

THE COLUMBIAN.

BLOOMSBURG, PA.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1907

HARRISBURG LETTER.

Special Correspondence.

Harrisburg, Pa., Feb. 12, 1907.

Six weeks of the legislative session of 1907 has already passed and there has hardly been enough work accomplished to form a basis of an estimate of the character of the body. Public expectation was high it may be remarked, probably too high. The dominant party had promised a good deal while passing through the valley of adversity from the election of 1905 to that of last fall, and a good many intelligent people imagine that the present session would be a sort of a reform ratification meeting. The first day's proceedings gave this notion a hard jolt. The election of McClain as Speaker of the House and Woods as President pro tem. of the Senate was a bad beginning of reform work and the re-election of Clerks Garvin and Judd confirmed the bad impression that had been thus created.

There was a deep-seated popular notion that the absence of the passes would keep the legislators to their work fairly well at least, and that without materially increasing the length of the session there would be ample time to take up, consider and enact such legislation as the party platforms had promised. But this hope has been entirely disappointed. The first day of the session was followed by a recess of two weeks and so far as practical results go the Senate has adjourned for the week every Wednesday. The constitution forbids the adjournment of either House for a longer period than three days without the consent of the other and owing to a blunder of somebody the consent of the House for the Senate to adjourn on Wednesday until the following Monday evening was not obtained on one occasion. But that made no difference to the Senators. They all went home as usual and on Thursday Senator Fox of Dauphin county called the body to order at the regular time, declared the absence of a quorum and announced an adjournment until the following Monday evening. That was a technical compliance with the provisions of the constitution which quieted the consciences of those concerned.

PLENTY OF BILLS INTRODUCED

Considering the frequent and prolonged recesses, however, for the House has held no Friday or Saturday sessions, and the Monday evening session is not for purposes of legislation but are to support the legal fiction that the constitution is being obeyed, a good many bills have been introduced and referred to committees. These cover every conceivable subject and include all the promised reforms. But this act simply exemplifies the Biblical adage that "many are called and few chosen." In other words a vast proportion of the measures "read in place" are duplications, as many as a dozen different bills being submitted on one subject. Most of these, moreover, are "artful loggers." That is to say they are bills upon subjects on which public opinion has asserted itself which more or less vehemence or considerable earnestness, intended to placate the demand without accomplishing the desired result. They are "legislative jokers" which serve the purpose of diverting the popular mind from the reform desired. They contain language of double meaning which can be construed in one way to the ear of the layman and convey a different notion to the mind of the lawyer.

The one hope which encouraged the thoughtful observers of events about the Legislature was that the "ostentatious and iniquitous "pinch bills" would be cut out of the programme for this year. "Pinch bills" are the most prolific source of revenue to the "grafter" in the lobby. They come in all forms but mainly in the form of tax and insurance legislation. For example a bill to levy a tax on some subject not hitherto taxed was a certain producer. Usually they are directed against corporations with plenty of money and as soon as they are introduced the corporations concerned are notified that they can be "killed in committee" for a given sum. The figure is generally high but less than the tax would amount to in a few years and the bargain was struck. It is said that the bill prohibiting the sale of cigarettes was introduced as a "pincher" and was only passed because of the "misappropriation" of the funds which the Tobacco trust had paid into the lobby to defeat it. The insurance pinchers were particularly frequent and productive. During the session of 1905 a Philadelphia Senator had those in charge. He has re-

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cently been favored by a high office in the organization.

THE PINCHERS ARE THERE ALL RIGHT.

The hope that pinchers would be cut out has been disappointed however. They are not exactly in the old form but they are there just the same. For example the Senator who distinguished himself by milking insurance companies two years ago has turned his attention to the railroads and has a "beast" in reference to eminent domain in already. There are others, moreover. Among them is a bill "to tax lands and personal property of railroads," "annual State tax on capital stock of corporations" and so on. The creation of new offices is another evil which it was hoped might be ended. But they are flowing in in undiminished volume. Keyser, of Philadelphia, wants a bureau of elevator inspection and Roberts, of Montgomery, wants the number of employees of the State Highway department vastly increased. Tustin, of Philadelphia, insists on a State commerce commission. New courts are wanted in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Delaware county and a Representative proposes to provide County Solicitors with stenographers at public expense.

