

# THE SAGE OF TISHOMINGO

BY GEORGE MILBURN

THE time for another dictator was at hand in Oklahoma. The State Legislature had grown too rambunctious for any common good. The citizens had elected six Governors in the course of the State's brief history, and all but one had been targets for impeachment. The fourth was saved by one vote, and that was cast by an ailing senator who was swished in an ambulance to the legislative chamber. The fifth lasted only nine months, just time enough to set up a military censorship of the press and to place the entire State under martial law. The next, a Rosicrucian, hung on for two years before the Legislature ousted him.

Gubernatorial campaigns in Oklahoma always have been successful, if the Governors have not been. They are spectacular affairs, hugely entertaining to the pellagra-ridden tenant farmers to whom they are addressed, terrifying to the town-dwelling minority. At the finish the voters from the forks of the creek swarm in for a riotous inaugural celebration, a mighty open-air barbecue, or a great square dance in the Capitol, stepped to the tune of a breakdown fiddlers' orchestra in the rotunda.

The rise of a new dictator naturally makes greater demands on the populace than the election of an ordinary Governor, and at the last election the citizens were more than commonly agitated. The time had come to choose an executive forceful enough to cope with a really mulish Legislature. It was even whispered in some quar-

ters that if impeachment were his lot the Federal government would disfranchise the voters and return the State to territorial rule. So the arena was somewhat more crowded with candidates than usual, the recriminations were harsher, the bopping was louder, and the entire spectacle was more beguiling than any preceding one.

Necessarily, the strong man would be a Democrat. Nine Democrats entered the preliminaries, and the professional forecasters sweated over the list, trying to pick a winner. Three of the candidates were millionaires, and four others had imposing records as administrators.

All of these aspirants were brought together one evening, early in the election year, before the campaign had grown warm. The State Press Association's gridiron banquet was in progress. As is the custom at such frolics, the toastmaster introduced, to rounds of complaisant hand-clapping, the various celebrities present. Before one he paused with mock-impressiveness and continued:

Gentlemen, I want to introduce to you a man who has twice been a candidate for Governor, who has been twice defeated, who left the State to establish an inland empire in South America, who made a fizzle of that, and who, within a few months after returning to this country, now has the intestinal fortitude to file again as candidate for the governorship of Oklahoma! Gentlemen, Alfalfa Bill Murray, the Sage of Tishomingo!

A stooped, greying man who wore shaggy, drooping moustaches and a cheap, wrinkled suit got to his feet, and started to make a speech. Surrounded by blasé country editors in their Sunday clothes, he made a pathetic figure. Many of the men present were newcomers to the State, and the idea of this uncouth old gaffer wanting to be Governor caused them to grunt in merriment. Jeers and hurrahs roared up and down the tables.

But newspaper men belong to a myopic tribe. They have none of the poet's depth of vision. None of them, for example, was capable of any such illumination as was vouchsafed, a short time later, to a sweet singer out in Pocasset:

You can bet your boots out in the grass  
roots

The boys are strong for Bill. . . .

A few are mad, but many are glad

That Bill is in the lead.

All over the State a few will hate

To give up their greed.

At the forks of the creek every day in the  
week

You can hear them say

Just wait and see how it will be

On election day.

And on election day Alfalfa Bill led the field in the Democratic preliminary run-off and won a place in the second primary by such a substantial majority over the millionaire who placed him that he could not refrain from exclaiming, "If he were a good Democrat, he would yield!" He gave the plutocrat a satisfactory trouncing on the second voting day, and the Republican candidate in November was a set-up. The Sage of Tishomingo carried 64 out of 77 counties, with a thumping majority of 100,000.

No one who had followed his campaign had any doubt that Oklahoma's new dictator was at hand. A Tulsa newspaper, the only important daily in the State that had

supported him drew an ecstatic contrast between Alfalfa Bill and the Messiah, and Bill, being Nordic, naturally showed up somewhat better in the comparison. The Sage of Tishomingo, in accepting the apotheosis, observed modestly,

No statesman can fail to see in the history of any people the moving of a Higher Power. I believe, as I believed in the beginning, that I was destined to win.

