

# What Mississippi and Alabama Think of Al Smith

By DIXON MERRITT

SEVERAL Republican candidates for the Presidency have dreamed of breaking the Solid South. None of them ever had a chance. No possible Republican candidate would have a chance now.

None the less the Solid South may be broken in 1928.

A Democratic candidate may do it.

The breaking of the Solid South does not mean exactly what it might seem to mean. There is no probability that any State south of Tennessee will, under any circumstances next year, go Republican. But there is imminent probability that in the Gulf group of solidly Democratic States unprecedented things may happen, that a considerable number of State and county and municipal offices may be won by Republicans and independents, and that there may be built up a party in opposition to the Democratic, a party which in future contests may be at least an effective party of protest.

This proposition swings on three hinges: If Alfred E. Smith is nominated by the Democrats, if an acceptable man is nominated by the Republicans, if the temper of the South remains anything near what it is. Perhaps there is a fourth hinge—if a fair measure of prosperity continues. Two of these hinges, or even one, might be sufficient to hold the proposition up and let it swing.

Those Northerners who so long have plotted the cracking of the South may find what pleasure they can in this situation, but they must be on notice that the satisfaction will not be solely theirs. Many Southerners, even among those who wish to see Governor Smith nominated, contemplate the change not merely with complacency but with positive pleasure. The South, no longer fixed in anything else, is becoming irked by fixity in politics.

That feeling is not entirely new. Its effective development has been hindered by the conviction that nothing would be gained by breaking down the one-party system in the South merely to build up a one-party system in the Nation. And it has always seemed that for the South to cease to be solidly Democratic would merely tend to make the Nation solidly

DIXON MERRITT went South to find out for Outlook readers what the people there really think about Al Smith. First we published his observations in his home territory, Tennessee and Kentucky, and in this issue we have his account of the attitude in the Gulf States. Later he will write from the seaboard.

*These articles represent the feelings of the people themselves, not the forecasts and predictions of editors and politicians.*

Republican, to bring about National political fixity, to eliminate even a party of protest. But now the situation seems to be different. If Governor Smith is to smash some Southern Democratic crystals, he is to have at the same time a fair chance of smashing some Eastern and Northern Republican crystals. I believe that a considerable number of those Southern Democrats who favor the nomination of Governor Smith do so mainly because they are quite willing, and even anxious, to swap a part of the South for States in other sections of the country. A part of the complex is a sincere desire to be rid of one-party government sectionally and Nationally, but another part of it is the honest horse trader's expectation of getting something to boot. Statistics show that Eastern and Northern States have higher yields of electoral votes.

WHAT is above written may have raised the suspicion that there is support of Governor Smith's candidacy in the Gulf group of States. The suspicion is quite well founded. There is much more outspoken support of Governor Smith in these States than in Tennessee and Kentucky. A part of that, too, is due to hard horse sense in practical politics. No matter how many Democrats in the Gulf States might bolt Governor Smith, he could still carry them. There is substantially no Republican Party in any of them. Gulf States Democrats who honestly are for Governor Smith can afford to say so. It

is not so in Tennessee and Kentucky, where the Republicans can win whenever they have even a little Democratic disaffection to help them.

To illustrate. In Tennessee or Kentucky a ten per cent switch would be dangerous and a twenty per cent switch would be disastrous to Democratic success. But an Alabama supporter of Smith said, quite complacently:

"Forty per cent of Alabama Democrats would stay away from the polls. Twenty per cent would vote for the Republican nominee. But the remaining forty per cent could handily carry Alabama for Governor Smith by about 10,000 majority."

"Handily," he said. Well, I have sat at the feet of political prophets for a good many years, and I have never known one who could play with so short a figure as 10,000 and be sure that he was safe. I believe, however, that Alabama would be perfectly safe for Governor Smith. This man's disaffection figures are high—a little high, not much; not high at all as to the proportion of Alabama Democrats who would hate to see Governor Smith nominated, but a bit high as to those who would actually refuse to vote for him.

AND that brings on talk about Alabama.

Alabama has always been about as solidly Democratic as any State ever was. It has not quite half a dozen counties in which Republicans frequently win. It has only one county solidly Republican, and that is its one county the main part of whose population recently came from Europe. It has no Catholic population worth mentioning except in Birmingham and Mobile, and the number of Catholics is not large in either of those.

