay toll to a company for all the water they might use, no matter whether they got it out of the Kansas river or out of the wells. I thought the water ought to be free to everybody, and that a man should have the right to dig on his own premises and get water wherever he could. So I returned that bill with my objections, in a veto message. The bill had passed the Council by a majority. It passed the Assembly by a nearly unanimous vote. Of course I had to return it to the Council. The worthy President of the Council had voted against the bill, and I thought, he being a citizen of Lawrence, that of course I was doing what he would approve; but when the veto message was read he called some one else to the chair and got on the floor and made a very violent assault on the executive action; he thought he could
not submit to anything of that sort, although the executive action was on the same side that his vote had been.

They passed the bill in the Council over my veto, and some one came down and told me in a rather exciting manner what had been done. I laughed, and remarked in answer that that was all right; that if I had had any ill feelings towards the people of Lawrence, I certainly would have approved that bill, because it would have put a tax upon them for all time to come, which, however, I did not think exactly right. In about a half an hour some one came and told me that there was a great crowd in the Legislative hall. I stepped up to see what was the matter; and I think the whole town of Lawrence was there. They crowded the members into a little corner where they could scarcely turn around, and there was as much excitement as I ever saw when Jim Lane was making speeches against Jack Henderson. At last they took a vote upon the question, and there was not a single vote against the veto.

The Governor was upheld that time by the unanimous vote of the Assembly.

I only give that as one of the incidents. Another matter that I might refer to was the Minneola capital. It was supposed that a large number of the members of the Legislature were interested in that venture. I did not much fancy living in Lecompton, I admit. It was a poor place to live in at that day; I think it is better now. But it was the Capital, and had been fixed so by law; and I did not think that the Legislature had any right to remove it. They had a right to move from place to place to hold their sittings, but they had no right to remove the capital of the Territory. I learned after a while that there were a good many of the members who were interested in lots in the proposed new capital. I did not know how that might be, but upon general principles I was opposed to doing anything that would get up any excitement or a disturbance. I vetoed that bill. They passed the bill over my veto, and then it appeared who were interested in that affair. Several very good men, for whom I had the highest regard, I found had secured an interest in the shape of lots; and they went to work and put up a great big building that they called the "Capitol Building." About the time that they got it up they came and notified me that I was to remove the records and everything connected with the Territorial Government down to Minneola.

Lecompton, as I said, was not a very inviting place, but from what I could learn it was quite as good as Minneola. Minneola was out on the prairie, with not a shade tree anywhere near it, while Lecompton was on the banks of the river, and we could at least see the water pass by, and could, if we desired, go a-fishing now and then; but down at Minneola we had not even that opportunity. So I declined to go. Then they talked about getting out a mandamus; but finally that all passed away, and Minneola was heard of no more forever.

Then we had a bill to reorganize the militia. That bill was gotten up for the purpose of taking away from the Governor all the rights that he had in relation to the militia. Under the organic act he was the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of Kansas. The navy was not very strong, but it was pretty nearly as strong then as the United States Navy is now.

For what motive the new militia bill was proposed, I do not know; it might have been good and might not have been good. I do not think it was very good. It was proposed to relieve the Governor of his responsibility. While the Governor was not particularly anxious about such things, he did not propose to be relieved of such responsibilities; he proposed to exercise all that were conferred upon him, as he always did do whenever it was necessary. That was an effort to give somebody else power to appoint military officers, and to commission them. The Governor refused to recognize such appointments. Commissions were issued by some of the parties
named in the bill; and the Governor came very near getting some of them into some very troublesome places, and would have done so if they had not dropped the whole thing.