## II

Democracy has been responsible for some gaudy manifestations, but none, perhaps, more bizarre than the campaign Alfalfa Bill put on last Summer. It was a one-man show, staged without political organization and almost without finances.

The Sage had only \$12 in cash at the outset. He borrowed \$40 from a home-town bank at Tishomingo, gave his wife a dollar bill, arranged for credit for his family at a grocery, and started on the speaking tour that was to open his campaign. He has never owned an automobile, so he hitchhiked from town to town. A sympathizer who owned a creamery contributed a large cake of cheese to the cause, and for weeks Bill lugged it across the countryside, subsisting on cheese and crackers. Occasionally a disciple would pass the hat for him, but he always refused delicately to permit the collection to be taken in his presence.

At one time, early in his race, he had only ten cents left. He was heartsick and ready to quit. In that darkest moment a check for \$20 arrived from a 100% Mississippian who had read a newspaper account of his heroic campaign, and who thus saved him for Oklahoma and the nation.

These happy fortuities accompanied him all along the road. Such a one brought the largest contribution he received.

I ran into B. A. Cook at Hartshorne. He volunteered to drive me to Atoka. On the way I said, "Cook, it is a durned good thing I met up with you for I have but a dollar to my name." When he returned home he sent me his check for \$100.

On the eve of his election he explained the method that enabled him to roll up his unprecedented majority, and to triumph over millionaire candidates who had spent fortunes in their efforts to hurt him. "I struck at and hit the Mass Mind," he said. "It was to this Mass Mind that I appealed in my platform and speeches. I avoided the pitfalls and surprised both friends and enemies by my constant hammering away at the Mass Mind of the State; surprised them because they believed I could be diverted from my appeal to the intelligence of the average man."

The Mass Mind, nevertheless, was sluggish in accepting him as the man of the hour. Although zealous Murray men were stationed in nearly every hamlet in the State, there were times, early in the campaign, when these disciples beat the drum to no avail. There were infelicitous occasions when the Sage of Tishomingo would arrive to fill his speaking dates and be greeted by only a meagre concourse of followers. These faithful minions he would berate furiously for not having brought out a larger crowd to guzzle the Word. Then he would take off in a huff for the next town.

Meanwhile drouth and imminent hard Winter were preparing the Mass Mind for the errant orator's message. Once more an auspicious accident befell him. He flung out an exasperated statement to the press, that when he was elected Governor he would rent out the Governor's mansion and live in the garage; that he would fire the gardener and turn the front yard into a potato patch. The city dailies, at that

early stage, were not taking his candidacy seriously, so, with wise-cracking headlines, they spread the tidings across their front pages. It was the season's best joke. The Sage retracted hastily, insisting that he had spoken only in good, clean fun. But the story, once started, was never laid, and the intelligence of the average Oklahoman, which had been immune to the candidate's new economic theories and red suspenders, was completely captivated by the potato patch story.

After that the citizens, attracted by such persuasive stuff, came in increasing droves to hear him expound his "gross income tax," an economic panacea of his own devising:

Under the gross income plan we would reach all persons, occupations and corporations that make an income above legal exemption. The income is the total amount for which the sale is made, less the cost and carriage of the goods. If the owner sells for less than cost, he has no tax at all.

The newspapers, discovering that the possibilities of the crusader's election were not so remote as they had at first supposed, decided, uneasily, that this and similar time-worn demagogueries were rank Bolshevism. Overnight Alfalfa Bill ceased to be their laughing stock and became a Red Menace. Irritable monosyllables, fighting words cropped out on the front pages. Bolivia Bill, and even Cocklebur Bill, were substituted for the more cordial nickname. The vocabulary of vituperation was combed to damn him sufficiently.

An Oklahoma City paper that boasts the largest grassroots circulation in the State detailed its woman columnist to begin a series of ringing attacks on the Sage's family life. Typical of these was a monograph entitled "Could You Be Proud of Murray?" It pointed out in horror that the candidate had

lived for years in a house without a bathtub. He never wears a coat unless the weather chills him, and habitually appears in a dirty shirt.

The story of how Murray and his family lived contentedly for years in a house with a sod floor will be broadcast to the nations. . . .

