

# THE OLD PARTISAN

By OCTAVE THANET

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"The Man of the Hour," "The Lion's Share,"  
"By Inheritance," etc.

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A Story of the Republican Convention of 1896.

SAT so far back in the gallery that my opinion of my delegate friend dwindled with every session. Nevertheless my unimportant seat had its advantages. I could see the vast assembly and watch the thrashing of the Republican pulse if I could not hear its heart-beats. Therefore, perhaps, I studied my neighbors more than I might study them under different circumstances.

The great wooden hall had its transient and unsubstantial character stamped on every bare wooden joist and unclenched nail. It was gaudy with flags and bunting and cheap portraits. There were tin ban-

nerettes crookedly marshaled on the floor, to indicate the homes of the different states. A few delegates, doubtless new to the business and overzealous, were already on the floor, but none of the principals were visible. They were perspiring and ar-

guing in those committee rooms, those hotel lobbies and crowded hotel rooms where the real business of the convention was already done and neatly prepared for presentation to the nation. I had nothing to keep me from studying my neighbors. In front of me sat two people who had occupied the same seats at every session that I was present, a young girl and an old man.

The girl wore the omnipresent shirtwaist (of pretty blue and white tints, with snowy cuffs and collar), and her green straw hat was decked with blue corn-flowers, from which I inferred that she had an eye on the fashions. Her black hair was thick and glossy under the green straw. I thought that she had a graceful neck. It was very white. Whiter than her face, which kept a touch of sunburn, as if she were often out in the open air. Somehow I concluded that she was a shop-girl and rode a wheel. If I were wrong it is not likely that I shall ever know.

The old man I fancied, was not so old as he looked; his delicate, haggard profile may have owed its sunken lines and the dim eye to sickness rather than to years. He wore the heavy broadcloth of the rural politician, and his coat sagged over his narrow chest as if he had left his waistcoat at home. On his coat lapel were four old-fashioned Blaine badges. Incessantly he fanned himself.

"It can't be—they ain't going to nominate him today!" he asked rather than asserted, his voice breaking on the higher notes, the mere wreck of a voice.

"Oh, maybe later," the girl reassured him.

"Well, I wanted to attend a Repub-

lican convention once more before I died. Your ma would have it I wasn't strong enough; but I knew better; you and I knew better; didn't we, Jenny?"

She made no answer except to pat his thin, ribbed brown hand with her soft, white, slim one; but there was a world of sympathy in the gesture and her silent smile.

"I wonder what your ma said when she came down-stairs and found the letter, and us gone," he cackled with the garrulous glee of a child recounting successful mischief; "made me think of the times when you was little and I stole you away for the circus. Once, your pa thought you was lost—'member? And once, you had on your school dress and you tore it—it she did scold you that time. But we had fun when they used to let me have money, didn't we, Jenny?"

"Well, now I earn money, we have good times, too, grandpa," said Jenny, smiling the same tender, comprehending smile.

"We do that; I don't know what I

would do 'cept for you, lambie, and this—is this a grand time, Jenny, you look and listen; it's a great thing to see a nation making its principles and its president—and such a president!"

He half turned his head as he spoke, with a mounting enthusiasm, thus bringing his flushed face and eager eyes—no longer dim—into the focus of his next neighbor's bright gray eyes. The neighbor was a young man, not very young, but hardly to be called elderly, of an alert bearing and kindly smile.

"I think him a pretty fair man myself," said the other with a jocose understatement; "I come from his town."

What was there in such a simple statement to bring a distinctly anxious look into the young girl's soft eyes? There it was; one could not mistake it.

"Well!" said the old man; there was a flattering deference in his voice. "Well, well. And—and maybe you've seen him lately?" The quavering tones sharpened with a keener feeling; it was almost as if the man were inquiring for some one on whom he had a great stake of affection. "How did he look? Was he better, stronger?"

"Oh, he looked elegant," said the

Ohio man, easily, but with a disconcerted side glance at the girl whose eyes were imploring him.

"I've been a Blaine man ever since he was run the time Bob Ingersoll nominated him," said the old man, who sighed as if relieved. "I was at that convention and heard the speech—"

"Ah, that was a speech to hear," said a man behind, and two or three men edged their heads nearer.

