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Nellie Bly And Thomas C. Platt

*The Big Republican "Boss" Chats About Himself,
of Politics and of Dr. Parkhurst His Pastor*

He Declares He Is Only An Ordinary Republican

*Believes in Woman Suffrage, Ambitious to See the Republicans Restored to Power
and Wished Office Seekers Would Give Him a Rest*

Platt: meaning perseverance, pluck, persistence and power. A politician and a leader. Feared by his enemies, respected by his associates, loved by his intimates and the wonder of the State of New York.

I never wanted to see a man so much and so little. I had the curiosity that all people have to see this man who is so talked about, and yet he was to my mind a terrifying bug-a-boo.

I pictured him as stem and cruel, seated upon a throne, from which he dealt favors to the laboring office-seeker.

I confess I trembled as he approached, expecting to be crushed by the first word, but as I glanced frighteningly into his face I saw his eyes were soft and gentle, and that in the various changes of an eventful life his mouth had not forgotten how to smile.

I can judge a man by his smile. I never saw a wicked man or a cruel one whose bad qualities did not show in his smile. Nor have I seen a good man whose smile did not tell prettier things about him than did ever a man's tombstone.

Naturally my terror vanished, and I pleaded my case so well that Mr. Platt, who is tired to death because he can't pick up a newspaper without seeing something about himself, consented to my interviewing him.

Platt and the Cartoon

"I saw a little cartoon of myself the other day," was his first remark, "and beneath was a single line. 'Too much Platt.' That is just my idea, and I wish the newspapers would let me rest for a while."

"If you were not interesting and the public was not interested in you," I replied frankly, "the newspapers would not bother about you."

"Still, I don't know what is left to say," he urged, "unless you repeat what Dr. Parkhurst said, that I am just like Croker."

"Did you ever meet Dr. Parkhurst?" I asked.

“No,” he answered, and then added slowly, “but I have been a member of his congregation for three years.”

“Why did you attend his church?” I asked.

“Mrs. Platt and I are Presbyterians,” he explained. “I suppose I went because Dr. Parkhurst is brilliant and – (slowly) inclined to be a little sensational.”

“My father was a New England Presbyterian,” Mr. Platt continued. “He was a church deacon, and his home was a hotel for every Bible and treat peddler, missionary or minister that came to our town. He was so strict that he never allowed any cooking to be done on Sunday. He always ate cold food on that day.”

As a Church-Goer

“Did he compel you to go to church?”

“Did he? I had to go to church four times every Sunday. I went to Sunday school early in the morning. After that to service; to conference, I believe it was called, in the afternoon and to service again in the evening. I had such a surfeit of church-going in my youth that if it could be averaged up, or spread out, it would do for all my life.”

Mr. Platt’s father was a lawyer, but he intended that his son should be a minister. The father’s religious fervour and severity frustrated his own wishes; the son disliked the profession.

Still I could not help thinking what a great minister had been lost in Thomas C. Platt. He has all the qualifications which would have made him powerful; his congregation would have been unlimited and he would never have had a backslider.

But fate ordained it otherwise. He was sent to Yale, and was in the famous class of ‘53’, which furnished so many brilliant men to the world, among whom were Stedman, the poet; Andrew D. White, ex-president of Cornell College; and George Shiras, Jr., justice of the United States Supreme Court.

His Start In Life

After he left college he was a bookkeeper, first in a grocery store and afterwards in a bank in Ohio. Then he became a lumber dealer, and since then everybody knows that he has been a United States senator, and has grown from a comparatively unknown man into the powerful leader of the Republican party.

Of course Mr. Platt works. He is in no wise like the political bosses of whom we have been wont to hear so much, who labor not, neither do they spin, but who build mansions on Fifth Avenue and accumulate millions.

Mr. Platt’s home is at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. He has a very pleasant suite of rooms on the fourth floor, but they are by no means luxurious. They are on the corner of Twenty-fourth Street and overlook Madison Square Park, and the intersection of Broadway and Fifth avenue.

The rooms are very modestly furnished. The regular suite of furniture, consisting of two sofas, straight chairs and a couple of armchairs, furnish the drawing-room. Two small desks, a bookcase and an inlaid table are the extra pieces of furniture. The walls are yellow in color, and four paintings, one a portrait of Mrs. Platt, adorn them.

An open grate, with coal fire—the most perfect I have ever seen—makes cheerful what might easily be a cheerless room, judged from the modern point of view. Mr. and Mrs. Platt abominate the useless litter that crowds the modern drawing-room.

