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STRANGER THAN ANY FICTION

Mitchell's Seventy Years All Full of Romance Intrigue and Adventure

The following article, which has been published in many of the newspapers of the United States since the indictment of Senator Mitchell, is a fairly accurate outline of his strange career. It is probable that the larger part of the present population of Oregon has little or no knowledge of his history, or of the sensation produced in Oregon 32 years ago, when the revelations of his remarkable life down to that time were first made. Some other details of his career since that time appear in the following article, but they are meager. On the whole, however, it is an accurate outline:

A career without parallel in American politics is that of John H. Mitchell, United States senator from Oregon, who, with his associates, has dominated that state more than 40 years; who has been elected to the senate four times; who has been charged with startling domestic infidelities and sensational political debaucheries, which he has never disproved and which would have wrecked the fortunes of any other person in public life; and who, now in his 70th year, at the height of his influence at the national capital, is indicted by a federal grand jury at Portland, Or., for having accepted an alleged bribe of \$2000 for abetting conspiracies to defraud the United States of its public lands.

Boys have grown to manhood and their children, too, while Senator Mitchell has reigned in Oregon. Politicians have come and gone—all but Senator Mitchell. He is the one remaining link between the old regime and the new.

Revolts against his domination have been often attempted; sometimes they seemed to thrive, but they always succumbed—the last being that of the Gold Republicans, who partly dethroned him in 1896, but lost the mastery in the ensuing five years, at the climax of which Senator Mitchell was triumphantly re-elected.

Mitchell went to Oregon nearly 45 years ago, at the age of 25 years. He was agile and vigorous then; now he is bent with years, his limbs are wasted, his long beard is white, his eyes are dimmed, but within his atrophied form, and behind his spectacled eyes, still dwells his masterful power over men—not eloquence, for he never had that gift, but persuasiveness—a faculty of political perception and organization; an art of winning admirers by a handshake or a glance, and of inspiring faith and confidence with a touch or a word—all this in spite of his impaired ability to remember names and faces as once he used to do.

In what state in the Union has one man ruled politics so long? None. Mitchell was in control of Oregon when Boss Tweed "owned" New York. That was more than 30 years ago, and still Mitchell is on the stage, and nearly all the federal offices in the state are occupied by his friends, and many state and county and city offices, too. He has controlled courts and juries, as well as legislatures; he has been fretted, but not defeated, by charges of corruption which he never met; his friends have been ousted from office for dishonesty or incapacity—several of them lately by President Roosevelt—but in spite of all the evidence brought against him of conjugal infidelity and of political debauchery, his meesmeric power has defied and swept away his political enemies, until today he is patriarch of the United States senate and chief of the inter-oceanic canal committee of that body.

Is it romance—this story of a 25-year-old youth, who deserted a wife and two children at Butler, Pa., in 1860, went to California with Maria J. Brinker, a school teacher; quitted her at San Luis Obispo shortly after arrival there, and went to Oregon, where he renounced his Pennsylvania name, Hipple, and assumed that of Mitchell; married Martha Price there, and while United to her declared his love for

charges that he took money corruptly as senator for work done in connection with surveys of public lands in Oregon, and never answered them; and now, when infirmities of age creep upon him, is indicted by a federal grand jury?

Is it romance—this tale of a man who has conquered more vicissitudes than any other person in western politics and defeated more enemies; who has associated with the greatest politicians of the country in the past generation, and has outlived them nearly all?

Washington county, Pennsylvania, was Mitchell's birthplace; time, June 23, 1835. He was born under the name of Hipple; that was his father's name, his mother's maiden name being Mitchell. A brother of the senator's a dentist, dwells in Ohio, by name Hipple, was John M. He grew to manhood at The senator's given name in boyhood Butler, Pa., and was educated at Witherspoon institute. At the time of his majority he was a school teacher.

While in that vocation he entered into relations with a pupil, Sadie Hoon, which required him to marry her. With her he lived until they had three children. One of them, a lawyer, lives at St. Paul; another, a daughter, at Tacoma, the wife of a judge of the superior bench of the state of Washington; the third, a daughter, at Canton, Ohio.

In 1857, still under the name of John M. Hipple, he began the study of law in the office of Samuel A. Purviance, and a little later entered into a partnership which was probably only nominal, with Purviance. But in 1860, finding his family relations unsatisfactory, and becoming possessed of some money, he quit Pennsylvania in company with Maria J. Brinker, and the two went to California. For a while they stayed at San Luis Obispo, but he left the woman there and went to Oregon. The woman returned to Pennsylvania.

