

Plum Tree

by
DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

This is the fifth installment of "The Plum Tree," David Graham Phillips' latest novel. "The Plum Tree," as its name might signify, is a political novel, told with accurate knowledge and yet invested with just the right proportion of love interest to make an entertaining and thoroughly readable novel. "The Plum Tree" will appear weekly until completed.

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ORGANIZED under Woodruff a corps of about thirty traveling agents. Each man knew only his own duties, knew nothing of the general plan, not even that there was a general plan. Each was a trained political worker; a personal retainer of ours. I gave them their instructions; Woodruff equipped them with the necessary cash. During the next five months they were incessantly on the go—dealing with our party's western machines where they could; setting up rival machines in promising localities where Goodrich controlled the regular machines; using money here, diplomacy there, both under, promises of patronage everywhere. Such was my department of secrecy. At the head of my department of publicity I put De Milt, a sort of cousin of Burbank's and a newspaper man. He attended to the subsidiary news agencies that supplied thousands of country papers with boiler-plate matter to fill their inside pages. He also subsidized and otherwise won over many small town organs of the party. Further, he and three assistants wrote each week many columns of "boom" matter, all of which was carefully revised by Burbank himself before it went out as "syndicated letters." If Goodrich hadn't been ignorant of conditions west of the Alleghenies and confident that his will was law, he would have sent out this department of publicity of mine and so would have seen into my "notation." But he knew nothing beyond his routine. Once he asked him how many country newspapers there were in the United States, and he said: "Oh, I don't know. Perhaps three or four thousand." Even had I enlightened him to the extent of telling him that there were about five times that number, he would have profited nothing. Had he been able to see the importance of such a fact to capable "local management," he would have learned it long before through years of constant use of the earliest avenue into the heart of the people.

He did not wake up to adequate action until the fourth of that group of States whose delegations to our national conventions were habitually bought and sold, broke its agreement with him and instructed its delegation to vote for Burbank. By the time he had a corps of agents in those States, Doc Woodruff had "acquired" more than a hundred delegates. Goodrich was working only through the regular machinery of the party and was fighting against a widespread feeling that Cromwell shouldn't, and probably couldn't, be elected; when on the other hand, were manufacturing presidential sentiment for a candidate who was already popular. Nor had Goodrich much advantage over us with the regular machines anywhere except in the East.

Just as I was congratulating myself that nothing could happen to prevent our triumph at the convention Roebuck telegraphed me to come to Chicago. I found with him in the sitting-room of his suite in the Auditorium Annex Partridge and Granby, next to him the most important members of my combine, since they were the only ones who had interests that extended into many States. It was after an uneasy silence that Granby, the uncouth one of the three, said: "Senator, we brought you here to tell you this Burbank nonsense has gone far enough."

CHAPTER XV.
Methus.

It was all I could do not to show my astonishment and sudden fury. "I don't understand," said I, in a tone which I somehow managed to keep down to tranquil inquiry.

But I did understand. It instantly came to me that the three had been brought into line for Cromwell by their powerful business associates in Wall street—probably by the great bankers who loaned them money. Swift upon the surge of anger I had suppressed before it named at the surface came a surge of triumph which I also suppressed. I had often wished, perhaps as a matter of personal pride, just this opportunity; and here it was!

Cromwell must be nominated," said Granby in his insolent tone. He had but two tones—the insolent and the cringing. "He's safe and sound. Burbank isn't trusted in the East. And we didn't like his conduct last year. He caters to the demagogues."

I refused to be seen until the afternoon of the fourth day, and then I forbade Granby. But when descended to the reception-room he nudged at me, tried to take my hand, pouring out a stream of sickening apologies. I rang the bell. When a servant appeared, I said, "Show this man the door."

Granby started white and, after a long look into my face, said in a broken voice to Roebuck: "For God's sake, don't go back on me, Mr. Roebuck. Do what you can for me."

As the curtain dropped behind him, I looked expectantly at Roebuck, sweating with fright for his imperiled millions. Probably his mental state can be fully appreciated only by a man who has also felt the dread of losing the wealth upon which he is wholly dependent for courage, respect and self-respect.

