

THE HOTEL CLERK DISCUSSES ELECTION DAY.

BY IRVIN S. COBB.

"WELL, she'll soon be over," remarked the House Detective of the St. Rockless, as he contemplated a campaign button about the size of a butter plate that had suddenly blossomed out in his buttonhole.

"Which she were you expecting over?" asked the Hotel Clerk, "the Mauretanian or some new opera singer with one of those V-shaped names that would make suitable trimming for an undershirt if there was only a little more of it?"

"I mean the agency'll be over by this time next Tuesday night," said the House Detective. "First Tuesday after the first Wednesday, you know."

"Oh, the election," said the Hotel Clerk. "But, I wouldn't go so far as to speak of it as being a agency, Larry. If I were you, so far as I've been able to judge there's been very little acute suffering anywhere, unless you make an exception for the feelings of Mr. Hearst when that callous deputy sheriff outrided on the privacy of his drawing-room compartment and handed him the papers from Governor Haskell, as he stood there, all defenseless, in his hand-painted impressionistic pajamas. Or does Mr. Hearst sleep in a simple shirt since he became one of the peasants?"

"Now, if you want to call it a agency fever covering a period of three months with chilly sensations in the feet, followed by a slowly rising temperature and slightly delirious mutterings during the last week, I may be with you, but I wouldn't care, in view of the present quiet condition of the patient, to make my language any stronger than that."

"Anyway, I look for a complete and satisfactory recovery by next Wednesday evening at the very latest. On election morning those of us who don't forget it will go to the barber shop or the undertaker's parlors or the front office of the livery stable or wherever the place is that has been selected as the temple of our liberties and the bulwark of a representative form of government for the time being."

"You find said temple and bulwark temporarily confined to the keeping of four gentlemen who are clustered together with their heads pointing toward a common center like the Nut City Male Quartette getting ready to render the opening lines of 'Way Down Yonder in the Caunfield.' These are the patriots who have been led to accept the sacred trust by an inherent love for the most cherished institution of their country and also because there's \$11.85 or some such nutritious sum coming to those who slick through for the full course. They're truly a bright lot, these election officers, especially the election clerks, who are the lads with the abrupt faces and the sudden foreheads that take down your name and ask you if you spell Xerxes with a Q or an H and assign you an address in the book where there's been a vacant lot for going on 50 years and then quarrel violently with each other over your middle initial, whether you've got one or not. There's also an impressive row of box stiffs made out of some light, washable material, which has never been done so, with a row

of seemingly human feet showing below the front draperies, and a policeman asleep in a front chair and a haunting smell of gin out of a bottle eddying elusively to and fro in the brooding air. So you take your ballot, which is about the size of a Miss Hotel bed quilt, and retire with it into one of the cheesecloth sanctuaries and unfurl it and find that instead of the great name which has looked down on you from every other street banner during the last few months it contains some lists of gentlemen that are total strangers to you. You then take in your right hand the pencil which a generous Government has expressly provided for the purpose, it being all of two inches long and is tied down at one end with a string and was evidently sharpened in a great hurry by a gentleman who mislaid his pocketknife and had to use his front teeth, only they must have been but indifferent teeth at best. You inscribe one cross mark about where you think your tickets ought to be, or two of them in case you don't care for the nominee—hence the phrase, double cross—and then you come out of your cozy corner and hand the symbol of your suffrage to a gentleman who asks you pleasantly why in Elmer Dumb Nation (no relation to Carrie of that name, although similar in disposition) you didn't fold it up first, and then drops it with an almost careless gesture through a crack in the lid of a wooden box. And that's about all there is to it, Larry, so far as you're concerned, for either your man wins or he doesn't, but generally doesn't, and in any event you make up your mind that the United States, as at present constituted, will probably be able to survive for another four years, because while our Presidents are not invariably healthy, our Vice-Presidents always are, that being, in all the known cases, their principal qualification for the job.

"The principal fault I'd find with election day, Larry, is that it's such a short and disappointing performance after an extensive and exhaustive bally-hoo. It's too much like following a circus procession all over town and back again to the show lot and winding up under a cook tent where some elderly citizens of settled habits are playing checkers for the root beer. After I've been going about from late June until early November contemplating the sideshow banners and having the gentlemanly agents walking amongst me with tickets for the after show, and discussing the merits of the star performers with the casual bystander and listening to the outside barkers and resisting the blandishments of the boosters and hearing the music, I naturally feel that it's considerable of a come-down to be called upon to cast my vote in the same place where I go when the back of my neck needs shaving, and then spend the rest of a three-hour day waiting for the hour when the artist behind the stereopticon screen will flash forth the tidings that the man who was defeated by all the stray ballots has been elected by nearly all the real votes."

