

KINDLING-WOOD PEDDLER

BY W. A. S. DOUGLAS

ANTON JOSEPH CERMAK, mayor of Chicago and absolute boss of both that city and the State of Illinois, was riding down to Florida. It was the last train journey he was ever to undertake as a living man, for he was heading for the bullet intended for Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Chicago newspapers had been making much of an alleged quarrel between Tony and the political dandy, James Hamilton Lewis, United States Senator from Illinois. The two were to meet.

Senator Lewis, two years before, had been elected to his old place in the Senate after twelve years in the wilderness: he had been, indeed, the first big-shot Democrat to benefit by the public disgust with all things Republican. Tony, then just getting his grip on both the city and the State, had given Jim Ham some help, and now he was determined to dictate the Federal patronage in Illinois. But Jim Ham was determined to keep that business in his own hands.

A meeting that would end in either a fight or a frolic was thus one of the first objects of that fatal journey. On the train an anxious political heeler, who knew that if Tony was a bulldog Jim Ham was a bull-terrier, propounded a question.

"Are you all set with Jim Ham on that Federal patronage?" he asked.

"All set," replied the mayor of Chicago. "Jim Ham will make the appointments."

"Oh," observed the heeler, "so he's got ahead of you?"

"No," said Tony. "He'll make the appointments—but I'll give him the names."

How much truth may have been in that assertion only Senator Lewis knows—and he's not foolish enough to tell. All that history records is that he went to the pow-wow and later announced himself as satisfied. Tony made a similar statement. But his brief words on the train really told much more, for they showed clearly his idea of handling that or any other situation. He was the boss, and that was that. If you didn't like it, well, look out.

"I'm running the Twenty-second Ward," he told his precinct captains years and years ago.

"I'm running Chicago," he later told the city's massed Democratic leaders—Irish, Jews, Bohemians, Germans, Poles, Negroes and white Americans.

"I'm running things all the way down the line," he later on told those who counted in the rest of the State.

A lot of people still insist that he learned his politics from George Brennan, Chicago's Easy Boss, but what he mainly learned from George was simply reading, writing and arithmetic. He got them at the Braidwood school down-State, where Brennan, after losing a leg in the coal mines, had turned to teaching, and had among his pupils—most of them the children of Bohemian and Irish miners—this husky boy who drove a mule in the pits by day and studied by night. Politically, the methods of the Irishman and the Bo-

hemian in the Chicago arena, years later, were so different that one is compelled to conclude that Tony studied Brennan, not for the purpose of learning what to do, but rather what not to do.

Brennan—and Roger Sullivan before him—were ardent apostles of the Deal. More, they argued, was to be gained for Chicago's Democracy, and incidentally for Sullivan and Brennan, by soft words and conniving than by the mailed fist and a battle of ballots in the open. Never in their day did the Democrats rise to the power they were to enjoy under the rule of the Bohemian immigrant. Sullivan and Brennan concerned themselves only with the city—Brennan even more than Sullivan—and let the rest of the State take care of itself.

While they reigned in Chicago there were always treaties with the Republicans. So many judges to the Democrats, so many to the G.O.P. So many jobs in this department and so many in that—with the Democrats getting the fewer in most cases. Very rarely, and then only in the case of a national upheaval, did they see a Democratic Governor sworn in, and as rarely did they see a Democratic Senator.

II

Tony Cermak, penniless, walking along the canal on his weary journey to Chicago, those long years ago, thought of the easy-going school-teacher whose fame as a politician had already been carried back to Braidwood.

"So he's a boss?" the young miner probably asked himself as he sat on the canal bank cooling his aching feet in the dirty water. "Well, just watch me."

But when young Tony arrived in Chicago at last he naturally made haste to call on Brennan, then basking in the sunshine

of Roger Sullivan's smile. This was in 1891 and Tony was barely eighteen years old.

"When an Irishman comes to see me and asks for advice," said Brennan, "I tell him to go mix with his own people. You're a Bohunk, Tony, so go mix with the Bohunks and see what you can do. I'll be keeping my eye on you."

Six years ago, a year before he died, Brennan told me that Tony then asked him which boss he considered the most astute of them all.