"Don't misunderstand me, Harvey," he began to plead, forgetting that there was anybody else to save besides himself. "I didn't mean—"

"What did you mean?" I interrupted, my tone ominously quiet.

"We didn't intend—" began Partridge. "What did you intend?" I interrupted as quietly as before.

They looked nervously each at the other, then at me. "If you think Burbank's the man," Roebuck began again, "why, you may go ahead—"

"There isn't in me such a storm of anger that I dared not speak until I could control and aim the explosion. Partridge saw how, and how seriously, Roebuck had blundered. He thrust him aside and faced me. "What's the use of beating around the bush?" he said bluntly. "We've made damn fools of ourselves, Senator. We thought we had the whip. We see that we haven't. We're mighty sorry we didn't do a little thinking before Roebuck sent that telegram. We hope you'll let us off as easy as you can, and we promise not to meddle in your business again—and you can bet your life we'll keep our promise."

"I think you will," said I.

"I am a man of my word," said he. "And so is Roebuck."

"Oh, I don't mean that," was my answer. "I mean, when the Granby object lesson in the stupidity of premature in-attitude is complete, you shan't be able to forget it."

They drifted gloomily in the current of their unpleasant thoughts; then each took a turn at wringing my hand. I invited them up to my sitting-room, where we smoked and talked amicably for a couple of hours. It would have amused the thousands of employes and dependents over whom these two lorded it arrogantly to have heard with what care they weighed their timid words, how nervous they were lest they should give me fresh provocation. As they were leaving Roebuck said earnestly: "Isn't there anything I can do for you, Harvey?"

"Why, yes," said I. "Give out a statement next Sunday in Chicago—for the Monday morning papers—endorsing Cromwell's candidacy. Say you and all your associates are enthusiastic for it because his election would give the large enterprises that have been the object of demagogic attack a sense of security for at least four years more."

He thought I was joking him, being unable to believe me so lacking in judgment as to fall to realize what a profound impression in Cromwell's favor such a statement from the great Roebuck would produce. I wrote and mailed him an interview with himself the following day; he gave it out as I had requested. It got me Burbank delegations in Illinois, South Dakota and Oregon the same week.

CHAPTER XVI.
A Victory for the People.

I arrived at Chicago the day before the convention and, going at once to our State headquarters in the Great Northern, shut myself in with Doc Woodruff. My doorkeeper, the member of the Legislature from Fredonia, ventured to interrupt with the announcement that a messenger had come from Senator Goodrich.