Alabama is, or recently has been, the worst Klan-ridden State in America, with the possible exception of Indiana. I have given some study to both of them at close range, and I can't see that one is worse than the other. Scores of flogging cases are pending in the Alabama courts and, when I was in Birmingham, a young man was shot down, after hav-





Underwood & Underwood

## THE TRADITIONAL SUNNY SOUTH

A scene in Biloxi, Mississippi

ing been twice flogged, while crossing a city playground park. How many of these deeds were performed by Klansmen nobody positively knows; but if all of them were, all that is proved is that lawlessness in Alabama followed a sort of Southern genius for personal violence, while in Indiana it followed another sort of genius for money crookedness and petty prying into other folks' affairs.

But the Klan is on the wane in Alabama, as it has been for some time in Indiana. I have never found anywhere a man who would admit membership in the Klan. But I have found in several places some who admitted that they once were members. From one of these in Alabama came information of a Klavern, once numbering among its members fifty-six Protestant ministers, which now has a total membership less than that number.

This is mentioned because it lays the ground for one of the chief objections raised in Alabama against Governor Smith's nomination.

It may be taken for granted that all Klansmen are opposed to Smith. But many active anti-Klansmen in Alabama are opposed to him because, they say, his nomination would afford the Klan

the opportunity of recruiting its membership, and thus would prolong the State's agony for years and make it necessary to do the job of house-cleaning over again.

**A**MONG these objectors to Smith's nomination are not a few who believe that his election would have a beneficial effect. If he could serve four years in the White House, with the Pope still living in Rome and with no cardinal coming from the Vatican to serve as private secretary to the President of the United States, they believe that the bugaboo of a Roman menace would be laid and that, in a large measure, religious prejudice would be dispelled. But they see no such result from Smith's nomination and defeat. They believe that the rejuvenated Klan would then, with some show of reason, claim credit for the defeat, that it might be able to perpetuate itself, and certainly would be able to continue its activities for years on the plea of necessity for Klan organization to prevent Catholic domination.

If the Democrats of Alabama were sure that Smith could be elected, a great many more of them would favor his

nomination. They fear what may happen if he is nominated and defeated.

This fear exists in equal degree in the other States of this group. Indeed, it is even more general in Mississippi than in Alabama. Most of the things that apply to Alabama are accentuated in Mississippi. And I am convinced that, of Mississippi Democrats, a larger proportion would stay at home or vote the Republican ticket. Even this, however, would not even threaten turning the State Republican, for there is even less of a Republican Party, comparatively, in Mississippi than in Alabama.

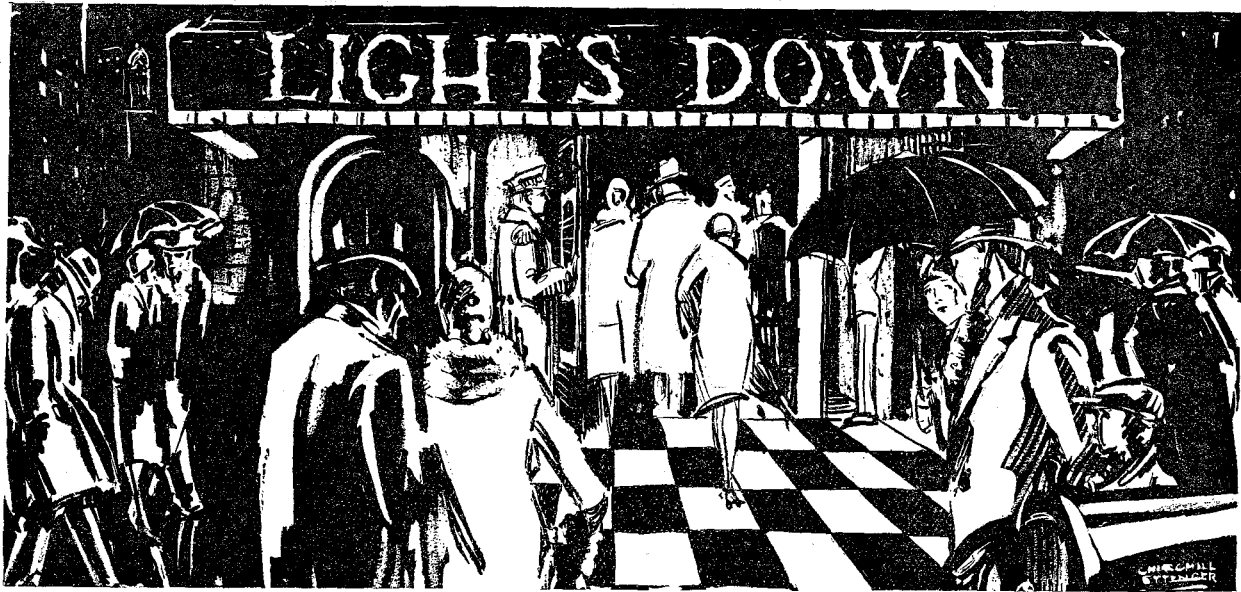
**T**HERE is, however, another difference which might serve to even things up, to make the proportion of disaffected Democrats about the same in the two States.

