

# WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT THE BIG AND BUSY AMERICAN

Sidelights on Man Who Has Been Filling Large Space in the World for Several Years and Who Is Soon to Be Called to the Highest Office and Greatest Honor Within the Gift of His Countrymen

There never has been a man who has had so queer a job as that of Secretary of War William Howard Taft. For that matter, there never has been a man like him in the service of the country, and in a way he has made his own job by giving abundant proof of his extraordinary abilities. One month he is down at Panama, seeing that they are not trying to run water up hill, the next he is opening the Philippine assembly so that it will stay open, and then, laying aside his white duck suit and Panama hat, he puts on his fur cap and fur overcoat and goes over to St. Petersburg to talk China and Japan with the czar. At times he runs the War department by foresight for a month in advance. He carries his cabinet portfolio with its myriads of matters in his hat on his long trips, and there never has been a time when things were quite so up to the mark as during his incumbency, though he has spent half of the time away from his desk. As Uncle Joe Cannon said not long ago, "It is really too bad that when the Almighty was making the earth and the fullness thereof, Bill Taft was not around. He might have been resting on the fifth instead of on the seventh day, and there certainly would have been more fullness."

Every human being is a sort of productive manufacturing plant. Some have small outputs and some big outputs. Taft is one great, big, gigantic plant, equipped with high grade, high speed machinery, and there is such a demand for his goods that he runs overtime. It looks as if his reward is going to be more hard work.

Physically, he is so big that the man who sees him for the first time always has a better opinion of the cartoonists. "They are not such liars in lines, after all," he says to himself. He is tall, of huge frame, and that frame is loaded with more than 300 pounds of stamina. There are a few men in different parts of the world who have at various times been under the impression that the man they were chumming with was a big, fat, good-natured, wheezy sort of person, who was fond of an arm chair and a strong cigar, and always made the street cars stop when he wanted to get on. They have tried to make things easy for him in an effort to be agreeable, or else just hard enough to have a little fun at his expense and get him out of breath. One man asked him to a game of golf in the hot sun in the Philippines. The secretary put him through nine miles of following the ball and a five-mile walk up to a plantation house on the mountain side for tea. The secretary was strong and fresh at the finish. The other man was in bed all next day. Some friends bribed an old French Canadian guide to lose him in the upper reaches of a trout stream. That evening Taft came swinging in calling for a square meal in a hurry. Behind him tottered the guide. When the other men got the guide out back of the house to ask him what happened he was in a rage.

"Wot fool you mek wis me? Hey git lose, shure Mike, hey git lose, but holly mackarelle, she walks me all 'roun dey dam Canada."

### Test of the Man

No man who has not an infinite capacity for effort should ever presume to put himself in the position of trying to keep step with the big plenipotentiary. The best of them have tried it, but before long they find that Taft begins work before they do and is hard at it long after they finish and seems to enjoy it and to thrive on it. He works harder, plays harder, sleeps harder, eats harder and lives harder than any man in public life today, and yet there is always that good nature about him that makes association with him a pleasure. This is the testimony of a man who has fought him for four years: "He is fair and honest, without any noise about it; he does the common sense thing always without any pretense of being the source of all wisdom; he is intensely American without carrying a red, white and blue handkerchief, and he is perfectly happy when he is doing the right thing as hard as he can do it, no matter whether it please anyone else or not. He likes praise as anyone does, but criticism cannot stop him; in fact, when he is roused I do not believe anything on earth can stop him. He is the quick-footed fighting elephant of modern world politics. We have grown up and they have asked us to sit in the eternal game of the nations, and we have bought an awful stack of chips. Bill Taft is the only man in the country big enough, cool enough and honest enough to play our hand."

