

Congressman Hitt as Wayback Reporter

If Representative Robert Roberts Hitt of Illinois were to compile his reminiscences the result would be a volume of extraordinary interest. Not only has he figured prominently in national and international affairs for nearly a generation, but he has enjoyed personal relations of a peculiarly close character with more men of eminence perhaps than any other man of the day.

Away back before the war, when a mere boy, he was attached to Abraham Lincoln in a way that gave him enviable facilities for studying the processes of Lincoln's mind. He was a stenographer and a newspaper reporter for the Chicago Tribune, at that time the one great republican organ of the west, and throughout the memorable debate between Lincoln and Douglas, preceding the latter's election to the United States senate, young Hitt followed Lincoln, taking down in shorthand every word that publicly fell from his lips. These famous addresses which made Lincoln's national reputation and which, more than anything else, contributed to his election as president, owe their permanent and enduring form to the youthful reporter's notes, the originals of which the congressman still hoards among his literary treasures. Lincoln called him "Bob" and was fond of the boy.

After the war Hitt came to Washington as clerk of a congress committee and had an opportunity to become acquainted with the great statesmen of the reconstruction era. His good luck sent him to Paris in 1874, just after the Franco-Prussian war, as secretary of legation and charge d'affaires ad interim. History was being made rapidly in the French capital in those days and Hitt spent seven years in Paris, a period which was closely packed with important events. He returned to Washington in 1881 to become assistant secretary of state and the next year was elected a member of the house of representatives. All through his career in congress he has been conspicuous in the discussion of international questions and now, as chairman of the house committee on foreign affairs, he is regarded as a diplomatic authority beside whom there is no peer. Had it not been for Hitt's conspicuous position in the house and for the fact that the administration regarded his presence there as essential to the proper handling of the complicated questions growing out of the war with Spain, he would probably have been appointed secretary of state when Judge Day retired from office.

Old-Time Friendships.
Hitt has had the good fortune to cement friendship more firmly than almost any other man now in public life. He was Blaine's closest friend in Washington. In the concluding years of Blaine's life Hitt was the man in whom he confided most and was often to be found in the historic old mansion on Lafayette square. At the same time that he enjoyed these affectionate relations with the great secretary of state he was the best friend of Speaker Reed, Blaine's bitterest enemy in public life. And no finer tribute could be paid to the delicate tact of the Illinois representative than that he should have continued for years such a relationship with two such men without losing the confidence of either.

In Hitt's house in K street is a room which is devoted to the memory of Blaine. The walls are covered with pictures of the

Maine leader, with autograph letters and with all sorts of relics which bring Blaine to mind. Elsewhere in the house are Lincoln relics, and stored away somewhere in places where they will be found sometime and brought to light are scores and hundreds of confidential letters from men whose names will figure in history. For instance, while Hitt was secretary of legation and charge d'affaires in Paris, he carried on a delightfully personal correspondence with James Russell Lowell, who at that time was American minister at Madrid. None of these letters has ever been published. Whenever they see the light they will make sprightly reading, for there is not one of them, no matter upon how trivial a subject, which does not contain an odd turn of speech or a witty allusion. How many other lines of correspondence the Illinois man has been carrying on during all these years only he can tell.

There are some things which Hitt remembers about great men who are dead and gone that would be meat for the iconoclast and that are hardly likely to find their way into any authorized biography.

Summer an Egotist.

Charles Sumner, as Hitt recalls him, was a monument of colossal egotism. Never, even for a single moment or when among those who might naturally presume upon some measure of acquaintance, would he drop the pose of the statesman or mingle with others on their own level. In a street car he would quote Latin to the conductor. He seemed always to feel that he was an object of observation and that he was contributing to the dignity of history. In the senate he was without influence. He was as far outside the daily life of his associates as if he had already been chiseled in marble. Once when he was placed by accident on the useless committee on revolutionary claims he took it as a personal affront, and nobody could ever explain the matter to him. "And yet," says Hitt, "Sumner was a great man and his memory will always live."

