

TAFT, THE IMPOSSIBLE

Picturesque Incidents in the Life of a Man who Violated every Prophecy Made Concerning Him

BY ROBERT LEE DUNN.

THE world has never relinquished its vivid interest in the man who does unexpected things. There is a permanent fascination about the doer of the impossible which appeals to every people and every clime. And this land, more than any other, is the special home of the daring souls who have accomplished what others called hopeless tasks. Here, more than anywhere else in the physical geography of the globe, do men respect and applaud the pioneer and the relentless conqueror of seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

William Howard Taft came into Yale College a great strapping Ohio youth, who seemed fitted for nothing so much as big meals and arm-chairs. There could have been no severity in setting up the big, clear-eyed and ruddy-faced Westerner as the finest sort of material for the beef-eating fraternity and the thumb-bit coterie. But he would have been under a daring soul, who would have nominated this monster for any part in the active athletic life of the institution, or even for leadership in its intellectual affairs. Brave, at least in those days, was not generally associated with mentality. The preferred physique for the intellectual leader was of the spare, lean, even goat type. "Big Bill" Taft could have any of the big honors of the athletic field or the class-room was by the very fact of his physique more than improbable—it was impossible.

But was it? What is the history of the case? Well, as a matter of fact, the history of the case is the beginning of the greatest series of absolutely direct violations of prophecy concerning an individual, which recent history in these United States offers the student. For, no sooner did the big fellow get familiar with the way of the land than he began to tackle things which, according to prophecy, were directly out of his sphere. Instead of sitting about in arm chairs and being elected leader of the beef-eating fraternity, he started in for the most strenuous sort of athletics, being promptly attracted to boxing, swimming, long-distance walking. Soon the surprising ability of this man to make his feet do his bidding came to the attention of his fellows and he was informally voted the light-footed man of the crowd. Even to this day he carries the reputation of official dignity through the daintiest of dances with a grace and ease that is astonishing. And the folks who start with him on his daily morning run of seven miles on shipboard soon find the pace rather too lively for them. The Taft of today is a trained athlete, with superb muscles ready for the quickest play.

And as to the intellectual prophecies, another disappointment. The clear-eyed, ruddy-faced Ohio student soon taught his classmates that there was no necessary antagonism between a big, healthy body and the hardest kind of intellectual research and study. He managed to take several of the most highly valued prizes of his class, and bore them off in quiet happiness in the face of the fellows who had associated the midnight oil and the gaunt visage with the prize-winner's record.

Both of these incidents indicated the coming man. This easy, comfortable fellow, who smiled at the most of the best things of life, did not lack for the plucky spunk with which to demonstrate that he was not the mere lucky chip on the success wave. If it were humanly possible, he showed that he could be as good a horseman as anybody, and despite his great weight, he is regarded today as one of the best horsemen in the United States. Going across the Pacific a jostling bet was made that he could not get through one of the big ventilators. He not only did get through, but with such ease that the crowd cheered his performance to the echo.

He is one of the quickest workers that the public life of the country has ever seen. Yet with a trained mind accustomed to judicial attitude toward the claims of each side to the question, he is free from the snail judgments which have been too often characteristic of our public men. They used to say that "large bodies move slowly," but with this sunny-tempered fellow as a dresser of decisions, great tasks with such ease that men wonder

if the work could have been as hard as they expected, we shall have to invent a new phrase better suited to the large bodies that move not only fast, but also in the right direction and with little fuss. This is the man who was impossible.

Speeches on Impossible Subjects.

Another extremely interesting phase of Mr. Taft's career is associated with his willingness to make speeches on the most astonishing subjects before the particular audiences which those speeches, according to the skilled prophets, could not fall in with. This is further proof of his habit of doing the impossible. And it may be said that when history is written thoughtfully, somewhere up in the dim future, it will be recorded that this very habit won him more friends than almost all other causes combined—excepting always the wonderfully magnetic charm of his own personality.