"I told him Dick Croker," said Brennan.

Remembering that, I asked Tony himself about a year ago who his own choice was.

"Richard Croker of Tammany Hall," he replied instantly.

"George Brennan gave me the impression that, as a young man, you sort of modelled yourself on Croker," I said.

"That's true—but only in my handling of politicians," he replied with a dry smile.

The Tammany method, in truth, was in effect the Cermak method. Tony was Prussian in his dragooning of friend and foe alike. There was never anything soft or slipshod about him. Like Caius Marius, he came from the humblest of people, and like Marius again he pulled himself to power by sheer ruthlessness as a leader. I believe that if the assassin Zangara had come to close quarters with Tony he would have run away shrieking in terror like the old-time would-be killer of Marius. For the chief plebeian of Chicago could have glared down his foe as easily as the chief plebeian of Rome, and might have paraphrased Marius thus: "Slave, wouldst kill Cermak!"

When Tony, following Brennan's advice, settled down in the Twenty-second Ward, that section of Chicago swarmed with Bohemians. He found lodging in the home of a man who had known his family

back in the Old Country. Brennan kept his eye upon him as promised, and within a week Tony was chauffeuring an old white horse for the street railway company. The animal's station was at the foot of a hill, to the ascent of which he would lend his best efforts, prompted by Tony's whip and the curses of the driver of the street-car. At the top of the incline Tony and his horse would hook off and return to the foot of the hill, ready to do the same thing all over again.

Meanwhile, Tony continued to attend night-school, and saved his pennies. His next job, according to the accepted legend, was selling kindling wood. He split the wood, made it up into little packets, and, so runs the story, piled them aboard a pushcart and wheeled his load through the streets shouting as he went: "Kindling wood? Any kindling wood today?"

The tale is one that Big Bill Thompson, defeated by Tony two years ago for a fourth term as mayor of Chicago, delighted to adorn in the heat of the campaign.

"A Bohunk pushcart peddler for World's Fair mayor!" Big Bill would shout. "America First, boys! America First!"

Then Big Bill, always clowning, would chant a ditty composed for him by his private poet laureate, Milton Weil. It has been printed in almost every newspaper in America but I must repeat it as a preliminary to Tony's reply, which did not get quite so much publicity:

Tony Cermak, Tony Cermak,
Where's your pushcart at?
How the hell can you be World's Fair
mayor
With a name like that?

Tony said nothing—at the time. He was one politician whose goat Big Bill was never able to parade. But on the night he was elected mayor by a thumping majority

he mounted the steps of the City Hall, raised his hand for silence, and spoke:

You remember that old pushcart of mine that Big Bill was always talking about? Well, along about the time the polls closed tonight I got my pushcart. I've always kept it by me to stop my head from swelling. I ran her up to the mayor's office, loaded Big Bill into it, shoved him down the steps, and dumped him into the lake.

I am sorry to change anybody's faith in that pushcart. I have written about it myself many times and in many ways, for it makes a good story. But, digging around in the history of Tony, I found that it was in reality an ancient wagon drawn by an old horse. Remembering the horse that hauled the street car I asked:

"Was it a white horse?"

"Yes," replied my informant, a venerable West-Sider. "Tony bought it from the street car company. Seems it went lame when he was riding it and they were going to send it to the knacker. Instead, Tony bought it for three dollars."

III

Tony lived four years in the Bohemian Twenty-second Ward before he attempted to cut a serious figure in politics. But every minute of that time he was preparing himself. He developed his wood peddling business into a trucking concern, founded a building and loan society, and opened a real estate office. Also he married a Bohemian girl, Mary Horejs, a waitress in the restaurant where he was in the habit of eating. The four years gone by, he knew everybody, and was ready to show George Brennan and Roger Sullivan how to play politics.

His recipe was simple. Like his model, Richard Croker, he went to work and kept working. His day was seldom of less than

eighteen hours. As precinct captain, as district leader, as chairman of the ward organization, as alderman, he gradually built up an organization. In it his word was final. He was, says an old associate, "awful fair but awful hard". Nobody else could promise a job in his bailiwick or discuss any other pickings. You had to go to Tony. And Tony weighed your uses and your shortcomings in a thoroughly cold-blooded fashion. Every man who got a job had to give good measure for it, and when he ceased being of any use to Tony off went his head.

