

## ►► The Imperial "Alfalfa Bill" ◀◀

### An Oklahoma Governor Who Rules With a Rifle

THEY have a new kind of governor "riding herd" in Oklahoma—a governor who knows his state's laws and who is not afraid to use the full authority of his office when he thinks it necessary. Denounced as a charlatan and derided as a clown when he took office, "Alfalfa Bill"—sometimes called "Bolivia Bill" and "Cocklebur Bill" by his enemies—immediately set himself to serious business in the executive mansion. When he could not enforce a law in any other way he called out the militia and, therefore, he has risen in public respect as an executive who knows what he is about.

The free bridges across the Red River between Texas and Oklahoma refuse to open, and the Governor issues an executive order and they open. A Federal court issues a writ against state officers, the Governor defies the injunction, sends the state militia to see that his orders are enforced, and the federal writ fades into a condition of innocuous desuetude.

A hospital patient addicted to chiropractic is helpless when confronted with university red tape; the Governor speaks and the doors of the university hospital open to admit the patient. A state law threatens the prosperity and happiness of a host of state school land lessees who cannot pay their interest, the Governor wills, and the teeth fall out of the statute and the school land farmers are happy. The oil corporations refuse to pay an adequate price for oil, and the Governor calls out his guardsmen and closes 3,000 oil wells until he gets his price.

Small wonder that the nation has become "Oklahoma-conscious," and that the *Denver Post* sighs, "O for a Murray for Governor of Colorado!" Here, admittedly, is a man who at least fills the shoes of the governor of a sovereign state in marked contrast to the usual Afraid-of-His-Shadow political bellwethers who too frequently quake and rattle about in high places.

This governor is William Henry Murray, aged 61, six feet tall, thin, weather-worn, with bushy, unruly hair, and a droopy walrus moustache. In succession he has been a newspaper subscription agent, school teacher, country editor, lawyer, farmer, historian, South American colonizer, and the ninth governor of Oklahoma.

But when Governor "Alfalfa Bill," as he is affectionately known among his

By LOUIS COCHRAN

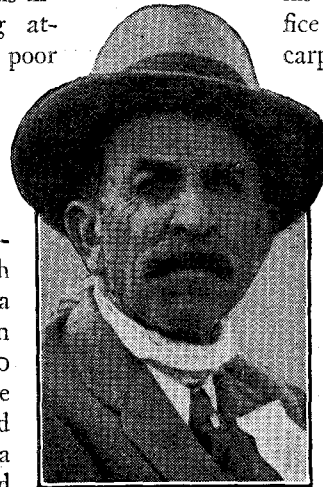
constituents, or "Bolivia Bill," as he is known amongst some of his critics, announced his intention of making his third race for the governorship shortly after his return in 1929 from his ill-fated Bolivian colonizing attempt there were few so poor as to do him homage, and none so rash or foolish as to believe he would be elected. For ten years he had been away from the state, and six years before had sailed away with twelve families to found a new colony at El Gran Chaco, Bolivia, on a 75,000 acre concession from the Bolivian government, and the magic name of "Alfalfa Bill" had all but disappeared from the public prints.

He had made two abortive efforts to become governor, in 1910 and 1918, and his reward had been but a vision of the promised land. He had been overwhelmingly defeated for reelection to Congress in 1916 because he gently pooh-poohed the notion of Wilson's impeccable wisdom, and scoffed at the idea that the Democratic President would keep us out of the war. But "Alfalfa Bill," undismayed, peeled out his last twelve dollars, gave his wife one dollar, arranged for credit with a grocer at his Tishomingo home, and for the third time started on the road which eventually led him to the governor's chair and no little share of national attention.

There were nine aspirants for the Democratic nomination. Three were millionaires, and four others had good records as administrators. "Alfalfa Bill" had no organization, no backing of any sort, no money, and every daily newspaper in the state was against him. But the crowds who came to jeer remained to cheer, and in the run-off Democratic primary he defeated his opponent by the impressive vote of 218,852 to 139,810 and swamped the Republican nominee in the general election by 100,000 votes, carrying 64 out of the 77 counties of the state.