Take, for instance, the speech that is at present uppermost in the public mind, at least among the bulk of the people of the Eastern States. The speech that he delivered at Cooper Union, New York City, in January. The title of that speech, announced long in advance, was "Capital and Labor." No more striking theme could have been selected for that great gathering in a building sacred to the memory of Lincoln, and in which, every Sunday night, vast crowds of working men gather for the purpose of discussing the stirring phases of the labor problem which are uppermost. Perhaps there is no gathering in the world where men speak freer than they do here; none where the audience is in the habit of being more audacious in its disregard of the conventional relations between speaker and audience, for they do not hesitate to hurl caustic and searching questions at the head of any speaker who faces them. One of the ablest lawyers of the metropolis, himself closely in touch with labor matters and with the trend of political affairs, told me the day before the speech that Taft was simply sitting down on the edge of a volcano when he dared to talk on such a subject at Cooper Union. Another critic said to me, in advance of the meeting, "That meeting is going to be Taft's political funeral." They were all with one accord agreed that the thing was impossible.

Now, was it? If it was impossible, then again this most remarkable man accomplished the impossible, for you have only to ask any of those who were so sure that the occasion was to prove his political downfall, what they really think of the impression created, to learn that they were sorely wrong in their prophecies. The meeting was in many respects the greatest night in Taft's career, for he faced the largest company of thoughtful working men in his history, men who were ready and primed to fearlessly fling at him questions concerning the motive of his past actions which they thought would trip him up; there was to be no quarter; the speaker was facing the most merciless body of questioners probably, on the American continent, and unless he could win them to his way of thinking he was liable to be hooted down.

Accomplished the Impossible.

It did seem that the task was almost too great to be worth attempt. With many another man it would have been cheerfully agreed that this was not quite the right moment for the introduction of a discussion concerning capital and labor.

But Taft made no such agreement with his own conscience or his fearful friends. On the contrary, he sailed into his subject with all the abandon of a college debater, he did not evade a single phase of the difficult and complex theme; he did not compromise; he did not extenuate; he did not apologize. He struck right straight out from the shoulder, like the manly man he is, told that magnificent audience of the rights of labor as well as the rights of capital, showed them how great an apparent advantage capital sometimes seems to have in legal matters, helped them to a clearer understanding of the judicial attitude toward some of the hard problems of the day, and unequivocally ranged himself alongside of the labor union as its staunch friend, crediting it with many of the benefits of the new machinery of the country, enjoying. If there has been a clearer



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result came into my office and said with enthusiasm "It was masterly." The leading workmen's paper of New York City said that the man made just the sort of impression that you would like to have made upon you when you went into a bank and the president met you to take care of your deposit. It said "If the boat was sinking, and he could swim and you couldn't you'd hand him your \$20,000, if you had it, saying 'Give this to my wife' and she'd get it, if he lived to get ashore." Just that sort of plain, wholesome, manly and honorable impression is exactly the impression that the immense audience of working men got from his speech on labor and capital. He was mobbed on the platform and at the doors on his way out, by thousands of work-

ing men who wanted to shake his hands and tell him they were for him heart and soul. He did literally accomplish the impossible. And that is the sort of speech that Taft is making all over the world. It is not limited to the big metropolises where the newspapers will take it up in big space; it is what he does in every little gathering of the far away Philippines, when they call upon the Big Chief for a few remarks. He is the only man in the world who has had the nerve to travel 10,000 miles for the purpose of telling another people that they were incapable, at present, of governing themselves, and that perhaps it would be two generations before they would be sufficiently advanced to warrant self government. And that same nation today worships the man

who told them these frank truths as few rulers are worshipped on any continent. The same thing happened in the matter of Oklahoma. Big delegations visited Washington to see the War Secretary in the interest of their special and pet schemes for the new commonwealth. They could not get him to commit himself. He told them very frankly that he was thinking the matter over carefully and that when he came out there as he planned to do in a few months he would make an address which would convey his thoughts with accuracy. And he kept his word. He made a speech which was so full of ginger that the whole state is talking about it yet. He announced matters up in such a judicial way that his speech is now found pinned up to the desks of thousands of the very men who were at first opposed to his utterance assuming that he was talking to them as a private citizen but as a Republican worker for the Administration. He has more friends in Oklahoma than any man not a resident of the state, and he is the man who dared to stand up and tell them the truth.

