

Cornelius N. Bliss Narrowly Missed Being President of the United States

Interesting Facts Revealed in an Interview Given Years Before His Recent Death, but Never Heretofore Made Public, Are Here Set Forth.

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FIVE years ago I interviewed Cornelius Newton Bliss. The article then written has been in pickle ever since. Before I could hurry it into type Mr. Bliss asked me to defer its publication, saying: "The time has not come to make public some of the things I told you."

Nor did it ever come, in Mr. Bliss's judgment. He was, moreover, an uncommonly modest man—an old-fashioned merchant in his dignity of manner, a fourth Earl of Chesterfield in courtesy, dress and atmosphere. Elegant, I might call him, though delightfully simple and sincere. And strong, yet I saw his fine eyes fill with tears as he talked of Marcus A. Hanna, his dead comrade in politics and his beloved personal friend.

Custodian of the war chest through four campaigns for the Presidency, financier of the Republicans during the historical battle of 1896, censured, tormented and challenged, he remained silent, though not because of fear concerning himself. He thought, I dare say, that every person who knew him believed him to be an honest man. The money came in. He paid it out to the committees. It was spent after leaving his hands, and spent honorably, he said. That was enough, for a merchant whose word in business was as good as gold, and for the treasurer of the Broadway Tabernacle, where he had worshipped for many years.

It was in 1904 that Judge Alton B. Parker, running on the Democratic ticket, accused the Republicans of accepting funds from large corporations. Mr. Bliss was questioned, but he said nothing. "Some day," he remarked to me, "all the facts will be known. I am not the person, however, to give them out at this time. When the truth is understood the country will be disillusioned with respect to a good many fallacies which have been accepted because they have not been explained. The newspapers insisted that Mr. Hanna had \$10,000,000 the first time McKinley defeated Bryan. Conservative men estimated Mr. Hanna's fund at \$7,000,000. We didn't have half that sum.

COST OF THE 1904 CAMPAIGN.

"If I were to tell how little we spent in 1904, when Parker was a candidate against Roosevelt, the public would be surprised and possibly doubtful. The contributions to the national committee in that year came from about five thousand business concerns and individuals, and some of them were almost insignificant. The expenses of the campaigns in 1896 and 1900 were very large, it is true. A political meeting was held in practically every school district throughout the United States during each of those years. Orators had to be hired and their hotel bills and railroad fare had to be paid. Besides, it was necessary to establish and maintain a great publishing house for the printing of documents. Nearly every man who had a dollar was willing to spend 50 cents in trying to save it.

"The cost of beating free silver was enormous, but it did not amount to \$10,000,000, nor to \$7,000,000. Money was paid to me by committees composed of the foremost business men of the communities in which they lived. It came from large places and small places, from the East and from the West. I never solicited money myself. There are ways

of getting it without begging or threatening people with a gun. I have received contributions and have returned them. Once I sent back a check for more than \$10,000. We did not want to be under obligations to certain men. Still, I suppose the belief is general that we gladly took all the funds which were offered. That has never been the case within my own experience."

Soon after Judge Parker's charge against the managers of Mr. Roosevelt's campaign and his subsequent defeat at the polls he and Mr. Bliss were seated side by side at a luncheon given in New York. Somebody blundered, but the incident turned out most happily. I had asked Mr. Bliss about his New Jersey farm, and that led him to speak of his unexpected meeting with the man who had attacked him rather savagely on the stump.

"Yes," he said, "I have about ninety acres of land on the North Shrewsbury River, which I call Oceanic Park. I have been going there every spring, early in May, for thirty years. From there butter, eggs, milk and flowers come to my town house in winter, costing me, I have no doubt, twice as much as they are worth. I also own five Guernsey cows. Shortly after the election in 1904 I was invited to a luncheon at the Chamber of Commerce, given in compliment to John Morley, the English author and statesman.

AN ENTHUSIASTIC FARMER.

"Oddly enough, I was put down at the table next to Judge Parker, whom I found to be a most agreeable and interesting person. I was somewhat embarrassed at first in hitting on a suitable subject for conversation, but we soon fell into livestock and farming. I learned that he had fifty cows. After that discovery we got along splendidly. When I went home and told Mrs. Bliss that Judge Parker was at my side all through the luncheon, she smiled in some amusement. "And what did you talk about?" she asked.