An Early Riser

Mr. Platt leads a most regular life. Every morning he is up at 6.30. At 7.30 he never fails to appear in the dining-room, having his bath and dressing in the mean time.

He breakfasts alone, as Mrs. Platt does not rise so early.

Ask any boy around the hotel about Mr. Platt's hours and he will tell you that every morning between 8 and ten minutes after, Mr. Platt leaves the hotel by the Twenty-third Street entrance.

He walks part way down to his office, which is near the foot of Broadway. He always reaches the office by 9, and there he remains until 4.30. That is, he works until that hour, but his business necessitates his going out to see different people, often several times during the day.

After 4.30 he starts uptown. If the weather is not too disagreeable he often walks part of the way, and invariably goes to his hotel. At 6.30 he and Mrs. Platt dine in the public dining-room of the hotel. They have a table of their own, but they have so many friends that they are seldom at it alone.

Mr. Platt is a moderate eater. Ten years ago he nearly died of hemorrhage of the stomach, after which he lived for six months on nothing but peptonised milk. Since then he has had to be most careful of his eating.

A Domestic Man

It is rather a contradiction to say that a man who lives in a hotel is a great home man, but such is the fact with Mr. Platt. He likes best to spend his evenings quietly in his rooms. But he gets very little quietness. His doorbell is constantly going, and every evening some statesman or other calls upon him.

For amusement he has little besides theatres. He and Mrs. Platt go to the theatre a great deal, and enjoy any kind of a play so long as it is well performed.

Naturally, he reads all the newspapers. This does not leave him much time for other reading, but he is fond of novels.

"Mrs. Platt saves me from wading through a lot of trash," he said with a laugh, "by reading all the new novels first and telling me whether they are worth reading."

As Mr. Platt talked to me he sat in a rocking-chair facing me, and Mrs. Platt sat by the desk playing solitaire, to which she is devoted, and occasionally putting in some clever remark to our conversation.

Says He Is Not Rich

"Everybody says you are a very rich man. Mr. Platt," I observed.

"Oh, Tom! And have you been hiding it from me all these years?" Mrs. Platt exclaimed with assumed reproach.

"That is one of the misfortunes I labor under," he answered me, smiling.

"Why do you say misfortune? If one is considered rich one does not have to pay one's debts." I reply.

"But if they think I'm rich they must think I am niggardly," he said, "No; I am a poor man."

“What was your first ambition when you were a boy?” I inquired.

“To make money,” he replied promptly, “but I never succeeded, so I am no longer ambitious.”

“Have you any particular ambition now?”

“Yes,” he replied earnestly, “My ambition is to see the Republican party restored to power in this country as it is in the state. Then I want to retire from politics.”

“Do you enjoy a good joke?”

“I don’t know anything I enjoy better, except to tell one,” he responded.

“When I hear funny anecdotes,” he continued, “they amuse me so much that I laugh until the tears roll down my cheeks.”

“Who is the funniest man you know?”

“I hardly know.” (Thoughtfully.)

“Mark Twain or Bob Ingersoll.”

As To The Press

“Do you feel at all sensitive about the unkind things that appear against you in the newspapers?”

“Oh, yes,” and his face grew grave. “It would be foolish to say I did not. Unkind things hurt me. I don’t think any one could ever grow indifferent to them. I would rather not get so much newspaper notice.”

“Will you tell me,” I asked timidly, “if you like to be able to give offices?”

“I can’t give offices,” he corrected me. “I can speak for people or recommend them, but I can’t give the office. Still, I am constantly importuned by office-seekers. I suppose I have helped more men to obtain offices and employment than any other man in America.

“I do not exaggerate when I say that today forty people asked me to help them get work. They were not all office-seekers, but men who needed positions. I am always happy to help people in this way when it is in my power. Among those I had today was an old woman who came to ask me if I could not help her son into some kind of employment.”

Mrs. Platt is also bothered by people seeking charity. She says it troubles her so much to be asked for favors which she has no power to grant that she worries for days over it.

“Do you receive many letters from strangers?”

“A great number. And such long ones! I would never have time to read them all if they did not filter through my secretary. He boils all the long ones down for me.”

Favors Woman Suffrage

“Do you believe in woman suffrage?” I asked.

“Oh, yes, indeed,” he replied emphatically. “I think women have as good right to a voice in all matters as men. Mrs. Platt believes so, too. Don’t you?” (to me).

“I don’t know; I have more rights now than I can use,” I answered evasively.

