

# Tom Johnson "Broke" But Still Fighting

Spectacular Career of Cleveland's Great Mayor-Newsboy, Rolling Mill Hand, Street Railway Worker, Traction and Steel Magnate, Congressman, Mayor

Tom Johnson's broke!

The big-bodied, big-minded, big-hearted fighter measured his strength with that of "the system" and "the system" won.

His wealth has at times been estimated at \$20,000,000, and now he is uncertain about his ability to maintain an automobile.

But "Tom" Johnson's spirit has not been broken. He lived in a cottage before. He can live there again. He has struggled singlehanded with the wolf of want. The animal can not terrorize him now.

"I still have a thousand fights in me," is his defiance to his enemies. His attitude is not a disappointment to either his friends or his opponents. Both knew the man. Both knew he would fall with his face to the enemy.

There is little doubt that Johnson's financial difficulties may be traced to the fight he has made to give Cleveland three cent fares. It is probable that his total wealth has been exaggerated, but there is no question that he sacrificed a fortune in his battle against special privilege.

Cleveland's mayor was born fifty-four years ago. He came from an old and distinguished Kentucky family. One of his relatives was the famous General Richard Mentor Johnson, the slayer of Tecumseh and afterward vice president of the United States.

"Tom" Johnson's father was a confederate officer in the civil war, and the overthrow of the southern cause left the family penniless. At ten, "Tom" made his first money by selling papers containing the story of Lee's surrender to Grant. At fourteen he was compelled to work in a rolling mill, and a few months later he secured a position with a Louisville, Ky., street car company, which was controlled by a relative, Biederman DuPont.

### BUYING HIS FIRST STREET CAR SYSTEM

About a year after his connection with this enterprise began, the DuPonts brought Colonel Johnson, Tom's father, in from the farm and made him superintendent of the road, a position he held for several years. He left it to accept an appointment as chief of police of Louisville. The superintendency of the road was then taken by Tom, who held it until 1876, when he and two associates bought of William H. English, the democratic candidate for vice president of the United States in 1880, the Indianapolis street car system.

Before this, however, young Johnson had invented a fare box, which was an improvement upon the fare boxes then in vogue and is still in use. He early learned that patents are not very effective in protecting inventors, and of this box and his patent on it he was accustomed to say that the patent wasn't very good but the box was. However sound either judgment may have been, the box or the patent, or both together, gave him first and last nearly \$30,000.

But Mr. Johnson had not made all this money before going into his street car venture in Indianapolis. To buy that system he needed \$30,000 in addition to his own resources. This sum was lent him by his friend and patron, Biederman DuPont. Mr. DuPont took no interest in the enterprise himself. He doubted the business ability of Johnson's associates. But he said he knew his money would be safe if Tom L. Johnson lived. So he made the venture as a personal loan.

The Indianapolis system, a miserable affair when Johnson took hold of it, improved under his management, and became very profitable. But he continued to operate without conductors and with mules for motive power. When he proposed modifying the system after electricity had come into use, some of his associates opposed the change. They were old friends and rather than offend them he sold out.

### YOUNG MAGNATE MAKES A FORTUNE

He had made money regularly since 1869, though slowly at first, and several of his patents as well as his fare box had been profitable; but the sale of the Indianapolis street car system yielded by far the largest sum he had yet been

able to call his own. His net profit was more than half a million dollars. Meanwhile, in 1880, Johnson had bought a small street car line in Cleveland, which he had built up by utilizing a discovery he had made in Indianapolis—the financial advantage of through lines and transfers. Johnson's great street railway war in Cleveland was with the late Senator Mark A. Hanna. Hanna was a director in the company with which Johnson came first in conflict. The preliminary round was won by Johnson, and to prevent his getting a still stronger foothold Hanna bought a controlling interest in the company whose privileges Johnson was attacking. Hanna's object was to fight Johnson more effectively than he might be able to do with a minority interest. Before fighting, however, he proposed peace and a partnership. Johnson declined the offer and a conflict then began which lasted several years. A detailed account of this conflict would be as interesting as an economic or business novel, but it would require a volume. The war was the sensation of the time in Cleveland. It eventuated in a great reduction of fares, a policy in which Johnson always believed and which he has always furthered.

Sometimes one side won, and sometimes the other, but Johnson's road grew faster than Hanna's. After awhile Johnson succeeded in uniting several other companies, thereby forming the Cleveland Electric Railway company, or "Big Consolidated." Hanna replied with a union of the cable roads, forming the Cleveland City Railway company, known as the "Little Consolidated." These consolidations resulted in ending the fight, but it was an armed peace. Subsequently Johnson disposed of his interest in the Big Consolidated and that company united with Hanna's.