We are drifting into a government by departments in this State or what might be properly designated a bureaucracy. In other words the several departments of the government are practically permitted to control all legislation on subjects affiliated in any way with their departments. "It's no use in trying to get any legislation," I heard an experienced Representative remark the other day, "unless the bureau of the government to which the legislation relates is favorable to it and it is equally impossible to defeat any legislation which any department wants enacted." That is the most dangerous symptom of recent times. Take the Highway Department, for example. Everybody knows that it is rotten and yet it gets whatever it wants and nothing that it doesn't want. It is not because the majority of the Senators and Representatives are venal that this is true. On the contrary it is a safe guess that if the question could be determined by a vote of either House the Highway Department would be "torn from stem to stern" and reorganized on a practical basis. But the committees of the Legislature are organized to serve the machine and only legislation favored by the bureau is reported from committee.

A FEW OF THE BAD ONES.

In this line there are a few bills pending which ought to receive more than a passing notice. One of these has reference to the killing of game within the commonwealth and another to the taking of fish. Both of these diversions interest vast numbers of people. The obnoxious feature of the pending bills is a clause requiring all hunters to take out licenses for which a fee of a dollar is charged in each case, the revenue derived from this species of robbery going to the Game Commission and the Department of

Fisheries respectively. Instead of in to the State treasury where all revenues properly belong. Obviously the purpose of these laws is to protect the game and fish for the convenience of wealthy residents of the cities who spend their vacations in the forests hunting or along the streams fishing. To serve this purpose to make farmers and their sons take out licenses to hunt in woods of their own and fish in streams which run through their own farms and farmers who can't afford to take out such licenses will be forbidden from shooting game even on their own farms. That is about the limit of absurdity and injustice.

The Department of Forestry is also in the lobby with a couple of "cokoos." One of these is an act "to define and establish auxiliary forest reserves," and the other to "provide for the taxation of auxiliary forest reserves." The first provides that any owner of "surface land on which trees suitable for merchantable timber or saved lumber shall be growing and which if cleared would not be suitable for agricultural purposes," may be "constituted a separate and distinct class of lands to be known as auxiliary forest reserves." Under the law the Commissioner of Forestry will have the right to appoint examiners who shall report to the County Commissioners and after all the rigmarole if the Commissioner of Forestry wants to he may so designate the lands. The other measure limits the taxation on such land to a valuation of a dollar an acre. This will be an admirable arrangement for tannery and other corporations which have or intend to acquire vast areas of forest. Their property will be practically free of taxation until they are ready to cut the timber from it, when it will be released.

PEANUT POLITICS APLENTY.

The feature of the session is the peanut politics which has already been revealed. The Republican managers are determined that no important legislation shall bear the stamp of Democracy and imagine they can fool the public with such trifling expedients. This was shown strikingly, the other day, in the action of the House committee on Electric railroads when the bills to authorize trolley roads to carry freight were under consideration. The first bill introduced on the subject was Mr. Creasy's measure and it may be added the he was the first to propose such legislation. The committee determined, however, that Creasy's bill should not be reported out. One member who for some inscrutable reason was elected in a Democratic district was particularly active and offensive. He protested vehemently against reporting the Creasy bill and declared that only Republican reform measures should be enacted or considered. He imagined that the bosses of his own party were influenced to the same purpose by similar considerations. His narrow vision could discern no other reason and he was encouraged in his delusion, poor, ignorant fool.

As a matter of fact, however, there was another and more potent reason for preferring the Homsher bill. It is an absolutely harmless measure. It makes no provision for the regulation of such traffic by the local authorities in boroughs which is the most important feature of the question. Under existing laws the passenger traffic of trolley roads is subject to regulation by councils and boroughs through which they run and in which they operate and considerable revenue is derived from that source. But the Homsher bill for trolley freight relieves them of this burden and if it is enacted the corporations can say to the people go hang. The Creasy bill gave them no such liberty or to speak more exactly such license. Another difference is that the Homsher bill includes elevated and subway roads. This is obviously a "tub to the whales." There are no elevated roads except in Philadelphia and they are operated by steam and no subways in the State. Consequently that provision of the bill was put in to make sound and signifies nothing.