Then came a proposition for a new convention to frame a constitution. Now, my friends, there has been a great deal said about that matter, and I have received letters from several parties asking for information about it, and I will give it to you as nearly as I can recollect, and I believe, correctly. You will recollect first, that the Governor, under the organic act, had three days in which to consider any bill which might be sent to him by the Legislature for his signature. If he would keep the bill in his possession for three days without returning it to the Legislature, with or without his objections, then it became a law of itself. If he approved it, of course it became a law; if he objected to it, and sent it back, then the Legislature had the right to pass upon it, and pass it over the veto by a two-thirds vote. Now the Legislature had to meet on the first Monday in January, and the law fixed the term for forty days. It fixed the time on the first Monday in January when it should meet, and therefore it included the whole of that day; and at the end of forty days the session came to a close. This bill for the calling of a convention to frame a new constitution was passed and sent to me within three days of the end of the session; that is, it was sent to me on the thirty-seventh day of the session. I concluded that we had constitution enough. We had then pending before Congress the Lecompton Constitution, which was a pretty ugly-looking affair all around. We had the Topeka Constitution, which was objected to on the other side just as much; and then we had the Territorial Government established by act of Congress, and I thought we had about as much government as one little Territory could very well live under.

Some time before that—I think early in the session—I was so thoroughly convinced of the fact that we were having too much constitution, that I sent to Judge Elmore, whom many of you knew, who lived up at Tecumseh, and a man in whose judgment I had great confidence. I sent for him to come down and see me at Lawrence. He did so. We talked the matter over, and I presented to him my views in reference to the Lecompton Constitution. He agreed with me.

Then, says I, "Judge, I want you to go to Washington City and see the President on this subject."

He says, "When?"

I said, "To-morrow morning."

"Why," says he, "I have got nothing—I have no clothing with me."

Says I, "You don't need anything; all you will want will be a shirt, and that you can buy anywhere, as you go along; start in the morning."

That night I wrote a long letter to the President, in which I summed up the condition of affairs here in the Territory, as I then understood them, and I urged him not to present the Lecompton Constitution to Congress at all, but to ask Congress to pass an enabling act to let the people of the Territory hold a convention and adopt a constitution and to wipe out all of those unauthorized constitutions that were presented.

Judge Elmore went on to Washington City and presented my letter to the President, had a long conversation with him, and also with his own brother-in-law, Senator Fitzpatrick, and other Southern gentlemen whom he knew there; and they all agreed to my advice.

Mr. Buchanan said that he was very strongly impressed with it, and that he was very sorry that he had not had the information earlier, because he had prepared his message in relation to the Lecompton Constitution, and he had shown it to several Senators, and could not withdraw it. It went in. You all know the result.

Well, I concluded that I would not approve that bill for calling a convention to frame a new constitution. Several committees were appointed by the Legislature to call upon me, begging me if I would not approve it, to return it to them that they might act upon it. I told them no, that I had made up my mind, and that I was not to be moved; that I thought we had constitution enough, and that I had an absolute veto in that case, and I proposed to exercise it, which I did.

The next night, after twelve o'clock, a bill was brought to me purporting to be a bill calling a convention for a new constitution, and indorsed on it that it had been returned by the Governor and passed by a two-thirds vote, notwithstanding these objections. That was signed by the four officers—the presiding officer of each
house, the Secretary of the Council, and the Clerk of the Assembly. I immediately sent for them, and told them that while that act of theirs, if I was disposed to act upon it, gave me power to do something much to their disadvantage, I did not desire to do it, because I did not want any trouble or disturbance in the Territory; that that act was all wrong on their part; that they certified to that which was not true; that that paper had never been before the Governor; that the bill sent to him never had been out of his possession, and he had not returned it to the Legislature with his objections, and consequently the whole statement was false.

Mr. Currier had the bill in his hands. He asked me what I wanted them to do. I told him I wished them to do one of two things: to give me a certificate of the fact that that had never been acted upon by the Legislature at all, or else to destroy it there, in my presence. They said that that would be pretty rough. Currier said that he would not put his name to any such paper as that, and said he: "What shall we do with it?" Deitzler said: "Destroy it." He said: "All right," and he tore it up and stuck it in the fire. That was the last of that bill.

Now a resolution was passed after the term had closed, after twelve 0'clock at night, and the legal term of the Legislature had absolutely closed — a resolution was passed, declaring that that bill had been properly passed by the Legislature, and they resolved that they would go on and hold the convention. Notwithstanding all that had occurred, and the failure of the bill to become a law, they decided to hold the convention. They did hold that convention at Leavenworth, and my friend Col. Ritchie called at my office on his way down, informing me that they were going down there to hold the convention. I told him that that was all right, and if he is here he will no doubt attend it. "Well," he said, "what are you going to do about it?" "Why," says I, "nothing; the Constitution of the United States gives to the people the right to assemble and discuss all public questions, and after they have assembled if they choose to turn their assembly into a debating society, they have a right to do it; I am not going to trouble them at all."