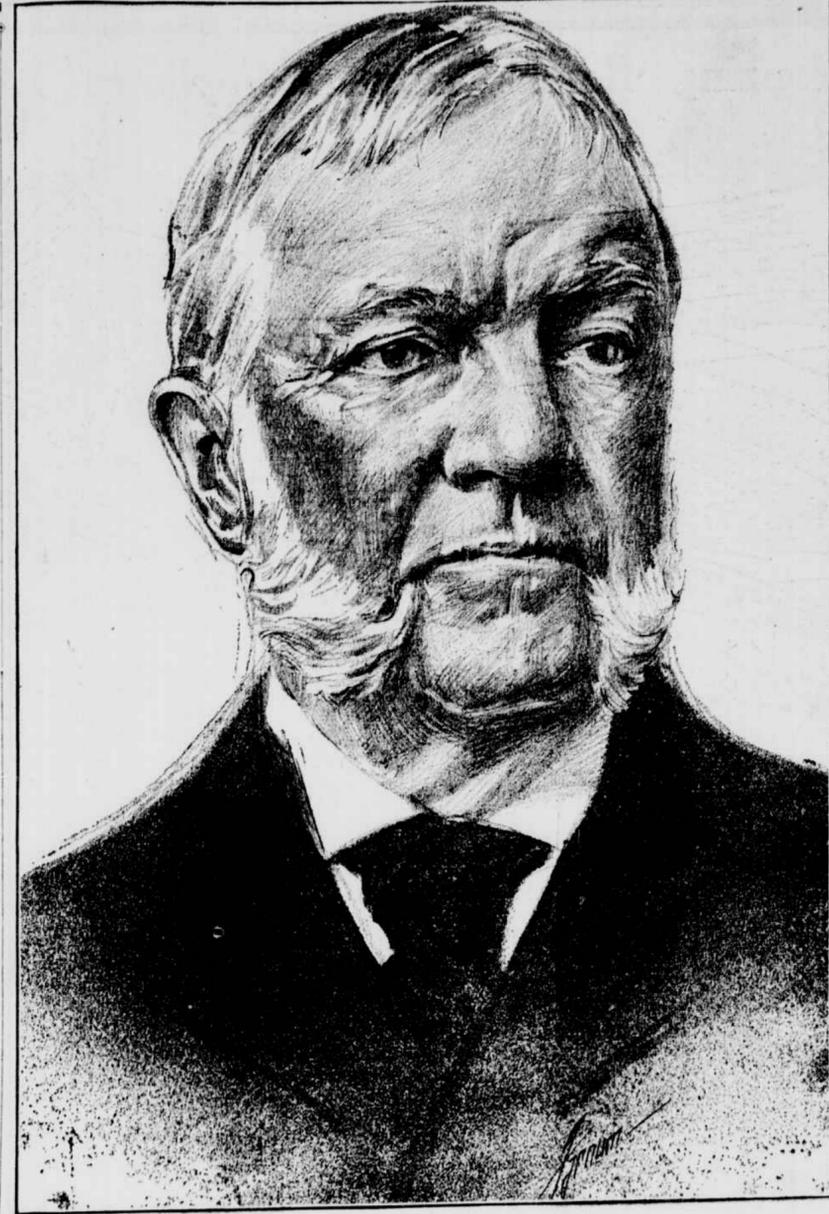
"Oh," I answered, "I talked about my herd and he talked about his herd."

Thus, and altogether naturally and also gracefully, I hope, Mrs. Bliss was brought into the present article. I introduced the unprinted interview I wrote five years ago with these words:

"A woman, a little woman, the daughter of a Presbyterian elder and hard as adamant, Senator Hanna mournfully said in describing her, changed the rush of public events in this country and permitted Theodore Roosevelt to be President of the United States. She will not thank me," I added, "for this recognition of her power in politics and the great matters of a nation, but history should not slur over or deny the facts, even for a sensitive and refined woman who asks no other dominion than her own home."

The nomination of McKinley in 1900 was certain. No other man was thought of by the country. The delegates to the Philadelphia convention were, it can be truly said, his personal friends. The Vice-Presidential nomination, however, was very far from being settled. The White House early in the year had been reticent, but was eager for William B. Allison, of Iowa.

It was McKinley's practice and strategy to gather about him men whose names impressed the national imagination. He told me immediately after his



THE LATE CORNELIUS N. BLISS.

election in 1896 that prosperity was to be restored, mainly at first by an appeal for public confidence, and that it was necessary, therefore, to call into his Cabinet the ablest and most respected counselors within the Republican party. He spoke to me of Allison, saying he wanted him to take the Treasury. The great Iowa man was afterward invited to Canton, but McKinley failed to persuade him to leave the Senate. He was more fortunate, however, with John Sherman.