Within eighteen months after his return as a failure from a foreign land, "broke," unhonored and virtually forgotten, he had taken in the governor's chair, and thereupon proceeded to

startle the nation by a series of acts unprecedented in their scope, and yet with a strict adherence to constitutional authority which earned the admiration of friend and foe alike. Gone now is the torrent of abuse and ridicule with which his election and entry into office was greeted; the incessant carping about personal peculiarities, and innuendoes of personal incapacity or weakness. Doubt or fear as to his courage, intelligence, legal knowledge or sincerity of purpose has passed away, and from an attitude of ridicule even his enemies have passed to an attitude which takes it for granted that any measure adopted by "Alfalfa Bill" will be successful. "Alfalfa Bill" has become a "favorite son."



Keystone

But it was not always thus. Born near the community of Toadsuck, Grayson County, Texas, the son of Uriah Dow Thomas Murray, an itinerant Methodist preacher who lived to administer, at 91, the oath as chief executive to his son, the future champion of state's rights ran away from home at 12. He picked cotton for a living, cooked his own meals on stones and slept on the ground for more than a year, but he made his way. His school attendance was haphazard and, intermittent, but, determined to better his condition, he enrolled at College Hill Institute at Springtown, Texas, worked his way through, and was graduated in a year and a half with a B. S. degree and a teacher's license. Then he became in turn a school teacher, newspaper subscription agent and a statehouse reporter at Austin.

WHILE editing a country newspaper at Corsicana, Texas, he became interested in law, and studying at night, was admitted to the bar at 23. Then, following the lure of adventure whose siren call he has never failed to hear, he migrated in 1898 to Tishomingo, capital of the Chickasaw Indian Nation, and married the niece of the Chickasaw governor.

It is not recorded that he disclosed great abilities as a lawyer, but he prospered and in time became the owner of a thousand acres of land, many farm animals and thirty tenant houses. While

making treaties for the Chickasaws he began a study of constitutional government, ancient and modern. He was a delegate to the Oklahoma constitutional convention in 1906, became its president at 37, and managed to have so many of his ideas incorporated into the state constitution that he is sometimes spoken of by his admirers as "the Father of the Constitution." He is credited with having written most of that document of 45,000 words, and when the territory became a state in 1907 he was elected as the first speaker of the House of Representatives.

Largely because of his services before and after the birth of "the most radical state in the Union" his pictures now adorn all the state histories, the Murray State Agricultural College at Tishomingo is named for him, and a county bears his name. In 1910 he ran for governor, but the voters had grown suddenly cold and he was defeated. He was elected member of Congress from the state-at-large in 1912, and in 1914, the state having been redistricted, he was elected as Congressman from the Fourth District.

He was a delegate to the Democratic National Conventions in 1908, 1912 and 1916, and is credited by some of his admirers with having started the swing of sentiment towards Woodrow Wilson at Baltimore when Clark was polling 554 votes to Wilson's 354. Ironically enough, it was largely because of his non-subservience to Wilson in 1916 that he was defeated for reelection, as he publicly declared that the Democratic President could not keep the nation aloof from the European conflict, and that within a year the United States would be at war against Germany. For such blasphemy he was "knifed," and he retired to the meditations of private life.

But the quiet of the farm or the petty bickering of country law courts could not satisfy the spirit of a man who had sat in Indian councils, and drafted a state constitution, and in 1918 he ran again for governor and was again defeated. In disgust William Henry retired again to the peace of his Tishomingo law office and the solace of his farm, and his name was seen no more in the newspapers.

In 1919, convinced that his adopted state would use him no longer, he sold

out his acres of good farm land, paid up his debts and set out for South America "to rest up and think things over." But it was not rest that "Alfalfa Bill" wanted, and he had proved he could think in Oklahoma. In 1924, having obtained a concession from the Bolivian government of 75,000 acres, he returned to Oklahoma to gather colonists for that promised land. He recruited twelve families and with his wife and five children set out for the land

of Canaan, which was five days' travel from the nearest railroad and among a strange and unfriendly people. Within six months his adherents had deserted, but "Alfalfa Bill," after paying back every dollar entrusted to him, remained with his family in Bolivia for five years. Only when the Bolivian government became unfriendly and cancelled the concession did this strange mixture of dreamer and man-of-action surrender to the inevitable and return with his Indian wife to the state he had helped to nurture through its trying period of infancy. Tishomingo gave him a rousing reception.

