

"Al" Smith and the Nation

I—Why Not "Al" Smith?

By DON C. SEITZ

ACCORDING to the World Almanac, the Catholic Church in the United States claims 18,654,028 communicants. One of them is Alfred E. Smith, three times Governor of New York, who has just been re-elected for a fourth term by a majority approximating 275,000. He carried into office by his success all other members of the Democratic State ticket except the Attorney-General. Mr. Ottinger, the present incumbent, pulled through mysteriously by a margin of 10,000. Personal popularity such as the Governor has gained is seldom so long sustained in the United States as is manifest in his case. His repeated triumphs place him in the front rank of candidates for the Presidency in 1928.

The Governor was formidable enough to deadlock the Democratic National Convention in New York for a fortnight in 1924. He is much stronger now, and an unmistakable propaganda is at work to make him the Democratic standard-bearer two years hence. This is evoking growls from the South and West, where Catholicism is but lightly represented. In the North and East, from Illinois to New England, the sentiment in his favor is singularly favorable. It seems to take no cognizance of religious differences and to consider only the merits of the man.

WHAT are these? To begin with, he has been in public life for upwards of two decades without becoming either corrupt or stale. He is a born New Yorker who has arrived at distinction—something of a rarity. He did not come from the slums, but from a rather respectable tenement-house region. Tammany Hall is his political foster-father. As a member of the New York Legislature he performed efficient service both for the city and the State. Among his fellow-legislators he won great respect. He has achieved personal popularity without resorting to any tricks. He is truthful, direct, and wise.

There are those who believe that the tiger cannot change its stripes any more than the leopard can alter its spots, but the sage Artemus Ward once said it

could be done with a paint-brush where nature had neglected to supply the proper markings. Another wise man is quoted as saying that the leopard could change its spots—when it became tired of one, it could move to another. Whether by paint-brush or locomotion, Tammany has undergone a considerable change. For one thing, it is submerged in the great votes cast by the other boroughs. It cannot dictate, and there is not much left for it to deliver. Tweed, John Kelly, Richard Croker, and Charles F. Murphy disposed of almost all the privileges that were worth paying for. About all that remains is a moderate amount of patronage and the pleasure that goes with "playing" politics. In this game Smith and his associates are adepts.

WITH but fifty per cent of the enfranchised voting, it makes it easy for the interested to triumph. This need not imply crookedness. The purity of the ballot in New York is pretty close to snow white. Up-State legislators have seen to that, while protecting as far as possible their own graveyards. New York City is a paragon of political purity compared with Philadelphia, even though it be Democratic, while the former is powerfully Republican.

Smith's merits as an administrator are considerable. He has in a long course of public life developed the habit of decision. He does not dilly-dally with affairs nor shilly-shally in his opinions. He is frank and aboveboard. To say that he is a big man in the American sense would not be true. He is an average man well equipped by inclination, habit, and experience for political life. He is a politician, just as Calvin Coolidge is. In a democracy politicians are necessary. We cannot all say, "Politics is a dirty game," and betake ourselves to the golf-links.

So it is that the politician survives and tries to fulfill his functions. Smith does it successfully. Wherein is he weak? The answer must be desultory and indecisive. In the complex growing out of prohibition the Governor and a few

others, like Governor Ritchie, of Maryland, and Senator Edwards, of New Jersey, have frankly declared themselves wet. None is on record as desiring the restoration of pre-Volstead saloon conditions. Nobody is. There does exist, however, a powerful body of people who feel that the better interests of the country, its respect for law and its political integrity, are threatened by the existing situation. They believe there should be some sort of a modification—just what none has made plain. The light-wine-and-beer compromise is no more than a gesture.

YET it is clear that some one of the parties will be compelled to take the issue on board. That prohibition is embedded in the Constitution does not bar further action. Indeed, it makes it all the more probable from the very imperiousness to opinion which the Constitution provides. Opinion will not be stilled or habits changed by written words. There is ample evidence of growing impatience with existing conditions. The majority of 1,200,000 for modification in New York was a loud notice that further action impends.

Long heralded as the party of Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion, the Democratic might be looked upon as the one the issue was most likely to seize. But before the Eighteenth Amendment went into effect more Democratic States were under prohibition than were those of Republican leanings. As to rebellion, Stephen A. Douglas, over whom the party split, received 1,300,000 votes, his secessionist rival some 800,000; so the bulk of the party was not rebellious. Southern Whigs were just as much for secession as Southern Democrats. In the matter of rum, it must be admitted that many saloon-keepers were Democrats.

THE problem facing both parties now is the one as to how far both are split on the liquor question, and which one will have to take up the wet side of the contest to save itself. The Whigs failed to accept anti-slavery, and died.

The Democrats may refuse to take up modification. But within both parties the issue has already sown the seeds of wreckage.

