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A Weekly Narrative of History in the Making

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EDITORIAL

CONTENTS.

EDITORIAL:

President Taft's Defense.....	793
Presidential Possibilities	795
A "Progressive" Ticket.....	795
"Progressive" Combinations	795
The Fitness of Things.....	795
Big Booze and Big Business.....	795
John Z. White in New Jersey.....	795
A Distinction With Some Difference.....	796
For An Intelligent Suffrage.....	796
Hot Weather Dress for Men.....	796
Aviation	796
The Future of Civilization.....	797
The Man Without a Party (Lona Ingham Robinson).....	797

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE:

Bryan, Nebraska, and the Interests (D. K. L.).....	799
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NEWS NARRATIVE:

President Taft's Alaska Policy.....	800
The "Dick to Dick" Scandal.....	802
Government Ownership in the Alaskan Northwest.....	802
Canadian Reciprocity	803
The Wool Tariff in Congress.....	803
Presidential Politics in Nebraska.....	803
Republican Progressives in Illinois.....	804
Death of Edward M. Shepard.....	804
Commission Government in Passaic.....	805
War Shivers in Europe.....	805
Russia an Enemy to Constitutional Government in Persia	805
News Notes	806
Press Opinions	807

RELATED THINGS:

Lazarus (Chas. Fred'k Adams).....	808
The Parable of the Weed Patch (E. D. Martin).....	808
People's Power (John Z. White).....	809
The Newsmongers (Langdon Everard).....	813

BOOKS:

"What Is a Living Wage?".....	813
"The Universal Consciousness of Life".....	814
Practical Philosophy	814

President Taft's Defense.

There are two horns to the dilemma in which Mr. Taft has got involved with reference to the Controller Bay affair. The first relates to the "Dick to Dick postscript;" the second to Mr. Taft's generous gift of government land to Mr. Ryan.

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He meets the "Dick to Dick postscript" with as comprehensive a denial as could be made by any one, whether innocent or guilty. It is general, and it is specific. It denies for himself, and it denies for everybody else concerned. Nothing that might be denied by any one of Mr. Taft's connections appears to have gone undenied by him. Coming from a President of the United States in office, Mr. Taft's denials are likely to be generally regarded as conclusive. And this is doubtless as it should be. Nearly 100,000,000 people can never be expected to call on their Chief Magistrate to do more than deny scandalous accusations. His word must be taken as conclusive. This allows President Taft's denial much greater value, of course, than Miss Abbott's assertion, notwithstanding that her reputation for truth and veracity appears as yet to be as good as Mr. Taft's, simply as a matter of personal reputation, and notwithstanding that she has not been shown to have had an adequate motive for forgery or falsehood in originally making her assertion, whereas

everybody whose denial Mr. Taft has o. k.'d has the highest kind of motive for denying. This is true also of Mr. Taft himself. But we are assuming that he is sufficiently appreciative of his exalted office to make him falsehood-proof against the most tempting motives. In respect, however, of Mr. Taft's denial in behalf of the other persons concerned, such as Ryan, "Brother Charles," Ballinger, and the various department subordinates—and these are the really important denials so far as Miss Abbott's assertions are concerned—the Glavis case of two years ago must not be forgotten. It lends color to the present controversy. For in that case not only did Mr. Taft do much comprehensive denying for others, but he got himself into the pickle of having cooperated in concealing facts and documents and of lending his official power to the degradation of department subordinates who didn't keep silence when their superiors denied. In respect of Glavis, the country took Mr. Taft implicitly at his word, and got stung. Shall they heedlessly risk a similar sting in Miss Abbott's case?

More important, however, than the issue of veracity between Miss Abbott and the Alaska ring, is the question of President Taft's action, for which he himself assumes full responsibility. Whether Ryan, the applicant who certainly did get what he wanted, and on Mr. Taft's own initiative—whether Ryan, and "Brother Charles," or any one else, in interest or only from amiability, did or did not induce Mr. Taft to act in Ryan's behalf, in consequence of the "Dick to Dick postscript," or otherwise, is matter of mere detail, except to the persons whose veracity is in question. The substantial thing is Mr. Taft's act.

If that act is not clearly shown by Mr. Pinchot to have been culpably improvident, then there is no such thing as culpable improvidence. Mr. Taft had been put on inquiry months before, and by a serious experience, as to all future Big Business projects in Alaska. The presumption was established that they would probably proceed from the Morgan-Guggenheim monopoly makers. Ryan was a petitioner for water front land in Alaska. Of course he did not march up to the White House under Morgan-Guggenheim banners or to the drumbeat of Morgan-Guggenheim music; but his coming at all necessitated more Presidential prudence in considering and less secrecy in deciding than Mr. Taft discloses in his defensive message.

Mr. Taft says, No! to the secrecy charge, because the newspapers got the fact immediately after his order. But this denial of secrecy, like so many of Mr. Taft's denials, is charmingly irresponsible. Publicity in such a matter does not consist merely in publication. It consists in such timely publication as to give everybody a chance. Time is of the essence of it. But Mr. Taft gave nobody a chance except Ryan. Hardly was the ink dry on his order before Ryan had appropriated all the land he wanted. And secrecy or no secrecy, it does not yet appear why any such Presidential action as Mr. Taft's in this case was necessary for public reasons.