Murray eats hot cakes, one of his favorite dishes. . . . He picks up the cake with his right hand, slaps it on to his left hand, reaches for the butter, picks it up with his right hand and smears it over the cake, with his hand dripping with melted butter. Doesn't the very thought of that turn your stomach?

Will the people of Oklahoma select a man who will set them back or lead them forward? Will they choose one who will bring ridicule and shame upon them or one who will make them proud?

The voters of Oklahoma, eight out of ten of whom have no bathrooms, and a considerable block of whom believe that sod floors have their talking points, too, were deeply moved by this denunciation, but in the wrong direction. Indeed, if Bill's victory seemed possible before, the invidious indictment of the lady columnist made it a cinch. Some analysts estimate that the picture of him wolfing pancakes alone brought him 25,000 votes.

The Sage himself was unperturbed by such snobbish scurrility, and when the irrepressible female went on in another article to describe how he wore "two pairs of trousers in cold weather, the inner pair hanging out below the outer pair," and to pass unseemly remarks about the cleanliness of his underwear, he inquired saucily, "Hmpf! How'd she find out? I stayed at an Oklahoma City hotel once, but I didn't see her. She must of worked in the laundry."

Before that blasting, shrivelling Summer was well along it was evident that nothing could stay the defections in the ranks of the other candidates. There were isolated

communities in which the rustics forgot that anyone else was running for Governor. "Oh, yes, we're all for Alfalfa Bill up this way," they assured political surveyors, "though they's some talk for a man named Murray, too."

He brought out the catch-phrases of forgotten campaigns and made them new and cogent. "Free seeds for the tenant farmer! Shift the tax burden from the poor to the rich! Equal rights to all! Down with special privilege!" So he stormed across the State, and he was heard.

Second only to the Sage himself in power of exhortation was the *Blue Valley Farmer*, a free-distribution campaign organ. This had been a decrepit country newspaper, but its editor, a fellow of unusual perspicacity, knew a man of destiny when he saw one, and he was early attracted to the Murray cause. His sheetlet bloomed with red headlines that assaulted the Mass Mind: "The Millionaire Boodle Limousine," "When the Stork is Followed by the Little White Coffin," "The Burning of a Hut is a Far Greater Tragedy than the Burning of a Palace," and so on. Although Bill took no part in editing the paper, he sometimes wrote signed lead articles for it. His shift from oratory was diverting, and there were issues in which he would leave off his philippics against the corporations and millionaires to proceed in a milder vein. Once he gave his readers a health hint:

I wear suspenders because a belt gives me hernia pains. The natural man is built from his shoulders tapering each way; the woman from her hips tapering each way, therefore a belt is suitable to her, but not to a man. Why learn the science of health and not profit by it?

He promised, to the vast delight of his followers and to the alarm of the professors, that he had startling things in store

for what he termed "the football, town balls and high balls" of the higher education. He spotted an allowance for a swimming pool in the State university's biennial budget, and he announced grimly that "those college boys can go to the crik if they want to swim!"

Some of the more timorous yokels feared that the Legislature, always faunching for a rampage, would impeach their champion before he could get any of his drastic reforms into effect. "Impeach me!" Alfalfa Bill snorted. "Let them try! That Legislature impeaching me would be like a bunch of rabbits trying to pull a wildcat out of a tree! All I'll have to do is whistle, and I'll have 100,000 followers by my side."

Twice that many hurried to the polls to cast their votes for him on election day. He was elected by the largest majority that any candidate has ever received in Oklahoma.

His faith in the intelligence of the Mass Mind was sublime the night the election returns were coming in. He lolled on a bed in an Oklahoma City hotel, in shirt-sleeves and stocking feet, smoking a nickel cigar. There was no radio in the room.

About ten o'clock the cheering in the street grew louder. They were shouting his name. The Sage of Tishomingo roused himself.

"Perhaps we better go down and see the boys," he said pacifically.

### III

Shining paladin of the great unwashed though he is, Alfalfa Bill throws no rocks at ancestors. He is an earnest advocate of heredity. He announced, on becoming Governor, that his pardons and paroles would be restricted, usually, to prisoners who came from good blood. He traces his own lineage back to Pocahontas through

seven intervening generations. This genealogical boast appears in his privately-printed volume, "Murray's Essays on Pocahontas and Pushmataha," the Sage's one excursion into the realm of beautiful letters. Reviewing the grand record of his family in those pages, he inquires, "Who is it that would not be proud of such a noble ancestry?"

