

A POLITICIAN OF OLD STYLE

J. T. SALTER

LAWRENCE HYDE, in his critique of sociology, says: "Every situation with which the sociologist deals is the ultimate result of a series of small personal and domestic crises. The outer conditions which he investigates represent only the final expression of an infinite number of minor conflicts in the hearts of all sorts of individuals. What determines the circumstances, not only of a man and his family, but of a village, a city, and a nation, is an endless series of decisions, insignificant in themselves, but cumulatively of overpowering force. Such decisions are being made all the time by all kinds of people in all kinds of predicaments, and it is they that determine the final situation."¹

Because I agree so thoroughly with this view, I propose to introduce a single politician as he has acted both in prosperity and in depression, who is powerful in a whole section of a great city. It is usually the "endless series of decisions, insignificant in themselves, but cumulatively of overpowering force" of such men and their lieutenants that determines the outcome of great elections.

Of course, no one portrait can ever embody all of the outstanding characteristics of a politician, especially in times like these. But there is a certain norm that has been developed in America in both the large cities and the rural counties, over a long period of years. Honest Tom McIntyre, the man whom I am about to present, is such a man. He is now (1938) one of three civil service commissioners in a city of 2,000,000 people. More important than that, he is the leader of one of his city's fifty wards, and has been very largely preoccupied with politics in his ward and city for something over fifty years. He is an old-style politician of the sort about whom, when American civilization becomes more mature, legendary lore will arise, as legends have already arisen about our Wild Bill Hickoks and Kit Carsons.

And if some critic objects to a sketch of an organization ward leader at this time, one need only observe that in many elections, and not only those in large cities and states, but in presidential contests as well, the victorious candidate is usually the one with the best organization on his side. At present,

1. *The Learned Knife*, p. 74.

because of the depression, the relief legislation of the administration and the magnetic Roosevelt, this is less true than it was five years ago and before that; but even now, and in spite of many protests, Roosevelt has not given up his Jim Farley.

Honest Tom is the leader in a ward that is more populous than are some well-known cities in the West, and there are under him more than eighty division or precinct leaders—the “sales agents” who live in the “sales territory” that they represent—the men who meet the voters face to face. He differs from a division leader in somewhat the same way that an army major differs from a lieutenant. He has had more political experience, and if not that, he has greater capacity for experience, than have those under him. He has the vision, the physical energy, and the financial backing to apply division politics to half a hundred divisions—to a ward. He has superior connections with influential leaders in the city. He has resourcefulness that enables him to meet (save for the Great Depression) problems that arise in the life of his people. And finally, I venture to say that, in spite of marked shortcomings in both Honest Tom and the organization of which he is a part, there is something of him in successful politicians all over the land.

HONEST TOM MCINTYRE.

There he stood, talking to four or five men in the corridor of City Hall just outside the door of the sergeant-at-arms' office—Honest Tom McIntyre, the Abe Lincoln of the organization, the “millionaire contractor” who got right down in the ditch with his men, and then on Thursdays came right up out of the ditch to go to council. When he was first elected, legend has it, two men had to hold him while a third introduced him to his first white shirt. Now as he stood there in the great hall, he seemed too big for his clothes. His rugged form would not be entirely confined. He is of the athletic type, his head is large and he has curly, grizzled hair, so thick that it must be wetted to be held in place. His skin has a deep, ruddy color that might have come from the wind and the sea, or the drinking of much rum. He is the most profane man I have ever met, but for some magic reason the profanity is not revolting on his lips. It goes with his seaman's color, and heightens the illusion I always have when I see him that here is the captain of a ship, home from a far port. Civilization has not put him in a groove, nor broken him. His face is luminous and infinitely expressive—it is the chiseled Irish sort. His eyes are drooping, and remind

one of the eyes of England's poet laureate, John Masefield—except that Honest Tom's eyes are always twinkling.