All these facts were proved without doubt over 30 years ago, and Mitchell never denied them. And it is a fact of interest that the chief investigator of the facts, W. Lair Hill, who 30 years ago was a newspaper man at Portland, Or., and printed them with all the vigor he could command, is now a lawyer and a defender of Senator Mitchell in the later's land fraud difficulties—thus evidencing the marvelous winning power of the senator.

Arriving at Portland in 1860, he assumed the name of John H. Mitchell, and began the remarkable career for which for rapid and persistent success, has no parallel in the annals of American politics. One year after going to Portland he was elected city attorney. One year more, and he was sent to the state senate. Another two years, and he was president of the state senate. Again a year, in 1866, and he failed by but one vote of winning the Republican caucus nomination for United States senator, yet such was his strength that he defeated the caucus nominee, A. C. Gibbs, and Henry W. Corbett was elected. Six years later, in 1872, he was elected United States senator, and in March, 1873, began his duties at Washington.

All this time he was known by his assumed name. Under that name he not only entered the United States senate, but married Miss Martha Price of a well-known Oregon family, by whom he had three children—one a boy, whom he named Hiram, which, he said, was his own middle name, and not Hipple, and who is now a captain of artillery in the army; the two others daughters, one of whom died at Washington last winter, the other of whom is married to the French Duke of Rochefoucauld.

In the summer and fall of 1873, after Mitchell's election to the United States senate, the details of his life and his assumed name began to leak out. The sensation was immense.

But Mitchell had already arranged with his law partner, Purviance, in Pennsylvania, to induce his wife there to obtain a divorce, and his marriage

here was legalized secretly by means of his influence with Judge Upton, of the state circuit court. By means of his influence with Judge Hamilton, of the county court, he had his name secretly changed from John M. Hipple to John H. Mitchell.

After his marriage in Oregon, Mitchell became infatuated with a sister of his Oregon wife. News reached Mitchell in New York that the sister was about to marry a man named Potter, and he wrote to her many very impassioned and ardent letters, declaring his affection, and pleading against the marriage. He proposed, though secretly, to abandon the Oregon wife and to marry the sister. The letters disclosing this purpose came into Potter's hands, and were published fac simile at Portland 20 years ago, a number of years after they were written. They made a big sensation, but Mitchell de-

nied their authority, though in fact there was no doubt of it.

A political storm ensued. The gale was increased in fury by charges that he had taken money corruptly as a senator, for work done by him in connection with surveys of public lands in Oregon. That story was much the same as the one on which the government has now had Senator Mitchell indicted, and will endeavor to send him to the penitentiary. The prosecution alleges that Mitchell accepted a bribe of \$2000 in March, 1902, to have illegal claims to land expedited through the general land office. The accuser is S. A. D. Puter, a convicted and confessed land thief, who says that he paid Senator Mitchell the money, and who hopes to escape the penalties of his own misdeeds, and to get even with those persons who have repudiated him by giving the prosecution

evidence. The immense prosecuting machinery of the government is in motion. It is sparing no expense and no labor. Things were different 30 years ago, when charges of corruption were made against Mitchell; the land office paid no attention to the matter then, though strenuous efforts were put forth to get it to do so. The charges were published, and Mitchell was challenged to sue for libel, but he ignored them, though they were supported by most responsible persons in Oregon.

In 1878 Mitchell came up for re-election, but Democrats controlled the body, and chose James H. Slater for the seat in the senate. Four years later Mitchell again tried for election, but a determined body of 18 Republicans refused to vote for him, and he was compelled to give way to J. N. Dolph. In 1885 he tried once more, and

succeeded, through the aid of 17 Democrats, who hoped to widen the breach between the two Republican factions by that procedure. When Mitchell came forward for a third term in 1891 he was elected with little opposition, but in 1897, because he had been a silver exponent, the legislature refused to send him back to Washington. Such was the intensity of feeling at that time that the legislature did not even effect organization.

During the next four years Mitchell's fortunes were at a low ebb. His clothes were shabby, and his friends fell away from him. It was said that he was seen to eat at 15-cent lunch counters. But his influence, though curtailed, was not all gone. His associates still held office. Factional struggles came to his rescue. And when, on the last night of the Legis-

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