The blood of the noble Pocahontas, however, had been strained pretty fine through succeeding generations of Scotchmen before his immediate forebears reached Grayson county, Texas. There, near the community center of Toadsuck, William H. Murray was born on November 21, 1869. His father, Uriah Murray, a holy man, toured the surrounding country as the better half of a gospel team. But the son was not of a devotional temperament, and when he was eleven years old he ran away from home to find work picking cotton in an adjoining county.

"I was twelve years old before I knew there was a President of the United States," he says in his reminiscences. "One day I was picking cotton, and a boy on a pony rode up in the field and yelled, 'The President is dead!' I looked up and asked, 'Who's he?' The boy replied disgustedly, 'The President of the United States, of course.' I covered my ignorance with a simple, 'Oh!'"

This embarrassing incident spurred him to inquiry, and that night he learned that the dead President was Garfield. He has been hot after knowledge ever since.

He attended a two-month session of rural school the following Winter. There he learned about Patrick Henry, and was seized with the ambition to become a lawyer and run for Congress. He put in another four months on elementary subjects, and then an emissary from the Springtown Male and Female Institute got

him in tow. Young Bill mortgaged his cayuse, and with the proceeds and six months' academic preparation he was ready for "college." The president of the Male and Female Institute, viewing him for the first time, turned to the school's bagman and exclaimed sourly, "You bring me small potatoes, few in a hill." But in spite of his impecuniosity, or perhaps because of it, the Institute was quick to grant him a B.S. degree. At the end of a year and a half he came out with high scholastic honors and a teacher's certificate.

Then he was in quick succession, a school teacher, a newspaper subscription agent, a Statehouse reporter in Austin, and a country editor. Meanwhile he was reading law at night, and he was admitted to the Texas bar at the age of twenty-three. But he prospered at nothing, and once he flipped a coin to see whether he should seek his fortune in South America. The coin augured ill for the hot country venture, so Bill invested it, along with all the others he had, in a stage coach ticket that would carry him North into the Indian Territory. He arrived in Tishomingo, capital of the Chickasaw Indian Nation, wearing a stove-pipe hat and a Prince Albert coat that belied his empty pockets. He had a good tongue in his head, however, and he had used it so well on one of his fellow travelers, the daughter of a Tishomingo hotel keeper, that by the time he reached his destination he had no trouble in getting board and room on credit.

Tishomingo, in 1898, was a bonanza town for an alert young lawyer. Young Bill, with no exertion at all, had a client right off the bat. The fellow was charged with dressing a neighbor down with a fence rail. Bill came out of his first case with an acquittal and a \$20 honorarium. But when he struck his stride he found hitching rack discussion considerably more

attractive than haranguing juries. It was soon evident that he would never make a million in the courtroom. A fellow townsman said of him:

He spent the time talking to anyone who had time to listen, sometimes on the street corner, sometimes inside a store or office, depending on the weather, and was soon able to gather an audience of street loafers whom he entertained with disquisitions on ancient history, State or national politics as he saw them, interspersed with stories of the anti-parlor variety.

There was no real necessity for him to concern himself about his practice. The year after his arrival he had married the Chickasaw Governor's niece, thereby becoming a citizen of the Indian nation himself, as well as acquiring allotments of some 1600 acres of rich valley land. This, when let out to share-croppers, was lucrative, and by 1902 he had retired from the law altogether.

His curbstome political discursions, perhaps, were not such a waste of time, after all. When, in 1905, a fantastic Statehood scheme was put forward and a convention was held to draft and send petitions to Washington, praying that the State of Sequoyah be admitted to the Union, Alfalfa Bill was right in front. That happy nickname had been given to him because, as a crackerbarrel concionator, he had championed, persuasively, a new forage plant, strange to the territorial cattlemen. At first there was a bit of raillery in it, for Bill, according to all reports, was far more active in preaching the benefits of alfalfa than he was in the fields cultivating it. But he liked the name and cultivated it. He has always been touchy about the alternative Cocklebur Bill, coined by early-day foes.