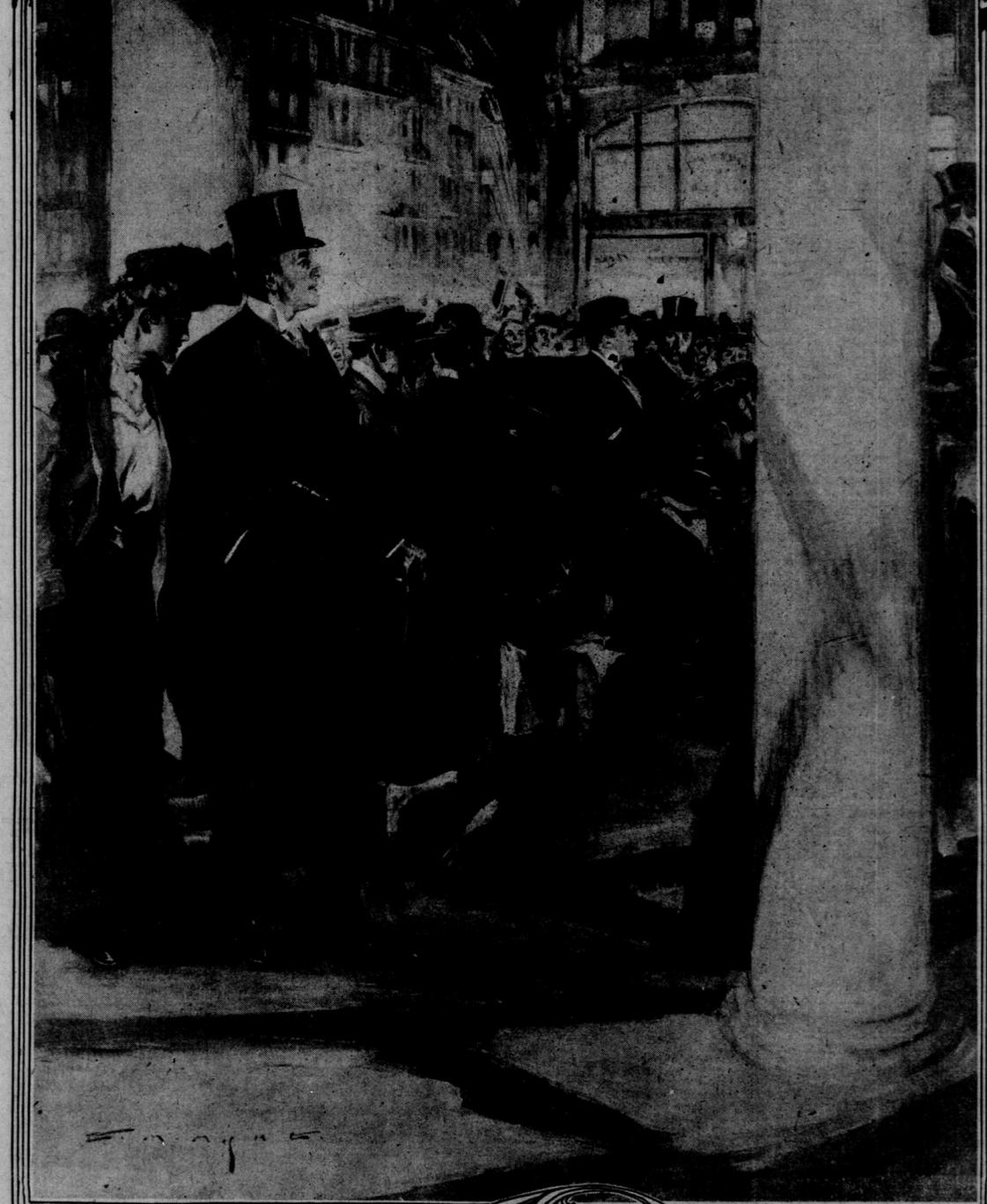
"Let him in," said I.

As the doorman disappeared Doc Woodruff glanced at his watch, then said with a smile: "You've been here seven minutes and a half—just time for a look-out downstairs to telephone to the Auditorium for the messenger to drive from there here. Goodrich is on the anxious-seat, all right."

The messenger was Goodrich's handy-man, Judge Dufour. I myself have always frowned on these public exhibitions of the intimacy of Judges in practical politics; but Goodrich had many small vanities—he liked his Judges to hold his coat and his Governors to carry his satchel. One would say that such a weakness would be the undoing of a man. Fortunately, we are not so weak as our weakness but as strong as our strength; and while the universal weaknesses are shared by the strong, their strength is peculiar and their reason Dufour had introduced himself and had exchanged commonplaces he said: "Senator, there's a little conference of some of the leaders at headquarters and it isn't complete without you. So, Senator Goodrich has sent me over to escort you."

"Thank you—very courteous of you and of him," said I without hesitation, for I knew what was coming as soon as his name had been brought in, and my course was laid out. "But I can't leave just now. Please ask him if he won't come over—any time within the next four hours." This blandly and without a sign that I was conscious of Dufour's uneasiness—for his vanity made him believe that the god the great Dufour knelt to must be the god of gods.

There is no more important branch of the art of successful dealing with men than the etiquette of who shall call upon whom. Many a man has in his very hour of triumph ruined his cause with a blunder there—by going to see some one whom he should have compelled to come to him, or by compelling some one to come to him when he should have made the concession of going. I had two reasons for this humiliating Goodrich, neither of them the reason he doubtless attributed to me, the desire to feed my vanity. My first reason was that he was able to make him bow before me in spirit, as he was a tyrant, and tyrants are always "cringers." My second reason was that I thought myself near enough to control of the convention to be able to win control by creating the atmosphere of impending success. There is always a lot of fellows who wait to see who is likely to win, so that they may be on the side of the man in the plum tree; often there are enough of these to gain the victory for him who can lure them over at just the right moment.



