

EDITORIAL

ONE hears little, of late, of the old urging that young Americans of condition go in for politics. Its chief exponent, in former days, was Roosevelt *der Grosse*, and perhaps his own sorry adventures as a public servant have been mainly responsible for its decline. For years he slaved for God and the flag with desperate zeal, butchering Spaniards and infidels, summoning wives to their physiological duty, and pursuing malefactors up and down the land. Half Tomás de Torquemada and half William Jennings Bryan, with Tartarin of Tarascon lurking somehow between, he entertained the country magnificently, and seemed destined to go down into history as one of the tribal heroes of the Crô-American people: he was himself, it appeared, the chief and shining proof that politics offered all the chances for Service that he said it did. But then, in his later middle years, something happened to him, and his finish was obscure, ignominious and full of lamentation. The folks he had saved from dragons and basilisks simply tired of him, as they so recently tired of Coolidge, and as they now tire of Lindbergh. He found himself supplanted by a pedagogue made up like the Anti-Saloon League killjoy of the cartoonists—a figure, by his red-blooded and phallic philosophy, both villainous and ridiculous. He passed from life like a rowdy schoolboy, blowing spitballs at the teacher.

Worse, his career, viewed with the detachment of the coroner's jury, began to seem vain in achievement as well as inglorious in reward. What, after all, had he accomplished, with his ample patrimony, his passionate energy, his cowboy hardening, and his Harvard polish? What had he done that any graduate of a city machine might not have done? Not much.

The malefactors, coming out of their holes, turned out to be fatter and more enterprising than ever before. The infamy of birth control was spreading everywhere. Progressivism had retreated to the cow States, and was the monopoly of statesmen with strange haircuts. Pacifism was on its legs again. And the Grand Old Party, choking the nation with its stench, was preparing for such obscenities as it had never attempted before. The paladin of reform, in those last sad days, was no more; there remained only the incurable jobseeker, grabbing votes wherever they offered. The career of that other backslider, Boies Penrose of Pennsylvania, was scarcely more depressing—in fact, it was rather less so. Penrose, coming out of Harvard too, started higher and fell further, but as he slid downward he took a sardonic sense of humor with it. He was a walking exposition of what politics could do to a young American gentleman, and he seemed to enjoy it.

But that any other young gentleman should follow him is no longer advised. The dream of a perfumed and denaturized politics, with the gentry edging out the muldoons, has been definitely abandoned. It is now obvious to everyone that the game, as it is played according to the American rules, is not for tender souls. What it needs primarily is toughness, and that toughness must be resistant to inward remonstrance as well as to outward assault.

In brief, the aspirant must be willing to sacrifice anything for votes, including honor. He cannot hope for elective office unless he is. The process of getting it is no longer a process of battling for ideas and defending principles; it is a process of concealing ideas and evading principles. By that route the three most recent Presidents

of the United States got to the chair of Washington and Jefferson, and by the same route their successors hereafter will follow them.

✓ The art political, as it flourishes among us, is the art of the cuttlefish. Its great master was Dr. Coolidge, and the essence of his technique was silence—the voluptuous silence of a cow in a sunny pasture. He lifted himself from the cracker-barrel to the throne by offending no one, and he offended no one by saying nothing. It was a magnificent *reductio ad absurdum* of the theory that democracy is government by free discussion—that the people rule themselves by taking counsel together. The only counsel that Coolidge ever took was with traders able to deliver votes, and the only counsel that he ever offered was unintelligible.