Tony had no friends in those days, as the word is defined in the dictionaries. It is, indeed, the truth to say that he had no such friends until Zangara's bullet laid him low. It was not until he immortalized himself with that lofty morsel of bad grammar: "I'm glad it was me instead of you" and showed the nation over nineteen days of agony that he had nerves of steel and the heart of a lion, that Anton Cermak, boss of Chicago and of Illinois, gathered to himself any real friends. But he gathered more of them in those nineteen days than it falls to most men to collect in a lifetime.

Men feared him, men respected him, and his worst foes conceded his capacity, but not many loved him. He presented the paradox of a man climbing to the heights in the great game of American politics by methods entirely contrary to the book of rules laid down by Tweed, Quay, Murphy, the three Vare boys, and even his own model, the only other great foreign-born boss, Richard Croker. Croker could backslap, he could make a deal, he could carry deadwood over the years, and his real friends were legion. There were thus many vulnerable spots in his armor of ruthlessness, but there wasn't one in that of his pupil. He was a hard man always.

When Tony took over command of the Twenty-second Ward it was purely Bohemian, but with the changes that the years bring about (and helped by some redistricting) its complexion changed. Some Irish moved in. So did some Jews, and so did a lot of Poles. Today, under the leadership of Alderman Henry Sonnenschein, for thirty years "secretary" to Tony, the ward runs as follows: twelve Polish precincts, eleven Jewish, five Irish, and fourteen Bohemian.

These changes were in progress while Tony still ran things in the ward, and as they were made he showed plainly that the Brennan and Sullivan style of politics was not the Cermak brand. For years the Irish had been the Democratic party in Chicago. They operated the chief Democratic club, and though they ruled benevolently, they never forgot that in Chicago the Irish were the chosen people. Their word was law to the Jews, the Poles, the Bohemians and even, in spite of many battles, to the Germans. When Chicago's Democracy met in executive session in Roger Sullivan's day the party cabinet included another Sullivan, an O'Malley, an Egan, a Daly, and a Ryan. And when smiling, kindly old George Brennan ruled, though the names changed slowly, the nationality remained: there were O'Brien, Dever, Kelly, Sullivan the Younger, and Igoo.

Even a Democratic President of the United States couldn't have squeezed a Czymczak, a Prystalski, a Cermak, a Rosenberg or a Horner into those conferences, not even if he passed out four Federal judgeships for the privilege. The "foreigners" sat in the ante-room, and when the descendants of the Kings of Munster, Connacht, Ulster and Leinster were good and ready they were called in, hat in hand, and told what to do. At least they were

so told until Tony heaved those prize-fighter's shoulders of his against the door, crashed it in, pulled his chair up among the Irish Kings, and demanded a hand and a pile of chips.

Tony's recipe for success was a simple one. Nationalities seem to last longer in Chicago than anywhere else, but he learned how to iron them out. A foreigner himself, he was the first to preach to all the other foreign-born or foreign-thinking peoples of the town that they should organize themselves into a single entity under the Democratic banner. He showed them the power they could gain by thinking and acting as Americans.

IV

Thirty years ago Tony went to the State Legislature at Springfield, where he distinguished himself as a bitter foe of Prohibition and Sunday closing laws. A two-fisted drinking man himself—though nobody ever saw him the worse for it—he fought the Anti-Saloon League to the instant of his death. In those early days he became head of the United Societies, composed of Germans, Bohemians, Poles and other groups to whom the threat against their beer-gardens was a calamity, and in serving them he broadened the strength and reach of the machine which was growing under his watchful eyes.

He first crashed that mailed fist of his into the local body politic in 1912, when he was elected municipal court bailiff—which in effect was chief bailiff. The day after his election he discharged the sixty-seven under-bailiffs of the municipal courts. The judges protested in fury, insisting that they had the right to choose all the employés working in their courtrooms.

But Tony stuck to his guns and put sixty-seven of his own henchmen to work.

