

KANSAS AS A FACTOR.

FIRST ANNUAL ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, IN THE HALL OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, TOPEKA, JANUARY 27, 1881, BY S. S. PROUTY.*

The struggle in Congress over the bill to organize the Territory of Kansas was the most exciting of any that had been experienced in that body since the days of 1820—in the great strife over the Missouri Compromise. The statesmen of the South, appreciating the growth of the anti-slavery sentiment in the country, which menaced the “peculiar institution” and threatened its political supremacy, if not eventual extinction, made a bold dash for an increase of power. They caused the repeal of the time-honored Missouri Compromise, which provided that no slavery should ever exist north of a certain stipulated line. The doors were thus opened for the admission of Slavery into an empire which was supposed to have been forever dedicated to Freedom. This repeal was embodied in the bill to organize the Territory of Kansas, and was effected by the passage of that bill. The repeal clause in the bill was the cause of the great contention in Congress. Pending its official consideration, the people of the whole country became interested in the subject, and ardently espoused the side which harmonized with their respective social and political predilections. The Anti-Slavery or Free-Soil element, alarmed and indignant, received large augmentations from the practical and unspeculative classes, by the audacity of the friends of slavery in ignoring a solemn treaty and attempting to extend the area of slave territory and increasing their power. It was evident, even to the most superficial observer, that the purpose of the slave interest was to make Kansas a slave State.

“Sir,” said Charles Sumner, with prophetic vision, in discussing this bill, “the bill you are about to pass is at once the worst and the best on which Congress ever acted. Yes, sir, worst and best at the same time. It is the worst bill, inasmuch as it is a present victory of slavery. In a Christian

*At the meeting of the Board of Directors of the Society, held January 20, 1880, on motion of Hon. J. S. Emery it was made the duty of the Executive Committee to secure the delivery of an annual address before the Society each year thereafter, at the State Capitol. In pursuance of the instructions, Mr. Prouty was invited by the committee to deliver the first annual address. Governor St. John presided at this meeting; and it was largely attended. The Governor introduced Mr. Prouty with a few well-chosen remarks, referring to the importance of the occasion. At the close of Mr. Prouty's address, brief addresses, narrating many incidents relating to the early times in Kansas, were made by Hon. D. W. Houston, Hon. Edward Russell, Hon. O. S. Munsell, Hon. John E. Rastall, and Hon. John Speer. The Manhattan Cornet Band was in attendance, and at intervals entertained the audience with appropriate music.