Was there any such public urgency as to make even the certainty of no monopoly a sufficient justification? If there was, it nowhere yet appears. But in spite of all Mr. Taft's denials as to the possibility of a resulting monopoly, Mr. Pinchot asserts that Mr. Taft's own map proves that the President has given Ryan the key to the Alaska coal situation. Mr. Pinchot's judgment on such a point is probably better than Mr. Taft's. "Brother Charles," or Brother Henry might know as well as Pinchot, and so might Mr. Ryan; but they would not be as likely to be so candid.

Mr. Taft thinks that if the thing turns out to be a monopoly, the government can get possession again by condemnation! Wonderful watch dog of the public interests is Mr. Taft, isn't he? Give away government lands with all the improvidence you please, for you can get them back again by condemnation. *But at a price!* And what price? "All that the traffic will bear." Not the price alone of actual improvements, but the price also of the monopoly value. Haven't the courts of New York—and Mr. Taft venerates the courts—haven't they decided that a franchise cannot be expropriated for public use by condemnation without payment of its full market value as a monopoly?

We are not disposed to characterize Mr. Taft's Alaska performance. But if some poor "chump" of a "panhandler" had passed a counterfeit coin under circumstances analogous on the question of "scienter" to those Mr. Taft himself discloses as the circumstances under which he opened that Alaska land to entry by Ryan et al., that "chump" of a "panhandler" would now be in a Federal prison as a "crook." We do not imply that Mr. Taft is either "crook" or "chump." If we did.

we should not imply either criminality or idiocy; we could plead that there is nothing necessarily criminal in the one word, nor of the fool foolish in the other. Anybody who does things by indirection is "crooked," in the slang of the time, without being necessarily a rascal. Diplomats are apt to be "crooked." And who may not be a "chump" on occasion? Only those persons that are too superhumanly wise ever to have anything "put over" on them. Some time we hope to write a lay sermon on "crooks" and "chumps," from the text about the wisdom of serpents and the harmlessness of doves. It may possibly have some value for honest persons of both classes. But not now.

* *

Presidential Possibilities.

John T. Fort, a predecessor of Governor Wilson in the gubernatorial chair of New Jersey, has recently returned from abroad across the Western States. He reports the outlook for Democratic nominations next year as Wilson and Harmon or Harmon and Wilson, with a shade of difference in favor of the former. Mr. Fort must be cross-eyed politically or he wouldn't get these two men mixed. Maybe, as a partisan Republican, he would like to see Harmon strapped on to Wilson; or possibly he got his news in Japan.

* *

A "Progressive" Ticket.

For President and Vice-President in 1912: Taft and Hearst! Why Not?

* *

"Progressive" Combinations.

The latest "get-together" program of the reactionary Progressive Republicans of Illinois, according to the Chicago Tribune of the 28th, is a "combination of the forces of Gov. Deneen and the 'Federal crowd' led by United States Senator Shelby M. Cullom." If now the Cullom-Deneen forces could get United States Senator William Lorimer also into their leadership, what a fine combination of "progressive" forces it would make! And would it be such a very incongruous crowd?

* *

The Fitness of Things.

"The Lincoln Protective League" is the name the Lorimer Republicans of Illinois have adopted. In itself a good name, it is peculiarly appropriate for the purpose—appropriate, that is, as a white horse is an appropriate match for a black one when you want a cross-match. And then this Lorimer-

ized "Lincoln League" denounces the Initiative, Referendum and Recall, which is as it should be, precisely.

*

If Governor Deneen is to lead "progressive" Republicanism in Illinois—and that's the way it looked to some wise men until Senator Jones came into the gubernatorial field—Republican progressives, and progressive Democrats, too, might do worse than wait for something to turn up. They certainly couldn't do worse by falling in behind the Hearst-Harrison aggregation, nor much worse by making Sunday-school terms with Roger Sullivan, et al.

* *

Big Booze and Big Business.

It is entertaining to find the New York Times applauding Dahlman of Omaha, the man who, when he thought he had been elected Governor of Nebraska, publicly declared that he would kick out of the Governor's office every member of the W. C. T. U. who might approach him on the "booze" question. Mayor Dahlman's declaration was well enough for him, for on the "booze" question he has the advantage of the W. C. T. U., he being an expert; but when the New York Times, spokesman for Big Business, glories in Dahlman, it is to laugh. The Times told a few days ago of "the severe denunciation of Bryan and his political methods in his own State," expressing its hope that the effect would be "wholesome in other States." It thought, or pretended to think, that it was talking about the Nebraska convention. In fact, it was talking about Dahlman's Omaha (Douglas county) convention, which stood for Big Business, Big Booze and Harmon of Ohio. But the State convention strode over Dahlman, so dear to the editorial heart of the New York Times and its Wall Street clientele, and while naming no names, ignoring Harmon's, the only name that had been proposed, it adopted a Bryanistic platform. We commend our readers to D. L. K.'s fine letter on the subject in this week's Public.

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John Z. White in New Jersey.

The speech of John Z. White at Passaic, N. J., reported stenographically and in full by the Passaic Daily News of July 24, ranks high among the convincing elementary presentations of the Initiative, Referendum and Recall as safety devices for representative government. It was delivered on the 22d in advocacy of the New Jersey commission form of city government, which was adopted by the people of Passaic at