Politics was quite as knock-down-drag-out an affair in the days before Statehood



as it continues to be in Oklahoma today. It was necessary for Bill to make some smart maneuvers, bordering on chicanery, to be elected delegate to the first Constitutional Convention in 1906.

There he made a sharp trade-off with the Democratic ring-leader, who had gubernatorial aspirations, and got himself elected president of the convention. He wrote so many of his own ideas into the instrument that he is sometimes known to the State as the Father of the Constitution. But the Republican administration at Washington edited the inspired work ruthlessly, and mordant columnists in the territory gave hints of a mythical army, Murray's Squirrel Rifle Brigade, that could be expected to rise up to defend the sacred document against the brigands of President Roosevelt.

By this time Bill had been conferred the designation of Sage, and he made no effort to disclaim it. He served, also, in the first Legislature, where he distinguished himself by introducing a measure requiring every hotel to supply "a nine-foot bed sheet that would fold back over at least 2½ feet." The inspiration for this bill came to him one night when he found his bedroom equipped with dirty sheets. He left the hotel and spent the night under a tree on top of a hill, and there the afflatus settled on him. Irreverent foes quickly dubbed him the Bedbug Statesman, but the Sage of Tishomingo persevered.

I told cotton farmers that if I could get the whole world using nine-foot sheets, it would use up the cotton crop. The bill passed and is the law today. Several other States now have it, regulating the use of sheets in hotels and rooming houses.

An Eastern newspaper man, covering the first Legislature of Oklahoma, wrote a description of the Sage which twenty-five years have scarcely altered:

He frequently left his chair, took off his coat and collar, rolled up his sleeves, and so participated in debates. In appearance he is a typical Westerner, having an angular figure, large nose and eyes, long hair and a moustache that stands out about five inches on both sides. He wears a broad-brimmed hat, often no coat, and otherwise shows indifference to style and conventionality.

And a Republican contemporary observed, with surprising fairness:

If the wild-eyed populistic brand of democracy continues to rule in Oklahoma, Murray unquestionably will be the man. Uncouth and uncultured, he has a remarkable native strength and he has read widely. In all probability he is the best posted man in the Southwest on the various isms he advocates. Furthermore, he is honest as politicians go. . . .

When the first Legislature adjourned, he retired to his Tishomingo ranch to prepare himself for the governorship in 1910. Everything, he trustingly supposed, was set for him to become the second Governor of the State. But there were still things he had to learn about politics. His cohorts knifed him in 1910, and another man received the nomination.

Two years later he was placated with an off-year nomination to Congress. That was the year of the immortal Wilson's big innings, and, without having made a campaign speech or got out a dodger, Murray found himself a Congressman. Washington did things to him. He had long been an ardent follower of W. J. Bryan, but closer contact with the Great Commoner soured his idealization. He turned to the Rooseveltian revelation for solace, and for all his democracy, he today finds many an imperialistic doctrine to his taste.

But his honesty finally tripped him. When he ran for the congressional nomination in 1916, he pooh-poohed the Wilson

campaign slogan, "He kept us out of war." He spoke knowingly of certain secret treaties that he had had access to in Washington. The United States, he declared, would be at war with Germany within a year after the election; to deny it was sheer hypocrisy. This was a flagrant betrayal of Wilson, and the horrified Democrats, finding it impossible to hush the vociferous Alfalfa Bill, ended by turning him out and nominating another man.

The Sage, not fazed, saw his prediction come true, and ran for Governor a second time in 1918. He placed a poor second in the primary. He was disgusted and embittered. The old dream of South America came back to haunt him, so he took ship thirty years after a flip of the coin had sent him in the other direction. He traveled through Peru, Bolivia, and Brazil. He saw in Bolivia a fertile valley that delighted his eye. He had a vision of the place teeming with Nordics, an inland empire with himself as head man.

