

AMONG THE LAWMAKERS.

Any one lacking in due respect for the law should spend a few days at the capital and see how fearfully and wonderfully it is made, and thenceforth he would bow down before it in reverence. Unsophisticated people have an idea that the chosen representatives of the people meet together and discuss measures for the welfare of the state; that great principles of government are argued; that logic flows like water—this may be true, for water flows but little; that forensic eloquence rings through the legislative halls and echoes from the lofty recesses of the ceiling—this is now avoided by long strips of cloth flies, to prevent animated speakers from receiving back from the ceiling broken and unintelligible chunks of their own eloquence to confound them; that when every "honorable gentleman from — county" has expressed his unalterable convictions, a vote is taken and the bill passes or fails, as the combined wisdom of the members shall decree. Beautiful and pastoral as this idyllic conception is, and it seems almost like a profanation to dethrone such an one, it falls like formless clay when one sees the actual process of law making. The first thing one learns after reaching the sacred precincts is that the legislature is composed of Tom, Dick and Harry, fellows he meets every day. Of course, he may only be personally acquainted with Harry, but some one else knows Tom and Dick, and altogether we know them all. If he go there with fear and trembling on behalf of Harry, who, he thinks, will have a hard time to keep himself above absolute obscurity among such a collection of the wise men of the state, the chosen representatives of the people, he soon learns that Tom and Dick's friends have as much reason to be afraid of Harry as he of them. That genial and bluff old soul, General Dick Oglesby, ex-senator and ex-governor of Illinois, relates his experience on this point in his characteristically blunt and humorous way. He says that when he first entered the senate chamber and looked about at the array of white heads, and felt that before him sat the wise men of the nation, those who names had been household words for many years, he stood in mingled awe and amazement, wondering how in the world he ever got there; but after he had been there a few weeks, had heard them talk, had seen them eat and drink and smoke and chew, he wondered how in the world any of them got there. It is in this discovery that Tom and Dick are no greater than Harry, and possibly not so great, that the visitor receives his first shock. His second comes when he learns that his previous notion that the legislative branch of the government consists of two houses explodes, as it is sure to do with considerable force when he sees the third house transacting business. The chief distinction between this house and the other two is that this one never adjourns. It attends strictly to business in season and out of season, at the capitol, at the hotel, at dinner, at the theater, at church and in the luxurious irrigating parlors. This house is peculiarly constituted. It is self appointed and requires no qualifications for membership. Any fool who feels like it can join it—and a great many do. Nevertheless it has a great influence upon the course of legislation, and he who wants to know how the cat is going to jump on any important question will do well to ask some well-posted member of the third house.

But legislation does not, by any means, depend upon the third house. In fact, if that body did not exist there would probably be more of it, and, one might add, of a better quality. Here is another thing the callow visitor soon learns—that the members when they go there have each a few pet measures they desire ardently to have passed, and are always open to conviction as to the merits of other bills when that conviction will secure a vote for their own. The member of the Olympia legislature who introduced a resolution making it an offence equal to bribery for members to trade votes, struck pretty near the root of a large evil, although he was laughed out of his position by his associates. Poorly equipped for practical work, indeed, is the legislator who has nothing to trade. Yankee blood will crop out, and the ruling passion of swapping will assert itself. "Thrice armed is he who hath his quarrel just," but better heeled by far is he who has his vote well in hand for about forty different things his brother members want. Yea, verily, then will he find the way he long has sought, and return to his constituents with triumph on his brow and his passed bill in his pocket.

There are other duties besides voting for each other's bills the members have to perform. They must say "no," and say it hard and often, not to invitations to impromptu sessions of the irrigation committee, for the word is not known in the book of etiquette used on such occasions, but to the applicants for clerkships. This duty falls with peculiar force upon the chairmen of committees. When the house or senate adjourns on the day the committees are announced, these poor men are made to realize fully the meaning of the poet when he sang:

The Assyrian come down like a wolf on the fold;
His cohorts all gleaming with purple and gold.

