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WOODROW WILSON

The Story of His Life From the Cradle to the White House

By **WILLIAM BAYARD HALE**
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CHAPTER XI.

One Year of a Progressive Governor.

THE platform upon which Governor Wilson had been elected had promised four principal things, which probably not a man in the convention that adopted it expected to see realized—the direct primary, a corrupt practices election law, a public service commission with power to fix rates and an employers' liability and workmen's compensation law. The governor's inaugural address—a remarkable document, vibrant with the spirit and the consciousness of a new age, new alike in politics and in the very elements of social and industrial life—made it clear that he regarded the platform promises as binding.

The new governor of New Jersey had little respect for the doctrine of "the three co-ordinate branches, as it had been pedantically exaggerated in practice."

It is not necessary here to go further into Mr. Wilson's ideas of responsible government (he believes that the American plan is capable of natural improvement), except to remark that he attributes the upgrowth of the boss system, with its extra legal (extra official) leaders, largely to the absence of constitutional provision for official leaders and to add that he had determined to be, as governor, an official leader—the chief of his party in the state, the party put into power by an overwhelming vote of the people—the leader, therefore, responsible not only for administering the routine business of the governor's office, but for seeing that the policies endorsed in the party platform on which he had been elected were embodied in legislation. During the campaign he had explicitly requested that no man vote for him who did not want him to be the party leader. He had warned the electorate of the state that if elected he meant to be an "unconstitutional governor," as the constitution was instantly interpreted to forbid his taking part in legislation.

What was the situation that confronted this hopeful governor?

His party had a majority on joint ballot of the legislature, but the senate, without whose concurrence no bill could become law, stood Republican 12 to 9. Democrats were in a majority of 42 to 18 in the assembly, but many of the party's representatives were connected with the old organization and resentful of the college president's advent into politics. The governor's triumph in seating Mr. Martine in the United States senate over ex-Senator Smith's candidacy had not ended the war between him and the old organization. It had given him prestige, it had heartened the friends of good government, but it had even more savagely embittered the old leaders and engendered sullenness among their still faithful followers. "We gave him the senatorship," they said among themselves, "but that is the end. We've done enough. If he asks for more he'll find out who is running the state of New Jersey." The state of New Jersey had been "run" for years by the allied corporation interests.

The way in which a situation so discouraging was forced to yield the surprising results it did yield is full of promise to men of hope.

Governor Wilson relied from the start on the merits of the bills, on public sentiment in favor of them and on his power to force the open discussion of them. He would not permit them to be done for in secret conferences; there should be public debate. He would make his own arguments for the bills so that all the state should hear him, and he would compel the opponents to give the reasons of their opposition publicly. The doors of his office stood always open, and he encouraged senators and assemblymen to make it a habit to come to see him and talk things over—familiarly, but never secretly. Those who did not come he sent for on one pretext or another, and the matter of the bills naturally came up. He told them that he had no patronage to dispose of, no promises to make and no warnings to issue, but he should like to have them consider the bills on their merits and let him know where they stood.

Heretofore Republican governors had consulted Republican members, and Democratic governors had consulted Democratic members. Wilson consulted members of both parties. He talked to them all alike of the good of the commonwealth. To Democrats he added arguments based on the platform promises. He made it clear that he considered himself chosen party leader, but he gave no orders—he would not be a boss. The nearest that he ever came to a threat was in the suggestion to a few stubborn op-

ponents that they debate the question with him in public in their own districts. From time to time the governor issued public statements regarding his measures. In one he expressed the fear that he might have to name the men who were preparing to be faithless to the platform promises and to betray the people.

On the opening of the legislature, Jan. 10, 1911, it was with difficulty that sponsors could be found to introduce the governor's bills. Few believed that a single one of them could be forced through before the end of the session. "Very well, then; we shall have to have a special session to do it," was Governor Wilson's undismayed reply. "However, let us hope that won't be necessary."

First in order came up the primary elections bill, to which an assemblyman from Monmouth county had allowed his name to be given—the Geran bill.

This revolutionary piece of legislation contemplated the turning over of both or all political organizations to the people. Conventions, so easily manipulated by nominating bosses, were done away with. All candidates for office from that of constable to president were to be nominated directly by ballot of the people; all party officers, committeemen, delegates to national conventions, and the like, were to be so elected by popular ballot.