His successor carries the thing a step further. No one, to this day, knows what his political faith and allegiance are. He came into the field, not offering principles, but shopping for votes, and he took them wherever he could get them, and on any convenient terms. Whether they came from the Anti-Saloon League, the Ku Klux Klan, the black vote brokers of the South, the Methodist bishops, the Pennsylvania cossacks, or the survivors of the Ohio Gang, it was all one. It was a parliament of all the talents that lifted him to the purple, and it became at once a parliament of all the virtues. Today the Baptist and Methodist brethren are in and out of the White House, and their fantastic scheme to tear the Bill of Rights to tatters is a Noble Experiment. The vote brokers, turned white, operate in the anterooms, with lines of applicants stretching in all directions. The Pennsylvania cossacks continue to hold the Treasury, and the Ohio Gang feels a freshening of heart. In the House the assembled men of mark cheer and make a carnival when a policeman assassinates a bootlegger. In the Senate the old sham, ✓ Charlie Curtis, occupies the woolsack, and Jim Watson is the mold of honor on the floor.

II

I often wonder how service in the Senate strikes the few relatively independent and self-respecting men who survive there today. Most of that small company went out as the Methodist tide came in, but four or five linger on, waiting for the inevitable ax. It must be a gaudy experience for them to shake hands with their colleagues: frauds thrown in by the Klan, boozy serfs of the Anti-Saloon League, bogus Liberals with banker backing, shady lawyers turned statesmen, graduates of crooked State machines, mountebanks and corn-doctors of a dozen unutterable varieties, cheap and trashy fellows, neck-benders, dodgers. There are not twenty-five men in the ninety-six who know what common decency is, ✓ or would understand it if they were told. They got where they are by being limber, and they must ever increase in limberness to stay. Does the Anti-Saloon League knock them about like wretches in a chain-gang? Then don't blame the dry mullahs for giving them what they cry for. If there were no Anti-Saloon League, they would be bowing and scraping to the brewers, as they did aforetime. Do they tremble today before the Power Trust? Then don't forget how they used to tremble before bald Sam Gompers.

In such men the human spirit sinks to its lowest depths. Honor is nothing to them, not even a name; they crave only honors, and the shabbier the better. For every cheap privilege and prerogative they are eager, and of it they are jealous, but of decency they know nothing. They were silent about the Klan when it was flogging and burning, and they are silent about the swineries of the Prohibition blacklegs today. They, or their like, did their best to save Fall and Daugherty; they will do their best for the Falls and Daughertys of tomorrow. ✓ Office is their one thought—to hold their present office, to grab a better one, to be safe in even a worse one. When, by God's will, one of them is chased out of his Senate pew by a worse charlatan,

with better talents for bending the neck, then there is a place for him on some useless public commission, with salary enough to keep him in liquor; or he proceeds to practise "law" in the cloakrooms or before some jobholder who is uneasily aware that he may some day come back.

Such is the Senate of the United States in the year 1929. I surely whisper no scandal about it. What I have said of it has been said in substance on its own floor, by members revolting against its craven imbecility. It is, under the American system of government, the depository and sanctuary of the national statecraft. It is the last refuge of free speech among us, and hence, in theory, of free men. It is, as they say, the best club in the land. But it is a club in which members of any delicacy, approaching most of their fellows, are forced to hold their noses.

III

In other directions the tale is the same. Has anyone ever thought to canvass realistically the Governors of the forty-eight States? Certainly it would be shocking, even in the jungles of Africa, to find a worse gang of First Chiefs. One of them, now happily retired, was saved from the hoosegow only by the Statute of Limitations. Another, lately impeached, was an astrologer, and consulted the stars whenever matters of state confronted him. Yet another, also recently departed, has been publicly accused of counterfeiting. A fourth, still in office, believes in phrenology, and decides the guilt and fate of condemned criminals by feeling their bumps. A fifth has been charged with conspiring to have an opponent assassinated. A sixth, with a lynching facing him, deliberately resigned the victim to the mob. Two or three more are former hirelings of the Anti-Saloon League. At least six are high goblins in the Klan. I pass over such heroes of malignant Babbittry as Young of California and the late Fuller of Massachusetts, and such extravagant fanatics as the late Pinchot of Pennsylvania. And I pass

over mere drunkards and ignoramuses.

