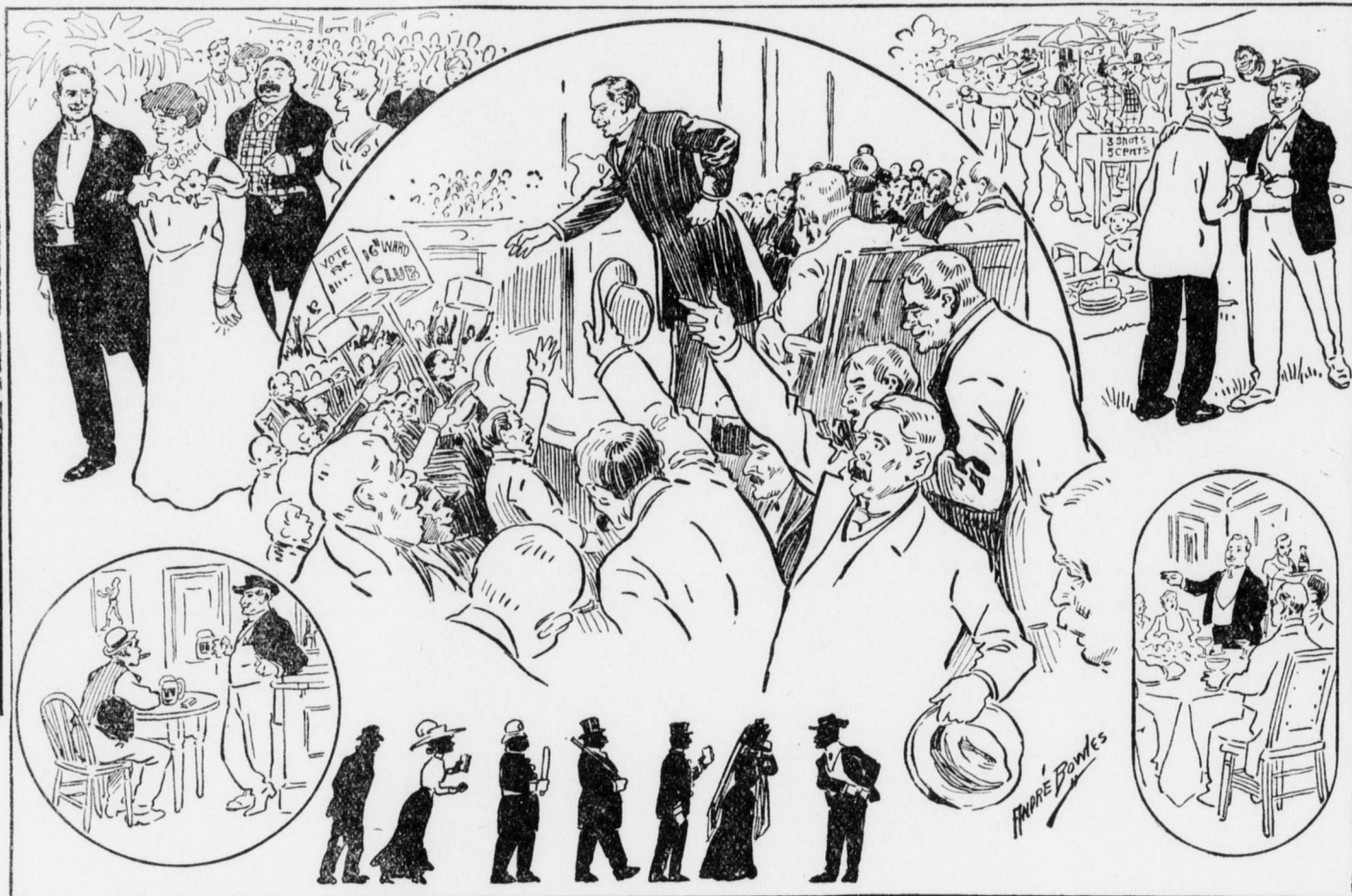


BEHIND THE SCENES IN POLITICS

THE POLITICAL SOCIAL WHIRL

By ERNEST M'GAFFEY



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The politician who is following the calling for a livelihood eats, drinks and sleeps politics. You cannot get him off the track. He finds little interest in anything else. All his reading, outside of the papers, is on political topics. He keeps track of past elections and past ward votes, knows how his ward has gone, will go, and ought to go in the future. He is the life of all political assemblies, for he has the air of the expert and the glibness of an "illustrated lecturer." He attends the "wakes," funerals, dances, parties, baseball and football games, christenings, church fairs, picnics and all other social happenings, and gets himself voted "the most popular man" whenever he has a chance.