Prohibition and the anti-Catholic sentiment are pretty closely allied in the South and West. The South was sick of whisky-drinking and gun-toting; it is Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian. It is much more pious than the Northeast, at least. That Rum and Romanism should enter the White House in the person of Alfred E. Smith seems to them beyond possibility. There may, there-

fore, grow out of it another Douglas-Breckinridge situation, by which the Democratic Party will once more smash itself, though hardly with the bloody consequences of 1860. The political situation is fast resolving itself into the one prevailing in that fateful year. It is plain that people are more and more coming to regret that the Eighteenth Amendment was not made permissive instead of mandatory. The item in the Constitution recognizing slavery was the thing that prevented curative legislation. Prohibition has been placed in the same

position, with a rebellious public striving for some way out.

Douglas tried to set aside the Constitution and to substitute popular sovereignty. Smith is standing for modification. Douglas failed, and his movement precipitated civil war. Can there be a compromise outside of the Constitution? Probably not. So there lies before America a long and uncertain road. Say what you will, the question will not down. An "Al" Smith who is not Catholic could perhaps clear the path. It may become straight enough even for him.

II—Why "Al" Smith?

By GEORGE FORT MILTON

THERE seems to be a tremendous amount of propaganda seeking to convince the dry Democracies of the South and the West that they should accede to the Presidential nomination of the Nation's leading nullificationist, Governor "Al" Smith, which has even increased in fervor since the general election of November, 1926. This propaganda bears lightly upon Governor Smith's fitness for the Presidency, but puts a great deal of emphasis on the theme that he can win.

The editor of *The Outlook* has propounded three points for me to discuss: First, Mr. Smith's attitude on prohibition; second, the political support that he would get from Catholics because he is a Catholic; and, third, the relationship of Governor Smith, as a product of Eastern and urban machine politics, to the Democratic Party as a whole. To these must be added the question: What is behind this Smith agitation, anyway?

I

MR. SMITH's attitude on prohibition, and that of Tammany, has been described by Senators Borah and Walsh and Mr. McAdoo as nullification. A New York member of Congress, Mr. Frederick Davenport, writing in *The Outlook* in October, said: "This New York referendum, in effect, asks Congress to . . . permit each State, if it pleases, to nullify . . . the Eighteenth Amendment."

Governor Smith's wetness is notorious. Under his leadership the New York Legislature repealed the Mullan-Gage State enforcement law. Under his further leadership the New York Assembly submitted to the voters a referendum about which Justice Crane, of the New York appellate bench, in his decision said:

"Congress could not constitutionally do that which those voting in the affirmative would by such vote suggest that it should do. Congress cannot abdicate its power to define . . . what shall be deemed an intoxicating beverage."

How does the country as a whole respond to the wet appeal? The wets claim November election solace from Massachusetts, where David I. Walsh, very mildly moist, defeated Senator Butler, whose dryness is unpronounced. But Governor Fuller, a staunch prohibitionist, defeated Mr. Gaston, an ardent wet, by 150,000. There is not much wet comfort in Massachusetts. New York's ardent dries defeated Senator Wadsworth, whose wetness was equal to that of Smith himself, and many analysts insist that Mills's wetness shriveled his up-State vote and led to his defeat.

In Pennsylvania a dry Democrat came within 125,000 votes of defeating a wet Republican for the Senate; true enough, William B. Wilson had the Vire primary practices to help him; but Wilson carried 55 counties, and came to Philadelphia with a majority of 100,000. Wilson's wet running mate for Governor, Judge Bonniwell, did not carry a single county against a dry Republican, and lost many which never go Republican in off-election years.

Vic Donahey, Ohio's Democratic Governor, dry, a staunch progressive, and an ardent foe of Smith and Tammany Hall, was elected for a third term. His running mate for the Senate, former Senator Pomerene, was defeated. Mr. Pomerene was wet. Mr. Willis, his successful Republican opponent, is dry, and the Willis victory was purely a prohibition test in Ohio.

The Governor's most ardent devotee in Illinois is George E. Brennan, Roger Sullivan's successor as boss. Brennan entered the Senatorial race with the specific declaration that he was running to show that "Al" Smith could carry Illinois.

After the nominations, the Senatorial investigating committee brought forth the damning fact that Brennan's opponent, Chairman Frank Smith, of the Illinois Public Service Commission, which made the rates for Insull's companies, had accepted thousands of dollars from Samuel Insull, Chicago utility overlord. This impropriety was so manifest that a dry Republican entered the field as an independent, and gave Brennan a splendid chance to win.

In the 1914 Senatorial race Roger Sullivan had come within 17,000 votes of victory. Sullivan's campaign situation was inferior to Brennan's. Despite all this, the Smith boomer failed to make the grade. The dry Republican won by 50,000, dealing a body blow to Tammany's big parade.

The wets lost out in the Missouri, Colorado, and California referendums. In the last State, McAdoo led a battle which gave that State a prohibition majority of 60,000, the largest ever had. Nor did the Congressional and Senatorial elections add to wet strength in Washington.

From a Democratic standpoint, the party of Jefferson is as substantially dry in the South and the West, with a few exceptions, as the party of Burr is wet in the East. Both sections have cross-currents; Pennsylvania Democratic dryness is a much more important defection from Tammany than the dry losses in Montana and Nevada. It is almost im-