These are some of the many impossible speeches which Taft seems to have a wonderful knack of getting off on his travels about the world. The more difficult and hopeless the task seems to be, the better he enjoys taking a shy at it. Nor is this characteristic of any but strong, self-reliant men; the weakness would hardly select for his special subject any of the themes with which Taft has entertained his fellow-men on his tour of the world. He has specially revealed in the delightful task of attempting the impossible. Ask those who went to scoff and remained to cheer how thoroughly he succeeded in winning them from narrow views and taken viewpoint to one which clarifies vision and sunniness of temper prevailed.

His Family Life.

Most public men of the day have no family life. It is impossible, we are led to believe. The tremendous demands of the governmental service render it absolutely prohibitive for any man to expect to be more than a mere boarder with his family after the Washington career starts. So true is this that some of the leading men in public life do not even take their families to Washington, preferring to squeeze a few days from their duties now and then which they may spend "back at the old home."

Now Secretary Taft is not one of this class. He has been doing public work for 25 years, and he is one of the best illustrations of the ideal American father to be found anywhere. Here, for his sake, he has succeeded in getting the impossible to kindly transform itself into the inevitable. After you come to know something of the Taft standpoint, you will hardly imagine the War Secretary as anything but a successful family man. He is the sort of warm-hearted, kindly-voiced man you expect to see taking a line little fellow around the shoulder and saying to him, "Charlie, my boy, shake hands with this old friend of your father's." You picture him sitting about a family circle around the lamp while the wife and mother tells of the little household items of the day, the daughter compares her French pronunciation with her interested parents, and the small boy struggles with the names of stops which the party did not make while they were touring round the world.

It means a good deal for a man who is the most-traveled public servant that the United States has ever had, to maintain a successful and happy home. It speaks well for his personal qualities and his regard for the splendid old days when the home was really the center and the hub of the Nation. Yet it is about as near impossible as anything that one could suggest for a man who is jumping about all over the world on errands of the gravest National importance to keep up a family life that shall be satisfactory. How does he do this seemingly impossible thing?

Well, first of all, he takes his family with him. That's the simplest way to get the result he seeks. For men of large means this would be the simplest sort of solution of the problem of having the family integrity preserved. But the Secretary of War is a man of very limited means and it suggests that sacrifices are made in the family income for the special purpose of keeping the family together. This is a phase of the subject which has

never suggested itself to most of the students of the doings of public men. Little Charlie Taft is probably the most-traveled boy of his age in the world. He has accompanied his father on two journeys of tremendous distance and made the recent trip with the Secretary around the world. And the boy's character is as distinguished as his father on the globe-trotting journeys. If the father is too busy with social or official business to attend to the demands of the small boy for company in his play, then the mother is his partner. And she has learned to catch a ball with unusual skill for a generation of maintenance and sharp comments.

The Taft family is a fine example of the best in American life. Though they travel so far and so long, it is done without personal servants or even a maid for Mrs. Taft. Mr. Taft has always assisted in her domestic needs. And Mrs. Taft is a good deal of a help to the correct clothing for her famous husband to wear from time to time. They are all old chums, this interesting Taft family, and the interests of all are interested in all. Yet what man of us, taking a shy at the subject offhand, would care to say that it was possible for any public officer such as Mr. Taft to have a generation of maintenance such a successful family life as he certainly does. It's just another of those times when he seems to be able to do the impossible. He has done it. He has done it to be said that the tactful and charming hand of the mother is plain in the shaping of the happy home life which the Secretary so greatly enjoys.