I remember that at one political jamboree there was a "beauty show" and I was appointed one of the judges. The other two judges were "pulling together," and I saw I was "double-crossed" before the "beauties" went on the platform. In front of the platform there was a big crowd on the chairs, and they were filled by the respective adherents of the contesting "fair." I had innocently supposed that things were "on the square" until I was approached by one of the judges with the idea that the first prize ought to go to a certain girl who, to my notion, was not within a thousand miles of being first in the race. I put up such a fierce "kick" that the other judges got a little bit uncertain, and at last, as first and second prizes were both gold watches, they agreed to let me select No. 2 if I would vote for their choice for first prize.

When No. 1's name was announced a groan went up from the crowd, accompanied by a cheer from one corner of the seats where the winner's partisans were bunched. When No. 2's name was given she was cheered by a big majority of the crowd, and I was satisfied my eyesight was still good. Now for both of these girls the vote had been solid, three votes for each. When it came to No. 3—and there were only three prizes worth anything—I did a little "double-crossing" myself. One of the judges proposed a girl who had a face like a custard pie at twilight. The other judge said, "Sure, that's the one!" I had selected a girl for this prize and had got her name, so I said to judge No. 2, "Where's your lady?" He pointed to her and I said, "Out of sight; but we'd better split the votes this time; you vote for Miss —" giving him the name of my choice—"so that the crowd won't have any holler coming on the split; two votes to one will win out anyway."

He did as suggested, but as I also voted for my choice the look of disgust that overspread his features when he saw how he had been "horn-swoggled" was something classic. But all he said was "Holy gee!"

After a man has been mixed up in politics for a year or so he begins to perceive that politics has as many angles in a social way as the game of "three-cushion caroms." The variety of gradations is so widely diversified and the intervals so abrupt that it takes a truly cosmopolitan spirit to successfully "take the degrees." At four o'clock in the afternoon you may be touching glasses with a young mechanic at a "ratskeller" in a friendly chat over your beer as to how things look in his end of the ward. At 6 p. m. you may be dining with a bunch of judges and party magnates in some

fashionable club, making wild guesses with the rest of them as to how national politics looms up. At twelve that night you may be addressing forty or fifty people in a little hall back of some saloon. You must be prepared to meet all kinds of people at a minute's notice, and you must be able to understand them and adapt yourself to them instantly and easily, or you will be lost in political society.

Suppose you happen to drop in at down-town headquarters where they are waiting for a meeting to be called. There may be twenty to thirty men about, some sitting in chairs reading or talking, some at a card-table playing a friendly game of cinch, others at a pool-table or a billiard-table. Can you play cards? Now, of course, it is not absolutely essential that you can; but if you can make a hand at one card-table or "pocket eight balls from the break," or play a fair game of billiards you are a more welcome member of society in that strata of political existence.

And if it should happen that you joined a group at some "high-toned" political club, where some topics such as literature, art, science, invention or similar matters were being discussed, and could hold your own in conversation, you were "making a hand" there, the same as at the more plebeian game of cinch. Nothing that a man has learned with his head or his hands but what will come in handy in politics.

Political club meetings, in the case of the down-town organizations, took place every Sunday in my time. They were enlivened by the admission of new members, the reading of reports and making of motions, speeches, and always something in the way of a vaudeville stunt by either a member of the club or some outside talent. These down-town meetings were valuable in bringing the leaders of the different wards together and affording them an opportunity to exchange political news and to discuss the coming spring or fall campaign. They were always largely attended, and it was a disgrace for any ward to be called upon for information of any sort and not have a representative on hand. A disgrace that I never knew to happen but once. No matter what the weather was the "faithful" were on hand.

The president opened the meeting and the utmost freedom of discussion was allowed in any debate which might arise. Sometimes a recess was declared, and the men talked and smoked until the meeting was called to order again. It was amusing to see how those of the gathering who were office-holders were regarded. If their position gave them no "distributive" power, they were looked on as merely "happy accidents," and not ranking at all with those office-holders who had "jobs" to sort out. In neither of my own positions did I have the appointment of even so much as a day-laborer at my disposal, so I was merely "a lucky guy." In fact I was lucky in more ways than one, for not having anything to give out I was not bothered by applicants.

These meetings always arranged for the parades, the marching trips and the "grand balls" which were given. Don't imagine it did not cost anything to mingle in political society, polite and otherwise. You were able to buy tickets to the balls, chances on everything that could be raffled for the benefit of some needy politician, badges and gloves, plug hats to march

in, together with other raiment, club dues, tickets to various dances and entertainments, and in fact, from morning until night, day in and day out, to "sift" your salary steadily into "the hopper."

