

The Morning Astorian

ESTABLISHED 1873
PUBLISHED BY

ASTORIAN PUBLISHING COMPANY.

J. H. CARTER, GENERAL MANAGER.

RATES.

By mail, per year \$6 00
By mail, per month 50
By carriers, per month 60

THE SEMI-WEEKLY ASTORIAN.

By mail, per year, in advance \$1 00



WHAT IS ELECTRICITY?

In "Harper's Magazine" for August Sir Oliver Lodge presents in a popular form a view of the nature of electricity which has recently received much attention from scientific men. To only a limited extent, perhaps, is he to be regarded the author of the theory here advanced. His belief in it, though, is noteworthy, for Sir Oliver is one of the leading authorities on electricity. Besides, he has a particularly happy way of discussing such subjects. Some of the most profound thinkers—Clerke Maxwell, for instance, have employed language which to the layman is absolutely incomprehensible. Hence, while clearness of statement is not evidence of sound reasoning, a man deserves public gratitude who talks and writes so intelligibly as Sir Oliver Lodge.

Textbooks on physics usually distinguish carefully between matter and force. The former can be recognized by man only while under the influence of some form of the latter. Again, force reveals itself only through the medium of matter. Still, the two are to be kept separate in the mind. Whether electricity is force or matter is a question which has received a good deal of consideration. Most physicists frankly confess that they cannot tell. Electricity, they say, can be known only by its properties. They prefer to describe it as a "physical agent," which is manifested in certain ways. At one time there was a disposition to consider electricity as one form of force, but the opinion is not so widely held today. Silvanus P. Thompson (of the London Technical college) whose works on this subject have been widely used in colleges and high schools, declares that electricity is "neither matter nor energy," though resembling both in being destructible. In some ways, he shows, it acts like an attenuated gas; in others it behaves like an incompressible liquid. He mentions respectfully the notion that it is identical with the ether which is supposed to extend everywhere through space, but he is careful not to commit himself to any of these hypotheses. Sir Oliver Lodge, in his article in "Harper's Magazine," goes further. He, too, denies that electricity is energy, but he is even more strongly impressed than is Silvanus P. Thompson with its similarity to matter. He will not say, in so many words, that they are identical, but he has no hesitation in affirming "that matter is composed of electricity."

Sir Oliver's faith is based on a conception of the atom, of which Professor J. J. Thomson (of Cambridge university) is the chief exponent. According to this expert, atoms are made up of two kinds of particles. Some are large and carry charges of positive electricity, and some are small—exceedingly small, indeed—and are negatively electrified. Professor Thomson calls the latter "corpuscles," says that they are far more numerous than the other kind, and adds that they are so diminutive that a thousand of them are required to equal in bulk a positive particle. When he thinks of the structure of an individual atom, the Cambridge physicist employs only a solitary positive element which is made to inclose, like a shell, the negative particles. Electric attraction binds the system together. As all atoms in the universe are supposed by him to be built on that plan, of course he make electricity coexistent with matter. He also shows that electricity seems to possess some of the properties of matter. It can be removed by filtration through cotton wool.

Other physicists concede that large positive particles and small negative ones can be detected separately, and that it is safe to guess at their size from the quantity of electricity they carry. On the other hand, very few experts are willing to evince belief in the hypothetical combination which Professor Thomson makes. Judgment on the correctness of the "electrical theory of the atom" is at present suspended. Consequently any argument which has that for a foundation is just now unconvincing. Nevertheless, Sir Oliver's article is valuable for the indication which it affords of the trend of modern thought regarding both electricity and matter.

A PIVOTAL STATE.

Political managers do wisely in putting New York state in the doubtful column, says the New York Commercial. It is the only safe course to pursue. No state in the union has been so erratic, politically, as the Empire commonwealth—at least, since the system of nominating candidates for president and

vice president of the United States by national conventions came into vogue. It is noteworthy, too, that, as a rule, the pluralities in each presidential year in this state have been comparatively small either way.

In 1840, General William H. Harrison, the Whig nominee for president, carried New York state over Martin Van Buren, the democratic nominee, by a plurality of 13,000; and four years later Polk, democrat, carried it over Henry Clay, Whig, by 5000 plurality. In 1848 General Taylor, Whig, swept the state over Lewis Cass, democrat, by 12,000 plurality, although Martin Van Buren, the "free-soil" nominee for president, received a larger popular vote in New York state than Cass did. In 1852 Franklin Pierce, democrat, carried this state by a plurality of 28,000 over General Scott, Whig; but in 1856, John C. Fremont, the first republican candidate for president, defeated James Buchanan, democrat, by a plurality of over 80,000—a plurality that would probably have been lessened, if not entirely wiped out, had it not been for the candidacy of Millard Fillmore, Whig.

Lincoln carried this state in 1860 by 40,000 plurality; but in 1864, in spite of the approaching successful termination of the civil war for the union side, he carried by only 7000 plurality. In 1868, however, Horatio Seymour, democrat, carried it against Ulysses S. Grant, republican, by 10,000 plurality, but four years later it gave Grant a plurality of 53,000, and that, too, in face of the "liberal republican" bolt. In 1876 it gave Samuel J. Tilden a plurality of 32,000 and in 1880 it again reversed itself by giving James A. Garfield a plurality of 21,000. In 1884 it gave Grover Cleveland a plurality of about 1100 over James G. Blaine, and then, in 1888, rolled up a plurality of 13,000 for Benjamin Harrison; and, in 1892, it again gave Cleveland a plurality of 45,000.

The cause of the enormous pluralities that this state gave to McKinley in 1896 and in 1900 is, of course, clearly understood. It is significant, however, that Governor Odell, who was elected by 111,000 plurality in 1900, was re-elected by a plurality of less than 9000 in 1902.