After a time he came back and told me that they had adopted a constitution, and they were going to put it into operation, and wanted to know what I was going to do about it. "Well, now," says I, "Mr. Ritchie, if I were to tell you what I was going to do about it you would know just as much as I do, and I do not propose you shall know what I am going to do, but I will say to you that you had better think two or three times before you make that move." Well, after a time the constitution came around, and it turned out that it was to be submitted to a vote of the people and the returns were to be made to the Governor and three others. They claimed in an address they made, that there were thirty thousand voters in the Territory, and one of the provisions of the constitution was that there should be "universal suffrage" that every man, woman and child, every horse, every cow, everything that had life in it, should have the right to vote in Kansas. Well, that is only an illustration of the wildness of the times. The people were carried away by their passions and their excitement; but it was not my place to be carried away by anything of that sort. Standing here as the representative of the General Government, taking no part in any of these excitements, it was my place to look at things calmly and weigh them properly, and act for the good of the people.

The election was held, and the returns showed somewhere in the neighborhood of three thousand votes cast, and the thing dropped right there. Nothing more was heard about the constitution. I infer that there were no frauds in that election, or they might possibly have brought it up to the thirty thousand that was claimed in the address.

My fellow citizens, there are doubtless many other things connected with the legislation of that session that I might refer to. But I presume that you have heard about as much of my administration here as you care about. I came to the Territory without knowing myself that I was to remain here; without being known to many of you. True, I had some friends in the country who received me kindly from the start, and they gave kind reports about me to their neighbors. True, there were some in the country who were determined not to be satisfied with anything I did; but they were very few, and when I was leaving the Territory, the people of Leavenworth, without regard to party, gave me a supper, which I have always regarded as one of the greatest compliments ever paid to me. Every shade of political opinion was represented at that party, from the most ultra Pro-Slavery man to the most violent of the Free-State men, and when I entered the room and looked down that table, I was ready for almost anything that might occur, for I did not see how it was possible for such a gathering of men to get through an evening pleas-
antly and without disturbance, and more especially when the table was loaded down with wine. But it passed off quietly. There was not a single word uttered by anyone there calculated to injure the feelings of anyone else. They treated each other with all deference, respecting each other's opinions, referring to no subject of irritation whatever. Among them I will mention Judge Lecompte, who at that time, talking I think for nearly an hour, never once referred to politics. I have always looked back to that reception as one of the brightest spots in my career.

Now, my fellow-citizens, perhaps it might be well for me to refer a little more in extenso to the trip that I made in the southern part of the State with Governor Robinson. The Governor has very kindly informed you about what was done at that time. He did not tell you, however, some things that occurred. He did not tell you, for instance, that shortly after we made our start down there, he and Judge Wright, riding together in a buggy, got into the Marais des Cygnes, about the middle of the stream, when something about the carriage broke, and the horses could not go on, and they had to stop. Judge Wright was in bad health, and thought he would be ruined if he got wet, and so Governor Robinson got out and backed up against the carriage, and got Judge Wright on his shoulders, and walked out with him. The Governor says now, that he was in hopes he would slip and fall down, but he could not find any rock to slip on, and so he got the Judge out safely.

Well, we went on to Osawatomie. The streams were very high. We had to swim several of them: that is, we crossed on a raft ourselves, and had our horses swim. At Osawatomie, some wild fellow there, I believe they called him Pat Devlin, who looked very much as though he was trying to carry out his name, for he certainly acted as wildly as it was possible for a man to do — I never saw a man under more excitement — while we were trying to get across the stream, he plunged into it and swam across. We were told afterwards that he was determined to kill somebody; that he was especially hostile to Federal officers; and as I was the only Federal officer along, I suppose the I was the one that incurred his hostility at the time.