The "grand balls" were of course the most important functions given by the party. They were attended by everybody, including the mayor, and he led the grand march. It was a lively time, and diamonds were as plentiful as blackberries. Full-dress suits were largely in evidence, and the dancing kept up until morning. At such a ball the extreme opposites of political life met, once a year, and the occasion was one to be remembered. Judges, with an eye to possible or probable re-nomination, were not at all too proud to attend, and occasionally some of the city's elite attended, just for the novelty of the thing. A woman might be led out by an ex-governor of the state for one set, and the next set—

"Take a turn down the middle With the man that shot Sandy McGee."

It was a truly cosmopolitan gathering, unique and picturesque, and rarely was there any disturbance that amounted to anything.

Another and more common phase of political social life was at the saloons. Here the ward politicians gathered, not only to talk politics, but to roll ten-pins, play pool and, at the card-tables, "play for the drinks." The amount of social intercourse thus had in a large city is enormous. After the ordinary ward politician had eaten his supper he would be ready to engage in his political cruising, and he could usually find a bunch of men at the bowling alleys, or in the card-room of his neighboring saloon. I went through a great many political fights and skirmishes, big and little, and except just at election times I saw very little drunkenness. But there was no doubt that the workmen and mechanics gathered at the saloons to see each other. And there was no doubt that they spent money there; maybe more than they should have done. But that was where they went to find companionship; to meet their "society." I have often gone to the swell political clubs and there met the professional men, lawyers, doctors and professors, business men of large interests in various channels, and they sat at the tables and drank their wine where the ward fellows drank beer, and they played "bridge" or "poker" where the ward men played "cinch," and when you come to the question of which is moral and which is not, I leave it cheerfully to every man for himself to judge.

Every year, and always in the good old summer-time, the swell picnic was held, generally away out in the country in some grove. And here political society sported itself in its gayest and gladdest "rags," and gave itself up to unalloyed festivities of all sorts and kinds. There was the fat man's race, the sack race, chasing the greased pig (so politically suggestive), the tug-of-war between the firemen and policemen's teams, the dances, the speeches, the bowling alleys, the "nigger baby and baseball" stand, the umbrella and cane game, the lemonade stands, the wandering minstrels, and the "shell game." You could spend your money a little at a time at the diversified amusements, or you could have one swift thrill and lose it all at the "shells."

When the band struck up a favorite

waltz tune at the platform you could go up and "pivot" with your partner, just to show that you were not proud, or that you knew how to "reverse." Dancing went on all the time, couples coming and going and round dancing being succeeded by quadrilles. Sometimes a lithe and sinuous jig-dancer got a space cleared for himself to disport in, and great was the enthusiasm when some girl would accept a challenge and come out on the boards to do a turn with the jig-dancer. Such advancing and swaying and retreating; such apparent indifference and then unexampled vigor; such a hammering of the boards and turning and twisting, until at the end the crowd roared its approval and the dancers disappeared among the spectators.

Political society at the picnics, democratic as it seemed at first blush, had its lines of demarcation, which were quite noticeably drawn. The wife and daughters of the "big boss" were on hand, together with the women-folks of the various office-holders, but they did not mingle with the average lady picnickers. They sat by themselves in something of exclusive grandeur, and were pointed out by the more ordinary of the merry-makers to their companions.

Sometimes a possible presidential candidate graced the occasion by his presence and consented to hand out a sample of silver-tongued oratory. But I never heard one yet who could draw away any of the attendance at the baseball game or the fat women's race. There's a limit, even to oratory.

Great was the consternation when, as sometimes happened, the flood-gates of heaven opened and drowned the picnic grounds. The last political picnic I attended commenced on a very threatening day, and at last the clouds seemed to make up their minds to sweep the grounds. Our party had taken alarm, with a number of others, and had gone down the track to where the first train to town was stationed. The crowd got there and jammed the train instantly. Just opposite the picnic ground, and a half mile from us, was a wide platform, uncovered, on which stood hundreds who were waiting for this train. "Let her go, Sam," said the conductor; "no stop till we get to Chicago." Away we went, and as we passed the picnic grounds hundreds more came down through the drenching showers in white dresses that stuck to their limbs and straw hats that were being soaked to ruin. But the train went past regardless of their yells, and as it went by the car windows were raised and the chorus of the latest song was wafted into their ears:

"Oh! ain't dat awful, Ain't dat a shame! To keep my baby Out in the rain."

His First Impression.

They stood by the lake. She was from Boston and poetical. "Are you romantic?" she chirped after a long silence. "Exceedingly," replied the Chicago man as he lit another black cigar. "Ah, I am so glad to hear it. What does your yellow half moon remind you of?" The Chicago man was thoughtful. "Well, to tell you the truth," he responded, after a minute's meditation, "it reminds me of the half of a pumpkin pie and—"

But the Boston girl was gone. Such a gross allusion to fair Luna was more than her aesthetic nature could tolerate.

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