"So I would suggest, Larry, that you



turn your attention away from your contemplation of the melancholy culmination of a lachrymose campaign and join with me in discussing some subject that's really got a little glump to it."

"Not for example?" asked the House Detective.

"Well," said the Hotel Clerk, "I can't think of anything more absorbing than the dispute regarding the true function of our best society which is now engaging so many minds on both sides of the Atlantic that heretofore didn't have any heavier burdens to carry in their heads than the part in their hair. Mrs. Astor started it off. You know of the Astors, of course, the great family from whom we have derived the Astor House, the Astor Hotel, the Waldorf-Astoria salad, the Astor Battery, the Astor Cigar and William Waldorf Astor. So you see Mrs. Astor is qualified to speak with the voice of authority and everybody

a small informal dinner without bringing in the Nashville Students to present their native cakewalk and plantation glee direct from Nashville, Illinois. It was Mrs. Astor's idea that if a rising musician reached the point where he could bid successful defiance to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Pianoes as a young poet turned a great epic poem out of his system unassisted, the leaders of Society ought to throw open the tradesmen entrance to him and take him right into their homes and give him a square meal, and make him feel in every way that merit was being properly rewarded.

"Great excitement immediately ensued. It was all right for Frederick Townsend Martin to become over-heated because he's already engaged in reforming society from the inside, the same way a skipper reforms a chess, but I couldn't understand why Uncle Joe Cannon, of Danville—I almost said Danville—should have burst from his cell the way he did. It would seem he resented an insinuation on the part of the lady that he belonged to a school of statesmen that wouldn't shine out in society. So he indulged in a few characteristic remarks, which if properly boiled down and skimmed off, ought to make good soup stock.

"I think myself Mrs. Astor was right. The only statesman of the present day who's really qualified to make a bit in society is the kind that gets elected to Congress occasionally from a Gobelin Tapestry district and spends his term at Washington giving a clever imitation of a suit of clothes partially inhabited by an ostensible person. But on the other hand you'd never gather from Uncle Joe's general walk and conversation that he ever devoted a spare hour to running baby pins in his under-shirt. And he'd have to have his profile redressed so that it wouldn't look so much like the coast line of the Atlantic seaboard, north of Cape Hatteras, and learn to wear hose to match his carvation before he could hope to really fit in with the cotton set. Even then, his under-shirt, if at all in society, is watching the society column of the daily press with bated breath for further contributions to the controversy. I can't recall anything of late years that has been so generally exciting except the New York Herald's great plan to form an alliance between the United States and Mrs. Tai An, the widow lady that's running China."

"You can't steer me away from politics yet awhile," said the House Detective. "I'm thinking pretty strong of voting the Socialist ticket, if the works in the Capitol are in changing things."

"Some of them believe in changing everything but their shirts," said the Hotel Clerk.

Jim Nasium on "The Chance to Become President"



off the refractory mule on the old tow-path for the Rapid Transit Company in the canal boat days?

I fear that in his younger days the American boy does not fully appreciate the advantage he has over the rest of the world in his "chance to become President." When he should be gathering up pine knots to light him through the midnight hours while he reads up the constitution and the compiled bylaws of the Standard Oil Company in order to fit himself to hold down his future job, he is apt to be hanging over a neighboring back garden, watching the play of the rail-splitter, mule-skinner and farmer boys of the present age must be a careless lot, or else they lack the courage to come forward and claim the prize when they hold the winning chance. At any rate, this brand of President seems to be going out of style. There is something radically wrong about this, and it will give me renewed faith in the equal distribution of chances to become President when I see some husky mill hand or an honest streetcar conductor winning out in the Fall elections. When the grand Presidential raffle is pulled off, if any driver of an ash cart or night watchman in a brewery finds that he has the winning chance tucked away in his vest pocket, where it has reposed undisturbed through the years since he received it as his legacy as an American boy, he should throw up his job and claim the prize and fight for it until he gets it, like William J. Bryan and W. R. Hearst. We are now on the eve of the great Presidential raffle that is pulled off in this country every four years, and among all the millions of American born males that are splattered from coast to coast

and from Kalamazoo to the Everglades there are only three, Mr. Bryan, Mr. Taft and Mr. Higgen, who are advertised to have any chance at all to cop the prize. Now, what has become of everybody else's chance? Are we such a careless Nation that we can boast of only three men at the present time who have been able to hang onto their chances until they grew old enough to hold down the job? Or are we such a modest Nation that the rest are too shy and retiring to publicly admit that they have a chance? Anyway, it isn't right that so many chances should be distributed to American boys and so few American men get in the raffle.