Taft's Appeal to Young Men.

One of the oddest developments of the life of the Secretary of War during the recent years has been his following of young men. This may be due to his heretofore spirit of youth, which the man seems to be peculiarly endowed, it may be due to his outdoor enthusiasm, or the warmth of his temperament, or whatever it is he has it strong and clear. Now the very last thing that any man in the leadership of young men usually dares to do is to range them up and get off a "speech" at them. You would think that it was grossly impolitic to say the least. Impossible, says the practical politician.

But Taft does it. Not since the days of George Washington has any man dared to talk so plainly and with such fine enthusiasm to the youth of the country concerning their large responsibilities to the public life of the day and their right and duty to share in it, as has Mr. Taft. And strange to say, he is cheered to the echo at every sentence. Whether it is in the chambers of the grand old institution from which he graduated or out on the wild plains of the West, every time that he gets to telling the young fellows of the Nation what they ought to do and why they ought to do it, he gets the biggest applause of the day. Stirring words he says too, such as "Wealth can give no facility like that which comforts the man who has identified himself with something bigger than himself." And again, "The best of all is the pure joy of service, to do things that are worth doing to be in the thick of it! Ah, that is to live!"

Now the strength and glory of this appeal to the youth of the country comes from the character of the man from a living example of the very things that are being preached. It is not mere empty platitudes. It is fiery word backed up by the deed. He can well afford to talk about the real glory of doing things worth while for he has been doing them for 25 years. He knows nothing about squeaking a certain office out of an occasional task, for he is the poorest man in high office today. But he does know as well as any man of this day and generation the right and noble motives. He cannot afford more than the most humble establishment in the great City of Washington but no matter where he lives and calls his home, he has noble motives. He cannot afford more than the most humble establishment in the great City of Washington but no matter where he lives and calls his home, he has noble motives. He cannot afford more than the most humble establishment in the great City of Washington but no matter where he lives and calls his home, he has noble motives.

After all, it is a good, clean, square, manly man, who is using his high talents for the benefit of the race among which he lives, and is making a joy of doing it. He is a minister first part without attracting comment."

THE CHASTE, YET GRACEFUL LINES OF THE STRING BEAN

"WHAT do you think about it, Larry?" asked the Hotel Clerk. "Shall I succumb to the long green frock, modeled on the chaste yet graceful lines of a string bean, with the double row of white buttons scattered along the short ribs like the stops on an organ? Or shall I allow my errand fancy to be wooed into a melodious coma by the modish one-button cut-away as worn with the fashionable wessut of the new squashed cantaloupe tint? Shall I have the scapolone effect on the turn-back cuffs? Or shall I order some of those tasty side pockets that are cut out in a curve and put on the bias like a shark's smile. It's all still an open question to me, and I will probably need the help of a few discriminating friends in making a selection.

"You see, there's such a confusion of directions coming from those that are best qualified to speak out and advise a palpitating and excited public. One leading authority, now, says that the broad lines wavy braid running down the center of the trousers or pants, if made west of Pittsburg, will provide a truly winsome finish to a business suit for forenoon wear. Another who is of equal standing in the profession especially recommends that they shall be made loose and care-free around the hips, but turned up at the bottoms as far as the distate of good taste and the size of the knee joint will allow.

"Personally, I have a haunting dread that the long and clinging frock coat may not become me. It would be fine for a slender, willowy form, say like Vice-President Fairbanks, who is really the only Gibson Girl statesman we've got left; but while I have a good figure, that is only pleasantly plump, still at that I'm willing to admit that I may be getting what you'd call lumpy in spots. That's what makes me hesitate in my selection of the close-fitting or princely effects with the sobriety way lapsels that open back like the shutters on a henhouse. Ah me! no wonder so many of our most prominent young men are breaking down under the nervous strain of trying to do the right thing in the face of such conflicting and contradictory advice."

