

Lorimer, the New Illinois Senator

Former Street Car Conductor, Who Got His Start in Politics by Organizing His Craft, Is Known as the "Blond Boss."

By JAMES A. EDGERTON.

THE main facts about William Lorimer, the new senator from Illinois, are that he was born in England; that he is forty-eight years old; that he came to the United States in childhood; that his father, who was a minister, died when the lad was ten years old; that from then on he has been a breadwinner; that he had little or no schooling; that he sold papers, blacked boots, wheeled salt in the packing houses and was a horse car conductor; that he became a machine politician and is now known as the "blond boss;" that he has been widely and vehemently denounced as being a representative of the vicious elements and "the interests;" that nevertheless his private life is notably clean and his family life ideal; that he does not smoke, drink or swear; that he has eight children, to whom he is devoted; that he is a large man, serene, unruffled, a good mixer and popular; that he never goes back on a friend; that he has been in congress seven terms; that he is known as the "father of the deep waterway project" of a ship canal from the great lakes to the gulf; that he is a fair speaker, but prefers to work on the quiet, and that his election as senator came as a surprise at the end of the longest deadlock in the history of Illinois.

This is but a skeleton outline, but it gives an idea of the man. His career is not commonplace or usual by any means, and perhaps the strangest thing in it is that he, a party boss, was elected to the senate by a combination of Republicans and Democrats. Another striking feature about Lorimer is that several times his enemies have gleefully proclaimed that the "blond boss" was down and out. Yet

Father of a Ship Canal From Chicago to the Gulf—Breadwinner From an Early Age—Good Mixer and Popular—Loyal to Friends

traitor, and his pursuit is relentless. The foes of ex-Senator Hopkins explain the downfall of that gentleman as an effect of that very cause. They aver that it was Lorimer who made Hopkins senator in the first place, and when Lorimer was trying to nominate Yates over Deneen they accused Hopkins of trying to carry water on both shoulders. These are the charges, and, whether true or not, the result is the same. Hopkins is out, and Lorimer is in. The "blond boss" turned the trick in the face of a plurality for the former senator in the primaries.

Perhaps the Democratic vote for Lorimer is explained by that very fight for governor, in which it is charged that after Deneen was nominated Lorimer threw his forces to Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic candidate, and ran him a hundred thousand or so ahead of his ticket. Afterward an anti-Deneen bipartisan combination organized the legislature, and Lorimer is given the credit for that. These intricacies of state politics have peculiar twists. After all the battle between the new senator and the governor, both Chicago men, by the way, and former friends, one of Lorimer's first moves after his election was to make a call at the executive mansion, and the interview between the arch enemies was so cordial that the Chicago papers at once figured out an offensive and defensive alliance.

Waving His Candidate In.

One of the most spectacular political stunts ever pulled off by Lorimer was the nomination of Dick Yates for governor nearly a decade ago. It was on the third ballot when the cause that the Chicago man espoused seemed lost and, according to report, another man

which was in the interest of some Chicago corporation. Billy Lorimer is of Chicago and for Chicago.

The Ship Canal.

Of all the things Lorimer has done or attempted to do for his own town the deep waterway project is the most momentous. When he first began the advocacy of this gigantic undertaking little attention was paid to him even in his own city. Gradually, however, Chicago began to awaken until today the ship canal from the lakes to the middle west. After fighting for it through many congresses and on the stump all over Illinois the new senator had the pleasure of seeing a great convention meet in Chicago in its behalf, at which both President Taft and William J. Bryan spoke in its favor. Now that he is in the senate he will make a still harder fight for his pet project and says that he will carry it through. For his advocacy of this one beneficent enterprise much can be forgiven him. There are many exam-



MRS. WILLIAM LORIMER.

ples of poetic justice in the world, and not the least of these is the general belief in Illinois that it was his championship of the deep waterway that was the deciding factor in gaining for Billy Lorimer the senatorship. It would be an interesting psychological study to know whether he had such a result in view when he began the seemingly hopeless fight. Why not give him the benefit of the doubt and believe that he was actuated by public spirit rather than private ambition? Or perhaps both factors entered, as they do in most men. In writing of many men I find that there is something good in all, just as there are other things to be deplored. In striking a balance between the two sometimes the scale tips one way, sometimes the other. In Lorimer's case that ship canal when it is carried through, as it certainly will be, will redeem much and blot out much. It will be a monument ever enduring, one of which the greatest and best might be proud.