At once he discovered that there was a Sunday-closing law on the books, and that the Republican administration—and the Republican municipal judges—were ignoring it in so far as G.O.P. saloonkeepers were concerned but enforcing it for Democrats. So he sallied forth with his sixty-seven bailiffs and smashed up the Republican drinking places. His enemies, the judges, replied by accusing him of grafting, but when he went on trial he was speedily acquitted. After this he ran for sheriff.

He was defeated but in 1922 he was elected to the presidency of the Cook County Board, a very powerful municipal body, and ran it until 1931. A great deal of work was done during his régime, and a citizens' committee brought charges of graft to the tune of \$1,000,000. Evidences of irregularity were found, but none of it was traced to the county board or to Tony.

In 1928 George Brennan, the Easy Boss, died, and the scramble for his shoes began. Michael Igoe, of the Irish Igoes, let it be known that Brennan had bequeathed the succession to him on his deathbed.

"To hell with that!" was Tony's answer, and the fight began.

The old group, the descendants of the Irish Kings, stood pat for the most part and hailed Igoe as the heir. There were some Irish who swung to Tony's banner, but Igoe went on fighting. Not till the gubernatorial contest last November did Tony finally get him out of the way. Then Igoe ran against Judge Henry Horner, a Jew, and Tony's selection. He was defeated in the primary and in November he saw Horner elected Governor. Then Tony stripped Igoe of his national committee-ship and conferred it on himself.

In 1931 he ran for mayor against Big Bill Thompson and beat him decisively. With his man Horner in the Governor's

chair, his man Deiterich in the United States Senate, and himself the mayor of Chicago, he had everything—or almost everything—in the hollow of his hand. The one possible discordant note came from the senior Senator, Jim Ham Lewis, who considered that he had done more to elect himself than Tony considered that he (Tony) had done. Jim Ham, to quote the mayor, “wasn’t staying put”. Death put a period to the question of what might have happened had the bulldog and the bull-terrier gone to the mat.

At the time of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago last June Tony welcomed all the representatives of his party as graciously as he had, a few days before, welcomed their opponents, the G.O.P. As each Democratic candidate staged his little show Tony was on his seat waving his hat, or galloping down the aisle with the band of the would-be President. This was one time that he chose to descend to the level of Brennan and Sullivan. He was out for a deal, though bothered a little by two stubborn old gentlemen who sat near him on the Illinois bench and kept yelping for Roosevelt. They were ex-Governor Edward Dunne and ex-Mayor Carter Harrison, Jr.

“Tell ‘em to shut up and use some sense,” whispered Tony to Chief Bailiff Al Horan. “Didn’t I put ‘em on the delegation?”

“You ought to have known better,” Horan whispered back. “You can’t shut ‘em up. They’re too tough. That’s one time you slipped, Tony.”

“Yes,” muttered the mayor, “that’s one time I slipped.”

There were other thorns strewn in Tony’s path. He had made Jim Ham a candidate for the nomination as a stalking horse and Jim Ham let him think he would stalk—until the first day of the con-

vention. On that afternoon the senior Senator from Illinois chose not to run and wired Tony to that effect. So Melvin Traylor, the Chicago banker, had to be put up, and Tony rubbed his hands and got back of his counter again.

The trouble with his line of reasoning was that the letter C comes ahead of I in the alphabet, and that William Gibbs McAdoo was at the throttle for California and in a position to announce that he had the Texas train hitched to his engine. So Merchant Tony hastily kicked his counter over and went into conference with the grocer from Indiana across the way, and when his turn came he was able to do something spectacular, after all. Illinois and Indiana lumped their vote for Roosevelt—to the tune of a mighty howl.

During the months just before his death Tony was deeply interested in the beer question. He saw in the return of malt liquor a greater and grander opportunity for working out his cherished dream—the Tammanyizing of Chicago *à la* Croker. Before the old year was out he had the municipal soft-drink license fee hoisted from \$100 a year to \$300. And there was a joker in that. For payment was only to be accepted in the form of 50% or \$150, leaving the City Council—and Tony—with the privilege of another hoist at the end of six months, *i.e.*, after beer actually came back.