There he stood telling some friends a story—in that short section of the corridor, the observed of all observers. Councilman Phinney Green of the 11th Ward was going by, and I asked him to introduce me to McIntyre. I will not say that Honest Tom was in liquor, for I could not prove that he was, but he was highly exhilarated. When he heard that I wanted to write about him, he smiled, put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Young man, I wouldn't want all of my record printed!" and laughed. A few minutes later he said: "I am Honest Tom, and if ever I am dishonest, I have never been caught. I can drink rum better than any man in the Hall, and that goes whether it is good rum or bad—I can drink it". Just at this moment another council man came out of the office. In jest Honest Tom pointed his finger at him and said, for all to hear: "There is a crooked councilman that changed his vote. If I voted one way, I would stay that way. I would not care what they said." And with that he walked down the corridor a few steps and turned into the council chamber.

The session was about to begin. When McIntyre entered, he spoke to nearly everyone standing along the wall, and everyone spoke to him. He had not gone twenty feet before he stopped and talked to two men. He was with them for several minutes; then he pulled away, and with a few more salutations sank into the cushions of his seat in time for roll-call. He partly rose, answered, "Present", and said, "No bills, Mr. President." (His voice is low, and his answer never varies. Once I heard an old-timer refer to the councilman as Silent Tom. I was surprised. In the corridor or in his office he is the ribald talker—only he is so good-humored and he looks so clean and lusty that he never seems ribald—but he never addresses the chair in council. He told me that he gave up the practice when Butler was Director of Public Safety. At that time he made an impassioned plea for the police that was not supported by his colleagues. "I have not spoken in council since. What's the use?" However, when it comes to voting, he votes right, and the organization never worries).

Shortly after the roll-call he grew restless; he quit his seat and desk, and walked back to the rear of the chamber. He turned to the right, and there, at the end of the room, sitting on an ample, leather-covered lounge, were seven old-time politicians and myself. Tom ambled toward us, and one of the men called

out, "Hey Tom, come over and have a seat!" The councilman was pivoting about on one foot, with something of a smile on his face. To our invitation he laughed, and replied that he wouldn't associate with a "bunch of crooks." One of the group said, "How are you, Tom?" Quick as a flash he said, "Damned near drunk!" The old-timer next to me said that Tom was awfully strong, and that he could remember the day when he was so drunk it took ten men to keep him out of the council chamber. A minute later, Honest Tom came up to me and said, "Young man, I will talk to you sometime, and give you the real stuff".

Since that time I have seen Councilman McIntyre many times, usually on Thursday afternoons in City Hall, just outside the council chamber. His attitude is always the same. He is a man of high spirits, and a most pleasant fellow to meet. He can never walk from the elevator in the south-east corner of City Hall to the councilmanic chambers without speaking to at least a dozen people, and sometimes he greets as many as fifty. (One of his lieutenants told me this story: "One time Councilman McIntyre almost came face to face with Bill Vare as he was walking down a corridor in City Hall. A crippled 'bum' happened along at the same time. Honest Tom just waved his hand to Vare, saying, 'Hello, Bill', and stopped and shook hands with the old 'bum'. Sometimes he will stop and chat, and when he does, a small group will immediately gather around him. It never matters what he is talking about—he is always interesting to hear. His great heartiness and charm enliven everyone, and fill his spot in City Hall with color and light. He is always greater than his words. His spirit stirs the heart. He is not all things to all men, but one thing to all men.)

One Thursday, just before City Council convened at 2 p.m., I found him talking to Magistrate L in the corridor on the fourth floor. I went over to them, and when Tom saw me he smiled and put his arm over my shoulder and drew me closer to them. He was in prime condition and most jovial—in happy contrast to the swarms of worried looking people who were jamming the corridors on the fourth and fifth floors of City Hall to protest against a threatened increase in the tax rate. "Here is a man", said Honest Tom to the magistrate, "that is going to write the story of my life. I'll give him more stuff than he can put in two books, judge!" The judge emphatically agreed that he could do it. I then asked McIntyre if he would speak a good word to Uncle Dannie Turley for me. "Yes", he answered,

"come on!" And arm in arm we started down the corridor for the councilmanic chamber. But when we got to the sergeant at arms' office we stopped, and the councilman, forgetting all about Uncle Dannie when he did not see him there, gently pushed me into the swivel chair, started out of the doorway, gave an incoming politician a hearty whack on the middle of the back, and disappeared into the council chamber across the hall.