Perhaps the people of Oklahoma were ready to elect any man who savored of honesty and

integrity; perhaps they were willing to try any nostrum, however desperate, which promised to relieve them of the ills which had befallen them. Their two preceding governors had been impeached and removed from office; their rich were growing richer and their poor were growing poorer; their crop valuations had shrunk from \$289,236,000 in 1928 to \$132,248,000 in 1930, a shrinkage of more than half, and there was even talk of Communism. Even so, no one paid any attention to this walrus-mustached old wanderer who had contracted the harmless habit of running for office; only the city newspapers ventured a mild chuckle now and then, which grew into hot bellows of rage as the sentiment grew from the echo of the candidate's voice to a popular demand for "Alfalfa Bill."

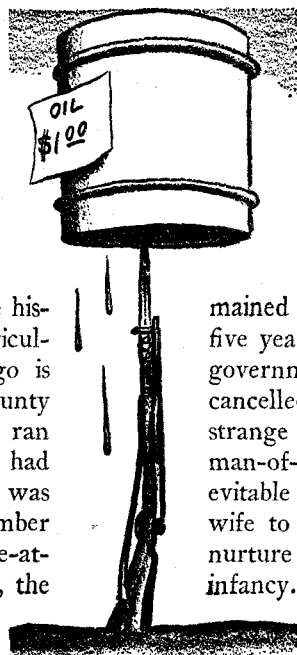
Not that "Alfalfa Bill" had money; he didn't. He started out with twelve dollars and once he was down to a dime, but he never gave up. Not that he had means of transportation; he didn't. Sometimes a friend would drive him from one speaking engagement to another. Sometimes he walked, but he got there whatever the odds or the weather.

Not that he had newspaper support; he didn't. Every newspaper in the state was against him, except the *Blue Valley Farmer*, a country weekly whose editor became attracted to him during the early stages of the campaign. Later, as the Murray movement grew and the financial strain eased, the newspaper was purchased by Murray's friends, filled with literature devoted to his cause and delivered free to every rural mail box. "The Red Menace," as the city newspapers called Murray, became so ominous that one Oklahoma City daily detailed a woman columnist to attend him and the public was regaled with horrified reports that the would-be governor "wore two pairs of trousers in cold weather"; that for years he and his family "had lived in a house with a sod floor"; that "his home was without a bath tub," and "he ate hot cakes with his hands." If there had been any doubt about the election before, these attacks turned the tide, and "Alfalfa Bill" won the Democratic nomination in a walk-away and was elected governor over his Republican opponent, Ira A. Hill, by a vote of 302,021 to 208,575, the largest majority ever given a governor in Oklahoma.

MURRAY promised the people that if elected he would reduce the ad valorem taxes and increase the taxes on incomes and corporations. He has done more; he demanded a tax commission to adjust assessments, and the commission is now at work. He asked for free seed to distribute to farmers without credit who were unable to buy seed, and the state distributed \$300,000 worth. He insisted upon quick relief for the needy, and the legislature voted \$700,000 and increased the gasoline tax from four to five cents to pay for the relief. The campaign cry of his enemies that he would make the state ridiculous by living in the \$6,000 garage and renting out the executive mansion has not been realized, but his action in planting six acres of potatoes in the park between the Statehouse and the mansion, the proceeds to be given to the poor, has not diminished his stature in the eyes of the voters who elected him.

But this is not all that "Alfalfa Bill" has done for the masses who placed him in office, or that he has tried to do. Certain of his proposed measures have been, if not radical, at least of refreshing originality. In messages to the legislature in 1931 he demanded, among other reforms, that no teacher, or employee of any state institution, receive pay while on sabbatical leave; that state officers be

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"O, SAY, CAN YOU SEE?"



## ➡ A Letter to a Republican Wet ⬅

By HERBERT C. PELL

DEAR MR. SICCUS:

I have often heard you say that you were strongly opposed to prohibition, that you believed it to be the most important issue before the American people at the present time; yet you insist on maintaining your place among that respectable group which by its influence and position is such a continuing credit and valuable asset to the Republican political organization.

Neither you nor I look on prohibition as merely a question of liquor. Your great party leader, Elihu Root, said many years ago in a speech, unfortunately unreported, before the United States Supreme Court—"Liquor is the least important part of prohibition." As a matter of fact, we know perfectly well that the liquor supply has not been affected, at least among the people who guide political parties or direct the commercial and social structures of the United States. Politicians and business leaders who oppose prohibition are not inspired by a craving for alcohol which under the present law they are unable to satisfy. Men and women of your type are obviously opposing it for far different reasons, but I do not propose to discuss this question with you as we are substantially at one in our conclusions.