In the end we are judged by our most conspicuous deed, whether it be of good or of evil. The deep waterway will certainly be the most conspicuous deed of Senator William Lorimer. Who can tell but that it may even swallow up his reputation as a "blond boss?"

Getting at the Real Man.

Fame plays queer tricks on us all. And we who most abhor the political methods of men of the Lorimer type are forced to applaud efforts for the public good such as those shown in his long battle for this enterprise that is to bless the future. I am not seeking to excuse Lorimer. I am only seeking to do him justice. A character sketch that shows personal or partisan bias is not worthy of the name. The effort should be to get at the real man and set him forth as he is—no more, no less. Kindliness and sympathy go a long way in getting at another's viewpoint and angle of vision. Until that viewpoint is gained a fair estimate cannot be made. I am frank to say that my first feeling as to Lorimer was one of repugnance. Looked at more closely, there is gold beneath the dross. This is not said of him because he is a United States senator. It would be just as true if he were still a west side street car conductor, although there would be no palpitating interest in him as such. These things can be said of him and for him: He has made his own way; he never loses his temper; in his home he is what every American man should be; his word never goes to protest; he sticks by his friends even though they go to jail; he is constructive and for his own town, and he has fought through good and evil report for at least one public work that will benefit mankind.

Such things weigh. They contain substance and have meaning. Perhaps I have omitted the one element that counts for most in the world, though it may be rated at more than its worth—Mr. Lorimer has plucked the golden apple of success. That is the credit side of the account, and why cast up the debit? The papers have been full of it for years, and it is generally known of men.

No sketch of Senator Lorimer would be complete that did not include Mrs. Lorimer. She was born in Canada, and he married her when he was a street car conductor. The same loyalty that has held him to his friends and to his city has welded him to his home. In the life of this man there is none of the sickening story of the successful man outgrowing the partner of his humble beginnings.

In personal appearance the "blond boss" is like his name—auburn of hair, red of mustache, a good fellow and as democratic as sunshine. Here is hoping that his most cherished ambition may be fulfilled and that he may live to build the Chicago ship canal.

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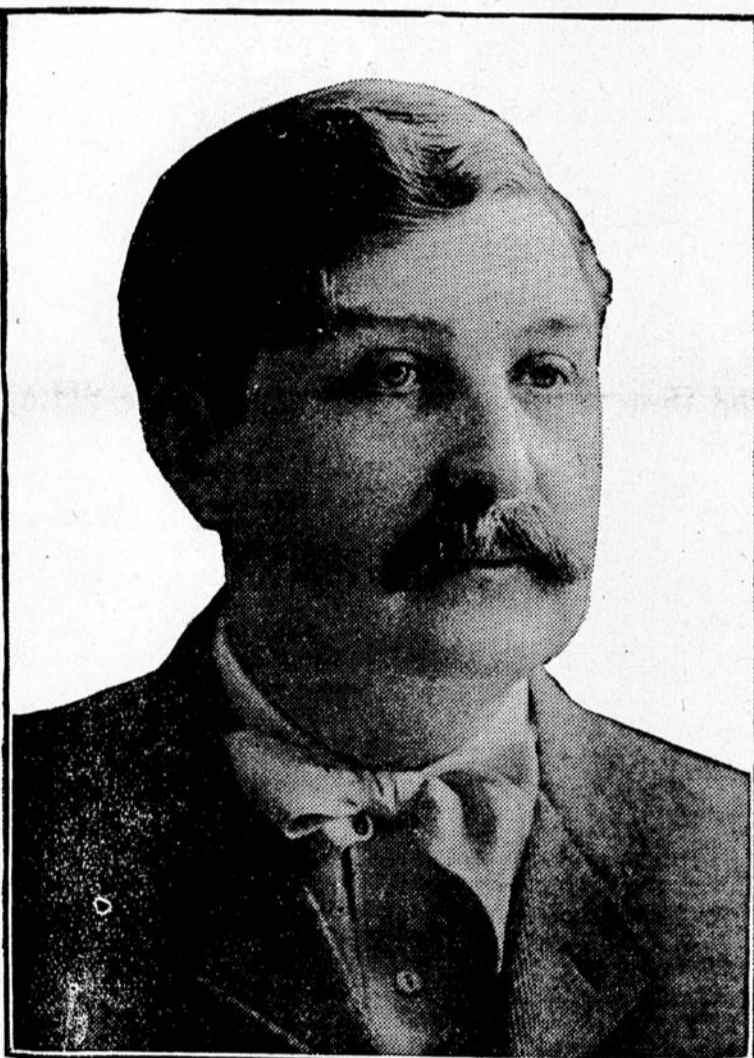
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WILLIAM LORIMER, UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM ILLINOIS.

