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Campaigning with Jackson

Horace Boies had twice been elected Governor of Iowa. His reputation both as a party leader and as an effective speaker had spread far beyond the limits of the State. In 1892 he had been almost the only Democrat who actively disputed the presidential candidacy with Grover Cleveland. Further than this, Mr. Boies had received the unanimous and enthusiastic endorsement of his party, and had been tendered the exceptional honor of a third nomination for the Governorship in 1893, despite his formal declination. To wage the campaign for the office of Governor against such a formidable candidate, the Republicans of Iowa selected Frank D. Jackson, of Butler County. From the moment he accepted the nomination the eyes of both friends and foes were anxiously turned upon him to see whether or not the popular young contestant would prove worthy of the Governor's steel.

Mr. Jackson opened his campaign at Sigourney with a carefully prepared speech in which he gave the general outlines of his canvass. The success of this meeting greatly encouraged his friends and put him in good heart. The next meeting was held at

[This contemporary description of the campaign of Frank D. Jackson for the office of Governor of Iowa in 1893 is adapted for THE PALIMPSEST from *The Midland Monthly*, Vol. I, pp. 169-176.
— THE EDITOR]

Columbus Junction, two days later. The accounts of this speech were sent to the daily papers by their local correspondents, who reported it merely as a news item, without regard to political effect. At once the party managers perceived that unless Mr. Jackson's meetings were systematically reported he would soon become isolated from the general movement of the campaign. In short, they decided that, by the aid of the press, Mr. Jackson should speak every day, not merely to those who might gather to hear him, but to the whole people of Iowa. It was to do this work of reporting that I accompanied the candidate throughout his canvass.

Every one in Iowa, from the small boy up to the most wily politician, is fully acquainted with the splendor and magnificence of the political rally — from the time when the speaker, with inspiring yet genial glance, descends from the train and delivers himself into the hands of the anxious committeeman and a coterie of his distinguished fellow-citizens, to the time when the last Roman candle is fired and the last of the out-of-town delegations stick their heads out of the car windows for a final triumphant shout. Still, in many respects the rally is theatrical, and, like the theater, has its "green room" and its "stage secrets".

Mr. Jackson thoroughly believed in the principles he advocated, and his genial disposition made the constant strain upon his good nature and cordiality as light as possible. Nevertheless, it can easily be

imagined that it was with a shrug of the shoulders that he pulled himself together at the call of a station and prepared to go through another "grand rally". To him it meant another thousand or more people to shake his weary hand, on the knuckles of which hard callouses had formed. It meant an interchange of civilities with half a hundred local leaders, each one apt to be jealous of a sign of preference shown another. It meant listening to the same tunes with variations according to the interpretation of each individual brass band. It meant a hundred smiling responses to the oft-repeated facetious compliment concerning "our next Governor". It meant another glee-club struggle with another original campaign song, in a vain attempt to make it keep step with "Marching through Georgia". It meant an hour and a half of impassioned oratory, involving an immense expenditure of vitality and nervous force. It meant another half hour of enthusiastic hand-shaking, with the perspiration oozing from every pore; and, finally, it meant several hours of conversation with local politicians who were loath to leave their guest.

Sometimes there were other features. A grand torchlight procession would be a part of the program, with brass bands, Roman candles, and transparencies as adjuncts. In this Mr. Jackson would be asked to participate by taking a seat in a carriage behind two fractious, plunging horses; while he, as the distinguished guest, was obliged to look calmly

pleased and dignified, although in mortal fear of life and limb. Still, all of this was not without a pleasurable effect upon the chief participant, as the kind assurances of cordial support, the good tidings of expected gains, and the many honors shown him could not fail to arouse his appreciation and gratitude.

The railroad journeys were, perhaps, the most quiet and restful parts of the trip. Even here, however, Fame pursued and claimed her victim! No sooner had Mr. Jackson settled down in the car seat for a short nap, than he was aroused by the conductor who was the advance guard of a number who had heard that Jackson was on the train and who wished to meet him. Perhaps just as he had finished with these visitors a station would be reached where an enthusiastic delegation, headed by the omnipresent brass band, would board the train en route to the place of his next meeting. It would not take them many minutes to ascertain that their favorite candidate was on board, and a general rush for him would take place. After fifteen minutes of handshaking, the band would take up its position as near the candidate as possible, "lift up its voice", and — play.