There is nothing quarrelsome or pragmatical about him, but he has never allowed anyone to impose on him. That was his record from boyhood. Around his old home in Cincinnati he was a boy who never had to whip the other boy twice. At Yale he found time to so thoroughly organize his working machinery that he graduated second in a class of 152, and yet his athletic record was a splendid one. As a lawyer in Cincinnati he rose steadily without building up a court pull which interfered with his going on the bench. When he took his seat on the wool sack he lost none of his friends among the lawyers, and they found that the best way to practice in his court was to do exactly as he had done when he fought them, viz., put their cases inside the common sense of the law and hope to win only when they had a righteous cause. He knew the law and they knew he knew it, and any attempt to bulldoze or hoodwink him merely made him smile. When he went into the cabinet the first thing he did was to find out what he was doing and to get information from anybody that had it and then use it. Very soon the men around him found that while their new fellow controller of the country's destiny was not a genius, he was a big, powerful, clever, quick, keen-sighted workman, absolutely trustworthy and thoroughly good-natured. He was never too big to be wrong, never too small to rise to the most gigantic task, and he played no favorites, though everybody could have his friendship and assistance that deserved it.

### Method in His Work

A politician might have done what he did at Cooper Union, in New York, a few weeks ago, by adroitness. What man in the country could have done it as Taft did it? The audience was the People's Institute, in which are to be found the essences of the great East Side of New York. There were some wonderfully brainy men and women there, all too pleased to have an opportunity to fire their intelligent questions on economic matters at a leading exponent of principles to which the more radical socialists, single tax advocates and anti-imperialists are opposed. Taft advisers and the New York gentlemen who were anxious that his appearance should go on record as a success urged the speaker of the evening to avoid any controversial topics and pronounce his doctrines on the tariff and kindred subjects, allowing his own personal magnetism to win over his audience, but without warning of what he was going to do, the big man vaded into the labor question and his fairness, his breadth of view and his sincerity were a revelation to his hearers. He met every question with a fair and informative answer, and every shaft of sarcasm with a jolly shot of repartee that turned the meeting into an assemblage of intensely interested friends, and no one denied that he had by fair means scored a tremendous hit.

Some men have the faculty of allowing assistants to gather information, digest it and present it for use. Taft pursues a different course. He has a discerning eye and the same judicial ability which made him so great a success on the bench. When one steps to consider how much there is to be known about Panama, Cuba, Porto Rico, Hawaii and the Philippines, which no statesman living in the United States could possibly get from reports and correspondents, and which could only be learned by the average man in long residence in each region, one is astounded that the big secretary in his hurried trips should have been able to form conclusions which in the end have been proven so just and accurate. The American policy in each has been successful because Taft framed it on a correct knowledge of conditions. Quite in this way he knows the inside workings of the various regions of the United States and of every country he has traversed. How does he do it? By asking questions where he knows he will get the truth. One day in Cuba a party of gentlemen seeking him to present a memorial found him in the back room of a little country store in deep conversation with the old man who owned the place, and who had not the remotest idea that he was entertaining the man who held Cuba's destiny in his hands. In the Philip-

plines he made long trips with great attendant hardship into the interior of the islands, and though he received the reports of the local authorities with great interest, he paid more attention to the illuminating sidelights he could gather from talks with the servants and the poor people of the region.

At every step in his long trip from Vladivostok to St. Petersburg he would throw on his fur overcoat and his fur cap and lose himself until just before train time. Sometimes he would have gone miles into the woods to some hamlet, accompanied only by his interpreter, and many a uniformed delegation of noblemen and high

officials waited for him for a three-minute reception while he spent an hour among the people in the side streets, seeing, listening and thinking. The result is that he has justly earned the reputation that when he talks he knows what he is talking about.