But not many days after that, I walked into a spacious office on the fourth floor of Philadelphia's "hall of a thousand sorrows" and found the city's most exuberant councilman sitting at his desk there. He gave me a hearty greeting, and pointed to a colleague on the lounge across the room. "There," he said, "there is the man you ought to talk to. Doesn't he look like a politician? If he had on a striped suit, he would be the perfect picture of a gang politician." I looked at Councilman Turley. He had a bull neck, a big, baggy middle that covered his lap as he sat, a small head and small eyes that were always partly closed. He merely blinked as McIntyre spoke, and looked straight ahead. And during our whole interview, there he sat, not like a wooden Indian, but rather like three sacks of grain.

"I was born in Philadelphia", Honest Tom began; "my father and mother were from Ireland, my father from the County Derry, my mother from County Down. They were never in politics. My father always said I was a dirty bum for going into politics. I was eighteen years old when I started. Just about that time I got into the contracting business. When I started out in politics, we used to be in a cellar. We would have a half barrel of beer, some limburger cheese and crackers, and we had an awfully good time. There were stables behind our house. Every night there were so many fellows sleeping in the stables that I counted on their vote. My first job was judge of elections. This was the only job I wanted, for if we could control the judge, we could control the election. From twenty-one years of age on, I was elected as judge of election either in this ward or in the 79th² Ward. For fifteen years I was judge of election in the ninth division a different Ward. It was known as the 'Bloody ninth' and it was a s-o-b! You should see the *Bulletin* for 1895. They have an article about me and how I voted forty people from my stable. They called me a small contractor then, and said I voted forty men from my stables. The boys were all there, too. They wouldn't vote unless I marked their ballots, and I always

2. I use the figure 79 in order to hide the identity of the ward. I have given Honest Tom a fictitious name, but all else that I write is true.

marked them, for I wouldn't trust any one of them. The night that article appeared, my mother said, 'You're sorry now, ain't you?' I had just brought home a load of gravel. I told her, 'Mother, there is a million people that know me to-day that never heard of me before.' And then he again declared, "The forty-five men were there too, they were there."

"Calkins, the ward leader of the 56th Ward, refused to seat me on the ward committee, although I was elected every year from the time I was twenty-one years of age until I was elected to the city committee and the select council in 1907. In those early days I would be elected to the ward committee, and Calkins would fire me out.

"Later I went over to the 79th Ward and got elected as judge of elections over there. I wanted to help the boys out, and show them just how politics were done. However, they talked about putting me in prison for voting away from home, so I resigned as judge. When I was elected to council from the 56th Ward, the boys of the 79th said, 'You're a fine s-o-b to be elected to council!' But I won, and I won for my friends! I never took a drink of rum until I got elected to council. I've been elected to council ever since, and have served under seven mayors. In the old days I was always elected to select council.

"Now Turley never had any trouble in his ward, but I always had the whole bunch against me. I was with Jim McNichol, and the Martin people were fighting against me. Pretty near all the ward committeemen were placeholders, and they would vote me out. They threw me out because their boss, Calkins, told them to. He was afraid I would get too strong and get his hide. He was first a magistrate, then a real estate assessor, and finally a mercantile appraiser, but I beat him at last. Dave Martin and Billy Knight were against me because I refused to put one of their friends in common council. I said, 'He is a Democrat.' 'What difference if he is, he will do as you say!' But I wouldn't take him.

