

VARIOUS

THE ONLOOKER,
VOLUME 1, PART 2

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The Casual Club

On last Thursday evening the Casual Club was gathered about a corner table in Sherry's. The great room was beautiful, the music brilliant, the setting and table appointments magnificent, and the dinner all that might be asked. There came but one thing to grieve the tempers of our members—the service was slipshod, inattentive, vile. One wonders that so splendid an arrangement should be left unguarded in the most important particular of service; that Sherry, when he has done so much, should permit himself to be foiled of a last result by an idle carelessness of waiters, who if they do not forget one's orders outright, execute them with all imaginable sloth. They attend on guests as though the latter were pensioners, and are listless in everything save a collection of the gratuity, personal to themselves, which their avarice and a public's weakness have educated them to expect.

Clams had occurred, and while we were discussing these small sea-monsters, Fatfloat broke suddenly forth. "I don't know if it

be a subject for self-gratulation or no, but I observed that the daily papers took quick note of my statement that Tammany Hall was looted of its last shilling. For the guidance of these energetic folk of ink and types, I will unfold a further huddle of details. Instead of nine hundred thousand dollars, there were more than one million collected for the Tammany campaign. No one can show where so much as two hundred thousand dollars were honestly disbursed. Let me tell a story; it may suggest an idea to our diligent friends of the Dailies. There is a rotund, porpoise-shaped globular gentleman known of these parts as 'Bim the Button Man.' This personage went into the printing business at the beginning of the late campaign and went out of it—like blowing out a candle—at the close. Bim the Button Man, for his brief parade as a printer, took a partner. Or perhaps the partner took Mr. Bim. The partner was and is a doughty 'leader.' It was the new-made firm of 'Bim' that flourished in the production of those posters and lithographs of Mr. Shepard which for so long disfigured the town. Mr. Mitchell, printer, complained bitterly over this invasion of his rights by Mr. Bim. The latter snapped pudgy fingers at the querulous Mr. Mitchell by virtue of his powerful partner. Who was Mr. Bim's partner? One year before when Mr. Mitchell's bill was seven thousand dollars, Mr. Croker, being in a frugal mood, felt excessively pained. Why then should it mount last autumn to three hundred thousand dollars and excite neither grief nor reproach? And what was got for those three hundred thousand dollars? When a show leaves New York, it

carries posters wherewith to embellish each fence and bill board in the land; and yet no show ever paid more than ten thousand dollars for paper. Five thousand dollars will cover every possible coign of bill-sticking advantage and hang, besides, a lithograph of Mr. Shepard in every window in the city of New York. Then wherefore those three hundred thousand dollars of Tammany? There be folk on the finance committee who should go into this business with a lantern. The most hopeful name of these is Mr. McDonald, our great subway contractor and partner of Mr. August Belmont; he is a member of that committee. He is, too, a gentleman of intelligence, business habits and high worth. Mr. McDonald of the subway, for his own credit and that of Mr. Belmont, his partner, should never sleep until he turned out the bottom facts of that Tammany treasure which has disappeared. Nor should a common interest with Mr. Croker and certain of that gentleman's retainers in the Port Chester railway deter him. Is there no honest man in Athens?"

It was at the close of the repast and when cigars were smokily going that Vacuum returned to the subject of Tammany Hall.

"Let me congratulate you, my dear Enfield," observed Vacuum courteously, "on your genius for prophecy. At our last meeting, you foretold the near overthrow of Mr. Nixon and the Croker regime. The papers inform me that all came to pass within the two days following your warning."