"I've merely been reading up on the modes, the Spring modes for me," said the Hotel Clerk. "I've been trying to inform myself how a man shall attire himself in order to avoid making himself conspicuous in the best circles. It would appear from my readings that the man who dresses up like a human being this season is in great danger of being jeered at as one lacking in the mere rudiments. One article that I saw in the paper says that not only the coatings, the vestings and the pantings, but even the undershirts and the pajamas and the porous plasterings, if such he worn, must follow a common color tone such as mauve or shrimp pink or muskmelon tan in order to stamp a fellow as a dresser of discrimination and individuality. And the attention that is being paid this year to the

KNOW HOW TO SHAKE HANDS WITHOUT APPEARING SELF-CONSCIOUS



smaller details of dress—you've no idea, Larry! A man of even the simplest taste is going to need at least six walking canes and as for scarfpins and—

I'D HAVE TO WALK ON MY HANDS TO GET MY MONEY'S WORTH



years of uninterrupted mazzina in this country, you might begin to get results. The Joe Cannon knob and declivities that distinguished the countenance of the founder of the hereditary estate have been obliterated from the faces of the present crop of male offspring, leaving them with a smoothness and symmetry unmarred by any expression whatsoever. The mind has become a mere damp trace which still adheres stubbornly to the inner, or unused side of the skull, but gives the owner no trouble. You'd see such a person sitting on the back of his

THE CHASTE, YET GRACEFUL LINES OF THE STRING BEAN



garments that are going to be worn by the pioneers of the world of fashion next month. I lack the hardihood myself to do it. I confess it with shame. Our stock sprang from the primeval soil at too recent a period to qualify me to wear those Pain's Fireworks clothes. If I should become the owner of a pair of the fashionable eggplant purple half hose, formerly socks, having a design of Southern amilax twined around the ankles and hollyhocks in the natural colors running up the legs. I'd feel that I'd have to walk on my hands in order to get my money's worth.

KNOW HOW TO SHAKE HANDS WITHOUT APPEARING SELF-CONSCIOUS



But one who is to the manna born, as the poet says, could go paddling around in society with his Southern terminals thus enmeshed in beauty's weave and never let on any more than if he was barefooted. "I'll tell you, Larry, it takes about three generations of persistent wealth and the kind of culture you get at Lenox and Palm Beach to reach the point where you can put on those spectacular garments and look as if you were wearing them. With you or with me, 't would look as if the clothes was wearing us. "After a family has enjoyed about 75

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BY IRVING S. COBB

looked like a doughnut in the face, and you'd probably say to yourself that this was a party lacking in nerve and daring. Which only goes to show how mistaken you'd be. That noble youth has a bunch of sporting cupercups in his blood like a tall stack of red chips. He proves it by the clothes he wears. "When a New York family has got so used to having money that its members can call the servants by their last names offhand and know how to shake hands at the level of the Adam's apple without appearing self-conscious, it usually produces a young Prince Charming with a head shaped like a pineapple cheese who is able to appear happy and comfortable in garments that you or couldn't turn out for a lodge funeral of a member of the Amalgamated Order of Laryngitis if they had to leave off the regalia!" "The cloth proportion is funny gams in any way you take it, Larry. When our healthy ancestors were inhabiting swamps of Britain, wearing their own teeth, and hair, and carrying no clothes baggages, which fitted them like savages. When they fell into the habit of wrapping up their legs the same as comic opera handitis and wearing outer garments which fitted them like a sack, as if they had been made by a fashionable London tailor of the present day, they were semi-barbarians. But in this century, when a man parades a pair of suspenders that save into his better nature and divide his disposition into two jagged fragments, and when he inserts his feet into the pointed, tight shoes that have been made for the purpose of seeing the rest of the pattern—why then he's a crowning product of civilization."

"Still at that, I bet there ain't no other cover-up in the United States except New York that'll stand for them (Continued on Page 11.)