On other occasions, Mr. Jackson was fortunate in not having his identity become known. He was then subjected to another kind of experience. As the campaign excited great interest, it was apt to be the chief topic of conversation among travellers, and he heard himself discussed with every shade of criti-

cism, from warmest support to bitter denunciation.

On one occasion a travelling man seated opposite, said to his neighbor, "I heard Jackson last night."

"That so? Is he a good speaker?"

"First class, splendid."

"What kind of a looking man is he?"

"He's a fine appearing young man." Then, in a whisper which was, however, plainly audible, he added, pointing to Mr. Jackson, "He looks something like that fellow over there, but he's a good deal better looking man!"

Whereupon the candidate for Governor drew himself into his coat collar and begged us not to call him by name.

At another time we were seated at breakfast in Missouri Valley, having made an early morning run from Sioux City. Two gentlemen were talking across the table, one of them relating, with great gusto, that the engineer had just told him he had received orders that morning from the superintendent to hold the train for a few moments at every station, in order to let Mr. Jackson shake hands with the crowds. "But," the engineer added, "I didn't see anything alive but one old cow all the way down from Sioux City." In justice to Mr. Jackson, however, it must be stated that this was not his expected route, and no one in the various towns knew he was to pass through.

There were other incidents of travel, such as a locomotive ride from Keosauqua to Mt. Zion, where

we raced with an excited horse which ran along the track for about a mile, while Mr. Jackson and I held on to the swaying engine for dear life, not knowing how disastrous the outcome of the race might prove to be. There were also several cross-country rides, on one of which the driver, whether because he was over-fond of Mr. Jackson's company, or because the presence of a real live candidate for Governor had turned his head, drove two tired men six miles out of the way, making our trip about twenty-four miles, the greater part of which was traversed in darkness.

Toward the end of the campaign the work became very fatiguing, and, to give some idea of the amount of labor involved, let the reader accompany us for a few of those last days. Leaving Sioux City between four and five o'clock in the morning, we went to Council Bluffs. After a stop of two or three hours we proceeded to Avoca, where a rousing meeting was held. Returning to Council Bluffs for supper, Mr. Jackson addressed a large audience in the evening. The next day we reached Glenwood at about one p. m., and there he spoke at a two-o'clock meeting. After concluding this speech he rested for a short time and was then whisked away for a ten-mile drive to Malvern. Wrapt in deep thought and three overcoats, with my soft hat drawn over his eyes, with all the blankets around him, and only the tip of his nose and the end of his cigar visible, our candidate made the trip in safety and almost with comfort.

We reached Malvern at five o'clock, where an audience of several hundred was patiently waiting. The candidate spoke for about half an hour and then took the train for Red Oak. Here there was an immense "rally". Colonel Joseph H. Sweney addressed a large overflow meeting while Mr. Jackson spoke at the opera house. They afterward exchanged places, and Mr. Jackson made his fourth speech that day!

Some days of this campaign fairly equaled the famous trips made by Governor William McKinley in Ohio. Indeed, they were much more fatiguing, for while the Ohio man rode at ease in a special train, the Iowan was subjected to all the inconveniences of travel in crowded day coaches. In all, Mr. Jackson made sixty-four speeches in fifty-seven different counties. He spoke in every county in the first and second districts, while along the main railroad lines, hardly a county seat was missed.

Perhaps the largest meeting of the campaign was held at Bedford in Taylor County. We reached that place about eight o'clock in the evening, having driven nine miles across country. As we approached the town, from a distance, the sky looked as though an immense conflagration was taking place. An extensive torchlight procession met the nominee at the outskirts of the city. When we reached the main streets we found them alive with people. The meeting was to have been held in the opera house, but as this was filled without making an appreciable differ-

ence in the size of the crowd in the streets, the committeemen urged Mr. Jackson to speak out of doors. He consented and the meeting was held in the courthouse square. From the steps of the court house, where the speaker stood, the spectacle seemed almost weird, as one looked out over the vast crowd, lighted up here and there by the glare of a torch until the dusky forms grew indistinct in the shadows of the trees.

An occurrence at Iowa City had its amusing side. The committee had been misinformed as to the hour of the candidate's arrival, and when the midnight train rolled in, a sub-committee with a fine turnout was in line awaiting the guest. An elderly and dignified gentleman alighted from the train, and was approached with the question: "Is this Mr. Jackson?" The query was as courteously answered in the affirmative. The gentleman addressed was handed into the carriage and without further ado driven to the St. James Hotel, where he registered and was shown to the room that had been assigned to his namesake.