THE COUNTRY CLUB.

The novelty of the session is the country club and that organization has afforded a good deal of amusement to a good many people who don't understand it. In the first place the impression was conveyed in the beginning that it was an organization of the country members to antagonize the city contingent and compel righteous legislation and with Sam Cochran of Armstrong county as one of the leaders it would be hard to imagine anything more absurd. As a matter of fact, however, the club is simply an association of members for the purpose of social intercourse and the interchange of views on questions involved in pending legislation and it is not limited to country members or even to present mem-

bers. It is a pity, however, that it isn't intended for the purpose first expressed. There is ample room for such an organization in the present legislature and abundant work for it to perform. But in that event the servile tools of the machine among the country members would have to be excluded in order to make it effective and there are a good many of that sort between the Delaware and the Ohio.

The investigation of "the Palace of Gratt" makes little or no progress. There was a great deal of haste in rushing the enabling resolution through the Legislature but that was more on account of the fear of debate than because of anxiety to expose crime. In fact there was an attempt at "railroading" in the Senate but Senator Hall interposed an objection and the bosses have come to understand that Senator Hall's objection means business. His purpose was simply to give the minority an opportunity to offer needed amendments and discuss the subject freely and that achieved he was content. That was two weeks ago, however, and thus far as practical work is concerned, nothing has been done since except the appointment of two very excellent lawyers to conduct the examination in the persons of James A. Stranahan, of Harrisburg, and James Scarlet, of Danville. If it were problems of law instead of questions of fact that are to be solved Stranahan and Scarlet would go to the bottom.

G. D. H.

For Director of the Poor

The Republican party through its regularly constituted authority has placed Oliver T. Wilson of Bloomsburg in nomination as a candidate for Director of the Poor for Bloom district.

The policy of the Republican has always been to support the regular candidates of the party. It has not only done this on principle but because there has never been an instance in our recollection when the candidate of the party has not been honestly nominated. In this instance we all the more cheerfully support the candidate because he has been tried and has proven efficient in this often perplexing and trying office.

When Mr. Wilson assumed office, three years ago the district had a floating indebtedness of \$5000. As a prudent business man, he insisted that this debt must be paid and to accomplish this object the tax was increased.

But now the district is out of debt and a handsome surplus is in the treasury and Mr. Wilson who insisted on an increase three years ago to meet an emergency, is just as insistent now that the tax rate shall be reduced.

There are other good candidates in the field but the Republican insists that there are none better than O. T. Wilson, who has proven his claims to your support. He devotes his time to the work of the district. He comes before you, not as an untried quantity nor as an experimenter. Vote for O. T. Wilson.

Adv.

NOTICE.

The supervisors or their treasurers and treasurers of boroughs can receive their respective shares of license money for 1907 on or after March 1st, 1907, by presenting themselves at the treasurer's office in Bloomsburg and receiving for the same.

M. H. RHODES,
County Treasurer.

The Irish House of Commons.

The Irish House of Commons sat for the last time on June 10, 1800. It was the duty of Lord Castlereagh to move the third reading of the union bill, and he discharged the duty with the utmost apparent equanimity. Other members were not so composed, and to conceal their emotion hurriedly left the room. The speaker, who hated the measure, rose to put the fatal question. He held up the bill for a moment in silence, and looked, according to a spectator's account on the scene, steadily round on the last agony of the expiring parliament. "He at length repeated in an emphatic tone, 'As many as are of opinion that this bill do pass say aye; the contrary say no.' The affirmative was languid, but indisputable. Another momentary pause ensued. Again his lips seemed to decline their office. At length, with an eye averted from the object which he hated, he proclaimed with a subdued voice, 'The ayes have it.' The fatal sentence was now pronounced—for an instant he stood statue-like, then indignantly and with disgust, flung the bill upon the table and sank in his chair with an exhausted spirit.—London Chronicle.

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