The old Republican straightened his bent shoulders, his winter-stung features softened and warmed at the manifestation of interest, his voice sank—the confidential undertone of the narrator.

"You're right, sir, right; it was a magnificent speech. I can see him just as he stood there, a stoutish, good-looking man, smooth-faced, his eye straight ahead, and an alternate that sat next me—I was an alternate; I've been an alternate four times; I could have been a delegate, but I says, 'No, abler men than me are wanting it; I'm willing to fight in the ranks.' But I wished I had a vote, a free vote that day, I tell you. The alternate near me, he says, 'You'll hear something fine now; I've heard him speak—'

"You did, too, I guess."

"We could hear from the first minute. That kinder fixed our attention. He had a mellow, rich kind of voice that melted into our ears. We found ourselves listening and liking him from the first sentence. At first he was as quiet as a summer breeze, but presently he began to warm up, and the words flew out like a stream of jewels. It was electrifying; it was thrilling, sir; it took us off our feet before we knew it, and when he came to the climax, those of us that weren't yelling in the aisles were jumping up and down on our chairs! I know I found myself prancing up and down on my own hat on a chair, swinging somebody else's hat and screaming at the top of my voice, with the tears running down my cheeks. God! sir, there were men there on their feet cheering their throats out that had to vote against Blaine afterward—had to, because they were there instructed—no more free will than a checked trunk!" The light died out of his face. "Yes, sir, a great speech; never so great a speech, whoever made it; but it did no good, he wasn't nominated, and when we did nominate him we were cheated out of our victory. Well, we'll do better this day."

"We will that," said the other man, heartily! "McKinley—"

"You'll excuse me"—the old man struck in with a deprecating air, yet under the apology something fiercely eager and anxious that glued the hearer's eyes to his quivering old face—"You'll excuse me. I—I am a considerable of an invalid and I don't keep the run of things as I used to. You see, I live with my daughter, and you know how women folks are, fretting lest things should make you sick, and my girl she worries so, me reading the papers. Fact is I got a shock once, an awful shock!"—he shivered involuntarily and his dim eyes clouded—"and it worried her seeing me read. Hadn't ought to; it don't worry Jenny here, who often gets me a paper, quiet like; but you know how it is with women—it's easier giving them their head a little—and so I don't see many papers, and I kinder dropped off. It seems queer, but I don't exactly sense it about this McKinley. Is he running against Blaine or jest for vice?"

The girl, under some feminine pretext of dropping and reaching for her handkerchief, threw upward a glance of appeal at the interlocutor. Hurriedly she stepped into the conversation. "My grandfather read a false report about—about Mr. Blaine's sickness, and he was not well at the time, and it brought on a bad attack."

"I understand," said the listener, with a grave nod of his head and movement of his eyes in the girl's direction.

"But about McKinley?" the old man persisted.

"He's for vice-president," the girl announced, her eyes fixed on the hesitating man from Canton. I have often admired the intrepid fashion in which a woman will put her conscience at a moral hedge, while a man of no finer spiritual fiber will be straining his eyes to find a hole through which he can crawl.

"McKinley is not opposed to Blaine, is he?" she asked the man.

"The Republican party has no name that is more loved than that of James G. Blaine," said the man, gravely.

"That's so, that's so!" the old partis-

an assented eagerly; "to my mind he's the logical candidate."

The Canton man nodded, and asked if he had ever seen Blaine.

"Once, only once. I was on a delegation sent to wait on him and ask him to our town to speak—he was in Cincinnati. I held out my hand when my turn came, and the chairman nearly knocked the breath out of me by saying, 'Here's the man who gave more to our campaign fund and worked harder than any man in the county, and we all worked hard for you, too.' Well, Mr. Blaine looked at me. You know the intent way he looks. He has the most wonderful eyes; look right at

you and seem to bore into you like a gimlet. I felt as if he was looking right down into my soul, and I tell you I was glad, for I choked up so I couldn't find a word, not a word, and I was ready and fluent enough in those days, too, I can tell you; but I stood there filling up, and squeezed his hand and gulped and got red, like a fool. But he understood. 'I have heard of your loyalty to Republican principles, Mr. Painter,' says he, in that beautiful voice of his that was like a violin; and I burst in—I couldn't help it—it ain't loyalty to Republican principles, it's to you!' I said that right out. And he smiled, and said he, 'Well, that's wrong, but it isn't for me to quarrel with you there, Mr. Painter,' and then they pushed me along; but twice while the talk was going on I saw him look my way and caught his eye, and he smiled, and when we were all shaking hands for good-bye he shook hands with a good firm grip, and said he, 'Good-bye, Mr. Painter; I hope we shall meet again.'