"Yes," said Lemon sarcastically, taking the words from Enfield, "we have been visited with that fell calamity, the

collapse of Mr. Croker and his rule. We have seen the black last of him, and the very name of Croker already begins to be a memory. But why should one repine?" Lemon's sneer was deepening. "In every age the other great have come and ruled and gone to that oblivion beyond. They arose to fall and be forgot. It is the law. Then why not Mr. Croker? True, even while we consent, there comes that natural sadness which I now observe to sparkle so brightly in every present eye. What then? We console ourselves as did Chief Justice Crewe full two centuries and a half ago when the decadence of De Vere claimed consideration. 'I have labored,' quoth Crewe, who if that be possible was more moved over the waning of De Vere than am I concerning the passing of Mr. Croker, 'I have labored to make a covenant with myself that affection may not press upon judgment; for I suppose there is no man that hath any apprehension of gentry or nobleness but his affection stands to the continuance of a house so illustrious and would take hold on a twig or a twinethread to support it. And yet Time hath his revolutions; there must be a period and an end to all temporal things—finis rerum—an end of names and dignities and whatsoever is terrene; and why not of De Vere? For where is Bohun? where is Mowbray? where is Mortimer? nay, which is more and most of all, where is Plantagenet? They are entombed in the urns and sepulchres of mortality!' And, as it was of that ancient day of Crewe and the De Vere so must it be of us and Mr. Croker. He goes; we stay; and so let us drink to all." Here Lemon filled his glass, and the

rest having amiably followed his example, offered with a wicked twinkle, "The disappearance of Mr. Croker!"

"What I regret in the business," remarked Fatfloat as he put down his glass, "is the ill fortune of Mr. Nixon. There is much of good honesty about that gentleman; he is high-minded and proud; I cannot but sympathize with him in his present plight."

"And yet," observed Enfield, mildly, "Mr. Nixon should have avoided that trap of an empty leadership. Mr. Nixon is no stripling; he knew Tammany and those elements of mendacity and muddy intrigue which are called its 'control'; he knew Mr. Croker, who in these last days was faithful to no promise and loyal to no man. Why did he permit himself to be flattered, cozened and destroyed? Why? He added inexperience to vanity and betrayed himself. It was the old story—the conference of that leadership on Mr. Nixon—the old story of the Wolf and Little Red Riding Hood, with Mr. Croker as Wolf and Mr. Nixon the innocent who was eaten up. No, no; he might have better guided himself. Mr. Nixon—were all about the friendliest—was still unfit for the place. It was like putting a horse in a tree-top; it gave the horse no grace nor glory and offered a sole assurance of his finally falling out."

"Isn't Mr. Nixon himself an honest man?" asked Van Addle.

"Were it to be merely a question of honesty," replied Enfield, "Mr. Nixon would make perfect answer. Broadly, he is an honest man. But that, politically, is all. And there be enterprises, such as Tammany Hall and the Stock Market, wherein to be merely

honest is not a complete equipment. Moreover, in this business of his so-called 'leadership,' Mr. Nixon might have carried himself with a more sensitive integrity and been bettered vastly thereby. You will recall that when Mr. Nixon performed as chairman of the Tammany anti-vice committee, he discovered in its entire membership that combine of blackmail and extortion which, standing at the head of Tammany and doing its foul work through the police, fostered crime in the community for a round return of four millions a year. Mr. Nixon called these evil folk by name and pointed to them. He could still relate that roll and never miss an individual. And if he did not put actual hand on the sly presiding genius, I warrant you he might, were he so inclined, indite a letter to him and get the address right."

"And the postage would be five cents," interjected Lemon.

"With this knowledge," continued Enfield without heeding Lemon's interruption, "and with his record as a foe of corruption, Mr. Nixon, had he been wise as a captain, or true to himself as a man, would have called about him the cleaner elements. He would have reminded them of the people's verdict of November and told them plainly that the rogues must go. He should have been loyal to himself. He should have made the issue against the corruptionists; he should have waged prompt and bitter war, and either destroyed them or died like a soldier high up on the ramparts. Mr. Nixon would have then become a martyr or a hero; and between the two there after all goes flowing no mighty difference. A martyr is a hero who failed; a hero is a martyr