To those who understand the significance of the great movement for the resumption by the people of the direct powers of government it would have been sufficiently astonishing that a governor of a state like New Jersey should have thought it worth while to make to his legislature such an audacious proposal as the direct primary, with popular selection of United States senators, popular nomination of presidential candidates and popular choice of party officers. This meant the killing of the bosses; it meant the extinction of corporation controlled organizations; it meant everything that New Jersey had never had and that the professional politicians and the big business interests could never permit it to have.

No wonder there was a battle royal! James R. Nugent was in active direction of the opposition. Ex-Senator Smith's relation, he urged the "ingrate" argument; Wilson knew no honor and would knife the men who assisted him; state chairman, he was officially in command of the party organization and could promise and threaten with the prestige of fifteen long years of almost unopposed party supremacy against this new governor's bare month of troubled experience.

Nugent easily arranged a coalition with the Republicans. Their organization was equally threatened, and far greater than the fall of the minority party bosses would be that of the Republican "board of guardians." If the Republican majority still in control of the senate stood pat the Geran bill would fall there, but Nugent wanted more; he wanted the Democratic lower chamber to repudiate the governor's plan. He was so confident that this could be managed that he arranged for a conference on the bill as a preliminary test.

It was a fatal error. The governor heard of the conference and genially suggested that he be invited. It was unprecedented for a governor to attend a legislative caucus, but it would have been awkward to decline to invite him if he wanted to come. So he went.

The gathering was in the supreme court room, on the second floor of the statehouse. One assemblyman, Martin, challenged the governor's intervention. He had no constitutional right to interfere in legislation. Had it not been written by them of old time that the executive and legislative branches must be kept sacredly apart? The governor replied by drawing from his pocket the Legislative Manual and reading a clause of the constitution which directed the governor of New Jersey to communicate with the legislature at such times as he might deem necessary and to recommend such measures as he might deem expedient. He was there, he continued, in pursuance of a constitutional duty to recommend a measure of that character.

In noble fashion did he recommend it. That conference lasted four and a half hours. For three hours of it Mr. Wilson was on his feet, first expounding the bill, clause by clause; answering all queries and replying to all objections out of a knowledge not only of the experience of other states, but of the practical workings of politics, that greatly surprised his audience. One by one he met and silenced all critics. Then, looking about upon them, he began what will always remain one of the notable speeches of his career, a speech which no man who was present will ever forget. They were Democrats, and he spoke to them as such. This, he told them, was no attempt to destroy the party. It was a plan to revitalize it and arm it for the war to which the swelling voice of a people called it in an hour of impatient expectancy. With an onrush of words white hot with speed and suppressed emotion he displayed before them the higher view of political duty and expanded the ground of his hope for the future of the Democratic party as a servant of the people.

One repeats only what the attendants at this remarkable meeting write in testifying when he says that they came downstairs not knowing whether more amazed by the force of logic that had fairly won them over or moved by the inspiring appeal to which they had listened. The conference, called to refuse the Geran bill, voted to make it a party measure.

A Republican caucus was proposed to insure party unanimity against the

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bill, but so many Republican members refused in advance to be bound that the plan was abandoned. The opposition had hoped that the senate committee on elections would refuse to report the bill out, but to this Senator Bradley, a Republican, chairman of the committee, declined to do a party.

The senate elections committee did hold a public hearing arranged by the opposition. It was a melancholy affair, from their standpoint. The speakers who were to demolish the bill never came, while a battery of able and by now enthusiastic cannoners riddled the pretensions of the enemy. Among the expected lights who failed to come and scintillate for the senate committee and the public was Mr. John William Griggs, McKinley's attorney general and governor of the state during the painless days of unrebuked misrule. Governor Wilson informed the senators that if Mr. Griggs appeared he would come himself and make a few remarks suggested by the former attorney general's speech. It would have been a great debate had it ever come off. The governor waited in his office, but Mr. Griggs never came. The total of the opposition was represented by James Smith, Jr.'s, private secretary, who, after some desultory vaporing, sent word to his chief that open opposition to the Geran bill was futile.

So now was secret opposition. Nugent still hung about Trenton. One day he went into the governor's office at the governor's request to "talk things over."

Nugent very quickly lost his temper. "I know you think you've got the votes," he exclaimed. "I don't know how you got them."

"What do you mean?" queried the governor sharply.

"It's the trick of the statehouse that you got them by patronage."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Nugent," said Governor Wilson, pointing to the door.

"You're no gentleman!" shouted the discomfited boss.

"You're no judge," replied Mr. Wilson, his finger continuing to indicate the exit.

(Continued next week)

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