The old man drew a long sigh. "Those few moments paid for everything," he said. "I've never seen him since. I've been sick and lost money. I ain't the man I was. I never shall be put on any delegation again, or be sent to any convention; but I thought if I could only go once more to a Republican convention and hear them holler for Blaine, and holler once more myself, I'd be willing to die. And I told Tom Hale that, and he and Jenny raised the money. Yes, Jenny, I'm going to tell—he and Jenny put off being married a bit so's I could go, and go on plenty of money. Jenny, she worked a month longer to have plenty, and Tom, he slipped ten dollars into my hand unbeknown to her, just as we were going, so I'd always have a dime to give the waiter or the porter. I was never one of these hayseed farmers, too stingy to give a colored boy a dime when he'd done his best. I didn't need no money for badges; I got my old badges—see!"

He pushed out the lapel of his coat, covered with old-fashioned frayed bits of tinsel and ribbon, smiling confident-

ly. The girl had flushed crimson to the rim of her white collar; but there was not a trace of petulance in her air; and, all at once looking at him, her eyes filled with tears.

"Tom's an awful good fellow," he said, "an awful good fellow."

"I'm sure of that," said the Canton man, with the frank American friendliness, making a little bow in Miss Jenny's direction; "but see here, Mr. Painter, do you come from Izard? Are you the man that saved the country for the Republicans by mortgaging his farm and then going on a house-to-house canvass?"

"That's me," the old man acquiesced, blushing with pleasure; "I didn't think, though, that it was known outside."

"Things go farther than you guess. I'm a newspaper man, and I can tell you that I shall speak of it again in my paper. Well, I guess they've got through with their mail, and the platform's coming in."

Thus he brushed aside the old man's agitation.

"One moment," said the old man, "who—who's going to nominate him?"

For the space of an eyeblink the kindly Canton man looked embarrassed, then he said, briskly: "Foraker, Foraker, of Ohio—he's the principal one. That's he now, chairman of the committee on resolutions. He's there, the tall man with the mustache—"

"Isn't that elderly man, with the stoop shoulders and the chin beard and caved-in face, Teller?" It was a man near me, on the seat behind, who spoke, tapping the Canton man with

his fan, to attract attention; already the pitiful concerns of the old man who was "a little off" (as I had heard some one on the seat whisper) were sucked out of notice in the whirlpool of the approaching political storm.

"Yes, that's Teller," answered the Canton man, his mouth straightening and growing thin.

"Is it to be a bolt?"

The Canton man nodded, at which the other whistled and communicated the information to his neighbors, one of whom remarked, "Let 'em bolt and be damned!" A general, subtle excitement seemed to communicate its vibrations to all the gallery. Perhaps I should except the old partisan; he questioned the girl in a whisper, and then, seeming to be satisfied, watched the strange scene that ensued with an expression of patient weariness. The girl explained parts of the platform to him and he assented; it was good Republican doctrine, he said, but what did they mean with all this talk against the money; were they having trouble with the mining states again? The Canton man stopped to explain—he certainly was good-humored.

During the next twenty minutes, filled as they were with savage emotion, while the galleries, like the floor, were on their chairs yelling, cheering, brandishing flags and fists and fans and pampas plumes of red, white and blue at the little band of silver men who marched through the ranks of their former comrades; he stood, he waved his fan in his feeble old hand, but he did not shout. "You must excuse me," said he, "I'm all right on the money question, but I'm saving my voice to shout for him!"

"That's right," said the Canton man; but he cast a backward glance which said as plainly as a glance can speak, "I wish I were out of this!"

Meanwhile, with an absent but happy smile, the old Blaine man was beating time to the vast waves of sound that rose and swelled above the band, above the cheering, above the cries of anger and scorn, the tremendous chorus that had stiffened men's hearts as they marched to

the dream of loyal, unselfish satisfaction dispelled.

"Ah, my countrymen," I thought, "you do a hundred crazy things, you crush 'les convenances' under foot, you can be fooled by frantic visionaries, but how I love you!"

