

# CURRENT TOPICS

ONE of the strongest, most ironclad of political machines, according to the Washington correspondent for the New York Times, is comparatively unknown except by name. The Times correspondent says: "Not Tammany Hall itself is such a close corporation as the house machine at Washington. Nowhere in the land is any body of men ruled with so despotic a hand by so small a governing body. In Tammany Hall the boss has a cabinet and the district leaders have a voice but the rulers of the house of representatives are a law unto themselves. There are just four of them, and they hold their sway not by any of the forces that lift men to the control of other machines—not by graft, not by force of character, not by patronage. They hold it by virtue of the official positions they occupy in the house. They are the speaker, the two majority members of the committee on rules, and the chairman of the ways and means committee, who is by reason of his office the floor leader of the majority. In this congress they are Joseph G. Cannon of Illinois, Charles H. Grosvenor of Ohio, John Dalzell of Pennsylvania, and Sereno E. Payne of New York.

ACCORDING to this same authority the house machine can be whittled down still finer; it resolves itself into the speaker and the two majority members of the committee on rules. The Times correspondent explains: "If the chairman of the ways and means committee should fall out with his colleagues they would run over him like a steam roller. The same power by which they reduce other congressmen to obedience would be equally efficacious with him. The only real power he has is by their consent. Personality enters into the matter very little. It is not by the force of an irresistible genius for leadership that Dalzell and Grosvenor, for example, have climbed to a position where they practically legislate for the country, so far as the lower house is concerned. They are able men as congressmen go, but do not overtop many men who might be mentioned among their republican colleagues. Put any one of these in the place held by Dalzell or Grosvenor or Payne, and he would straightway become an equally towering despot. The proof is that the omnipotent boss of the house, the chief of the house machine, Speaker Cannon, was utterly powerless to oppose the house machine when he was on the floor. He was just as able then as now, just as much of a natural leader, but whenever he opposed his will to theirs, as he sometimes did, they tossed him out of their way as they would a new congressman just learning his way about the streets."

NEWSPAPER readers may be interested in knowing the source of power and how the house machine establishes its rule. The Times correspondent provides the following explanation: "The average newspaper reader is likely to attach little significance to the name 'Committee on Rules.' He probably thinks it is a committee to establish or revise rules of procedure—a sort of parliamentary committee. When a bill is reported in the house a 'rule' is reported, too. The 'rule' defines the scope, not only of the discussion, but if necessary of the conditions under which the bill can be passed. For example, if the committee on rules chooses, it can prohibit amendments. It can have the bill made to suit its preferences, and then prevent the house from changing it. In other words it can absolutely prescribe the form of the legislation to be enacted. The power to amend is as much a part of the legislative power as anything else but the committee on rules can shear the house of that power. Theoretically of course, the rule can be beaten, but in practice it is so difficult as to be virtually impossible. The two democratic members of the committee naturally count for nothing in the machine. They are merely informed of what is to be done after the speaker, Mr. Dalzell, and Gen. Grosvenor have agreed upon it. The committee on rules and the speaker can prevent the consideration of any bill. Suppose the case of a new congressman, just elected, who was only a few months in which to 'make good' with his constituents, and secure a re-nomination. He has got to get that new public building and also the appropriation for deepening the creek. He

knows perfectly well, even if he is the newest of new congressmen, that both these propositions will die if he antagonizes that measure the committee on rules is now bringing in. Of course he votes for the measure, whatever may be his convictions on the subject. Revolt? How can he revolt? He is tied hand and foot with political ruin at the hands of his enraged constituents staring him in the face if he does not hasten to comply with the lightest wish of the house machine."

AN INTERESTING story is told by the Times correspondent showing the manner in which one representative grappled with the machine. The story follows: "One of the notable figures of this congress and of past congresses is James A. Tawney of Minnesota, a man of power and force. When the house machine brought all its power to bear for the passage of the Cuban Reciprocity bill in 1902, this man was the leader of the beet sugar insurgents. He was supposed to be too big a man to come under the ban of the house machine. One day, after the fight had been going on for some time, Tawney went to the speaker's desk and asked what had become of a bill in which he was interested. Mr. Henderson's jaws came to with a snap; he spoke straight at Tawney from under his heavy brow and growled: 'You'll have to see the committee on rules about that.' When the news of this spread among Tawney's supporters it carried panic; it did more to take the heart of the insurgents than anything else. If the mighty Tawney, the republican whip of the house and a friend of the leaders, could be thus treated, what hope was there for the rank and file? In that fight Tawney snatched victory out of the jaws of defeat and routed the house machine at the last moment, by sheer force of his own indomitable powers. But the exception proves the rule. For once that the house machine has been beaten it has been successful a thousand times. Yet Tawney's victory weakened the control of the machine, for in addition to its real and tremendous powers it had an asset of immense value—fear, coupled with a superstitious belief in the hopelessness of opposition. When the house machine had been beaten once, this asset was depreciated. It was based mainly on the actual fact that resistance was hopeless in Reed's day. But Henderson was a different man from Reed, nothing like so strong, and once his prestige was damaged by defeat his power waned."