He took an option on 75,000 acres of the rich Bolivian land, and returned to the United States to recruit his subjects. Money poured in to him until the banks at Tishomingo bulged. His prospective colonists, though, were as panicky as they were gullible. There were disquieting rumors and uneasy dispatches from Bolivia, and once the amateur colonizer returned all the money that had come in to him. But finally, in 1924, he set out with twelve families, the faithful residuum of an original 400, and with farming equipment and supplies they sailed for the Southern Utopia. Upon landing in South America they were carried by rail to a spot sixty miles from their destination, an abandoned mission house. The rest of the distance was traversed in two-wheeled carts.

Scarcely a week had passed before a dreadful nostalgia descended on the Okla-

homa farmers. One by one they deserted the colony. They arrived at port towns haggard and terrified, and sympathetic Americans on shipboard took up collections for their safe return to Oklahoma. At the end of a few months the Murrays had everything to themselves. They stayed on resolutely, alone, for five years, in the course of which Bolivia was at war. On one occasion the Sage "found himself forced to cloak himself in the American flag to prevent Bolivian soldiers from taking his horses and mules."

A minstrel in Claremore, the literary capital of Oklahoma, has contributed a celebration of Alfalfa Bill's romantic adventure to swell letters:

In his younger days Bill thought to blaze  
A pathway through the tropics,  
But the fates were inclined to be unkind  
And Bill lost his kopecks.

Bolivian brakes, lagoons and snakes  
And swamps with foul aroma,  
Made Bill repine for auld lang syne,  
And the joys of Oklahoma.

Oft he would sigh as the years sped by,  
And his thoughts were sometimes bitter,  
But he bucked the game till his purse went lame,  
For Bill was ne'er a quitter.

When he landed in New Orleans on August 13, 1929, far from bearing the mien of a defeated man, he came with the spirit of a Napoleon back from Elba. A small cluster of villagers greeted him at the station in Tishomingo as he descended from the train in a soiled linen suit. His dauntless old guard, out over the State, soon began giving yocks for him as a candidate in next year's election—for what office, no one knew.

He himself entertained a pleasant idea of running for United States Senator, but he gave that up. He explained resignedly,



"My friends wanted me to run for Governor, and in this life a man will not go far who will not do as much for his friends as he expects them to do for him."

The Claremore bard sang on,

Yes, Murray came back with an empty sack,

To the State from whence he wandered,  
And he entered the race for the Governor's place,

And the voters flocked to his standard.

Sons of the sod, who live near God,  
And toil for the little treasure,  
And the wool hat boys, who taste few joys,  
And have few hours of pleasure—

These were the guys that awarded the prize

To Bill in the late election,  
And of course Bill knows to whom he owes

The honor of his selection.

In spite of his lack of the stuff called jack,  
To pass among his backers,  
Bill won the race while feeding his face  
On cheese and sody crackers.

And the voters rejoice when they hear his voice

Raised in tones of thunder  
For the people's cause and the need of laws

To protect them from graft and plunder!

The multitude that saw Alfalfa Bill nominated, perhaps the largest ever gathered in Oklahoma, was drab with the costumes of the common folk, but it was flecked with the color of Indian blankets, too. Uriah Murray, his nonagenarian father, administered the oath of office.

"Shucks," said the patriarchal gospel shouter, surveying the crowd, "many's the time I've preached to more folks than this."

The Sage of Tishomingo chuckled indulgently.

"He's a little near-sighted, you know," he explained.

#### IV

Once inaugurated, Bill lost no time in assuming the dignity of dictatorship. He put aside the fetching costume in which he had stumped the State; the baggy trousers were pressed, the red suspenders were covered, the shaggy handlebar moustaches were trimmed, and a modish snap-brim hat replaced the battered sombrero he had cast in the ring the year before.

He promulgated a set of office rules for the guidance of visitors. Among them were,

Don't ask me about the weather. The Weather Bureau is in Washington.

Don't try to deceive me. Be brief and to the point, because I suspect your motive already.

Don't ask me how I feel. I may feel like damn it and tell you so.

Don't try to tell me how I was nominated and elected. Perhaps I know more about that than you do.