at the next turn of the wheel he won greater victories than ever. His present triumph is a case in point. He had fought Deneen both in the primaries and at the polls, and Deneen gave him a drubbing each time. "That is the end of Billy Lorimer!" yelled everybody. And now look at him—one minute dumped in the gutter and left at the rear and the next on the front seat of the band wagon at the head of the procession!

Serene and Canny.

Lorimer in his acceptance speech blandly and benevolently handed out bouquets to everybody, even his foes; looked as innocent and cherubic as a blond boss could; said he was a Republican, but loved the Democrats who had jumped the fence in his behalf; talked for tariff revision downward because it had been promised in the platform; spoke a good word—two of them, in fact—for his deep waterway scheme and looked so serene that no one would have dreamed that he had just pulled off a deal without a parallel in the history of American politics. For an ex-street car conductor who had got his first start in politics by organizing his craft it was quite a piece of generalship. Lorimer is distinctively a politician. The convolutions in his gray matter are not in vain. They stand for something. He is canny, as becomes one of Scotch blood, which he is, although born in Manchester. He plays the game, and, win or lose, he is not a quitter. His loyalty to his friends is both his strength and his weakness. So long as they stay by him he stays by them, no matter what else they may do. This had laid him open to many attacks. On the other hand, he has a long memory for his enemies. Let a friend double cross him or play the

was actually nominated. Suddenly Lorimer appeared on the stage waving a Yates banner. He kept it up until the convention was stamped, and in the confusion the third ballot was never counted. A fourth roll call was ordered, and the day was won for Yates. The act by which the new senator first forced himself into general notice was almost as spectacular. It was in 1892, and he was a delegate to the Minneapolis convention. Illinois was for the renomination of Harrison, but Lorimer would not be bound by the delegation and voted for James G. Blaine. As Blaine had hosts of friends in Chicago, the rising young politician lost nothing by the move.

A third incident shows a streak of independence in Lorimer that would not be suspected from his reputation as a machine man. It was in the days just after the Maine had been blown up in Havana harbor and when Tom Reed and the administration were trying to prevent or at least delay a declaration of war. Lorimer served notice on Reed that he would lead a revolt, which he did and forced action. He pulled off a similar coup in his salad days as a kid congressman. Though he was supposed to keep silent, he made so warm a fight for the Chicago public building bill that, in spite of everybody else who was looking for pork, the Windy City won the day. It must be said for him that he has always stood up for Chicago. Much of the criticism of him has been due to his championship of his friends and of Chicago interests. When Roosevelt led the fight for meat inspection it was Lorimer who rushed to the support of the packing houses. Only recently the Michigan delegation was in high dudgeon because Lorimer had fathered a scheme at Sault Ste. Marie