"THAT IS SENATOR SCARBOROUGH OF INDIANA."

As soon as Dufour had taken his huge body away, I said to Woodruff: "Get out with your men and gather in the office downstairs as many members of the doubtful delegations as you can. Keep them where they'll be bound to see Goodrich come in and go out."

He rushed away, and I waited—working with the leaders of three far-western States. At the end of two hours I won them by the spectacle of the arriving Goodrich. He came in, serene, smiling, giving me the joyously shining eyes and joyously firm handclasp of the politician's greeting; not an outward sign that he would like to see me tortured to death by some slow process then and there. Hypocritical preliminaries were not merely unnecessary but even highly ridiculous; yet, so great was his anger and confusion that he began with the "prospects for an old-time convention, with old-time enthusiasm and that generous rivalry, which is the best sign of party health."

"I hope not, Senator," said I pleasantly. "Here, we think the fight is over—and won."

He lifted his eyebrows; but I saw his maxillary muscles twitching. "We don't figure it out just that way at headquarters," he replied coolly. "But, there's no doubt about it, your man has developed strength in the West."

"And South," said I, with deliberate intent to inflame, for I knew how he must feel about those delegates we had bought away from him.

There were teeth enough in his smile—but little else. "I think Burbank and Cromwell will be about even on the first ballot," said he. "May the best man win. We're all working for the good of the party and the country. But—I came, rather, to get your ideas about platform."

I opened a drawer in the table at which I was sitting and took out a paper. "We've embodied our ideas in this," said I, holding the paper toward him. "There's a complete platform, but we only insist on the five paragraphs immediately after the preamble."

He seemed to age as he read. "Impossible!" he finally exclaimed, "preposterous! It would be difficult enough to get any money for Cromwell on such a platform, well as our conservative men know they can't trust him. But for Burbank—you couldn't get a cent—not a d—n cent! A rickety candidate on a rickety platform—that's what they'd say."

"I made no answer."

"May I ask," he presently went on, "has ex-Governor Burbank sent this—this astonishing document?" Burbank had written it. I confess when

he first showed it to me it had affected me somewhat as it was now affecting Goodrich. For, a dealer with business men as well as with public sentiment, I appreciated instantly the shock some of the phrases would give the large interests. But Burbank had not talked to me five minutes before I saw he was in the main right and that his phrases only needed a little "toning down" so that they wouldn't rasp too harshly on "conservative" ears. "Yes, Mr. Burbank has seen it," said I. "He approves it, though, of course, it does not represent his personal views or his intentions."

"If Mr. Burbank approves this," exclaimed Goodrich, red and tossing the paper on the table, "then my gravest doubts about him are confirmed. He is an utterly unsafe man. He could not carry a single State in the East where there are any large centerings of capital or of enterprise—not even our yellow dog States."

"He can and will carry them, all," said I. "They must go for him, because after the opposition have nominated and have announced their platform your people will regard him as, at any rate, much the less of two evils. We have decided on that platform because we wish to make it possible for him to carry the necessary Western States. We can't hold our rank and file out here unless we have a popular platform. The people must have their way before election, Senator. If the interests are to continue to have their way after election."

"I'll never consent to that platform," said he, rising.

"Very well," said I, with a mild show of regret, rising also, as if I had no wish to prolong the interview.

He brought his hand down violently upon the paper. "This," he exclaimed, "is a timely uncovering of a most amazing plot—a plot to turn our party over to demagoguery."

"To rescue it from the combination of demagoguery and plutocracy that is wrecking it," said I without heat, "and make it again an instrument of at least sanity, perhaps of patriotism."

"We control the platform committee," he went on, "and I can tell you now, Senator Sawyer, that there platform, nor nothing like it, will never be reported. In his agitation he went back to the

grammar of his youthful surroundings. "I regret that you will force us to a fight on the floor of the convention," I returned. "It can't but make a bad impression on the country to see two factions in the party—one for the people, the other against them."

Goodrich sat down.

"But," I went on, "at least such a fight will insure Burbank all the delegates except perhaps the two or three hundred you directly control. You are courageous, Senator, to insist upon a count of noses on the issues we raise there."