The scope of this knowledge is tremendous. Imagine one man going over every part of the ground encompassed by the plans for the fortifications of Subig bay; studying the needs of the planter in Pina del Rio until he knows what is fair to him as well as the man gone miles into the woods to some hamlet, accompanied only by his interpreter, and many a uniformed delegation of noblemen and high

## William Allen White of Kansas

It is barely twelve years since William Allen White was discovered. Some sections of Kansas knew him as the Emporia editor some years before, but the sound of his editorial megaphone was rarely heard beyond neighboring county lines. In 1896 several things happened to him. A republican of strong convictions, he was swatted right and left by the populists. He did not like their professions and pretensions any more than their symbolic whiskers, and accepted every opportunity to pull their hirsute adornments, individually and collectively. The pulled populists did not retort in kind, but flaunted before his eyes and dinned into his ears "The Crime of '73." The temperature of Kansas was warm enough at this time. The populist cry made him warmer. His safety valve was popping and spitting. To diminish the heat and lighten the pressure he grabbed a pen, some paper and turned loose. In twenty minutes the pressure was relieved, populist swatted fore and aft and the

foundation of his fame laid in the copy written.

Then he hung the editorial, along with some others, on the "time copy" hook and went to Colorado Springs to spend a few days with his wife, who was an invalid. The next morning he had almost forgotten the incident of the day before.

In a few days the editorial inspired by the taunting populists appeared on the editorial page of the modest little country town daily. There was less than a column of it. Within a week the editorial was put on the telegraph wires and reprinted in every leading republican newspaper in the country. The Sunday papers used it and within a fortnight it appeared on the "patent inside" of the smallest of the country weeklies. Telegrams and letters of congratulation began to pour in from all over the country and William Allen White of the Emporia Gazette and his editorial, "What's the Matter with Kansas?" were discussed from Key West to Spokane Falls, from Red Bluff to the Gulf.



WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE.



WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT.

time keeping touch with the financial situation, the tariff and the temperance movement in the south and west. Remember, this is not other men's printed knowledge he enjoys, but his own knowledge drawn from ten thousand sources and weighted by a master in differentiation.

It is fifty years, six months and twenty days since William H. Taft was born in Cincinnati, the second son of Judge Alphonso Taft and Lousia Maria Torrey. Thirty years ago he graduated from Yale college, second in a class of 120. Passing over his boyhood and college life, and considering only the activities of manhood years, it would be a difficult task to find a record equalling that of Omaha's distinguished guest in variety of public services at home and abroad. His record comprehend diplomacy, jurisprudence, statesmanship, war secretary and peacemaker, and in each he has shown the intellectual strength and grasp of affairs that bespeak the master.

The accepted, familiar portrait of Secretary Taft is brief and comprehensive. "He is big, physically and intellectually." And he is as democratic as he is big. Likewise, strong, faithful, honest. The story goes that when President McKinley was simply at his wits' end to get a big man—a really big man—to head his newly-made Philippine commission, he called Judge Day in consultation. He told of his troubles, of the men he had canvassed and found wanting. And then he ended with: "Help me out, Day. I must have a big, broad man; and he must be strong, faithful, honest."

And Day said: "Well, why don't you appoint him; you know him. That description fits Bill Taft to a hair."

And when President McKinley thought it over, he thought so, too.

But Taft didn't want the job. "I'm not the man you want," said he. "Why, I have never even believed that the Philippines should be retained." But President McKinley prevailed upon him to accept, for as Mr. McKinley's illustrious successor said of Mr. Taft later on: "He delights in responsibilities."

Then add to that description of Mr. Taft from President McKinley's lips a pertinent declaration once made by Judge Alphonso Taft, the secretary of war's father, and you'll have a pretty fair idea of the man. This latter story has been a family joke for years. Even yet they say that Secretary Taft is apt to blush when he hears it, for it has been ding-donged into his ears ever since he graduated from the age of knickerbockers and pudgy ankles clad in home-knit stockings. The story goes that when the present secretary of war was going to school in Cincinnati, his school report one month showed that the future statesman had devoted more of his attention to hand-ball and other delights of youth than to his books.

Mr. Taft, mother-like, excused the boy. "Even if the report isn't very good, he's almost at the head of his class," said she.

But Judge Taft shook his head. "Mediocrity won't do for Willie," said he.

### Some Personal Characteristics

Personally Mr. Taft is possessed of great innate refinement, and he impresses even the stranger who meets him for the first time as a man of as much culture as breadth. His sympathies are quick and far reaching, and no man in trouble ever told him a tale of woe without receiving sympathy and, where possible, help. But his most noteworthy characteristic is his magnetism, which attracts all who meet him, and which when he comes in contact with the Latin races renders them his devoted slaves.