who succeeded; both gain the veneration of a people, and die or live secure of self-respect. Mr. Nixon should have uplifted the standards of a new crusade against that handful of great robbers who, making Tammany their stronghold, issued forth to a rapine of the town. Nor, had he done so, would he have fallen in the battle. As I have already said, nineteen of every Tammany twenty would have come round him for that fight. He would have conquered a true leadership and advanced a public interest while upbuilding his party. Mr. Nixon, however, failed tamely in the very arms of opportunity. He kept to the same ignoble counsel that had so wrought disrepute for Mr. Croker. And, afar from thoughts of assailing those who had dragged Tammany Hall through mire to achieve their villain ends, he went openly into their districts, commended them to the voters, hailed them as his friends and urged their retention in the executive board. Is it marvel, then, that Mr. Nixon as a 'leader' took no root? or that by the earliest gust of opposition he was overblown? It could not have come otherwise; he fairly threw himself beneath the wheels of Fate."

"As to the future of Tammany Hall," said Vacuum, "will Mr. Croker make further effort to dominate it and send it orders from abroad?"

"Undoubtedly," returned Enfield, to whom the query was put, "Mr. Croker will strive in all ways to prolong himself. It is with him both a matter of money and a matter of pride. But he will fail; his whilom follower, Mr. Carroll, is too powerful. Mr. Carroll is

in possession and will yield only to Mr. Martin,—that inveterate foe of Mr. Croker."

"Do you know why Mr. Croker attacked Mr. Carroll just before he left?" asked Vacuum "and ordered his destruction? One morning, he was taken by Mr. Fox to view Mr. Carroll's building operations near Fifth Avenue in Fifty-seventh Street. Mr. Fox called attention to the grandeur of Mr. Carroll's plans. The workmen were tearing down a house to make room for Mr. Carroll's coming palace. Mr. Croker gazed for full ten minutes in wordless, moody gloom. Then turning to the sympathetic Mr. Fox he broke forth: 'What do you think of that? He's tearing down a better house than mine!' From that moment Mr. Croker went about the tearing down of Mr. Carroll."

"I had not supposed him so small," said Fatfloat, "as to feel piqued because Mr. Carroll would build a better house than his own."

"He didn't feel piqued," said Lemon; "he felt plundered, and doubtless asked a question concerning Mr. Carroll that has been so often asked about himself."

"And yet," observed Van Addle, appealing to Enfield, "I should love prodigiously to hear your views on the situation in Tammany as it stands. I confess both an ignorance and a curiosity for light."

"And I am sure, my dear Van Addle," returned Enfield, "you are heartily welcome to aught I may know or believe on the subject. A great noble of Rome observed that to direct a wanderer

aright was like lighting another man's candle with one's own; it assisted the fortunes of the beneficiary without subtracting from the estate of the Samaritan. For myself, I need neither the Roman argument nor the Roman example to create within me a benevolent willingness to hang a lantern in the tower of truth for the guidance of any gentleman now groping as to the actual status of Mr. Croker with Tammany Hall.

"It requires no word to those initiate to convince them that Mr. Croker no longer sits on the throne, and that his potentialities are forever departed away. For myself, grown too indolent for an interest in aught beyond the sentimentalities of politics, I sorrow that this is so. Indifference is ever conservative and hesitates at change; and, speaking for what is within myself and not at all perhaps for that which is best for the public, I would have preferred a continuation of the Croker dynasty. As it is, good sooth! Mr. Croker is destroyed. And your ruin, of whatever character, the resort of owls, the habitat of bats, and all across it flung the melancholy ivy—that verdant banner of victorious decay!—is, at its loveliest, but a spectacle of depression; and one who has witnessed Mr. Croker in his vigor must be at least dimly affected as he beholds him take his sad and passive place with those who were. Mr. Croker is not to be blamed as the architect of his overthrow. With what lights that shone, his conduct was prudent enough; and his dethronement is to be charged to destiny—to kismet, rather than to any gate-opening carelessness on the purblind part of himself. 'Prudentia fato

major,' said the Florentine. But the Medici was wrong, and before Death bandaged his eyes for eternity it was given him to see that Destiny, for all his caution and for all his craft, had fed his hopes to defeat. And yet, while Mr. Croker may not be charged as the reason of his own removal, some consideration of causes that incited it should have a merit and an interest. It is one vessel crashing on a reef that points a danger, and makes for the safety of every ship that follows, and the story of a wrecked and drowned dictatorship cannot fail to instruct ambition in whatever field.