I have met both Mr. Taft and Mr. Bryan, and while I have never yet met Mr. Higgen, I saw an elegant cartoon of him by Tom Powers once in the New York American, and I think that out of the three we ought to be able to pluck a fairly average sort of President. Since the unfortunate occurrence of my childhood days, when some tramp fished my chance out of the pocket of my old trousers and probably turned it in at some saloon for a beer check, I have never taken much interest in Presidential elections. My interest in these affairs has usually been confined to wondering which one of the candidates had my chance. I have sounded both Mr. Taft and Mr. Bryan on this subject, but they have both assured me that they haven't got it. And from the way they looked when they said it, I don't believe that either of them would have come out for the office at all if they thought they were

doing it on my chance. They both said something about Eugene V. Debs having it, as his chance somewhat resembled what they thought mine might have been. I don't know whether they intended this as a slur at Mr. Debs or myself, but in either case it was unkind.

Mr. Taft assured me that his chance was given him by Mr. Roosevelt on condition that if he won he would finish up a few little jobs that Mr. Roosevelt has started and can't finish. Mr. Bryan said that he has used his chance two or three times and it is still good for two or three more, and as he made it himself, he ought to know what he is talking about when he says that it isn't mine. Mine may not have been very much of a chance, but I would hate to think that either Mr. Higgen or Mr. Debs has it.

Having lost my own chance to get the President's job, I don't give a continental cuss who gets it. Knowing Mr. Taft and Mr. Bryan personally, I can assure the American people that either of them can hold down the job almost as well as I could do it myself, although I have a few policies that neither of them have in their platforms. Our ideas are somewhat similar, as they have both come out for the Roosevelt policies, and I would too if I were in their place and thought it was the only chance I had to win. We are devoting our efforts to the same life-work, as while they are aiming to save the country through political legislation, I am educating the masses

with my gifted pen through the public press. We are all three great men, but I have succeeded better in keeping it a secret than either of the other two. Anyway, I don't see much use in having any controversy over the Presidential situation this Fall, when both candidates say that they will hold down the job along the same lines as Mr. Roosevelt has in the past. If Mr. Roosevelt insists on going over to Africa to devastate the animal kingdom, why not call off the election and have Mr. Bryan and Mr. Taft collaborate on the job, and perhaps we can strike some kind of a decent average that will satisfy both parties. This would relieve the Standard Oil Company of a great deal of expense and anxiety, and it would still give Mr. Hearst an excuse for publishing his newspapers so that the suffering public would continue to have an interesting and reliable publication to turn to in their hour of need.

I would suggest that Mr. Higgen be given a job in the White House, too, but I am afraid that the cartoonists and comic artists of the New York American would deface the wallpaper with their pictures. It would be embarrassing if some foreign Minister would drop in some morning for a little chat on international affairs with the President and found Mr. Oppen dipping his finger in the ink well and drawing a life-size figure of Happy Hooligan over the mantelpiece. And it might give rise to international complications if Tom Powers would insist on decorating

Copyright by James Kleevers. I just now the kids of this grand and glorious land of the free are getting it finally imbedded in their thick tanks that every American boy has a chance to become President. That's where we have the bulge on most of the boys from over the big drink, because over there they keep all the best jobs in the family, and in order to get in on the ruling stunt and political graft a kid has to show remarkably good judgment for one so young in selecting his parents. If the boy in Greece or Italy or Russia happens during a thoughtless moment to allow himself to be born into a family of the poor peasantry, when he gets old enough to hustle out and stab the world in the face there is nothing left for him but to bunch up in the steerage and best it over here to become chief engineer on a penitentiary or pilot of a pushcart. About the highest office he ever attains to is Master of Transportation to Kingsdom Come for the Black Hand Society. There's nothing to it, the race of life is a handicap race, and the boy who is lucky enough to be born under the Stars and Stripes isn't scratch man. Over here the kid who cut his milk teeth on the curbstone and started out in life as a "under monkey" in a Pittsburgh rolling mill may some day be sitting in the White House heaving the trusts, or by diligent perseverance and a close study of Joe Miller's joke book he may even get so far as to amass untold wealth as a newspaper proprietor. Wasn't Lincoln a rail splitter, and didn't Garfield get his start in life by lambasting the epidemia