

## BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE NATION'S CAPITAL

By Thomas F. Logan

Special to The Inquirer.

INQUIRER BUREAU, POST BUILDING.

WASHINGTON, D. C., June 22.—The unreported, unheralded dinners of the Alfalfa Club are the latest symptoms of the life humorous and the life intellectual in the Capital. Here it is, at the little dinners, or rather the luncheons, of the Alfalfa Club that the intellectual elite of Washington meet every day. Recalling the days when Will Shakespeare and his friends sat in the musty little room in London where great thoughts were hatched, the Alfalfa Club seems destined to fulfill a similar mission in American science.

The club is the offspring of the habit of Logan Waller Page, cousin of those Pages who represent the Nation at Great Britain and Italy and himself Director of the Office of Public Roads, to take luncheon nearly every day with his two able assistants, J. E. Pennybacker, Jr., and Charles P. Light. Distinguished visitors from various parts of the country knew where to find Mr. Page about luncheon time and would drop in to join the party.

Gradually, the luncheon table had to be enlarged. So many visitors dropped in that a room in one of the hotels was set aside for the group. Mr. Light suggested that the group of regulars had better call itself the Alfalfa Club, and as the Alfalfa Club it is now known not only in Washington but in every State in the Union.

### MUST HAVE ACHIEVED SOMETHING

The qualifications for membership are simple. If a man is interesting and has a friend already in the club—a friend who thinks enough of him to invite him to luncheon—the chances are that he will be elected to membership. He must demonstrate, however, that he has achieved something in life and that, in achieving it, he has not lost his sense of humor, either in the receptive or the distributive sense.

He will surely hear good stories at the Alfalfa Club luncheons—stories with a punch and a point to them. He may hear Mr. Page tell a story, brimful of humor, which, however, illustrates the value of improved highways, or he may hear Secretary of Agriculture Houston tell one, equally funny, but pointing the moral of better crops. It is the single rule of the club that if these stories are repeated by a member in other company he must give credit to the Alfalfa.

Thus, the fame of the club is rapidly spreading. In Texas, in Maine and in every State in the Union are men who are telling stories they heard at the Alfalfa Club, and when they drop into Washington on a hurried trip and find that it is near the luncheon hour they jump into a taxi and hurry to the Alfalfa room, where they are sure to find a group of congenial spirits telling more stories, illustrating physical or spiritual phenomena.

### PROVIDES FRESH VIEWPOINTS

Naturally, the personnel of the club is constantly changing—not that any members ever drop out, but that new ones are constantly coming in, and it is always possible to get a fresh viewpoint at luncheon. Perhaps it may be some man who feels that the established order of things is all wrong. He inveighs against everything that happens to be. Everybody takes a crack at him and he learns that there are things going on in the world besides the tariff and currency. He discovers that the government is not a foolish, argumentative organization, wasting its time on theoretical reforms. He knows, when he leaves, that there are men in the government service who believe that the improvement of our public roads will mean a more equal distribution of immigration; better sanitary facilities in the country districts, better schools, and a quicker and better distribution of crops.

Mr. Page is the President. He sits where MacGregor always is supposed to sit. When he finds something new or interesting in human nature or science he brings it along in the form of a man. Mr. Light is field secretary of the American Highway Association—he was formerly State Highway Commissioner of West Virginia—and he makes trips from one end of the country to the other, invariably reporting at the Alfalfa Club the state of the union and the latest stories from the different States.

Pennybacker, another regular, is executive secretary of the American Highway Association—a perfect encyclopedia of information and statistics, which he illuminates occasionally with well pointed stories. Major Hunter is another. He tells the story of the Civil War, not as the histories tell it, but in pointed stories that introduce the human element.

At one of the recent dinners, there were present besides the regulars mentioned, the Swiss Minister, Thomas Nelson Page, who has been selected as Ambassador to Italy; Ira E. Bennett, Dr. Galloway, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture; Major Hemphill, Congressman Levey, chairman of the Agriculture Committee; Richard V. Oulahan, former United States Senator Faulkner and Congressman Frank Clark, of Florida.

### FUND OF GOOD STORIES

Ambassador Page told some of those Southern dialect stories which have given him rank with Mark Twain among American authors. Then he gave a disquisition on dialects, pointing out the distinction between the darky dialect of North Carolina and that of Virginia. His stories are imitable. It would be useless to repeat any of them because it is in the way he tells them that the merit lies.

The talk turned casually towards alfalfa, and Dr. Galloway, who is one of the foremost scientists in the government service, told how juleps could be made with alfalfa instead of mint; how the flavor of steaks could be improved by cooking them in alfalfa; and how, as a matter of fact, an entire dinner, varied and tasty, could be prepared with alfalfa as the sole material.

The Swiss Minister revealed the fact that the people of his country were the first to grow alfalfa to any extent, and the discussion of food reminded Mr. Oulahan of the circumstances surrounding the visit of a naval officer to England, just before the Spanish-American war, to buy ships. It was not an easy job. The officer encountered many difficulties before he was able to purchase a ship, which was known at that time as the Diogenes. He went into Whitechapel and hired a crew of roughnecks to sail the ship home to the United States.

The naval officer had to get away in a hurry because he was afraid war would be declared against Spain by the United States, and if the word were given his purchased ship would have been prevented from leaving the English port. He hurried his crew on board, and not until he was three miles out did he hoist the American flag. Then he called the crew together and made a little speech, telling them that they were now sailing under the American flag and that the name of the ship henceforth was to be the Tacoma.

There were grumbings among the men for some days afterwards. The Captain could see that trouble was brewing. Finally the mate went to him. "There's trouble among the men," he said.

"Well, what is it?"  
"Well, sir," said the mate, who was a husky Irishman, "they say things looks pretty bad. When we started out, shure we was called the Diognosis, and now, shure, we are told that we're the Tapioca. It looks bad, sir."

### SOME INSIDE HISTORY

The story reminded former Senator Faulkner of a famous bit of inside history, never before made public. "I was in the Senate at the time," he said, "and one day, received a message to be at the White House at ten o'clock. When I got there, Senators Hoar, Spooner and other leaders were there with President McKinley.

"I realize," said the President, "that Congress is going to force us into a war with Spain and I intend to put the matter frankly to you gentlemen. We are not in a condition which will permit us to fight a successful war. We haven't enough ships and we are without powder and guns. I realize, however, that war is inevitable, and I am going to try to make an agreement with you gentlemen. If you will all use your influence to prevent incendiary discussion for ninety days, I will go ahead and prepare the army and navy, making contracts for supplies, powder and arms. I will make the contracts without the formal authority of Congress, and then Congress, when the time comes, can make the appropriations to take care of the bills."

"The agreement was entered into," said Senator Faulkner, "and we did our part and the President did his. And on the day that war was declared we appropriated \$50,000,000, which was placed at the disposal of the President. It is generally known that most of that money had been spent by McKinley before it was appropriated by Congress."

One subject leads to another at the Alfalfa Club, until nearly everything under the sun, as well as things never dreamed in Horatio's philosophy, are covered. If a person is anxious to obtain a broad view of life he can count himself fortunate to be a member of the Alfalfa Club.

## The Alfalfa Club