

The Public

A National Journal of Fundamental Democracy &
A Weekly Narrative of History in the Making

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Vol. XV.

CHICAGO, FRIDAY, APRIL 19, 1912.

No. 733

Published by Louis F. Post
Ellsworth Building, 537 South Dearborn Street, Chicago

Single Copy, Five Cents Yearly Subscription, One Dollar

Entered as Second-Class Matter April 10, 1898, at the Post Office
at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879.

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EDITORIAL

Roosevelt.

In one of his recent campaign speeches—we quote from the report in the Chicago Record-Herald of March 28th—Mr. Roosevelt again re-
curred to his usurpation in the Panama case.* It is a startling disclosure of his notion of what he means when he talks of "carrying out the will of the people." In the Panama case, so he himself now says, "I guessed in advance what the will of the people would be and I guessed right." If he hadn't guessed at the will of the people, and carried out his guess as their will, there would have been masterly debates but no canal—so he further says. Instead of letting the people express their will in advance, he guessed their minds in advance, and, as he adds, "took the Isthmus, started the canal, and let them debate" him. And now he justifies his usurpation because he "guessed right." Couldn't that be said for Caesar? Wasn't it habitual with Napoleon?

And what reason is there for hoping that Mr. Roosevelt, if again in power, would limit his guessing at the will of the people to public works and the invasion of weak nations? Suppose he should guess "in advance what the will of the people would be" about invading a powerful nation and thereby beginning a great war out of which he might emerge as "the Man on Horseback"!

*See current volume of The Public, page 219.

Not to guess at the people's will, if the conditions for such an invasion and its consequent war were ripe, might open the way for masterly debates but no war; whereas by making the invasion and starting a war, he could "let them debate" him instead of the war. And wouldn't he "guess right" in such a case also? The war once begun, wouldn't it be the people's will to prosecute it? Or, if not their voluntary will, couldn't Mr. Roosevelt use treason statutes to guide the will of the people in the direction of verifying his guess?



There is nothing in our present political situation more ominous than Mr. Roosevelt's popularity. It is the popularity at a democratic crisis of a demagogic despot in the confidence of plutagogic schemers. Better by far Taft than Roosevelt, if the choice be indeed so unhappily limited. Better King Log than King Stork. Better an Aristocrat full-fed with conservative traditions than a Progressive hungry for personal power.



"Playing the Game."

What has been a vague suspicion, that the Perkins-Roosevelt-Progressive movement is a kind of standpat rally, begins to assume definite outlines. Conservatives are making many a curious rally in these desperate days; and as the interests back of Roosevelt come more clearly into view they take on shapes that look very like political schemers at play with the peculiarities of a self-centered boy. Not that Roosevelt himself is in any deep, dark plot. One hesitates at that; first because the thought would be unkind, and second because the man is incapable of dark doings, for dark doings abhor the limelight. But have Mr. Perkins and such other backers of the Roosevelt plunge as he, ever before been noted for democratic ardor? Their eleventh hour conversion to Presidential preference primaries is hardly to be taken without a great deal of salt. And Mr. Roosevelt's speeches, although highly useful as straws showing the direction of the political wind, might easily be considered as more significant of what Mr. Roosevelt wants than of what he very profoundly believes; they might easily be considered the utterances of a clever opportunist, or of a puppet of clever opportunists, playing for position. Why is Mr. Roosevelt so suddenly awake to direct legislation and preference primaries just in the nick of time? When he previously undertook to discuss all human questions, he left these out. Mr. Roosevelt's backers, in advocating preferential voting for Presidential candidates, have apparently count-

ed, not without acuteness, upon Mr. Roosevelt's "popularity" as an asset. May they not be chuckling inwardly at the thought that even if he does advocate radical measures while seeking office, he can be "controlled" when he gets into office?



Belated Vindications.

A light which has been recently thrown upon two famous governmental murders should not be allowed to grow dim. One is the hanging of Mrs. Surratt at Washington in 1865; the other the shooting of Ferrer* in Spain nearly fifty years later.



Of the hanging of Mrs. Surratt, the late Benn Pitman has left valuable testimony. Benn Pitman, a brother of Sir Isaac Pitman, the inventor of phonographic shorthand writing, was the official stenographer for the military court before which Mrs. Surratt was tried as a conspirator in the murder of President Lincoln, and about a year before his death Mr. Pitman made a written statement of the case. In that statement, which has since been published, he declared with emphasis that to his mind Mrs. Surratt's entire innocence of participation in or prior knowledge of the conspiracy is beyond question. Here is his explanation of the basis of his judgment:

As official recorder of the trial; as having heard every word of the testimony; as compiler of the published volume, 'Lincoln Assassination Trial'; more than all, as having previous to the trial written down from the lips of the principal witnesses their stories of what they knew or about which, in their employment of spies, they lied, I have had the best opportunity of forming a true opinion.

And so he had. Not only did he have the best opportunity for passing judgment, but many things which leaked out after the execution indicate that his judgment was right.



Of the Ferrer case it is the Supreme Civil Court of Madrid that speaks. Ferrer was shot by order of a council of war. It is notorious that this council merely went through the form of pronouncing the judgment of death. As in the case of Mrs. Surratt, death had been determined upon in advance of the pretended trial. Ferrer's innocence is now judicially declared by the Supreme Court in a proceeding for the recovery by his heirs of his confiscated property. In ordering this restoration, and as the basis for it, the court decides that—

Ferrer was not concerned in the Barcelona dis-

*See The Public, volume xiv, page 301.