Modest almost to a fault, democratic in the best sense of the word, Secretary Taft pursues the tenor of his way, accomplishing feats which others have declared impossible, never flinching in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and rarely making enemies, despite the fact that he never deviates from the course which, with mature deliberation, he has determined on as his line of duty.

Before entering upon a legal career Mr. Taft took a course of training as a newspaper reporter in Cincinnati. Court cases were his hobby. By this experience he gained knowledge of and a sympathy with newspaper men that has always marked his dealings with them. He talks more freely, perhaps, than any other public man to the men of the pad and pencil, and his confidence has never been abused. Mique O'Brien, very well known in Ohio and New York newspaper circles, tells of his first experience with Judge Taft, then on the United States circuit bench. "I told the city editor that I was the best court reporter that ever happened," said O'Brien, "for I needed the money. As a matter of fact, I couldn't have told a subpoena from a lunacy commission if I had been asked. First rattle out of the box I was ordered to go to Judge Taft's court and report a big case then being tried."

"Well, it was a peach, that case. Something about a railroad. I never did know more of it than that. I couldn't have known that much only a man dressed like a conductor came on the stand. I sat there in a daze all day long, and finally made up my mind to go back to the office, draw what money I could get a square meal on, and then beat it. I could see my finish looking me squarely between the eyes. But some kind angel put it into my head to put my troubles up to Judge Taft."

"So I did. I waited until he left the bench and then I addressed him. He listened to me with a twinkle in his eyes. 'Come back after supper,' he said, 'and I'll try to explain the case to you.' And I did. And when I got back he had the entire story written for me, in inimitable style, and even had the headlines prepared. I turned it in to the city editor. 'Fine, bully,' sezee. He showed it to the boss. 'That man O'Brien is too valuable to be kept on court work,' said he. 'Raise his salary and put him at something else.' Later on I confessed, and one of these days I want to tell Judge Taft how that little help he gave me helped me out of a hole that looked bigger than the court house to my boyish eyes."

### Jokes at His Expense

Mr. Taft is too kindly a man to have won much reputation as a wit. His fear of hurting the feelings of his fellow men too often chokes back the witticism which comes to his lips, but his sense of humor is inexhaustible and never failing, and he enjoys a joke at his own expense quite as much as when it is on the other fellow. His great size has led to many jokes on that subject, two of which, because of their authors as much as because of their butt, have become almost historic. Of one of these Secretary Root was the author. Mr. Taft, then governor general of the Philippines, had completed a long and tedious journey up the mountains to Bengat, from which place he cabled the secretary of state:

"Arrived safe and sound after riding 100 miles mule-back." To this message Secretary Root immediately replied: "Congratulations on your health. How is the mule?"

Mr. Justice Brewer also got off a joke on Secretary Taft at the Yale commencement exercises. Praising the secretary of war as a distinguished alumnus, Justice Brewer said:

"Why, Secretary Taft is the politest man in the cabinet. I once saw him on a street car give his seat to three ladies."

There is no member of the administration who takes such pains to help the Washington correspondents as Secretary Taft. It is his policy to give to the public every scrap of information which can properly be made public, and he often stops in the midst of a busy day to "cudgel his brain" in an effort to think of something which will "make a paragraph." It was on one occasion that an Irishman in the corps, whom the secretary had chaffed unmercifully, got his revenge. Issuing from his private office in riding costume one summer afternoon, Mr. Taft was greeted by a group of newspaper men who begged for a news item. After thinking for some time, he said: "Gentlemen, I cannot think of a single thing which has come to my attention today which would make a story." Then, striking his leg with his riding whip, he added, with a smile, "Gentlemen, what do you think of that for a leg?" "Mr. Secretary," quickly replied the Irishman, "it would do credit to a piano," and the hearty laughter of the secretary echoed and re-echoed down the War department corridors as he strode away.