"Following the last presidential campaign, Mr. Croker sailed Englandward to repose himself from his labors. For ten months did he rest, recuperate, restrengthen and restore himself. And when he departed, albeit he may have had no suspicion of that fact, Mr. Croker left his chieftaincy behind. That was to happen in the nature of things, and Mr. Croker would have foreseen it had he been a true scientist of supremacy. Remember it, all ye kings and princes and potentates among men! a crown will never travel, a scepter cannot leave the realm, and there are no wheels on a throne. Mr. Croker was not aware of these cardinal truths of kingcraft when he sailed away; the knowledge became his at a time too late to have a value beyond the speculative. Mr. Croker left the garments of his leadership behind him and eighteen of the 'leaders' appropriated them with a plot. They caught their chief in bathing and they stole his clothes.

"Mr. Croker was home ten days before he missed his

leadership, and even then he was made aware of its spoliation only by beholding it in the hands of the cabal. Mr. Croker meant Mr. Nixon for the mayoralty; but the plotting eighteen, intriguing with Brooklyn blocked the way with Mr. Coler. The coalition was too strong for Mr. Croker to force, and the logic of that same word pressed to a conflict meant his destruction in the city convention.

"'When the lion's skin is too short,' said Lysander, 'we piece it out with the fox's,' and while the Greeks thought this sentiment unbecoming a descendant of Hercules, they were fain to acquiesce in its practice when met by a peril too strong for their spears. Mr. Croker remembered Lysander; and, being thus hedged and hemmed about, sought safety by nominating Mr. Shepard. There need be no mistake; Mr. Shepard was not a candidate, he was a refuge. And such a refuge as is Scylla when one is threatened of Charybdis.

"When Mr. Croker seized on Mr. Shepard, he defeated the Coler plot, but made no safety for his leadership. He succeeded only in losing the latter in a fashion less harrowing to his vanity, less obnoxious to his self-respect. It was the old Roman at the last, who, preferring suicide to capture, throws himself on his own sword.

"Study the situation as Mr. Croker studied it, following the city convention; it will aid to an understanding of what has happened since, and tell the story of his lost leadership. Following Mr. Shepard's nomination there lived no Croker hope. With either

Mr. Shepard or Mr. Low elected, Tammany would dwindle—as one now beholds it—to be a third-rate influence. The autocracy of Mr. Croker would disappear. At the best, he might beg where he had once commanded, with every prospect of being denied. Mr. Croker, in alarm for his pride, decided that his sole chance to quit with credit was to quit at once, and on that thought he acted. Following the naming of Mr. Shepard he treated with the plotters and abandoned to them half his dominion. It was they, and not Mr. Croker, who determined the personnel of the late county and borough tickets; one has but to remember the folk who were named, and recall those who were not, to know that this is true. But bad fortune overtook Mr. Croker and the eighteen who then held him in partial thrall. The city ticket of the one, and the county and borough tickets of the others, were beaten."

"They were, of a hopeful verity!" interrupted Fatfloat. "They were beaten as flat as a field of turnips! And it was in high good time, too. Had Tammany retained the city, before 1904 the outlaws would have stolen everything but the back fence."

"They did not keep the city, however," continued Enfield, "and being defeated, Mr. Croker developed with much speed an eagerness for England. I do not blame him; while outwardly respectful, the leading folk of his circle were cheerless and cold, for to be beaten is to be hated in Tammany Hall. And so he made pretense of abdication and Mr. Nixon appeared in his place. The sequel of that ill-fortuned substitution is known."

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