Whether it was premonition or a plan is still a matter for interesting speculation, but both the President and Senator Hanna laid down the principle before the meeting of the national convention in Philadelphia that the Vice-President to be chosen ought to be competent in talents, character, balance and training for the succession. There had been no such requirements from that quarter in 1896. Garret A. Hobart was a New Jersey millionaire of limited experience in the service of the public. Up to that time, it must be remembered, McKinley and Hanna had not earned the authority to originate party policies or doctrines.

In the open and hearty manner that was a constant surprise and often a shock to the politicians who believed in mystery, muteness and secrecy, Hanna told his friends that Cornelius N. Bliss, cotton merchant, manufacturer and banker, was his candidate for the place. The etiquette of the situation required McKinley to keep silent. While he preferred Allison, he would have joyously

welcomed Bliss, his solid parts and reputation, his dignity, his kindness and his geographical location, as a fulfillment of all the conditions set forth by Hanna and himself.

The bond between Hanna and Bliss went beyond mere affection. They loved each other. I heard James A. Garfield utter about the fragrant flowers—red and white roses I have always thought he meant—that sometimes bloom on the wall of politics. He had returned to Ohio that he might thank the Legislature for electing him to the United States Senate. His thought so beautifully expressed describes the tender friendship, the brotherly relations that existed between Bliss and Hanna. Their acquaint-

ance, begun in the maelstrom of politics, led to the closest and most intimate of masculine associations.

Even so, Bliss resisted Hanna's purpose to nominate him for Vice-President. Having escaped from the Cabinet and home in New York, he stopped his ears to Hanna's pleas and reasonings. The delegates gathering in Philadelphia were Hanna's men. He held them in his own right of leadership as much as in the right of the President, whose agent he was. In the first hours of the convention he could have voted them as he willed. Moreover, back from Cuba, with his Rough Riders, Roosevelt was Governor of New York, and was ambitious to be Governor again. At that moment Hanna's power was supreme.

After days and nights of pressure and in the weariness of spirit that comes from battling with a friend Bliss wavered momentarily. "I should sacrifice my home," he told Hanna, "but if Mrs. Bliss consents, I'll yield."

Custodian of Republican War Chest Admitted It Cost a Lot to Defeat Free Silver, but Not Seven Millions, as Was Reported.

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WHEN HANNA WAS BEATEN.

"Your answer," Mr. Hanna said—and I use his words just as he gave them to me—"puts the case entirely beyond my reach. Mrs. Bliss would scarcely speak to me after you went into the Cabinet, believing me to blame. If she is to decide, you will not be nominated."

From that hour on it was Roosevelt in a happy disorder that almost edged on violence. Those persons who knew the hidden currents which flowed beneath the surface of events at Philadelphia are sure in their opinion that Bliss, unwilling to take his wife back into the publicity and confusion she abhorred, put away the opportunity that would have made him President.

The friends never spoke of the matter but once afterward. McKinley died, Hanna hastened to Washington. At the hotel Bliss was waiting for him in sorrow. The two men, so much alike and yet so unlike, clasped hands in silence. When they were in the elevator Hanna, gaunt with sleepless nights and a heavy heart, turned to Bliss and quietly asked: "Have you thought what might have been your place to-day?" There was no response. And so the subject died in all future conversation between them.

THOUGHT HE WAS THROUGH.

"After McKinley's first election there was talk that I might be called into the administration," Mr. Bliss said to me when I interviewed him. "Mr. Hanna favored the suggestion. I supposed, however, that I was done with public affairs. In January, following the election, I was invited to Cleveland, and spent several days at Mr. Hanna's house. Mr. McKinley was there at the time. On the morning of the second day he came out of the library, holding a letter in his hand. It was to John Sherman, he informed me, and was a request that Mr. Sherman accept the office of Secretary of State in the Cabinet just forming.

"During my visit in Cleveland I was asked by Mr. McKinley to become Secretary of the Navy. On my return to New York I consulted my family and business friends and declined the honor. Going to Washington a few days before Mr. McKinley was inaugurated, I was told by Mr. Hanna that all the Cabinet offices but one had been filled. He and others began to press me again. I re-

stated all day. That night, with great reluctance and in much fatigue, I surrendered so far as to say to Mr. Hanna, 'Do as you please.'

"Next morning Mr. McKinley sent for me from his hotel. On my entering the room he introduced me to several men as the new Secretary of the Interior. In a few minutes Senator Thomas C. Platt rapped and was admitted. I was introduced to him—though I knew him, of course—as I had been introduced to the others.

