

## VIII

### THE MAN

**I**N personal appearance Tom L. Johnson was a stout, portly gentleman of medium height. His features were of a fine cut and in his youth he must have been a pretty boy. There was something of the expression of a bird in his countenance, let us say that of a magpie. The eye was bright, lively and intelligent, and always on the *qui vive*. His motions, too, were quick and alert, like that of a bird. The nose, and the mouth with its thin lips were well shaped. The chin was strong, but nicely rounded. His was a fair complexion in his days of health. His personality was as strong as his back was broad, and needed room, even to the crowding of others.

He was jovial and genial, with a smiling countenance, but could look terribly stern

and imperious. His manners were perhaps a little brusque, but to come in personal contact with him meant to like him. One could not get away from his magnetism, from his merry laughter, his pleasant familiarity. He made friends wherever he went, enemies only of those whose interests he crossed. They were not few, however. A man of his character is bound to be greatly hated and greatly loved. His simple and democratic demeanor won him the friendship of the people, the silent contempt of the vulgar rich. Nobody could be more pleasant and more overt than Johnson. His excellent health, his optimism, his natural carelessness of forms, made him an ideal companion in an idle hour. He was a good story-teller, with an infectious laugh. He was on occasion full of mirth and merriment, and liked to see young faces about him.

The companionship of men seemed to be more attractive to him than that of ladies, although he was not adverse to their presence and was quite free and easy in their so-

ciety. Like most of our business men he had but a poor taste for art and literature and no real desire for the theatre. His taste was for work in his youth and early manhood, and for politics in his later days. Neither did travel appeal to him, though he crossed the Atlantic several times. The beauty of nature never aroused his enthusiasm, and a sea of human beings had more attraction for him than an ocean of water.

On the other hand, he was fond of mathematics and of solving problems that dealt with actualities. His mind turned to inventions, and in the basement of his mansion he spent many an hour in the construction of a suspended railroad that was to attain a speed of two hundred miles or more an hour. The invention was never finished. At one time he bought a few acres of land and spent a large sum of money establishing a trout pond. In about three years he sold farm and fish, having become tired of it all, yet the farm, with its gully and pond, was a most picturesque piece of property. But he had

only thought of the fish and the fresh vegetables of the farm and not of its beauty.

Mr. Johnson was a spare drinker, but a good eater. He liked a full table, but could content himself with the simplest of food. On an election night he would indulge in a bottle of beer and half a dozen bags of salted popcorn, over which simple repast he was quite happy. He was fond of entertaining a few friends at a time at his spacious mansion, but rarely were the doors opened for great social functions. In fact, society was against him, as he was against it. His political activities had estranged him from the four hundred, who could not pardon a man of his means for associating with the plebeians. Although a member in good standing of the aristocratic Union Club, he made fun of it, criticised it, and "roasted" it. He alluded to one of the highly-esteemed members of the Chamber of Commerce as "Mr. Pink Whiskers." His friend Peter Witt spoke of the "Onion" club and Mr. Johnson did not call him to order. Of course, respectable

citizens could forgive Peter but to Mr. Johnson forgiveness was never offered. Thus Johnson was obliged to content himself with the society of his political associates, with whom he seemed as happy and lively as ever.

In the large reception room of his house he would frequently gather about him the young men of his inner administration circle to talk with them about civic problems over a cigar. There was no drinking nor were refreshments served. Mr. Johnson would recline on a comfortable leather lounge and around him sat in easy chairs or ottomans his associates. The humblest of them would feel quite at home. Here also were welcome visitors from other places. William Jennings Bryan, Henry George, Jr., and others found at Mr. Johnson's home a hospitable roof.

Mr. Johnson entertained a high opinion of Mr. Bryan, though he did not agree with him in all things. He took him for a bright, versatile and able man, and fought his last battles in Ohio. Bryan himself was more of

a diplomat than a friend toward Mr. Johnson, to whom he caused some bitter disappointments. In this respect the Mayor was dealt with as he had been in the habit of dealing with others in political matters. He buried his resentment but did not forget it; in fact, he never forgot a humiliation and was the very man to retaliate at the opportune moment.

Mr. Johnson's fortune was a large one, insuring him an income sufficient to enable him to live in opulence, and to keep up an expensive establishment. While satisfying his every wish, he was not regarded as a liberal man with money. Of course, he provided for his family according to his means and aided "on the quiet" some poor relations. He was very much attached to his brother Albert, with whom he had been associated in business, and whose untimely death caused him real sorrow. He was an indulgent father and a good husband. His daughter, Elizabeth, generally known as Bessie, was the pride of his life, and when she con-

tracted an imprudent marriage, he stood by her in the hour of need. She had many traits of character in common with her father, was bright and lively, full of activity and ambition. She was on the stage for a time and wrote novels and dramas, which showed some literary talent. She was an attractive and prepossessing young lady. Unfortunately, she became the victim of a well-educated and smooth Italian fortune-hunter. It required but a few weeks for her to learn her error.

"Bessie, right or wrong," said her father; "I am with her." His home and his arms were wide open for his child, who returned to the family home before the honeymoon was over. A few months afterward a divorce freed her from an undesirable husband.