"The Washington Party (an anti-organization group) was strong then. Some of the leaders in my section asked me if I wanted them to endorse me. I said, 'Yes'. Later I asked them what it would cost. They said they would let me decide after the primary. One night eight of these leaders sneaked over to my house the back way. They explained that they did not want to be seen in my presence. I said, 'All right'. I got out a quart of whisky and gave each of them a good drink. I won the nomination by a large vote. None of these fellows ever

came back to get their pay. When I saw them, I said "Why don't you fellows come and see me?" 'Tom', they said, 'you got such a big majority that we thought you would forget all about your promise.' I said, 'No, I never go back on my word.' I asked them what their help was worth. They said, 'Fifty dollars apiece.' So I took out a roll of bills and put one hundred dollars before each of them. I then got out a bottle of rum and gave each of them a drink. They took not only one drink, but two, and after that no one could ever lick me.

"The organization gave Fox money to get elected to the City Committee; Fox actually had four more committeemen than I had. The night of the election one of my committeemen was going in the room, and he was asked who he was going to vote for. He knew then that I could not be elected. But Rainer, my committeeman, said, 'Old McIntyre is good enough for me.' That was in 1906. Fox beat me for the last time in that election. The next year I was elected, and I have been ever since."

I asked McIntyre how he inspired such high loyalty in his men. I had talked to seven of them, including the leader of the women's organization in the 56th Ward, and they are all, lock, stock and barrel, for Honest Tom, just as Rainer had been 25 years ago.

"I can answer that question in a minute. I never met a soul that was on the ward committee that I didn't use my best efforts to make him a friend; no matter if he had voted against me before, I still tried to get him to go along with me. It all depends on how you use the people as to how far or how well you will go. Ask the colored men in my ward. They will tell you that I am the only 'white man' that they know. Some people want to be too stingy, and will not give anything away, or they want all the credit for themselves. I know enough to believe that I wouldn't be worth a damn if it wasn't for the fellows that go with me. I made a study of that at the start. I realized then that there was room enough for a good leader if he gave credit to those that helped him. Play fair with your neighbors and they will never fail you. Some time ago, in 1920, Parker, my opponent, wanted ten of my committeemen to vote for him for the city committee, but they refused; so Mayor Moore fired all ten. However, I paid each of them \$100 a month until I got another job for them. When Parker asked them to vote for him they all said, 'Go to hell!' It cost me between ten and fourteen thousand dollars to take care of these ten men who had

been fired for loyalty to me. One day I spoke to Ed Vare about it. Vare said that he would write me a check. I said, 'Damn it, Ed, I am paying these men, and I don't want a check, but I do want them to get a job!' Vare got them a job. You see, I was paying only \$100 a month, and when they got a job they were getting at least \$1800 a year. One time I asked Judge B— if he had a place for niggers. I said 'Haven't you got any damned place for a nigger?' B— said to a friend, 'Have you got a damned place for a nigger?' (B— is a shrewd judge and shrewder ward leader.) We got a place for him as a janitor.

"Both in my contracting work and in politics I stay close to my men. I work with them now. I throw the stuff in mixers. I work with them and keep them going. The sooner we finish a job, the more money we make."

I asked if he had belonged to any boys' club. The councilman misunderstood my question and said, "Hell, yes—I joined all of them!" And then he started talking about the Masons and he added, "But the club that I think most of is the 56th Ward Republican Club. I am president of it. For twenty years I went there seven nights a week, but don't go there so often now, for I am often at Atlantic City. Our club is on— Avenue between X and Y streets. Come on over sometime and see us. We have everything there, cards, billiards, pool and a bowling alley." I enquired, "When will I find you there?" He said that he did not know. "I might not be there for a month and I might be there tonight." (When he is there, the boys gather around him and the room is packed with good listeners and animated talk. When the leader isn't there, neither are the followers. The club house is deserted save for fifteen or twenty men who talk and play games and wonder if the Old Man will show up). "Ask the people in the section where I live. They are all for me." (I talked to about thirty of them, almost at random, and each one of them seemed to feel that Honest Tom was his personal friend.)³ "I was born in the 19th Ward. My father was in the milk business—he always kept about sixty head of cows. Till I grewed up to be damn near a man I herded them around the vacant lots. But when the country got built in around us, we moved with the cows to the 56th Ward section. The cows would get the sidewalks dirty and the board of health got after us, and so we had to move. For the last sixty years I have lived in the 56th Ward, and when my sister died, she left me the property, though I now live in Atlantic City."