The evening before, a committee of young ladies had gone to the room assigned to Mr. Jackson and elaborately decorated it with flowers, and upon the pillow had placed a horseshoe of roses. When shown to the room, thus decorated, the stranger remarked to the bell-boy that he wished to see the clerk, as there must be some mistake. The clerk asked if his name was Jackson. He said it was.

“Well,” said the clerk, “this room has been engaged for you by your Republican friends.”

“The devil it has!” said the elderly gentleman. “I’m not Frank Jackson. I’m a travelling man, and I vote in Illinois!”

He was shown to another room.

Early in the campaign Mr. Jackson and I had parted company at De Witt and were to meet at Ellsworth in Hamilton County, where he was to address an afternoon meeting. Arriving at Ellsworth I found Mr. Jackson had not yet made his appearance and, ten minutes before the last train was due, a telegram was received saying that on account of heavy rains he had missed his train and would be unable to fill the appointment. Thinking that there was nothing for me to do, I took the train intending to return to Des Moines. But at Jewell Junction, four miles distant, I met Sidney A. Foster, who was on his way to the northern part of the State, and told him he must get off and make a speech. I then explained that at Ellsworth there were over three thousand people expecting to hear Jackson, who was unable to come, and that Ralph Beaumont, a Populist speaker, was on the ground and if left alone he might do harm. After much urging, Mr. Foster consented to come. We drove over to the picnic grounds and I informed the committee that a speaker had been found who would take Jackson’s place.

When Mr. Beaumont heard that he was to have opposition he determined, as was afterward evident,

that the second speaker must speak after nightfall if at all. It was a cold, rainy day, and after Mr. Beaumont had spoken for two hours the crowd, largely Republican, began to show signs of uneasiness, but the speaker was unrelenting. Mr. Foster grew nervous. The president of the meeting hemmed and hawed to attract the speaker's attention, and several impatient Republicans had their watches out to see that he did not run over time. Finally the longed-for moment came, and the anxious committeeman tugged at Beaumont's coat-tails and called "time"; but the speaker calmly turned and announced that according to his own watch he had nine minutes left. After this no further attempt was made to stop the flow of Populist oratory.

But all things have an end; and at last Mr. Foster took the platform. It was raining heavily at the time, and he only intended to pay his respects to the first speaker and sit down; but the crowd had become excited and shouted "Go on," "Go on," so the redoubtable "Sid", catching the inspiration of the moment, spoke for twenty minutes longer, utterly regardless of the rain-drops that spattered upon his wavy hair. Immediately after the speech we drove to Jewell Junction, and were soon en route for Des Moines, feeling conscious that a pretty good day's work had been done.

We entered upon our last week of the campaign with feelings of relief, checking off the meetings as a prisoner might count the last days of his captivity.

Finally the last day arrived, and the last meeting was held. It was at Cedar Rapids, and the Republicans there had determined upon making the meeting "the grandest rally of the campaign". There was no ostentatious display, no fireworks, no multiplicity of bands and glare of torches. But the immense crowd lining the streets for blocks and the band of Civil War veterans who escorted the young candidate to the opera house gave the occasion a dignity to which no amount of campaign pyrotechnics could have added. The wise ones, who always secure the best seats an hour or more in advance, were the only people, save his veteran escort, who heard Mr. Jackson that night, for when the crowd realized that it was time to go into the opera house they found a cordon of policemen barring the entry and turning the people from the door. Every inch of standing room was taken while the stage was occupied by a large body-guard of Union veterans. The old soldiers heartily joined in the war songs with which the meeting was opened, and when Mr. Jackson appeared they fairly went wild with shouts and cheers. The speaker stepped forward amidst an uproar of applause. It may have been the applause of the veterans behind him; it may have been the large audience in front; it may have been the sight of his wife and son, as they smiled encouragement to him from one of the boxes; or it may have been the thought that this was the last of the struggle, that the fight was nearly over, and the victory

all but won — which it was I can not tell — but at any rate Mr. Jackson fairly surpassed himself that evening. I had heard the speech, in substance, fully sixty times before, yet I found myself listening with eager interest to the old sentences which, that night, seemed clothed with a new energy and a new force and meaning.

Thus the campaign ended. On the following night, we waited with intense interest for the verdict of the people of Iowa, to learn whether those weeks of labor and anxiety had “told”, or had gone for naught. When the votes were counted it was found that Mr. Jackson had won by a plurality of more than thirty-two thousand over Governor Boies, the most popular Democrat in Iowa and a talked-of man in the nation.

F. W. MEYERS