This quick and decisive action was much applauded by the friends of the Johnson family and was quite in accordance with the ways of Mayor Johnson. He was not a man to be trifled with and could hardly be said to be considerate toward people who were indifferent to him. Yet, as a father he was almost

more than indulgent. His son Loftin, who was considered an intelligent young man, belonged to the *jeunesse dorée*, without being restricted by paternal authority, a rather uncommon fact, considering the great demands made by Mr. Johnson upon the working capacities of the people under his authority. Mrs. Johnson, a good and dignified lady, was much attached to her husband, whom she used frequently to accompany to his political meetings, ever watching and worrying over his welfare. In his days of triumph she sought to soften his impetuosity. In the times of sickness and trials she was at his side with a soothing and nursing hand.

Yet such was the vitality and energy of Tom L. Johnson, that he disregarded during his fatal sickness the advice of his physicians and the pleadings of his family and went to England to attend a meeting of "single taxers" to whom he made a speech. After his return to Cleveland he appeared at a number of political gatherings, though appearing weak and exhausted. He simply



refused to be a sick man and fled from doctor and all across the ocean into a foreign land, where those he met knew nothing of his disease and could not sympathize with him. He had ever been an impatient man, impatient with himself as well as with others. However, he was not unkind and was ready to make amends for any hasty action. It was rather his firmness of character than an unfeeling heart that made him appear uncommonly stern at times.

His tenacity of purpose was more than wonderful. It was impossible for him to yield in matters of importance upon which his heart had been set. He was a born fighter, indefatigable, courageous, always at the front. His power of concentration was marvellous and enabled him to accomplish more than an ordinary man. This form of concentration made it possible for him to dismiss every care and worry and to enjoy life in the midst of strife and battle. He was a splendid sleeper, insisting upon a sufficient number of hours of rest. "Bright as a dol-

lar" after awaking, he seemed to smile upon the whole world with the pleasure of contentment. But he was not a man of solitude; he needed people around him, and an occupation for his mind. Late in years he engaged a French tutor with whom he studied the French language while seated at the breakfast table with his family. He learned enough to read Dumas the elder with pleasure and to speak a little of the language. At the least he could make himself understood in French in a case of necessity. His daughter learned to speak French fluently, an accomplishment which enabled her at one time to take part in a drama played by the Club Français of Cleveland. Mr. Johnson was a proud father that night.

He was much liked by the people in his employ, though exacting in his demands. With a number of servants in his house he was most popular. He was naturally their master, and did not find it necessary to exert any authority. He would laugh with them like a comrade and help them along in time of

trouble. His French tutor received through him a city position which could almost be called a sinecure. The wretch showed his gratitude by becoming a defaulter and disappearing. His name was Louis Devineaux.

There was animation and life wherever Mr. Johnson appeared. Like Joe Emmett, he seemed always accompanied by a ray of sunshine. Yet his personal magnetism was not of the kind to draw out the best in man. He did not invite confidence, as he could not take a real interest in his fellow beings. His intimate friends were few, his admirers many, the sycophants around him noticeable.

Easy-going in some respects, he would tolerate in his political kitchen a few men of shady reputation and unsavory renown. Of course, he had nothing to fear from them and was not averse to make use of them should occasion demand it. One remarkable circumstance was the wide knowledge Mr. Johnson possessed about the leading citizens of Cleveland. He knew of their foibles but never referred to them even in times of po-

litical warfare. He took no undue advantage in such cases.

He was not insensible to flattery. This man of the people had his vanities like all of us. Yet it was astonishing that his sharp and discerning intellect should often fail him in the judgment of men. It would not be fair to claim that he, though seeing, would not see, but it is true that he allowed himself to be cajoled into the belief of infallibility and that this state of mind grew worse with every succeeding victory. Peter Witt alone had the courage to admonish him, but he was treated more or less as a court jester, and preached to deaf ears. Men who have no time to take a look at themselves are apt to forget their weaknesses and faults.

Mr. Johnson, like many business men, contributed to a church and caused his name to be registered by one. It is doubtful whether he could be called a Christian, though he never said anything to give offence even to a pious minister of the gospel. He could not bring himself to believe in the germ theory

in spite of all that learned physicians might say to him on the subject. But he was full of sympathy with the good work done by his friend, Rev. Harris R. Cooley. He believed in the uplifting of mankind and in relieving the suffering of the poor. A man of large means, he conducted the city institutions on a larger scale than they ever had been before. It was not his intention to be saving in the administration of the Outdoor Relief Department, and he said so openly.

Taken all in all, Tom L. Johnson was an "uncommon" man, highly gifted in intellect, happy through a sunny disposition, endowed with great strength of character and a wonderful capacity for work. He was possessed of indisputable personal magnetism and an honest desire to be useful to mankind. His mind was of a practical turn, not very enthusiastic, but persevering to the end. Though quick-tempered, he was not abusive, but neither was he forgiving when insulted. One might have spoken of him as being even vindictive. He had to suffer many a fierce

attack, but beat them off with never-failing courage.

He lacked the finer qualities of the well-educated man, the higher morals of the philosopher, and the inherent reverence for absolute truth. He was essentially the product of American life with its struggles, its disregard for conventionalities, its love for achievement and its recklessness in gaining an end. But after all he had been favored by nature like a prodigious child. He made many enemies in his life, but still more friends. He must be judged by this standard by those who could not understand him.