By this time Johnson with his brother, Albert, had acquired interests in the Detroit street car system and in the Nassau enterprise of Brooklyn. But in 1898, about the time the large combinations were forming, he withdrew altogether from the street car business.

While engaged in this business Johnson became interested naturally enough in the production of steel rails, and in connection with both businesses he co-operated with his associates, Biederman DuPont, A. V. DuPont and A. J. Moxham, in making useful inventions and securing profitable patents. One of their steel plants, the Johnson company, was at Johnstown, Pa., and another at Lorain, Ohio. In the depression of 1893-98 Johnson's financial interest in these establishments was very nearly swamped.

Johnson becomes disciple of George

While interested in street car systems, both in Cleveland and Indianapolis, Johnson frequently rode on the cars between those cities. On one of these trips a newsboy asked him to buy a book called "Social Problems." It was Henry George's second book on the industrial question, but Johnson supposed it to be a work on the social evil. Saying as much, and adding that he had no interest in that subject, he refused to buy the book. The train conductor, who happened to be within hearing, happened also to be familiar with George's teachings, and knowing Johnson well, he told him he was mistaken in the character of the book. "It will interest you more," he assured him, "than any book you have ever read." Upon this assurance Johnson reluctantly invested half a dollar in the book and read it. A new world was revealed to him, and he promptly bought and read George's "Progress and Poverty." After reading this, he challenged his lawyer, L. A. Russell,

of Cleveland, and his partner, Arthur J. Moxham, to show him any flaw in the argument. Unable to comply, they objected to the premises. But Johnson convinced them that the premises were sound. The final result of their controversy was the complete conversion of all three to George's views.

Johnson has since tried to find the conductor who turned him into this path, which is more to him than personal riches, but he can not recall his name and has only been able to learn that the man is dead.

Soon after his conversion, Johnson sought out Henry George, and between these men a warm friendship and profound confidence took root in 1885 which lasted until George's death in 1897.

It was on Henry George's advice that Johnson entered politics.

### A MONOPOLIST FOUGHT MONOPOLIES

Johnson practically managed George's spectacular campaign for mayor of New York and contributed liberally to the great economist's campaign funds.

In 1890 Johnson was elected to congress from a Cleveland district as a democrat. He was re-elected in 1892, and went down to defeat two years later in a republican landslide. He attracted national attention while a member of the house by his frank discussion of public questions. He avowed himself a free trader and a single taxer and the foe of monopoly in every form.

About the subject of monopoly Johnson took what seemed to men less frank a curious position. He was an avowed monopolist.

Once he came near being committed for contempt of court by insisting as a witness in answer to the question as to his occupation, that by occupation he was a monopolist. Yet he opposed monopoly.

That seemed inconsistent, and on one occasion in congress a trust lawyer, a member of the house, said in debate that Johnson ought to vote for the measures he denounced as monopolies, because he was himself a monopolist. Johnson instantly retorted: "As a business man I am willing to take advantage of all the monopoly laws you pass; but as a member of congress I will not help you to pass them and I will try to force you to repeal them."

In 1901 Johnson made his first campaign for mayor of Cleveland, on a platform which declared for municipal ownership. He was elected and he has been thrice re-elected. A year ago his opponent was Congressman Burton, one of the ablest Buckeye republicans. President Roosevelt selected Burton to make the race, and the street car companies of Cleveland, assisted by the allied public utility monopolies of the country, raised an unprecedented campaign fund. But Johnson's hold on the people could not be shaken. His majority was larger than ever.

Johnson's fight in Cleveland centered on the city control of its street car system and the inauguration of three-cent fares. He organized, constructed and operated a municipal three-cent fare system for which he had secured a franchise, but his opponents succeeded in having the people refuse to extend the grant beyond the probationary period. Then the road was thrown into a receiver's hands.

Johnson insists that his experiment would have proven an unqualified success if it had been given a fair trial, but the people of Cleveland had evidently wearied of the struggle.—Denver News.

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### MR. ROOT FOR SENATOR

It is plain that Ellhu Root will be United States senator from New York if Messrs. Roosevelt and Taft have their way. Timothy L. Woodruff has withdrawn from the contest after a visit to Mr. Taft and Mr. Taft has issued a statement in which he formally endorses Mr. Root. Incidentally it may be remarked that no objection to Mr. Root's selection has come from the representatives of the great corporations.