"I suppose," Mr. McKinley went on to say, with a graciousness of face and voice he employed on certain occasions, "that the choice of Mr. Bliss is entirely satisfactory to you."

"It is," Senator Platt replied.

"I believed then, as I believe now, that Mr. McKinley brought Senator Platt and myself together purposely to put his question in so public and open a manner that Senator Platt, there in my presence, would have been greatly embarrassed had he made any other answer."

"Mr. Thomas C. Platt," I had once said, add my words were printed, "sometimes acts so as to make it impossible for self-respecting men to be associated with him, even in a worthy purpose." At all events, whether or not Mr. McKinley planned to make it impossible for Platt to oppose my appointment, I was promptly confirmed the next day in the Senate.

"You were in office at the declaration of war with Spain," I said to Mr. Bliss.

TRIED TO PREVENT WAR.

"I was, President McKinley, every member of his Cabinet, and Mr. Hanna, I am glad to remember, did all that was possible to prevent war. The Senate, however, was savagely belligerent. Every day Senators stormed at the President to send a message to Congress that would compel Spain to fight the United States. He employed all his skill and influence to defeat the Senate, but the war spirit in the country rose higher and higher, and the Senators, gaining encouragement from the watching public sentiment, grew fiercer and fiercer.

"On reaching the White House one morning I noticed men standing in groups and talking in whispers. I asked for the President and was told that he was walking in the garden. My business being unimportant I was about to leave when I was asked to go and see him. I found him pacing back and forth in the long path among the trees on the north side of the Executive Mansion. His hands were clasped and his head was bent upon his breast.

"I approached and he motioned me to his side. We walked in silence for some time, and then I mentioned the business that was in my mind. But he did not hear me. His face was drawn and gray. To and fro we tramped, I venturing to say no more, and he in the mute agony of a combat with himself. I thought of that scene in a garden near the brook of Kedron, when Another exclaimed: 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.' By and by the President took a long breath and, turning to me, said: 'Let us go in.' The day following the war message was read in Congress."

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Queer Little New York Farm That Has Grown To Be Worth Twenty Millions of Dollars

Now Trustees of the Philanthropy Called Sailor Snug Harbor Face a Legal Puzzle.

THE trustees of the Sailor's Snug Harbor are up-stump. They want to be businesslike. They don't know whether such a thing will be right. So they have asked the courts to tell them. They wish to administer in a common-sense fashion the property left to their care by the will of Robert Richard Randall 39 years ago, and now valued at over \$20,000,000. They have asked the court to instruct them whether the injection of ordinary business acumen into the affairs of the Randall estate, in view of what the Randall will does and does not say, may be done with acceleration and impunity—whether, in other words, these trustees, who have been arbitrarily named by Mr. Randall and charged with the high duty of carrying out his purposes, may take steps to keep the value of the Randall estate from doing a continuous decline. It is a piquant situation. Some of the trustees are very serious; others are also serious, but combine with that circumstance a saving sense of humor. These latter are getting the most enjoyment out of the episode.

It isn't as if Mr. Randall had provided in some way for the trustees of his estate to be named because of some peculiar fitness, or as a reward for some meritorious public service. No; the trustees, according to the will, must be the Mayor of the City of New York, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, the president and vice-president of the Marine Society of the City of New York, the senior minister of the Episcopal Church and the senior minister of the Presbyterian Church in said city. He also stipulated the Chancellor of the State and the City Recorder, but these offices are no more.

So, you see, when Mr. A. Barton Hepburn became president of the Chamber of Commerce he resolved automatically into a trustee of the Sailor's Snug Harbor by the terms of the will, whether he might wish to become a trustee or not and quite regardless of whether his other duties, including incidentally those that devolved upon him as president of the Chamber of Commerce, might enable him to extract any comfort from that indubitable honor. He will not provide for such a contingency. To act in accordance with ordinary business judgment, the trustees should improve the estate that has changed from being an orchard to being one of the most noteworthy real estate tracts in the very heart of Manhattan.

conducted the business of the estate, is that, after having called me to the mast from 110 years back, Mr. Randall ties me hand and foot. I mean that his will shows to a marked degree how totally unconscious Mr. Randall was of the probability, since become an aggressive fact, that the city of New York would grow. He left a small farm; it is now tremendously valuable. He did not provide for such a contingency. To act in accordance with ordinary business judgment, the trustees should improve the estate that has changed from being an orchard to being one of the most noteworthy real estate tracts in the very heart of Manhattan.