There is indisputable evidence that he does know. At least the peroration of his first address to the Legislature proved that the title of Sage was no empty honorific. That remarkable document, prepared, it was rumored, long before the day of his election, revealed an extraordinary knowledge about a little of everything. It began:

To the Honorables, the Senators and Representatives of the Thirteenth Legislature: Gentlemen, You have come here by the sovereign will of the people to aid me in carrying out the mandate recently so emphatically pronounced at the polls. . . . All good citizens will acquiesce in the will of that majority. Malefactors and enemies of the State only will attempt to thwart it.

He launched his promised attack on the "frills and frets" of the higher learning. The State university, he disclosed, was engaged in turning out "high-toned bums, soured and disappointed with life itself, refusing to return to the overalls standard."

He proposed, as one remedy, an eight-hour teaching day for college professors, like that of other laborers.

He tartly advised all lesser public officials to desist from decorating public documents with their photographs.

He modified his gross income tax to a proposed emergency tax on the salaries of all State employes, including school teachers.

He submitted shocking evidence of a vicious lobby, ferreted out by his private espionage system. Its corrupt agents, he revealed,

for several years now have swarmed around the Capitol of this State. One of the worst, if not the worst of [their doings] is the use of women, particularly those of loose and careless character. They get the unsophisticated member from the small town or country into their graces until he ceases to resist the temptation. . . .

As a means of shielding the bucolic lawmakers from the onslaughts of these depraved hirelings of the vested interests, with their gambling games and hard liquor and prurient females, he suggested the erection of a dormitory on the Capitol grounds, in which the legislators might be kept at night, safe from vitiating blandishments during their sojourn in the city.

The sycophantic newspapers, harking back to the Sage's campaign whimsies, sniggered over this sally. But when, a few days later, a senator close to the executive earnestly introduced a measure asking a \$500,000 appropriation for

a legislative dormitory on the Capitol grounds. As a matter of economy . . . single beds should be provided for unmarried assemblymen, while double beds are allowed for married members. Each of the 175 apartments is to have an electric refrigerator, a couple of rugs and a couple of chairs. No person of less than sixty years old shall be employed in the home, and

then not until he has been recommended to the Governor by the Ministerial Alliance in his home town. . . .

Alfalfa Bill defended the bill with some truculence.

"Somebody is always getting a laugh out of the measures I recommend," he exclaimed with asperity. "This idea of having a dormitory on the Capitol grounds isn't such a gag as some think."

When he has a mind to, however, he can turn a sprightly witticism. Upon his taking office his loyal supporters swamped him with applications for sinecures. He placed many of them, but when one henchman wrote in asking to be appointed State bee inspector, the benevolent Bill hesitated. "Hm," he said, glancing at a stenographer's ankles, "I don't know as we got any place around here for a bee inspector, but we might use a good chicken inspector."

When Will Rogers came back to his native State and met the Governor, there was some uncertainty about which of the two displayed the perter wit. Rogers pointed to a portrait of an ex-Governor on the wall of the executive chamber and commented smartly, "There's old Ed Trapp. My, what a map!" Alfalfa Bill shot back quickly, "He's all bay window, not much lap." Will took lunch with Bill, and the reporters revealed that the Sage's steady diet consisted, not of pancakes, but of half-cooked onions and hard boiled eggs, with an occasional glass of buttermilk to wash them down. The encounter ended in a draw, and the Governor cavalierly tendered Rogers a colonel's commission in the famed Squirrel Rifle Brigade.

An earthy savor permeates much of his speech. "Sister" is his customary address for female callers. He is not averse, at times, to voicing lurid, mouth-filling oaths. He described one of his appointees as "a man with a face that looks like he has wore

out three bodies," and some of his phrases already have enriched the local language.

His rôle of dictator makes it necessary for him to dominate everything from the Legislature down to the lowliest commissions, but he is indefatigable. Not infrequently he works at his desk far into the night. There are times, however, when the strains of an oldtime fiddlers' orchestra waft down the Capitol halls, and then boisterous voices may be heard calling the dance rounds,

Shirt tails out and toe nails draggin',  
Come on, you nesters, keep on raggin'!

Swing yo' podners, circle to the right,  
They ain't goin' to be no supper here to-night!

Old Aunt Sal and Uncle Lee  
They got bit by a goggle-eyed flea.

and the privileged ones look on while the Governor himself executes a neat turn from the strenuous "kitchen sweat" step in the center of his office floor.