I think that I may fairly state your attitude on this question thus: The Eighteenth Amendment and its ancillary concomitants—intolerance, extended corruption and widespread law violation—have created a serious condition in this country and today are a menace to the continuance of that type of Americanism in which you have been brought up to believe. They have created a new governmental point of view which you consider to be dangerous to the country. In short, you believe that the group of questions which we ordinarily lump together as prohibition constitute the most important problem which has faced this country since slavery and you profess yourself to be totally opposed to the contentions of the dries. You describe yourself as a Wet.

It is not for me to tell you what is or is not the most important issue before the country. It would be mere impertinence on my part to tell you that you should cast your vote for one reason or for another. That is your own affair. You have the right to believe anything you wish. You may vote solidly for one party or the other because Lincoln freed the slaves or because Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence; to you the most important problem before the

people may be whether a certain road will or will not be macadamized next year, or you may believe that a lowering or a raising of certain taxes is the vital question.

Do not tell me during the course of this discussion that there are other issues to be considered which are more important than prohibition. If you believe this, I have nothing to say, but in that case, I ask you in all sincerity not to continue to talk against prohibition as if no other issue existed. I do not think that you have the right to profess one set of principles and vote for another.

A Republican Wet is a contradiction in terms, a political anomaly. Prohibition has been a serious issue before the people of the United States since 1918, when the Congress which passed the Eighteenth Amendment was elected. Most of the legislatures before which the amendment came for ratification were elected in 1918. Since then in every state east of the Mississippi River where the Republican party has been a serious fighting organization—that is to say, in every state in which it has even once carried a state election in twelve years—it is the prohibition party. This is as true in New England States or in New Jersey as it is in New York with which we are more immediately concerned. The figures for New York are as follows:

Since 1918 4 Republican candidates for governor out of 7 were endorsed by the Anti-Saloon League. At all 7 elections, the Democratic candidate was opposed. Of 175 Republicans elected to the state senate, 135 were endorsed; of 131 Democrats elected only 3 were endorsed; of the Republicans elected to the state assembly, 782 were endorsed and 235 were not. The Democratic record is 6 endorsed and 584 unendorsed. The percentages are 57 per cent of Republicans endorsed for governor by the Anti-Saloon League and no Democrats. Of senators elected, 77 per cent of the Republicans were endorsed and of the Democrats 2.3 per cent. Of the assemblymen elected, 70 per cent of the Republicans were endorsed and 1.03 per cent of the Democrats.

These figures are taken from the

*American Issue*, published by the Anti-Saloon League and are as complete as possible. They do not include, however, figures for years when the League submitted no report in its annual publication. These figures were gathered through the courtesy of the New York Public Library. I wrote to the Anti-Saloon League in all the New England States, in New York and in New Jersey and have received no answer except from the state superintendent of Rhode Island, who refused to give me any information. He wrote, "Our services are not at the disposal of booze propagandists, hack writers, nor unknown, unintroduced, impertinent snoopers." He also wrote, "You have failed to identify yourself as a friend of the purpose for which they are sacrificing [*sic*]." It is evidently their policy to decline information to the public.

IN THE last twelve years you have voted the solid Republican ticket and yet you say that you are opposed to prohibition. The Anti-Saloon League has endorsed many men for public office, but, as far as I know, it has endorsed no Democrat running in the East for governor or United States senator since 1918; the number of Democratic candidates for local offices that it may have endorsed is extremely small and they have in practically every case been thoroughly beaten. I, myself, refused to support such candidates on the ground that party principle is more important than party label.

I am not a Democrat because I believe that Jefferson was a better or a worse man than Abraham Lincoln. They are both dead, and their parties with them although it is beginning to look as if some at least of Jefferson's problems were coming up again. I am a Democrat because I belong to that urban group which usually supports human liberty and stands ready to trust the enterprise of the people and which is willing to leave to the average man the responsibility of his own life. This group has as its guiding principle a phrase of one of our

state Democratic platforms—"We advocate the utmost freedom to every individual in the practice of his religion, in the conduct of his private life and in the administration of his business which is consistent with the maintenance of justice and of public order." This group believes