It was Baldwin of Iowa that made the first speech. He was one of the very few men—I had almost said of the two men—that we in the galleries had the pleasure of hearing; and we could hear every word.

He began with a glowing tribute to Blaine. At the first sentence our old man flung his gray head in the air with the gesture of the war horse when he catches the first, far-off scream of the trumpet. He leaned forward, his features twitching, his eyes burning; the fan dropped out of his limp hand; his fingers, rapping his palm, clenched and loosened themselves unconsciously in an overpowering agitation. His face was white as marble, with ominous blue shadows; but every muscle was astrain; his chest expanded; his shoulders drew back; his mouth was as strong and firm as a young man. For a second we could see what he had been at his prime.

Then the orator's climax came, and the name—the magic name that was its own campaign cry in itself.

The old partisan leaped to his feet; he waved his hand above his head; wild, strange, in his white flame of excitement. He shouted; and we all shouted with him, the McKinley man and the Reed man vying with each other (I here offer my testimony as to the scope and quality of that young Reed man's voice), and the air rang about us: "Blaine! Blaine! James G. Blaine!" He shrieked the name again and again, goading into life the waning applause.

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it safe from his failing ears—"he had a kind of a stroke, and ever since he had the notion that Blaine was alive and was going to be nominated, and his heart was set on going here. Mother was afraid; but when—when he cried to go, I could not help taking him—I didn't know but maybe it might help him! he was such a smart man and such a good man; and he has had trouble about mortgaging the farm; and he worked so hard to get the money back, so mother would feel right. All through the hot weather he worked; and I guess that's how it happened. You don't think it's hurt him? The doctor said he might go. He told T—, a gentleman friend of mine who asked him."

"Oh, dear, no," I exclaimed, "it has been good for him."

I asked for her address, which fortunately was near, and I offered her the cab that was waiting for me. I had some ado to persuade her to accept it; but when I pointed to her grandfather's pale face she did accept it, thanking me in a simple but touching way, and, of course, begging me to visit her at Izard, O.

All this we had been sedulously fanning the old man, who would occasionally open his eyes for a second, but gave no other sign of returning consciousness.

The young Reed man came back with the water. He was bathing the old man's forehead in a very skillful and careful way, using my handkerchief, when an roar of cheering shook the very floor under us and the rafters overhead.

"Who is it?" the old man inquired, feebly.

"Foraker! Foraker!" bellowed the crowd.

"He's nominated him!" muttered the old man; but this time he did not attempt to rise. With a smile of great content he leaned against his granddaughter's strong young frame and listened, while the cheers swelled into a deafening din, an immeasurable tumult of sound, out of which a few strong voices shaped the chorus of the Battle Cry of Freedom, to be caught up by 15,000 throats and pealed through the walls far down the city streets to the vast crowd without.

The young Reed "boomer," carried away by the moment, flung his free hand above his head and yelled defiantly: "Three cheers for the man from Maine!" Instantly he caught at his wits, his color turned, and he lifted an abashed face to the young girl.

"But, really, you know, that ain't giving nothing away," he apologized, plucking up heart. "May I do it again?"

The old partisan's eye lighted. "Now they're shouting! That's like old times! Yes, do it again, boy! Blaine! Blaine! James G. Blaine!"

He let us lead him to the carriage, the rapturous smile still on his lips. The "rooter" and I wormed our way through the crowd back to the seats which the kind Canton man had kept for us.

We were quite like old acquaintances now; and he turned to me at once. "Was there ever a politician or a statesman, since Henry Clay, loved so well as James G. Blaine?"

## Unworldly Girls.

Mrs. August Belmont has formed among the shop girls of New York a society called the Spuds—A Society for the Prevention of Useless Giving, which, it is hoped, will put a stop to much foolish and harmful Christmas extravagance.

Praising this really admirable society, Mrs. Belmont said the other day:

"Girls are too generous, too unworldly. They need such a society as this. In their fine, unworldly way they are all too much like a girl who sells notions in a big Broadway shop."

"This girl was engaged. Her chum said to her one day:

"Are you sure George's thoughts are all of you?"

"A proud and happy smile irradiated the engaged girl's face as she replied:

"I know it. Why, he has lost two good jobs in the last month for writing love letters during business hours."

## Tip for Barbers.

John Barrymore