But there are occasions for sternness, too, and the Sage is equal to them. He has never put aside his campaign dramatization of himself, and he clings pertinaciously to his place on the local front pages. For example, his private spy system unearths plans of his enemies to assassinate him. He, in turn, anticipates the move before a convention of newspaper men:

First they will try to gain their ends with me in the Governor's chair. Then they will try to impeach me. I have no fear of their doing that. Then they plan to attempt my assassination. But I'm not afraid of their bullets. I have reached sixty-one years and when my time comes, I will go.

A violent uprising of the common people is his usual threat. He and his operatives, through their timely intervention, already have averted several insurrections, he reports. "I shall always feel that I saved the State from anarchy," he said in telling of one such case. He makes the most of this dark menace, and uses it to bludgeon the Legislature to do his will. On one occasion, after he had hinted broadly that the starving masses were ready to fight for him as soon as he gave the signal, a local contingent of the unemployed took him at his word and prepared to march on the Capitol. It was necessary for him to issue a proclamation to halt the invasion.

Once, after the recalcitrant Legislature had been slow in acting on his measures, he followed his prepared address with an impromptu harangue. It was a moment fraught with ominous portent and blue invective. He concluded dramatically, "The roll will be called and the fire bells rung before this is over. When you have whipped me, you can brag about it. But wait until you do!"

Wait until they do, forsooth! Out in the grassroots his constituents are clamoring for him to run for President. Not long ago he accepted an invitation to make an address at Lincoln's birthplace in Springfield, at the ceremonies commemorating the Great Emancipator's birthday anniversary. He brought his oration to a close with this fervent plea:

O! Father of All Mercies,  
Send us another Lincoln!

Possibly he has his own opinion about where an answer to his prayer could be found.

# DO THE RICH GIVE TO CHARITY?

BY ABRAHAM EPSTEIN

THE common faith in the boundless generosity of American philanthropy remains unshaken even in these trying and skeptical days. All Americans have long taken pride in the widespread and numerous organized charities of their country. Its philanthropy has been proclaimed throughout the universe because on some occasions we were able, through our size and wealth, to startle the world with our mighty benevolence. During the current period of depression and want, with millions of people in city and country desperately in need of the most rudimentary subsistence, redoubled faith in the noble myth of the inherent munificence of American philanthropy has become as indispensable to the national peace of mind as a raccoon coat to a Yale undergraduate. It was necessary to summon forth this faith, since only the survival of the myth could protect the rich from what they considered the imminent calamity of higher taxation on large incomes.

Accordingly, the "veritable colossus of charity," as Senator Glass characterized President Hoover, called on the Red Cross, "the greatest mother," to gather her poor children under her protection. Colonel Arthur E. Woods was sent out to kindle the fires of sacrifice. Judge John Barton Payne issued the call of charity from his throne in the Red Cross Temple. Fifty-seven elders of the nation, including Calvin Coolidge, Alfred E. Smith, Samuel Insull and John L. Lewis of the United

Mine Workers, were ordered to batter down the walls of Jericho with their radio microphones. At the same time, a chorus of press-agents worked overtime to inspire the halting and the hesitant. These official applauders and yes writers, many of them threatened with unemployment because the market for Do Not Sell America Short songs had collapsed, now found full-time jobs in the new chorus of Blessed Charity. Said Mr. Hoover:

This is not an issue as to whether people shall go hungry or cold in the United States. It is solely a question of the best method by which hunger and cold shall be prevented. . . . Our national resources are not only material supplies and material wealth but a spiritual and moral wealth in kindness, in compassion, in a sense of obligation of neighbor to neighbor and a realization of responsibility by industry, by business, and the community for its social security and its social welfare. . . . We can take courage and pride in the effective work of thousands of voluntary organizations for the provision of employment, for the relief of distress, that have sprung up over the entire nation. Industry and business have recognized a social obligation to their employes as never before. . . . Never before in a great depression has there been so systematic a protection against distress. . . . Never before has there been such an outpouring of the spirit of self-sacrifice and service.

Meanwhile, Colonel Woods assured the nation that "a new economic era with business management assuming the responsibility of continuous employment is