Every preliminary license so granted had to pass the scrutiny of the mayor of Chicago. The district leader, the alderman, *et al* could make recommendations, but the final okay was to be his alone. Thus he dreamed of the return of the old saloon system of political organization. He saw the politics of every precinct being run from a corner saloon. He saw the politics of the ward being run from the alderman’s saloon or the saloon of the alderman’s

brother. And he saw the city's politics being run from the bars of the great hotels. He saw a new and powerful machine in the making, and he planned to keep it under his thumb. But death took him before the suds really began to flow.

V

I have said that Tony had no friends in the dictionary sense until his bravery in those last days brought him millions. But he had women and children around him who must have loved him dearly—his three daughters and his several grandchildren. The qualities that were not visible to a newspaper man were pretty clear in the mind of an eight-year-old boy walking along the street hanging on to his granddad's thumb.

I shall never forget, during that terrible all-night session at the Democratic convention, the spectacle of the mayor of Chicago sitting back in his seat not more than eight feet away from me holding on to a large jar of home-made pickled tongues. Regularly he would toss one of them into his mouth. Obviously he was enjoying

them. I leaned over from my seat and beckoned to a friend sitting in the Illinois delegation.

"He likes them, doesn't he?" I observed.

"Yes," replied my friend, "but they don't like him. And he can't keep from them. One daughter fixes them for him and another daughter gives him hell when she catches him eating them. They've just tipped her off that he's on a lamb's-tongue spree again and if you watch there may be some fun."

Sure enough, a few moments later, a well-dressed, good-looking young woman with fire in her eye came marching down the aisle. She stopped behind the mayor of Chicago, whisked from him the jar and what was left in it, and marched away again. Tony grinned, wiped his lips and then turned on the delegation.

"Which of you boys told her?" he inquired.

At the huge funeral which Chicago tendered to its murdered mayor three men of God officiated. There was a rabbi, a Methodist parson and a Catholic priest. Even in death Tony Cermak, who called himself a freethinker, was a politician.

THE NEW AMERICAN DICTIONARY

BY LOUISE POUND

COMPILERS of dictionaries are often said to be too optimistic in predicting the end of their labors. The makers of the Historical Dictionary of American English, now under way at the University of Chicago, are aware of this, and have set no date for its completion. They say only that they are going ahead as fast as materials and funds permit.

They have been at work since 1925, when Sir William Craigie, one of England's most competent lexicographers, equipped with invaluable experience from his work on the New English Dictionary on Historical Principles (now usually known as the Oxford Dictionary), was brought to the university to set in motion the machinery for the projected work and to oversee its publication. When it will be finished cannot be predicted with any certainty. It is still in the stage of collecting material, though some editing is going on. No part of it will be issued during the present year. But the longer the period of collection, the more swiftly, in the end, will go the business of editing. This is because it sometimes takes a long time and much hard work to supply separately any deficiency found in the material amassed.

A large room on the top floor of Wieboldt Hall, a building devoted to modern languages, has been given over to the staff of workers. A collection of dictionaries, reference books, and other volumes that have a bearing on American speech has been assembled there, and it sees daily

use. Already hundreds of thousands of slips are in hand. The way to get slips is to go systematically through great numbers of books. The more books that are read, the more occurrences of a word that are amassed, the more valid the results. A small army of accurate and observant readers is needed to bring to light the needed citations and to establish the facts concerning usage. Much of the work at Chicago thus far has been done by graduate students in lexicography, preparing for the master's degree or the doctorate. A staff of assistants has been provided by the university from its fund for research.

Next to Sir William Craigie, the most important man associated with the compilation of the dictionary is Mr. George Watson. He worked on the staff of the Oxford Dictionary from 1907 onward, and was brought to America by Sir William in 1927. Mr. Watson holds the title of research associate at the university. His range of reading is encyclopaedic and his powers of work enormous. Another valuable assistant is a former Rhodes scholar from Missouri, Allen Walker Reed, who has done much investigating of American words and American place-names.

A few previous collections of material are available to the makers of the new dictionary. The most valuable is that of the late Richard H. Thornton, who amassed a great deal more than he printed in his American Glossary in 1912. Books vary greatly, of course, in their value as