THROUGHOUT the last session of the 57th congress signs of revolt multiplied and what would have happened had Henderson remained speaker can only be surmised. The Times correspondent says, however, that the advent of Speaker Cannon settled all that and today the power of the house machine is to all appearance more strongly entrenched than ever. This correspondent concludes: "The final seat of power in the machine is with the speaker. A revolt of the committee on rules against him would supply an exciting fight, but the result would not be long in doubt, of which no stronger proof can be found than that the fight of house against senate in the early days of the 48th congress was a complete reversal of the old policy of Payne, Grosvenor, and Dalzell. When they were co-leaders with Henderson they never fought the senate, and the house was a mere appendage of the other body. They had to fall in line with the new speaker's policy. What Payne and Dalzell thought of it cannot be said, but it was highly distasteful to Grosvenor. The old man seemed not only worried, but lost. He felt that he had fallen on evil days, and that all the habits of mind of years were being torn up by an iconoclastic hand. But he had to follow his leader. This, then, is the explanation of why the lower house is a compact body which can be moved this way and that at a touch, while the senate, despite its coterie of bosses, is often uncontrollable. It explains equally the past talk about the degeneracy of the house and the present talk about the house's regaining its old position. For the great body of representatives are puppets, moved by the irresistible power of the machine, and when the chief of that machine, the speaker, is willing to let his branch of congress be degraded to a mere tail to the senate, the house may grumble but must obey. When the speaker, as

is the case with Cannon, has higher ambitions for the house and has the willingness to fight, the representatives must follow him again. With Joseph G. Cannon as the chief of the machine, the real legislator of the popular branch, there are brighter days in store for the house, and it seems coming to its own again."

THERE has been some newspaper discussion concerning the "dog's cold nose." "A Sailor" in the New York Times says: "The true story of the dog's cold nose has been handed down to us sailors from the log book of the Ark, and we generally get things pretty correct when the log book is the authority. The true version of the story is that Mrs. Noah went down one morning to the potato bin in the lower hold for the vegetables required for the noon-day meal. Her favorite collie dog, 'Nip,' followed her, as was his daily custom. While Mrs. Noah was sorting out the tubers the Ark collided with a small snag, which punctured a small hole in her side close to where the lady stood. Seeing that immediate action was necessary, she took off her woolen petticoat and apron and stuffed them into the hole; but the pressure of the water was so great that it forced the things out, and so she put them back again and sat on them, calling loudly for some one to come to her assistance; but no one seemed to hear her, as the animals between decks were making such a noise. In her position she leaned back so that the backs of her arms were pressed up against the cold sides of the vessel—hence the backs of women's arms are always cold. The water was coming in fast, and she began to fear for the safety of the ark and her precious cargo, so she jumped up and grabbing 'Nip,' thrust his nose into the hole and bade him stay there until she went to the fore hatch and shouted for help. A carpenter's mate heard her and came down into the hold with a soft pine plug, released poor 'Nip,' and stopped the leak. The water outside was very cold, and Nip got a cold nose, and hence all healthy dogs have a cold nose."

REPLYING to the question: "What is meant by a historical reference to the Boston mob of 1835?" The Des Moines Register and Leader says: "On October 21, 1835, a mob of several thousand people attempted to break up a meeting of the Female Anti-Slavery society in Boston. The demonstration was the result of an announcement that one Geo. Thompson would address the meeting. Thompson was very unpopular, principally because he was an Englishman and because he had advocated arming the slaves and otherwise encouraging them to rebel against their masters. The fact of the matter was that Thompson had left the city on the day previous to the meeting, fearing the very kind of an uprising which occurred. When the mob gathered around the building in which the meeting was held and their actions became very threatening, the mayor was called upon to officially announce that Thompson was not present. The frenzied horde then turned their attention to William Lloyd Garrison, who was in the office of the Liberator, an anti-slavery paper near by. He escaped to a carpenter shop, but the mob followed, rope in hand, with the avowed intention of dragging him through the streets by the neck. Two stalwart friends of Mr. Garrison saved him from the fate intended, but not until his clothing had been literally torn to shreds and his body and face scratched and cut in several places. No one was killed, but the disgraceful demonstration caused intense excitement throughout the land."

SOME life insurance companies are proposing to offer a reduced rate to men who are total abstainers. Referring to this proposition, the San Antonio, (Texas,) Express says: "It may prove to be some inducement to total abstainers to insure against death when the insurance companies make a specially low rate for the teetotalers, and it may be an inducement, also to total abstainers from strong drink by those who may reap their reward in the lessened cost of life insurance. But above and beyond it all may be the moral effect of disproving by unerring statistics the shallow fallacy that moderate indulgence