MAIN HALL, SAILOR'S SNUG HARBOR, ON STATEN ISLAND.

"We should mortgage part of the property for enough to erect up-to-date structures to replace buildings now ready almost to tumble down. This would seem to be common sense. But are the trustees entitled to use common sense, according to the will? We want the courts to let us know." When Robert Richard Randall, Esq., died

in 1891 he left an extremely short will, an apple orchard, a pair of gold sleeve buttons, a gold watch, shoe-brushes and knee-buckles of a material not specified, a few pounds annuity to a few nephews and nieces, and instructions that all his just debts, of which there were probably not many outstanding, he being a methodical man, should be paid immediately. The



MAP OF PROPERTY IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK BELONGING TO THE TRUSTEES OF SAILOR'S SNUG HARBOR.

and worn-out sailors." That statement might seem to be clear. And yet the trustees were compelled to call upon a well known lawyer a few years ago for an opinion answering the question, "What is a sailor?" The commerce of the sea was no longer wholly in charge of companies and individuals who operated sail vessels. The firemen and the engineers of steamships were applying for the benefits of Mr. Randall's charity. Could the trustees recognize these, and other men who earned their living on sea-going craft other than sail-

boats? It was a problem. The lives of the trustees, by the way, have been full of problems. The lawyer rendered his decision, only a



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employed words in their ordinary primary meaning. There were no steamships in Mr. Randall's day, therefore by the term "sailors" the testator meant common sailors, said the lawyer, who in the sea phrase are before the mast in vessels propelled by sails. This did not seem to be an opinion worthy of long guiding the trustees, so they employed another lawyer, and got just as learned a statement from him to the effect that sailors were men who followed the sea. Some years hence, a trustee said a few days ago, the term "sailor" may be construed to include the man who flies his craft through the air.

Then in the matter of "aged, decrepit and worn-out" sailors, as referred to in the will, the trustees asked their counsel some time ago: "Must these three qualifications exist in combination, or may any one of these items separately constitute eligibility?"

A will may seem awfully clear, but be found hard for trustees to understand. A crisis has just arisen that has decided the trustees to ask the courts to help them. It is in connection with the remarks of Mr. Hepburn, as quoted above. The Sailor's Snug Harbor, on Staten Island, now has 56 inmates.

Owing to the more or less dilapidated condition of the majority of the buildings on the institution is only 2 1/2 per cent a year. Even so, the income amounted to \$50,623 last year. Enough, of course, to care for 1,800, instead of 800 men. Perhaps the 1,800 sailors would not have all of the luxuries that those at present in the Harbor are glad to enjoy. But the point is that even under adverse physical conditions of the property the income is a great deal more than sufficient to care for all applicants that come under the terms of the

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They Want to Know Whether Will of Founder, R. R. Randall, Binds Them to Business Folly.

Randall will. No eligible case has been rejected since the beginning of the charity, more than eighty years ago. No other avenue of charitable endeavor is open to the trustees, because the will is specifically narrow relative to who shall be the beneficiaries. Suppose the courts rule favorably respecting the wish of the trustees to mortgage some of their city property that they may improve the rest of it and thus greatly increase their income. What will they do with the money? Already a surplus is piling up at the rate of \$50,000 a year.

The trustees have just brought a friendly suit against the Attorney General of the State of New York to ascertain whether there is anything in the Randall will to restrain them from exercising what Mr. Hepburn calls ordinary business judgment. In other words, the trustees would like to know if the court please, whether the old orchard that for about eighty years now has been cut up into streets may be permitted to stand inadequately improved.

In his will, which rumor credits Alexander Hamilton with having drawn (one reason perhaps why a thirty years' war by the heirs to break it proved fruitless), Mr. Randall said nothing about adequate improvement of the property. He said nothing about borrowing money to build skyscrapers. He may never have dreamed that the orchard would require any attention beyond an occasional inexpensive pruning of its trees.

Among the present trustees of the Sailor's Snug Harbor are exceptionally capable men of affairs, who are accustomed, in private life, to see a legitimate opportunity to increase the value of their holdings. These men find it difficult, therefore, to extort much satisfaction from a condition such as at present exists in the property Mr. Randall left to their care. They say that any landlord with horse sense would replace the decrepit rookeries that now cover the Randall estate with office buildings and modern apartment houses.

Continued on fifth page.

EXTERIOR SAILOR'S SNUG HARBOR, ON STATEN ISLAND, AND SOME OF THE INMATES.