After a while we met Montgomery — at Moneta, I believe. I addressed the people there, and I appealed to them to turn out and take care of their own affairs, and to protect their neighbors in their rights as well, to live peacefully with each other, and carry on the affairs of the country in the same way as they had been carried on in the communities from whence they had come, and that their rights were the same here as they were there, and that they ought to protect each other and see that no one trespassed upon the rights of his neighbor. We were well received there. Governor Robinson made some remarks, and Judge Wright also, and then we were just about ready to depart. Captain Montgomery came up; did not come up to us exactly, but he sent Pat Devlin to say to me, that he wished to talk to me, and if I would give my pledge of honor not to arrest him, he would come up and talk to me. I told him that I was not in there to arrest anybody; that I had come down to see and talk with the people, and see if we could not arrange matters so as to have peace and quiet in the land, but as for giving a pledge of honor, or a pledge of any other kind, that would bind my official action whenever it became necessary to act, I was not going to do it, and I did not do it. We went from there down to Montgomery's place. We met a crowd of people there. They were all armed. I made an address to them there, and so did Governor Robinson, I think; I am not sure about that.

But we went from there to Fort Scott, and the people having been notified that I wished to meet them there, they gathered in to the number of about 800 or 1,000. I think almost every man in Bourbon county was there, and there with his arms on. They had rifles, and shot-guns, and pistols, and knives, and they were all in sight; and they looked as though they were ready to use them on each other. Great excitement prevailed. I made some remarks to the people, talked to them as quietly and pleasantly as I could, and was followed. I think, by Judge Wright. After he got through, Gov. Ransom, formerly Governor of Michigan, took the stand. I had great confidence in Governor Ransom. He was an elderly man, a man of great intelligence, a man who had the respect of everybody that knew him, and I was confident that he would do everything in his power to bring about the result we all so much desired. I turned aside to talk to some one, and in a little while I heard him denouncing the Free-State people for having brought on the condition of affairs that existed there, and in an instant Judge Wright interrupted him very sharply and faced him. I sprang up between them and told them that thing must stop. Says I, "Gov. Ransom, you are a much older man than I; I did not expect this kind of conduct on your part; I had a right to expect something different from you. You must stop this talking. You must take your seat and keep quiet." He did take his seat, and kept quiet.
regretted very much to do it. I regretted to speak in that manner to a man much older than myself, but it was a crisis in affairs at the time. If he had been permitted to go on it would have resulted in a bloody flight on the spot, for the people had already begun to separate into two parties, and in another minute or two, or upon the firing of a single shot, there is no telling how many people would have been killed there.

To make a long story short, I prevailed upon all the county officers of that county to resign their offices, and then I told the people that while I had the right to appoint any man I pleased to fill the vacancies, that I desired an expression of their wishes in the matter, and that I wanted them to hold an election right then and there, and that I would receive it as instructions as to whom to appoint to those offices. They asked me how they should do it. I told them to set up their candidates, place them out at one side of the public square, one here and another there, and let their friends form a line on the right and on the left. They placed their candidates out, and I gave the word to march. They then counted them, and reported to me the number that they had found for each candidate. The first was for sheriff, I think. Then for the next offices we went through the same ceremony, and the election was held in that way. I gave them a certificate of appointment, and as soon as I got up to Leesporton sent them their commissions. We had no more trouble down there. From there we went to the place on the Marais des Cygnes where that horrible massacre had occurred only a short time before. We found every man who came there had his arms with him. I addressed them about as I had been addressing the people before; quieted the trouble in the neighborhood, and appointed the proper officers for that county, and we came home, and I believe those adjustments lasted as long as the Territory lasted.

Now I have brought you through pretty much all of the ten months that I was with you. I have perhaps given some facts that you have not heard before; perhaps you have heard some matters differently related. I have endeavored to give you the facts without embellishment, and trust that the relation of them will leave as good an impression upon your mind as the facts themselves did at the time I left this Territory as Governor.

