

CONFESSIONS OF A WASHINGTON LOBBYIST



WAS associated with White, the ablest lobbyist of his time, for several years, profiting by his advice and experience, until he was killed by being thrown from a horse and I succeeded to his business. White, I may remark incidentally, left a fortune, his son and daughters are both prominent in Washington, where they have a large house and entertain hand-

somely. If any one remembers where the money came from that pays for their entertainments no one is impolite enough to talk about it.

In novels of Washington life you often read about women lobbyists. It may be that women have now invaded the field just as they have every other that used to be thought was the exclusive province of man, but certainly in my day no women made a regular profession of lobbying. In all my experience, and it has been a long and varied one, I have known only one woman who took a hand in the legislative game, and but for luck she would have cost me a large fee. And there is another thing that convinces me how little the men who write novels really know. I have often been amused by reading of men or women lobbying because of sentiment or of the romance involved in a bill, but here again only once have I known romance to cut any figure with a lobbyist, and curiously enough it was in this one case where I found myself opposed by a woman lobbyist. The fact is, lobbying as it was carried on in my day was straight business from start to finish, you paid for what you got, and a woman was always at a disadvantage. I have paid thousands of dollars to men who worked for me, or whose votes I needed, but never except in this one case did I ever offer to split a fee with a woman.

THE first job I took on my own account after White's death was to secure the passage of a bill to allow a company to build a bridge across one of our great rivers. Many years before a bridge had been built, and it had become one of the most profitable monopolies in the United States, as it was the sole highway between East and West and every passenger, every railroad car, every pound of merchandise, every letter, even, had to pay its tribute to the owners of the bridge, a close corporation whose dividends were enormous. Finally the railroads, backed by boards of trade, chambers of commerce and the newspapers, determined there must be another bridge to break the monopoly.

I said in a previous article that however much the reader might despise a lobbyist it would be impossible for them to exist were there not members of Congress with whom the lobbyist could do business, and this bridge bill is a case in point. Our proposition was honest and straightforward. All we wanted was permission to build the bridge with our own money. We did not ask a dollar from Congress or help of any kind. We were to do the people a service at our own expense and risk, and if we made money surely no one could object.

Why, then, the reader may naturally ask, was there any necessity for a lobbyist? Simply because, as White so epigrammatically expressed it, you had to fight fire with fire. In those days that

was the way things were done. There is a great improvement now and the standard of morality is higher, which is one reason lobbyists no longer make the money that White and I did; but in my time there was scarcely a bill of any importance that escaped the taint of the check book.

THE men who owned the bridge were not going to give up their profitable monopoly without a fight. Our people had organized a company, sold their stock for cash and were ready to start construction work whenever Congress allowed them to go ahead. When they came to me I knew I was up against the stiffest proposition I had ever tackled and that it would have taxed even White's ingenuity to win.

I frankly told my clients—for it was always my principle to be honest with the men who employed me—that I thought we had a losing fight, but they insisted I must make the attempt. They paid me a retaining fee of \$35,000 and agreed on a further sum of \$65,000 when the bill was signed by the President, and they were to allow me \$50,000 for "expenses." We both understood how that money would be used.

It has already been explained how a lobbyist of ability works. I followed White's methods, which could not be improved upon. We had the bill for the bridge introduced in the House, which is easy, as any man can put in any kind of a bill; and then through my ferrets and agents and using my own private sources of information, I entered upon the preliminary work, which was to ascertain how the committee stood.

If I had been green to the business I should have felt as certain of being \$100,000 richer by the end of the session as I was sure that I was living. Every report was favorable. Not a single member on the committee objected to the bill. At first I thought I was being fooled and that the ferrets were faking, but when I checked them up the result was the same. I expected my first big fight would come in getting a favorable report from the committee, and yet the committee was with me from the start. I was surprised and didn't know what to make of it.

As there was no opposition in the committee the bill ought to have been reported to the House almost immediately, but some weeks went by with the bill still held up and then I knew that the cards had been stacked against me and I must find out who had turned the trick. What puzzled me was my failure to put my finger on the lobbyist representing the other side. I was certain they had a lobbyist and I wanted to locate him, for by that time I was onto the methods of every man in Washington, and when you know who you are fighting half the battle is won. But whoever was directing the campaign and handling the money kept in the background. I tried in every way possible to sound the members of the committee, but without success. They all said they saw no reason why the bill should not be reported, but meanwhile it had been referred to a subcommittee and there was always some excuse to explain why no action had been taken. With my experience I knew that the committee had been "seen" by our rivals and I must get busy in a hurry.

I spent the next few days investigating every member of the committee and finally decided there was one man with whom I could do business. I took a chance, for it is a dangerous thing to offer money to a member of Congress and risk exposure,

but the situation was desperate. I didn't waste words or beat about the bush. I told him plainly that I knew the game, and asked how much he wanted to do a certain thing I proposed. He said \$5,000. That evening I handed him the money in crisp banknotes.

A FEW days later the committee held a meeting and my man said it was a shame the bridge bill had not been acted upon and it must be reported to the House at once. That was rather a facer to the committee, but the chairman said he had no objection and the bill was sent to the House with an unfavorable report, my man being the only member to vote for it. The committee thought they had us sewed up, as when a bill is objected to by a committee it seldom passes the House.

At the Capitol I had frequently noticed an extremely pretty young woman talking to members. She was always very quiet and reserved in her manner and her clothes showed her dressmaker to be an artist. She was so attractive that I asked one day who she was and learned that she was trying to get a Civil War claim, which was too small to make it worth while for a lobbyist to be engaged. When I heard this I paid no further attention, but the woman was so appealing in her youth and delicate beauty that more than once I was tempted to do her a good turn by offering my services and receiving my reward in her thanks. I knew how impossible it was for any claim to go through Congress on its merits at that time.

But I was too worried about my own affairs to be able to play the squire to beauty in distress. I not only wanted the \$65,000 that was contingent on my success, but I must win; for a lobbyist's great asset is his success, and every day that passed showed me I was playing a losing game. The bill was blocked. The mysterious influence that I couldn't place was always there and working overtime. Whenever an attempt was made to bring up the bill someone would be sure to object or in other ways delay action. It was the most baffling and perplexing problem I had encountered.

Weeks of the session went by in this way when, one morning sitting in my office trying to scheme out a new move, my clerk brought in a visiting card reading Mrs. Watson, and said that Mrs. Watson wanted to see me. The name meant nothing to me, but I had her shown in, and there stood the beautiful young woman whom I had so often noticed at the Capitol.

"You're surprised to see me," she said with a laugh. "We've been on opposite sides of the fence, but now it's time to get together and show a gang of swindlers what curs they are," and her beautiful eyes flashed.

In substance this is what she told me. Her father had been the engineer of the bridge, it had been a difficult and hazardous undertaking, for it was in the early days of bridge building; the responsibility had broken him down and he had died shortly after the work was finished, a victim of his own skill. To Mrs. Watson, who had seen almost every rivet driven and every girder swung into place, who had comforted her father during his long days of anxiety and finally shared with him his brief hour of triumph, the bridge was his monument and the enduring tribute to his genius. She was as jealous of her father's fame as a mother is when a rival would seek to discredit her son, and she feared if another bridge were built it would rob her father of some of his reputation, and instead of being the one man who