For, like a cloud of Kansas grasshoppers, the applicants, both male and female, who have been hovering around in anticipation of this event, rise up and envelop the luckless lucky ones, and a brave man is he who gives them valiant battle. This is one of the penalties of greatness, one of the nickels the legislator has to drop into the slot of the machine that elevates

him above his fellows. "Wretched is that poor man that hangs on princes' favors!" and equally wretched is the trusting, hoping, despairing but ever-seeking applicant for a clerkship. A promise is not a good promise unless it is kept, and these off-color promises are dealt out with a liberal hand by those badgered committeemen who would fain get far beyond "the mad-dening crowd's ignoble strife," and attend a session of the irrigation committee. This is a matter that will never be properly settled until the legislature adopts the principle that clerks shall only be paid for the work they actually perform. There has been a great deal of fun made of the lady clerks, and much has been said complimentary to neither their ability nor character. This is entirely undeserved. So far as intelligence goes, they are equal to the average of applicants for clerkships in other lines of business, and the same is true of them so far as their character and conduct are concerned. The root of the difficulty is that clerks are appointed for committees that have no earthly use for them, and that under such circumstances it is needless to inquire into their qualifications. From among the applicants it is possible to select good, reliable, serviceable clerks for those committees that actually need them, and if this be not done it is folly to lay the blame upon the clerks. Let the clerks be selected in the same way they would be chosen by the same persons for their private business, and there will be little complaint on the score of incompetency. There is one official speaker, but there are four or five self appointed speakers who cost the state about \$5,000 apiece preaching economy. The session costs more than \$1,000 a day, and a little mathematical calculation will convince the wordy member's admiring constituents that words cost money, even if they are but the veriest rant. These silver-tongued orators should learn that silence is golden.

Then there are other duties for the members to perform. Many things must be investigated, and examining committees flit hither and yon, shedding the calcium light of official inquiry upon everything. The doors of the penitentiary and insane asylum stand tremblingly ajar to receive them—temporarily only—and anxious officials exhibit a politeness of demeanor and a cordiality of reception that they themselves hardly recognize as familiar. Even the inmates of those institutions feel the infection in the air and enjoy it, for they know it bodes them well for a few weeks. If their votes could settle it the legislature would remain in constant session and send out an investigating committee every week. Not only these two great institutions feel the infection, but the officials of every kind of establishment who want to get a fair look at the treasury, or who have heads to lose, become, for the nonce, models of propriety and saintliness. How far the pendulum swings the other way when the strain is passed it is not well to inquire. Possibly a permanent board of asylum and prison commissioners—with apologies to Governor Pennoyer for suggesting any more officials (see cartoon)—would have a tendency to perpetuate these holiday beatitudes in our public institutions.

Speaking of the governor, it must not be overlooked that he does a great deal of legislating himself, in addition to his executive duties and running all the state offices and the supreme court. The legislators pass a bill because their eyes tell them it is white; but, lo, the governor vetoes it on the ground that it is black, and immediately there is a chorus of voices that exclaim, "Yea, verily, it is, indeed, black. We thought it white; but it is surprising how black it is. Let it mourn for itself in its own raiment." This feature has not come to the surface yet, but there is one thing certain, the governor can be depended upon for vetoes. To be sure, Washington is a long distance away, and 1892 has not come yet; but the telegraph lines are all in good working condition and time speeds on the wings of the booming Chinook.

As an educator the legislature yields not the palm to anything. The practical lessons of every day life it teaches sink deeply into the souls of its pupils, and its influence—never mind for what—is far-reaching and permanent. One lesson is enough, as a general rule, and that one of the honorable gentlemen has thoroughly learned his and is proved by the following pathetic lament, written on the back of a defunct bill, and rescued from the omnivorous maw of the waste basket by one whose soul is also attuned to poetic harmonies:

THE LAY OF THE FIRST SESSION.

(Written by one not familiar with the lay of the land.)

I brought with me a little bill safe in my inside pocket,
And entered it the very first, and got it on the docket.
When it came up to get a vote, some enemy, to block it,
Referred it to a committeeman who put it in his pocket.

MORAL.

It's mighty tough; but then I've learned my lesson good and straight
The next time I to Salon come, a wise man of the state,
Wise man I'll be, you bet your life. I'll be forever blowed,
If I don't trade with every man who wants a wagon road.

This poetic scintillation, besides the impressive moral lesson it conveys is also valuable to show that even so depressing an environment as a legislature can not prevent the heaven-born muse from bursting into song.

QUILL.