Hitt tells entertainingly of the way in which the Chicago Tribune failed to print a line of Lincoln's historic speech at Freeport in the Douglas debate—the greatest of all Lincoln's addresses before the civil war. Hitt was reporting the speech and was writing out his notes for the next morning's paper, when Owen Lovejoy, the abolitionist agitator, rose in the rear of the hall and delivered a harangue which is now forgotten, but which for the moment roused the meeting to a frenzy of enthusiasm, while Lincoln's had seemed rather tame. Joseph Medill, the proprietor of the Tribune, was carried away with Lovejoy's speech and came up to Hitt's desk excitedly, ordered him to stop transcribing his notes of Lincoln's speech and to let the Tribune have every word of Lovejoy's harangue in the morning. The Tribune the next morning was all Lovejoy and there was only a word about Lincoln's oration. "An illustration," says Hitt in telling the story, "of the fact that the contemporaneous impression of a great occasion does not always coincide with the judgment of history."

Mr. Hitt is of medium height, of modest bearing and one of those in public life, not any too numerous, who is a gentleman always. His voice is softly modulated, his manner is frank and friendly, although he

never forgets the diplomatic proprieties; his conversation is stored with information and anecdote, and yet he has never been known to reveal a thing which was to be kept in confidence. He makes no pretensions to oratory and is not much of a politician.

Seumas MacManus, Irish Story Teller

(Continued from Sixth Page.)

give up such nonsense and attend to his school. Jamie MacManus, or "The Master," as he was alternately called, persisted. Finally, finding himself so drawn to writing and foreseeing, at any rate, a much remuneration from it as he received from his school, he threw up the school and cast his fortunes ultimately with literature. As he had been prominent in the celebration of the centenary of Irish rebellion of 1898, some attributed his severance to that connection, assuming that he had been dismissed because of it, while others, who knew of his resignation and future plans, hailed him as visionary and impractical to give up the position of "Master" and sixty pounds a year for uncertainty and writing "for the papers."

The Sense of Humor.

Persons casually meeting Mr. MacManus complain that he does not live up to his reputation as a humorist in private life, as his manner is serious and absorbed, but his friends find that his every-day sense of humor is sufficient for all purposes, especially when he plays some practical joke on them, as he is sometimes given to doing. He has the traditional Irish qualities of quiet waggery, of warm-hearted impulses and of "fighting some more for Ireland." In his more individual traits he has a sure-headedness that is authoritative. He does not surrender his convictions and can "argue" as persistently as his own Billy Baxter. In his young days the father of Seumas MacManus was known as the greatest fighter—the strongest man in his parts; his mother is still noted for her witty power of ridicule and her homely humor. The projective power of the father's transmitted aggressiveness and the wit and homely logic from the maternal influence have made a combination of vital force that the son is turning to good account. In the face of all his good fortune he has the admirable sense to accept himself quite naturally and to keep his head straight, that is, from being turned. When it is turned it is in reminiscence of Donegal, for with the fun there is a human pathos of sympathy in all his writings, and when he wears Donegal homespuns there was a pride of place and a tender affection of interest with Donegal's plodding children that went along with the purchase that no London tailor could supplant, not to mention the added value that "Shan dreamed the warp and woof of it." But that doesn't count very much; he is just as likely to wear his worst hat to a reception and his best in a storm. "Where did you get that hat?" he was asked one day as he put on a yachting cap preparatory to making a call. "In Derry," he replied, quite unconcernedly.

Mr. MacManus is giving readings from his stories and poems this winter and he is meeting with unusual success; the quaint infection of speech, the drollery of the Irish manner and the inimitable Irish brogue which Mr. MacManus accounts his proudest possession are as good as a trip to Ireland.

A Tooth Puller

The daughter of a Mississippian who has adopted Memphis as her home tells the following story on her father:

"Papa was relating to the family and some of his friends one day the experience he had gone through in having a tooth pulled. He said the dentist pulled so hard that he pulled him clear out of his chair. I was only a little girl at the time, but I mustered up courage to say, half-musingly:

"Well, papa, that must have hurt mighty bad."

"Well, I guess it did," he replied. "If you could have seen the two roots of that tooth that were wrapped around my backbone you would know how it hurt without asking me."

"I suppose he meant jawbone, but the laugh that followed was too loud for me to hear the correction and I do not know to this day where the roots of that tooth had taken hold."

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