3. To-day in 1938 the voters are critical of Honest Tom and other Republicans in Philadelphia. His ward has voted Democratic in four out of the last five elections.

As McIntyre talked, his face was flushed and his eyes sparkled, and he seemed to relish the idea of talking about his life in politics. His three party workers and Councilman Turley sat there without saying a word. There was nothing extraordinary here to them but the professor, and ten minutes was plenty for looking him over. Honest Tom talked with gusto, and much of the time he looked at his companions as he talked. I was merely a prompter. When I asked if his father had been in politics, he said, "Hell, no! My father said that I was a fool for going in. He voted for me the first time but never after that, because I learned to drink in city council. At one of my later elections he asked a friend how I was making out. The friend said, 'What do you care? You won't vote for him.' My father said, 'I know, but then you see, he is my son, and I would like to see him come through.'

"I know many of the people in my ward and they know me. I know the boundary lines of each division in my ward. I know pretty nearly the name and address of all my committeemen, but there have been so many changes lately that I would not know all at the present time. I have experienced committeemen that help me on party details. They never miss, and if I'm not here one of my men is.

"In the old days I was always there. Once after I began drinking liquor I got home at three o'clock—I had a hell of a load on, so I laid down on the hay and went to sleep. In the morning my father said, 'Tom is a queer one. Instead of sleeping in a nice bed here with us, he will go out in the barn, and sleep with the bums.'

"At times people would come to the house and ask for me. My father would say that I was away, and ask them if he could do something. They would always say, 'No, I guess not'. You know my father used to believe that all I ever done was to get these bums out of the station house. I enjoyed that life a lot. It was an expensive piece of business, though—this being in politics, for me. Once I spent so much money paying rent for my ward committeemen that I overdrew my account \$800. My bank carried me. I never took any help from the city committee. I had to pay all my own bills. My old man thought he was going to make a minister out of me (Tom is Presbyterian) but I didn't like that kind of business because there were so damned many women around."

I suggested that politics was a strenuous game. He disagreed. He said, "Oh, no, not if you play it right. I go to

Atlantic City at 6 o'clock, look the papers over, have supper and go to bed at nine. I go to sleep at once. In the morning I read the *Record*, because I know if there is any scandal about the politicians the *Record* will publish it. At night time I get the *Bulletin*. In the morning at Atlantic City I get six or seven papers and give them to my friends." At this point, Dick Moore, his friendly lieutenant, spoke up and said, "Tell him about the lunches, Tom". Tom smiled and said, "Oh, yes, I take my friends to lunch."

I asked if he read books. He said that he did, but, "I can't think of the name of the book." He added, "Oh, damn it, I bet my sister had five hundred. I just pick them up and read the one I come to. I like to read about shipwrecks and that sort of thing."

I told Honest Tom that I thought that I could understand why he was a leader, but, "Take Grimm, for instance; what has he got that makes for leadership?" The councilman paused and answered, "I wish that I knew. A fellow like Grimm is a disappointment to a real leader. He was made over night by Vare. Such an outrage!" One of McIntyre's standers-by expressed the opinion, "He is a counterfeit!" Honest Tom answered, "Yes, but his job is not a counterfeit." The councilman's reply demonstrated his ability to strike at the jugular vein in an argument. Almost invariably the organization leader places the toga on an old-time committeeman, but in the case of Grimm he was placed in a ward specifically for the purpose of being made a leader. Vare wanted a man he could trust implicitly.

Several times Honest Tom explained, "I could write that book myself!" When I thanked him, he gave me a hearty handshake and said, "That's all right, young man—you come back some other time and we will talk about politics some more." I offered him a cigar, which he refused. "If that were a pint of liquor, I would drink half of it with you." I told him I had no liquor, and that if I had I would probably drink it myself. He said, "Not me, I never drink alone. I always drink with my friends."