He took up the platform again and began to pick it to pieces phrase by phrase. That was what I wanted. Some phrases I defended, some I conceded might be altered to advantage, others I cheerfully agreed to discard altogether. Presently he had a pencil in his hand and was going over the crucial paragraphs, was making interlineations. And he grew more and more reasonable. At last I suggested that he take the platform away with him, makes the changes agreed upon and send it back for my criticism and suggestions. He assented, and we parted on excellent terms—"harmony" in the convention assured.

When the amended platform came back late in the afternoon, I detained Goodrich's messenger, the faithful Dufour again. It was still the Burbank platform, with no changes we could not concede. I had a copy made and gave it to Dufour, saying: "Tell the Senator I think this admirable, a great improvement. But I'll try to see him to-night and thank him."

I did not try to see him, however. I took no risk of lessening the effect created by his having to come to me. He had entered through groups of delegates from all parts of the country. He had passed out through a crowd, so well did my men employ the time his long stay with me gave them.

On the next day the platform was adopted. On the following day, amid delirious enthusiasm in the packed galleries and not a little agitation among the delegates—who, even to the "knowing ones" were as ignorant of what was really going on as private soldiers are of the general's plan of battle—amid waving of banners and crash of band and shriek of crowd Burbank was nomi-

inated on the first ballot. Our press hailed the nomination as a "splendid victory of the honest common sense of the entire party over the ultra conservatism of a faction associated in the popular mind with segregated wealth and undue enjoyment of the favors of laws and law-makers."

When I saw Burbank he took me lawlessly by the hand. "I thank you, Harvey," he said. "For your aid in this glorious victory of the people."

I did not realize then that his vanity was of the kind which can in an instant spring into a Redwood cypress from the shriveled stalk to which the last glare of truth has withered it. Still his words and manner jarred on me. As our eyes met, something in mine—perhaps something he imagined he saw—made him frown in the majesty of offended pose. Then his timidity took fright and he said apologetically, "How can I repay you? After all, it is your victory."

"Then ours," said he. "Yours, for us."

CHAPTER XVII.
Scarborough.

We hear much of many wonders of combination and concentration of industrial power which railway and telegraph have wrought. But nothing is said about what seems to me the greatest wonder of them all—how these forces have resulted in the concentration of the political power of upward of twelve million of our fifteen million voters; how the few can impose their ideas and their will upon widening circles, out and out, until all are included. The people are scattered; the powers confer, man to man, day by day. The people are divided by partisan and other prejudices; the powers are bound together by the one self-interest. The people must accept such political organizations as are provided for them; the powers pay for, and their agents make and direct, those organizations. The people are poor; the powers are rich. The people have not even offices to bestow; the powers have offices to give and lucrative employment of all kinds, and material and social advancement—everything that the vanity or the appetite of man craves. The people punish, but feebly—usually the wrong persons—and soon forget; the powers relentlessly and surely pursue those who oppose them, forgive only after the offender has surrendered unconditionally, and they never forget where it is to their interest to re-member. The powers know both what they want and how to get it; the people know neither.

Back in March, when Goodrich first

suspected that I had outgeneraled him, he opened negotiations with the national machine of the opposition party. He decided that, if I should succeed in nominating Burbank, he would save his masters and himself by nominating as the opposition candidate a man under their and his control, and by electing him with an enormous campaign fund.

Beckett, the subtlest and most influential of the managers of the national machine of the opposition party, submitted several names to him. He selected Henry J. Simpson, Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio—a slow, shy, ultra-conservative man, his brain spun full in every cell with the cobwebs of legal technicality. He was, in his way, almost as satisfactory a candidate for the interests as Cromwell would have been. For, while he was honest, of what value is honesty when combined with credulity and lack of knowledge of affairs? They knew what advisers he would select, men trained in their service and taken from their legal staffs. They knew he would shrink from anything "radical" or "disturbing"—that is, would not molest the two packs of wolves, the business and the political, at their feast upon the public. He came of a line of bigoted adherents of his party; he led a simple, retired life among sheep and cows. He wore old-fashioned rural whiskers, thickest in the throat, thinning toward the jawbone, scant about the lower lip, absent from the upper. These evidences of unfitness to cope with up-to-date corruption seemed to endear him to the masses.

