

CONFESSIONS OF A WASHINGTON LOBBYIST



OR more than twenty-five years I was a Washington lobbyist. It was my profession or trade, and it paid me handsomely. The public has heard much recently of the operations of the Washington lobby. It made me laugh when I read of these "startling" disclosures. Think of a man calling himself a lobbyist and being content with a fee of \$50!

In my day I should have felt insulted had anyone wanted to retain my services and offered less than \$1,000, and thousand dollar fees were simply pocket money. When I was active the Washington lobbyist wasn't a piker and he didn't play a skin game. We did big things and got big money for doing them.

I am no longer in the business. My investments have turned out well and I can afford to take life easy. I suppose most people will think that a man who has been a lobbyist ought to be ashamed of it. Perhaps he ought, but I want to say one thing here. The lobbyist may be bad, but the man in public life who takes money from him is far worse. You can take my word for it that the lobbyist wouldn't exist if there were not men with whom he could do business. It isn't the lobbyist who corrupts a public man; it is the public man who invites the lobbyist to buy him. An honest man in Congress has nothing to fear, of course.

I didn't start out deliberately to be a lobbyist; I don't suppose any man ever does. I drifted into it through force of circumstances which I had not the strength of character to control.

BRIEFLY, I was elected to Congress when twenty-five years of age. It was pure luck. The man who had represented us for ten years was known to be a grafter and the people wanted a change, so when some of the young fellows in our district proposed that I run for Congress I took up the proposition more as a lark than anything else. None of us knew anything about politics and we didn't have any money to speak of, but we were chock full of enthusiasm and nerve. I had recently come out of college, had hung out my shingle as a lawyer, and as clients were not numerous I was losing nothing by making the campaign.

My father was the pastor of the leading Methodist Church in our city. He was a good man, as well as minister, and everyone loved him. My mother was a good woman. I was their only child. If heredity counts for anything I ought to have been a good man. I was brought up under the best influences

and in surroundings to keep a man straight, and yet I walked the crooked path at the first opportunity. It shows what creatures of fate or environment most of us are.

A new Congressman quickly realizes how little he amounts to in Washington, but I was the exception. I was the youngest member of that Congress, my campaign had attracted some attention, and the newspapers called me the Kid Congressman, a name that stuck and did me no harm. Until I came to Washington never at any one time had I \$250 to call my own. As soon as Congress met I had an income of \$416 a month (in those days members of Congress were paid \$5,000 a year), a tidy lump sum for mileage, \$125 a year for stationery and newspapers, and \$100 a month to pay a private secretary or to keep if I did my own work. I not only had money enough to live comfortably and do something for the folks back home, but I could save.

I THOUGHT I should be lonely, but the day after my arrival there came an invitation from our Senator to dine with him, and that was the beginning of a life entirely new to me. The Senator's wife was very kind, his two daughters were pretty and lively, they told me the people I must call upon and offered to introduce me to some of their friends. Before the end of the month I had met several pretty girls, and invitations to dinners, luncheons and dances were coming fast; sometimes they came so fast I had more than one invitation for the same evening. I soon found that a bachelor member of Congress who is fairly presentable and not quite a fool and knows how to dance need never complain of being lonely in Washington.

And I soon made another discovery. Four hundred and sixteen dollars a month looked very large at first, for I had been used to simple living, but in the course of a few weeks I saw that \$5,000 a year is rather worse than poverty in Washington. Unfortunately I had in those days an oriental imagination and a domestic pocketbook, and I could not accept favors without returning them. When people invited me to their houses I felt I must pay back, so I began modestly with a little dinner to the Senator and his wife and a few other persons at one of the fashionable hotels, and although there were only ten of us, when I had settled the bill and paid for the flowers and tipped the head waiter and his assistants and the hat boy and a few other persons, I was exactly \$143 out, which made a pretty big hole in that month's salary.

That was the beginning. I gave little parties whenever I could and as a result I was always hard up. When I first came to Washington I engaged a private secretary, who drew the regular \$100 a month from the government. But about this time, with my increasing experience and also my increasing expenditures, I discovered that many members

shared their secretaries and were able to save \$50 of the monthly allowance, and it did not take me long to make a similar arrangement. That was my first downward step. I could not disguise from myself that it was petty graft and had to wrestle with my conscience to come to it, but here was an easy way to make \$50 a month, and I needed the money badly. Thus I had become that most contemptible of all persons—a petty grafter.

WITH that extra fifty I was no better off than before, and again feeling the pinch I saw how I could make still another fifty, and every dollar was an object. I dismissed my secretary which made me hustle. I went to a dinner party every night and often danced until three or four o'clock, but I was up every morning at seven and worked like a steam engine. It was about this time I made my first speech, the papers gave it a good deal of space, and I was looked upon as a coming man. That made me more in demand than ever and I had to put in an hour or two every morning accepting or declining invitations.

I was now always so pressed for money that frequently I had to skate over thin ice and I should have gone through if it hadn't been for the sergeant-at-arms of the House, who was the good angel of those members who, like myself, spent their salaries before they were earned. On the first of the month a member's salary was placed to his credit with the sergeant-at-arms, and he could draw on his deposit as he could at a bank, but the law prohibited him overdrawing his account. The sergeant-at-arms was accommodating and willing to take a member's note, for which he charged pretty stiff interest, and in that way I managed to get along.

When Congress adjourned I went back home to make my campaign for re-election. All my friends thought I had a cinch, but in November I was defeated by thirty-three votes. I returned to Washington a lame duck.

It didn't take me long to find out what that meant. I should have received a salary check on the first of November, and after the election I wrote to the sergeant-at-arms inquiring why he had neglected to send it, but received no reply. Twice during November I wrote and then again in December, and when I arrived in Washington I went at once to his office, as by that time all the money I had was the few dollars in my pocket. I was angry and asked him what he meant by treating a member so insolently, but without a word he put his hand in a drawer and drew out my notes and the assignments of my salary and placed them on the desk. The situation was simple enough. I owed him nearly \$2,000, and my pay until the last day of my term would just about make him even. There was nothing to be said and I was wise enough to keep silent,