Mississippi is purely a rural State. It has no cities and few manufacturing plants of much size. Most of its voters have the rural Democratic view-point, traditional in the South.

Alabama, on the other hand, is an important industrial State. Its iron mills, for instance, are among the largest in the country. Most of its large for-

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### *A Review of the New York Theatre*

#### John Galsworthy's "Escape"

**Y**OU will come out with a lump in your throat from John Galsworthy's "Escape."

You will find yourself asking how it is that individuals feel not at all and act not at all the way they—as society—are supposed to act and feel. You will be conscious, too, of a thrill of admiration for the English conception of fair play and the so-called "gentleman's code." And you may not be at all sure how much of this you owe to John Galsworthy's play and how much to Leslie Howard's fine acting in the leading rôle.

For an English gentleman, escaped from prison—an unfortunate accident, which resulted in conviction for manslaughter has put him there—has just given up his gallant attempt to outwit his pursuers: constables, prison guards, farmers. He has sacrificed his chance to make good his escape because his success will mean that the parson of a village church must stultify himself in the eyes of God, and his flock, by telling a lie. And that is not "cricket."

It is not fair play. He has no right to ask the parson to do that. In the village vestry, where the parson has allowed him to hide while his pursuers searched the church, the Englishman steps from behind the vestments and gives himself up.

"It's one's better self, one can't escape," he says.

And Captain Denant's run for freedom is over.

Which sounds trite, and perhaps moralistic in print, but in the theatre is dramatic and compelling enough. In fact, at the end of a heartbreaking hunt over mist-hung moors, down into trout

streams, out of valleys into the mountains, through inn bedrooms, cottage parlors, gravel pits—at the end of all this, Captain Denant seems very much the thoroughbred Galsworthy evidently considers him: the Englishman to whom life is a sporting event, and observing the rules of the game of more value than success or failure.

English all the way through, in its presentation of different types of society and the way each faces the problem of helping or hindering a man hunted by the police, the play itself is built very simply upon a variation of the question: What would you do if a friend of yours committed what you considered an excusable murder?

In Galsworthy's instance, Captain Denant strikes a plain-clothes man in Hyde Park because the officer is unnecessarily nasty in arresting a harmless prostitute who has simply held a conversation with the Captain on a park bench. In falling, the officer hits his head on an iron railing—and Captain Denant is faced with manslaughter. The blow has killed.

As a prisoner, naturally, he feels no moral obligation to repent while society punishes him. Instead, at work in a fog on the prison farm, he toys with the idea of escaping, and, given opportunity, does so. Once away from his guards, in the fog, he runs like a hare, only, however, to run in a circle and encounter one dangerous, breathless situation after another; never knowing how any one will act, growing always hungrier, more desperate, more fagged, but never losing his sense of humor, never casting overboard his philosophy of fair play.

Through nine exciting, totally different, unexpected scenes; for forty-eight starving, pushed, frightful hours—night and day—the prison siren sounds in the distance behind him like the baying of a great hound. During all this time his pursuers clatter after him, beating the coverts, roping the roads, searching the village. And through it all he staggers and runs, hides and escapes, invariably failing to disguise his identity, and so being forced to depend upon his wits; invariably finding friends in the fair sex and enemies in the stolid, unimaginative middle class; but always keeping his head up and his nerve unshaken—until in the end his own sense of honor defeats him and he surrenders in the village vestry.

This is the instance Galsworthy presents. It is manslaughter, not murder, to be sure. And the people of the play are not friends of the Captain's; they merely know the facts in his case through the newspapers. But the question is really the same. Captain Denant, as becomes a proper hero, enlists your sentimental sympathy because he is in reality a victim of circumstances, because he fought for the country which now punishes him, because he is a Sir Galahad of the playing fields of Eton, because he is of an excellent wit and polish, and because he represents intelligence and good breeding persecuted by stupidity and officialdom.

Because of all this, we sympathize with him and identify ourselves with him. Which makes of the play a special instance, and one which it is not quite fair for us to use in pointing a moral, or drawing a philosophical conclusion, or