As soon as those big organs of the opposition that were in the control of the powers began to talk of Simpson as an ideal candidate, I suspected what was in the wind. But I had my hands full; the most I could then do was to supply my local "left-bower," Silliman, with funds and set him to work for a candidate for his party more to my taste. It was fortunate for me that I had cured myself of the habit of overrating worth, either Simpson or should I convince them that Burbank was as good for their purposes as Simpson, would be indifferent which won.

I directed Silliman to work for Rundle of Indiana, a thoroughly honest man, a deadly earnest about half a dozen deadly wrong things, and capable of anything in furthering them—after the manner of fanatics. If he had not been in public life, he would have been a camp-meeting exhorter. Crowds liked to listen to him, the radicals and radically inclined throughout the West wore by him; he had had two terms in Congress, had got a hundred-odd votes for the nomination for President at the last national convention of the opposition. A splendid scarecrow for the Wall-strewn crowd, but difficult to nominate over Goodrich's man Simpson in a convention of practical politicians.

In May—it was the afternoon of the very day my mutineers got back into the harness—Woodruff asked me if I would see a man he had picked up in a delegate-hunting trip into Indiana. "An old pal of mine, much the better for the twelve years' wear since I last saw him. He has always trained with the opposition. He's a full-fledged graduate of the Indiana school of politics, and that's the best. It's almost all craft there—they hate to give up money and don't use it except as a last resort."

He brought his man—Merriweather by name. I liked the first look at him—keen, cynical, indifferent. He had evidently sat in so many games of chance of all kinds that play roused in him only the ice-cold passion of the purely professional.

"There's been nothing doing in our State for the last two or three years—at least nothing in my line," said he. "A rank outsider, Scarborough."

I nodded. "Yes, I know him. He came into the Senate from your State two years ago."

"Well, he's built up a machine of his own and runs things to suit himself."

"I thought he wasn't a politician," said I.

Merriweather's bony face showed a faint grin. "The best ever, does he? He's got the professional out of business, without its costing him a cent. I've got tired of waiting for him to blow over."

Third—and hungry, I thought. After half an hour of pumping I sent him away, jettisoning Woodruff. "What does he really think about Rundle?" I asked.

"Says he hasn't the ghost of a chance—that Scarborough'll control the Indiana delegation and that Scarborough has no more use for lunatics than for grafters."

This was my encouraging. I called Merriweather back. "Why don't you people nominate Scarborough at St. Louis?" said I.

Behind his surface of attention, I saw his mind traveling at lightning speed in search of my hidden purpose along every avenue that my suggestion opened.

"Scarborough'd be a dangerous man for you," he replied. "He's got a nasty way of reaching across party lines for votes."

I kept my face a blank.

"You're played against the Eastern crowd, these last few years," he went on, as if in answer to my thoughts. "You don't realize what a hold Scarborough's got through the entire West. He has split your party and the machine of his own in our State, and they know all about him and his doings in the States to the west. The people like a fellow that knocks out the regulars."

"A good many call him a demagogue, don't they?" said I.

"Yes—and he is, in sort of a way," replied Merriweather. "But—well, he's got a knack of telling the truth so that it doesn't scare folks. And he's managed to convince them that he isn't looking out for number one. It can't be denied that he made a good Governor. For instance, he got after the monopolies, and the cost of living is 20 per cent lower in Indiana than just across the line in Ohio."

"Then I should say that all the large interests in the country would line up against him," said I.

"Every one," said Merriweather, and an expression of understanding fitted across his face. He went on: "But it ain't much use talking about him. He couldn't get the nomination—at least, it wouldn't be easy to get it for him."

"I suppose not," said I. "That's a job for a first-class man—and they're rare. And I shook hands with him."

About a week later he returned and tried to make a report to me. But I sent him away, treating him very formally. I appreciated that, being an experienced and capable man, he knew the wisdom of getting intimately in touch with his real employer; but, as I had my income-parade in Woodruff, I had better than I had in my rough work of politics, there was no necessity for my entangling myself. Merriweather went to Woodruff and Woodruff reported to me—Scarborough's friends in Indianapolis all agreed that he did not