Undoubtedly one reason for the political fickleness of the Empire state is the shifting character of the population of this city. Every year a large new element, both foreign and American, is added to our voting population. In addition, there is also a considerable element in this city which, while agreeing with one of the leading political parties on matters like the tariff, disagrees with it on other questions, and, accordingly, it votes as circumstances seem to demand.

In a word, there is a great army of independent voters in this commonwealth, and both republican and democratic campaign managers do well to keep the fact in mind.

OUR WONDERFUL POLITICAL MACHINERY.

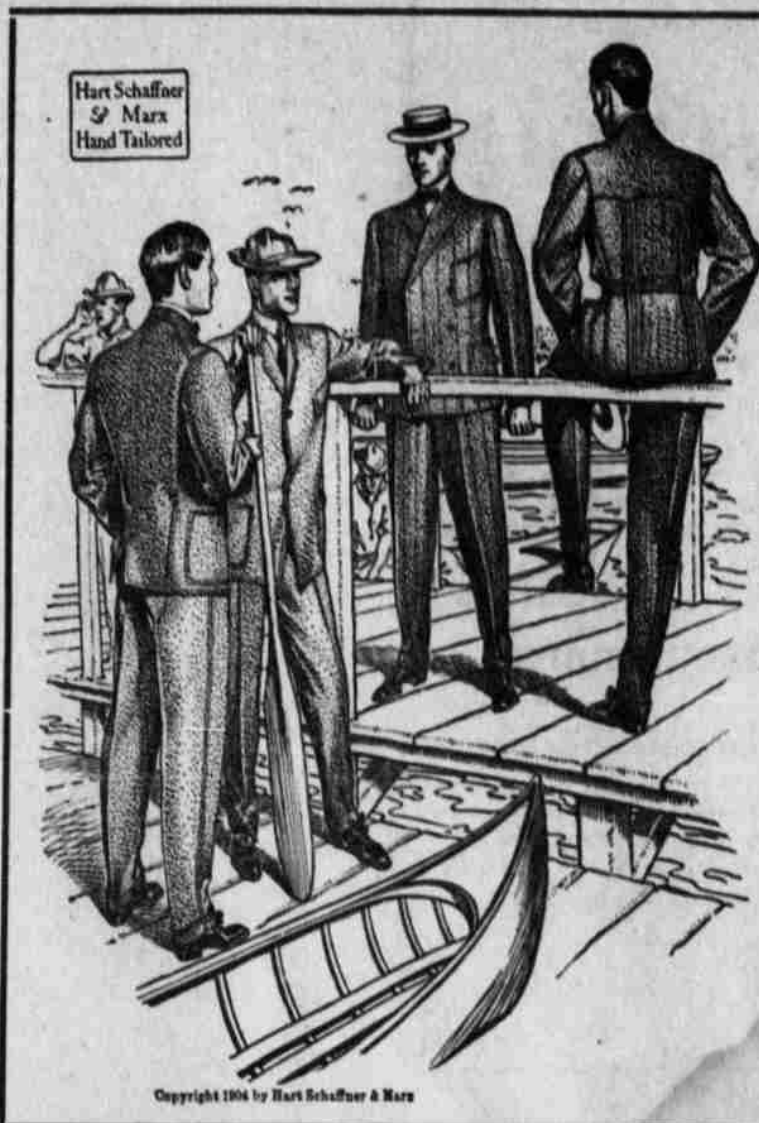
When our republic began its career under the constitution there were fears that its size would make the vast machine of government unworkable. There were special apprehensions concerning the choice of a president—that elective monarch whose glittering position might be expected to engender rivalries resembling the dynastic struggles of European kingdoms, says the Saturday Evening Post.

The framers of the constitution tried to diminish the dangers of a presidential election by removing the choice as far as possible from the people and putting it into the hands of a select body of electors who might be expected to act with wisdom and sobriety, but they were dubious of the outcome. And at first their doubts seemed to be justified. The universal popularity of Washington carried the country safely through the first two presidential elections, but after his retirement the rivalries of parties and factions threatened civil war, if not anarchy.

The country is 16 times as populous now as it was when Jefferson was elected. The mere increase from one presidential election to another is greater now than the total population was then. We shall have what would then have been the unheard-of and absolutely terrifying spectacle of 16,000,000 voters expressing their choice at the polls. In Jefferson's time the presidential electors were chosen by the state legislatures. Yet our political machinery has been so perfected that it performs the gigantic task of today more smoothly than it performed the petty work of a century ago. Small men can govern a great country now more easily than great men could govern a small country then.

The quadriennial miracle of nominating, electing and inaugurating a president is carried out with so little trouble or friction that we hardly realize what an extraordinary thing it is. Nothing like it has ever been known in any other age or country. The institution of elective monarchy, which is what our presidential system really is, has never been worked anywhere on such a scale, and never on any scale at all with any long-continued success. French and Swiss presidents are figureheads, and Latin-American presidents are military chiefs. But we have acquired the knack of electing a constitutional monarch for a four-years' term with such facility that there seems to be no limit to the capacity of our machinery. Apparently it will work just as well for a population of 500,000,000 as for one of 80,000,000.

Outing Clothes



You know without telling you what is meant by "outing clothes;" coat and trousers usually are worn with a negligé shirt; to loaf in, or go summer-resorting in; or maybe, on sweltering days, to wear to business Hart, Schaffner & Marx outing suits are something more than simply thin cool clothes; you'll get such outing suits as you ought to have if you come here and ask for Hart, Schaffner & Marx clothes. We'll show you the label; a small thing to look for, a big thing to find.

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