But that was not all that I had to do with Kansas. It so happened that when the war of the Rebellion broke out I was appointed to a command in the army, and ordered to report to General Hunter. I did report to General Hunter at Fort Leavenworth for duty. He looked at my order and said: "Very well, I will just put you in command of all the troops in Kansas." "Well," said I, "General, what are the troops and where are they?" Said he, "I don't know anything about them; you must find them the best way you can." Well, I soon found that he was much disgusted with something. I began to inquire around to find out whether I had anybody to fight or not. The same day, I think it was, a man came down from Troy, Doniphan county, with a requisition for thirty days' rations for six hundred men. He was referred to me. I asked him for his muster roll. He said he did not have any. "Well," said I, "how can I issue rations without knowing whether you have any men at all or not? You must have been mustered into service. You must satisfy me about that." Well, he said they had always been drawing rations that way. "Well," says I, "I can't give you an order for anything of that sort. General Hunter may do it, but I cannot." Then I took him and introduced him to General Hunter and he asked him some questions. I told him how matters stood. Well he said he would give him rations for ten days, I believe it was, and that he must go back home and bring on the muster roll and the necessary papers to show that they were in the service. At the end of ten days he came back, and with him the Colonel (I have forgotten the name) and the muster roll of the regiment, and the roll consisted of one Colonel, one Lieutenant Colonel, four Captains, four First Lieutenants, six Second Lieutenants, and not a single private. Well, I told him that that kind of a roll was not sufficient to draw rations for six hundred men, and he went away, and I suppose from what I heard afterwards, that there was not a foot of ground between Troy and Leavenworth that he did not make resound with abuses of me.

I afterwards learned that there was a regiment down at Mine creek that had lost its Colonel, and the Major of the regiment came in and reported that there was no Colonel belonging to that Regiment, and that the Lieutenant Colonel had resigned and he wanted the Colonels. Well, he produced the resignation of the Lieutenant Colonel, and who should it be but my old friend, John Ritchie. There was some-
thing I did not like about the whole proceeding and so I concluded that I would go down and see about it in person, and I did so, and I rode right into camp without being halted once, although they were within a few miles of the Missouri border, where fifty men could have gone in and surprised them. There was not a single sentinel out. The Lieutenant Colonel was absent. Having resigned, I suppose he had gone home; at any rate he was not there. The Major was up at Fort Leavenworth. I put the senior Captain in command. I do not now remember his name; he was a man whom I had never seen before. I came back up here, and I think I sent H. Miles Moore down there to investigate that matter afterward; and I do not think he has ever made his report to me. I told him to-day that I thought he had better be making that report. The result of that was, that Powell Clayton was appointed Colonel of that regiment by Governor Robinson, and he made a good officer. Colonel Ritchie denied that this was a bona fide resignation; that it was taken from him under a false pretense; and that was what the investigation was to be about, as I recollect.

Well, it is not necessary to go into particulars about those matters. I found a number of regiments in the State, composed of good men—as good men as ever shouldered a musket or handled a saber. They needed only discipline to make them good soldiers, and I took pride in making them good soldiers. In whatever I did to bring about discipline in the army, it had nothing in the world to do with my likes or dislikes towards any particular individual. My conduct was directed entirely towards bringing about the efficiency of the soldiers, and I would have displaced the nearest friend I had if he was incapable of occupying the position; or I would have taken the greatest enemy I had in the country and put him in command, if I believed he was capable of filling the position. My object was to benefit the whole country, and all I did was with a view to that object.

Now, my fellow-citizens, I suppose you have listened to me about long enough. Of course there are very many incidents that I could relate which occurred during all that time that I have passed over. I have tried to relate the most salient, the most striking facts. As I said, I came to the Territory without any ill-feelings towards anybody. I left the Territory with the same kind of feeling. I took hold of the office of Governor for the purpose of doing my duty as a public officer, and properly representing the Federal Government in the Territory of Kansas, and in doing that I let no person's opinion control me in my action when not in accord with what I thought was right, and I never formed an opinion without fully satisfying myself as to what I believed was best for the Government.

I hope, fellow-citizens, that you may have many meetings such as this. I hope that I may meet you hereafter—not as a speaker, for I assure you that I have no desire to be considered a speaker at all, but as a listener. I thank you most kindly for your attention, and hope that we may meet again.