Why should any young man of education and substance, eager for an honorable career in the world, aspire to thrust himself into such company? Of what honor is it to be a Senator of the United States, when the Senator at the next desk takes orders from Methodist bishops and the one on the other side got his place by knuckling to the Klan? Who wants to be a Governor when a third of them are rogues and another third idiots? I suppose these questions have been asked by more than one young man, and that the answers help to explain the increasing ignobility of our politics. Among men, as in trade, the bad coin drives out the good. As the career of politics becomes less and less appetizing to young men of sound qualities and honorable traditions, it also becomes more and more impossible. It tends inevitably to become a monopoly of the dubious, the unfit and the preposterous. In the last general election one of the candidates for President was a man who was either too cowardly or too cunning to discuss any of the dominant issues rationally, and the other was a man who discussed them in bad English. Were both, even so, better than the man the winner succeeded? Well, let us see who comes next. My prediction is that the time is upon us when even such fabulous asses as Bryan, examined in retrospect, will seem to have been almost statesmen, and, what is more amazing, almost gentlemen.

Young men, to be sure, still go into politics. They crowd up from below, pushing the old mountebanks over the precipice and into oblivion. But I think it would be a sad error to mistake them for the sort of young men who were summoned to the field by Roosevelt. They are hard-boiled fellows, and under no illusions. They have learned the capital lesson that the government they live under, whether in the States or in the nation, is owned and operated by base and scurvy men, and that if they would have a hand in it they must learn how to be base and scurvy too.

H. L. M.

Only too true!

GOLIATH AND HIS DAVIDS

BY RAYMOND S. TOMPKINS

PANICKY reformers, loud-mouthed lawyers, go-getting promoters and mud-dle-headed statesmen have so thoroughly tangled the reins of public utility control that the possibility of sensible regulation of the industries that light our homes, run our factories and our transportation, and transmit our conversation is in danger of disappearing. No men fear this more than the men whom regulation is popularly supposed to gall the most—the public utility magnates.

In the face of all sorts of opposition the electric power industry of America has grown to immense proportions. In the twenty-six years since 1902, according to Census Bureau figures, its annual revenues have jumped from \$80,000,000 to \$1,900,000,000, the investment in it from \$483,000,000 to \$10,300,000,000, and the annual kilowatt hours of production from 2,500,000,000 to 83,100,000,000. Nothing has produced this development but the growth of public demand for electricity: every new form of use for power which human ingenuity can devise is swiftly seized upon by a public that cannot get enough of it. Yet we are told that whenever we push a button, make ice cubes for highballs, put a bottle of beer in the refrigerator or grill a pair of kidneys we are only strengthening the arm of the power Goliath for the blow with which he will one day slay us. The immensity and efficiency of his business, though it was produced by the increasing scope of our own wants, is thus viewed with vast alarm by multitudes of earnest persons.

If it be true that no industry is more suspected or feared than the public utility

industry, it is also true that no industry is more fearful of its masters. It is full of frightened men whose ears twitch like scared deer at the bang of the morning newspaper against the front door. No industry is so carefully scrutinized. At its faintest gesture of defiance or defense, press, public and officialdom leap upon it with x-ray and scalpel. Every day it must stick out its tongue and tell what it has had for supper. In the sadly troubled state of mind induced by this situation it casts about for help.

Not infrequently we hear the question, "What chance has the public in a legal battle with a public utility which can employ staffs of high-priced experts to overwhelm the public's handful of defenders?" The question has some reason in it, for, in addition to regiments of engineers, administrators and workmen, the public utility industry maintains large staffs of lawyers, accountants, statisticians, publicists and financial experts who keep in constant trim to serve as shock troops in battles in the public arena. Yet, formidable as these staffs appear, their value is questionable, for their weapons, the law, logic and figures, are often shattered in the clash with orators and politicians who, while shy on technical knowledge, have a sound understanding of the sort of stuff that gets printed. Nevertheless they are maintained, and frequently at great cost, all of which is charged to operating expenses and hence gets into the rate and is paid by the public. There is irony in this, for it is presumably in the public interest that the hue and cry has been raised about the breakdown of regulation,