

CHAPTER III

The Spirit of 1911

It was hot that Monday morning ^{early} in August, ^{though} the sun was only half-way toward the zenith. The heat was made more oppressive by a haze of heavy humidness. It was difficult to think, even more so to concentrate. But Mr. Barton had no regrets that the first day in his editorial chair, after his brief summer vacation, should be so uncomfortably stuffy. He'd rather be here than at the beach which he disliked with the tumult of vacationers, frolickers and fun-makers. The countryside resorts were no better. Invariably it was hot and stifling there; the lake fetidly tepid, and its luxuriant growth entwined you and took you to its creeping bosom whenever you attempted to put your foot into it. Summer in the country is rejuvenation time for all the insects that ever existed and been dormant for ages (insect ages), to come to life in their insistent swarms and rout you out from your hiding to attack you. And the worm, white and pink, crawls out from its moist and humid burrow, and glimpses the sun and you. A world invested with crawling and buzzing life. He'd rather follow the trek of the deer in the eternal twilight of the autumn woods of Maine and Vermont; trudge the carpeting of the pine needle and the mellow-yellow and crimson leaf; meditate in the occasional dappled glade, where the weakened fall-sunrays have a chance to penetrate and to distill the odors and fragrances of the inner depths of the forest; thrill to the excited and exaggerated call of the bird in the quiet of the forest temple, to the winging of a wild duck, to the sound of a falling leaf, and its sudden dry crunch under foot.

He leans back in his chair and turns his head toward the Square. Hardly a soul there. The "little" cigar tastes like a dry weed, and he throws it away in disgust. He wipes his brow, turns the fan on, but all he gets is a blast of hot air on the back of his neck. At least the air is stirring.

After a cool drink from the cooler the cigar tastes better.

And he must think - hell, high water and humidity!

He must think for his paper and three states, and others. And he finds very little comfort in thinking. No matter from which angle one approaches, his party's fate is a gloomy one, its destiny in immediate jeopardy.

The loss of the House in last fall's election to the democrats was bad enough, but the ever widening cracks in the party itself were worse. Much worse. The loss of an off-year election could well be overcome by presenting a solid front in a presidential year. But with the revolting Insurgents ever forging to the fore, and with the cooling of Roosevelt toward Taft ever becoming more frigid, what will be the fortunes of the party a year hence? A short year to mend the breaches. But he believes the forces tearing at the Party's unity are invulnerable.

Roosevelt is silent, but he knows he is seething within. The very silence from that quarter is ominous.

Will Roosevelt break...?

On the horizon it looks like a three-cornered struggle.

What is there, indeed, if that ever happens?

A bitter thought on such a hot day.

But one must face the issues. One must build. But where begin? And only one year left to do the building, to smoothen and surface the rifts!

His head was beginning to ache with the heat of it. He lit another cigar and as promptly threw it away. It scorched his tongue and tasted like hot ashes. The hot glare, reflected from the light marble of the

new building across the Square, was bring into his eyes and he averted his face. He rubbed his forehead and went for another drink from the cooler. Personally he liked Taft and felt sorry for him. Broad-gauged and a clear thinker, he would have made a good president hadn't he had the misfortune of coming after the volatile Roosevelt, and hadn't fallen into circumstances derogatory to him, mostly not of his own making. Above all, his intentions were good, even if some of them had miscarried.

He thought the man's service to the Conservation of soil was considerable. He had replaced Pinchot by the Yale School of Forestry, added to the national forests by the purchase of timbered tracts in the Appalachians. Taft also got authority from Congress to withdraw coal lands from entry, and ^{he was} the first President to withdraw oil lands.

Improvement of public land laws. Requirement of safety appliances on railroads. Establishment of a Bureau of Mines. Parcel Post Law. Separation of Commerce and Labor Departments. Although not successful in his foreign policy, he had nevertheless gainful treaties with Nicaragua and Honduras by which Americans had obtained valuable concessions. He had prosecuted the big trusts....

Yes, he liked Taft - "Bumptious Bill". A likeable personality. An easy going comfortable man. He had his faults, but what man hasn't...?

He was startled out of his reverie by the sharp tingle of the telephone at his elbow. He looked at it sharply as if the instrument were alive and bent on annoying him.

"Mr. Forrest is on the wire," the secretary said, "will you speak to him?"

"Yes, put him on." His voice was gruff and showed his annoyance.

He certainly hasn't lost time, the very first hour after his return. But shouldn't he feel a little apologetic to Mr. Forrest for not acting on his peeve before he left? But the heat was oppres^sive, and he wasn't sure whether he could control his voice, and be civil. Afraid that ^{the} dry

plaintive whine of Forrest over the wire, the very sound of it, would make him irritable and even irresponsible. All right big boy calm yourself, and hold your tongue. Play the game - and to the end. Gently, gently, and don't lose your temper.

"Hello, hello! Yes, this is Barton speaking. What? Can't hear... A little louder, please... Yes, Mr. Forrest?" Somewhat surprised, as if he didn't know. There was a bit of hoarseness in his voice, but no hint of gruffness..... "That is right... Just returned....."

"The heat - rather depressing," came from the other end of the wire. "Quite so," Mr. Barton answered. The old hypocrite, Mr. Barton thought, talking of the weather, while he has the Emporium on his mind. "But I dislike long vacations. Rather be here... where I can hold the line."

"Been under the weather, sort of," Mr. Forrest began.

"Speaking of the weather..." Mr. Barton ^{could} hardly suppress a chuckle.

"What was that?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing at all."

"As I was saying, a bit ill. Hardly followed the matter ..."

"Sorry to hear it."

"The matter about Mr. Dreen," Mr. Forrest pursued. "The old theatre is in Black's hands, which means that Dreen....." he hesitated.

His illness hasn't mellowed him toward Solomon Dreen, Mr. Barton thought. A little man with a big arrogance. "I was under the impression that you were about to get it," he said.

"So I was, but was tricked out of it."

"You mean you were outbid," Mr. Barton said stubbornly, "and that's legitimate. Business."

"Not where Mr. Black is concerned. At any rate, Mr. Dreen must be stopped before he turns the place into..."

"Into a what?" Barton broke in. Hold your temper big boy. Don't shout.

"Into a place of open lewdness!"

The damned hypocrite, the sanctimonious liar, Mr. Barton said to himself, aloud: "So far as I know Mr. Dreen hasn't got it yet."

"But he will, he will. I am sure of it."

"It hasn't been proven that the Dreen troupe is lewd," Wallace Barton insisted.

"So you found out already," Forrest's voice was hard.

"I found out nothing yet. But a man is innocent until.... You know the rest."

"It can be easily proved."

"I am not after proving anything but the truth. And the first thing tomorrow I will..."

"Not through this Sheraton fellow." There was the flair of presumption in the tone of Mr. Forrest's voice, as if of an order from higher up. It smacked of implacability to which Mr. Barton was becoming incensed. He was about to hang up as a curt answer. But then the added words - "I hope" - came to his ears and the editor was placated.

"You must leave this to me," he said with all the calm he could muster, "I am still editor."

CHAPTER IV

The Crux of the Matter

But the next day and the day after, and for more days that could be counted in a week, Wallace Barton was busy with matters on a national scale, concerning the Republican Party. He was out of town most of the time, sitting in on important conferences, planning strategy, giving his views and taking others' in return. On party unity, party policy, Taft, Roosevelt, Insurgents, and La Follette! High level talk in the highest eche-