One morning, when I saw Honest Tom in Dick Moore's office, I thought of Albert Jay Nock's feeling about the characters in Dickens—"But how interesting! Why, one would walk miles unending to meet one of them and, having met him, would haunt him and delightedly follow him up and down the earth!" He gave me a lusty greeting; he was in top form. He asked me and Zeke Moran, the detail man of another ward leader, to come down

to his office. There he passed around a box of Antony and Cleopatra cigars. We each took one. Just then two men came in, one a rather humble and ordinary looking man of about fifty, who went up to Tom and, with a most appreciative expression, started to thank him. His ward leader interrupted. "Did it cost you \$100?" The man answered, "No, he gave me three years probation!" He gave the man a friendly pat on the back, and the man went out. He doubtless had a new feeling of independence; he was beholden to no man, but forevermore Honest Tom was his friend. A more human acknowledgment of a service rendered could not be imagined. But the benefactor thought no more about the matter. "I told the judge to give him probation—that he had no money—that he would not handle drink or sell any wet goods again," he said as he dismissed the matter.

In personal conversation or in talking to a small group, Honest Tom is as alive as a character in Rabelais, but on a platform, before 200 or 500 people, part of his magic is lost in thin air. The distances are too great. One night last summer, I was one of a hundred and fifty on the lawn in front of the U. V. W. Ward Club. Several ward leaders made rather effective speeches. When Honest Tom stood in the spotlight he smiled, and everyone cheered. He told the people that he couldn't say much there. "But I got a nice farm on the other side of the county line. After this primary I want all of my friends to come out there and have a drink of rum." The applause was immediate. Later in the campaign he spoke before 600 in a neighboring ward. The night was sweltering hot, as Philadelphia nights in September are likely to be. Again McIntyre made the briefest of speeches. "I think we got awful nerve. We got an awful gall to keep you people here in this hot building. Anyone here for any time at all knows who I am and where I stand. I guess my two minutes are up." Again there was great applause, not because of the words that had been said, but because this man was the man they knew and loved.

Honest Tom's innate spirit is as blithe today in 1938 as it was when his party was the only party in Philadelphia. But the *elan vital* has gone from his people, or they have become more restive under Republican leadership in general and the Councilman McIntyre brand in particular. The depression, the great destroyer of jobs, traditions, wealth and personalities, had squarely settled on the voters and their families in the 56th Ward, and they knew it. They, like the man with the shoe that hurt his

foot, knew something had to be done. They did not know any solution for their ills or the ills of the economic system under which they lived, but thousands who had never voted Democratic before did so in 1932 to 1937. Honest Tom lost his ward in these years because his people were suffering, and he could not make it up to them. Some were impelled positively toward Roosevelt and his work-relief program, and others were merely bent on voting against the party in power. I do not believe that Councilman McIntyre could have changed had he wanted to. He, like City Hall, is built according to a certain rigid plan. He may expire, but he cannot change. His people, however, could not very well keep from changing.

The last time that I saw him we were talking in a wide corridor of City Hall. A messenger came up and said, "Councilman, Judge Stern wants you to come down to his office."

As we said good-bye, I noticed again how good he was to look at. His complexion was still ruddy, and even though his teeth were not so good, one rarely noticed that; they merely indicated that he was human and seventy-six.

As he started down the corridor for Judge Stern's office, I thought how long ago it was since he had begun his strenuous life in dead earnest—before he was eighteen! For more than fifty years he has been on the winning side in politics; now it must seem hard to face a series of defeats. One hundred victories in the past cannot add up to a sum as impressive as one defeat in the present. Nor only was his candidate for mayor defeated in the primary, but the winning Republican candidate in November failed to carry the 56th. Today in City Hall the Republicans say that this ward has turned sour; Honest Tom says that his people have no jobs; he thought he saw the handwriting on the wall and was not a candidate for re-election to council. Had he been, he would have won his eighth term, for Philadelphia went Republican in 1935. The Great Depression has liquidated personalities as well as fortunes. (Herbert Hoover is another Republican who has been returned to private life by this inexorable force). However, Honest Tom's skin is thick; his heart is stout. He may be beaten today, but he will not give up. Only Death can remove men of his breed from politics.