“But you have your own opinions,” he urged. “And don’t you think you are more fitted to vote than many men who have the right?”

“I don’t doubt that,” I answered.

Thereupon we entered upon a little argument, which ended by my asking Mr. Platt if he had ever been threatened by cranks.

“Never, except during the World’s Fair. Then I used to get as many as fifteen letters a day, always unsigned and apparently from very ignorant people, containing threats, but I was not afraid and was never offered any bodily harm.”

“Are you fond of pets?” I asked.

“Very fond of them,” he said, with warmth. “When we had a country place we had fourteen cats, and every one of them was trained. Mrs. Platt is very successful in training cats. We had seven dogs also. I love birds, too. We used to have the most accomplished birds. We had an oriole once that could do everything but talk. It lived to be eighteen years old.”

“Will you take an active interest in the legislation of this winter at Albany?” I asked, approaching politics suddenly.

Mr. Platt smiled.

A Word About Politics.

“It’s absurd to ask, because they accuse me of dominating the legislature. Might as well ask, ‘Would a duck swim?’ ”

“What proportion of the municipal office-holders do you think ought to be Republicans?”

“All we can get,” he answered, promptly. “The Republican party always represented great moral ideas, and the election shows conclusively that people think those ideas are safe.”

“I suppose you rejoice over the overthrow of Tammany?” I suggest.

“That goes without saying,” he answered, heartily. “I have been working all my life in that direction.”

Mr. Platt has three sons and three grandchildren of whom he is very fond. One son is a lawyer, a member of the firm of Tracy, Boardman & Platt. His other sons are both general superintendents of the United States Express Company; one is New York and the other in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Platt is very liberal in regard to women’s rights. He believes there are many public offices women can properly fill.

Mr. Platt used to like to travel, but he is too busy to do so now. He works all the time, never taking a holiday. In the summer, when the city becomes unbearable, he goes down to the Oriental Hotel, but he comes to his office with the same regularity he always maintains.

He is not superstitious, and yet he would rather see the new moon over his right than over his left shoulder. He is not a clubman, though he belongs to several, the Lawyers’ and Republican being among the number.

He is charitable in the true sense of the word. He does not believe in giving money, but believes in helping people to help themselves.

What is he like personally?

Well, in the first place, he is sixty-one years old, but does not look it by a good many years. He is 6 feet 10 inches in height, but is quite slender. His thinness does not look like ill health; merely as if he never had time to get fat.

He has a high forehead, crossed by six lines, which indicate an unusual amount of thought. His hair is brown and is turning gray. He wears a pointed beard, cut close, which does not conceal his mouth, a strong, splendid one, and a smile that is at times actually boyish.

He has soft gray-blue eyes that are bright and twinkly with good humor and intelligence. Very handsome eyes they are. They are frequently hidden behind glasses.

He dresses well, but quietly. He is very particular about his dress and is extremely tidy. Usually he wears a frock coat. His only jewelry is a modest seal ring, which he wears upon the third finger of his left hand.

While his taste runs to quietly-colored scarves, he is very particular about them and has an unusually large number, even for the most dressy of men.

Mr. Platt has small hands and feet. He does not seem the least inclined to nervousness and can sit in a chair beautifully. Never fidgets.

He is, as the world knows, an unconquerable fighter. He never forgets a foe and is always true and sincere to his friends. He hates flattery worse than he does a Democrat and has not the faintest kind of "big head." I should judge that he has not a particle of conceit.

He has an amiable disposition, a sunny, happy nature, and a laugh that is positively boyish.

He is never blue, but under all circumstances foresees a silver lining. His superstitions are confined to the moon. Otherwise he does not believe in signs nor does he pay any attention to dreams.

He does not smoke and never drinks, except sometimes he takes a little claret with his dinner. He does not suffer from any ailments and walks with a light, youthful step.

With all the changes life has brought him Mr. Platt has never grown blasé or cynical. He loves life.

The only thing he ever shrank from is the thought of death. He hates it, and will not permit any one to talk upon the subject in his presence.

Mr. Platt patronizes a clipping bureau, which furnishes him with notices of everything that is published about him. But he does not keep a scrap-book. After reading the clippings he throws them into a waste basket, good and bad together.

Why He Attracts

In America when a person has some unknown way of pleasing and attracting people we say he has personal magnetism. But the word does not describe in the fullest sense this delightful charm with which some are blessed. The Mexicans call such people "simpatico," and that is the word to describe Mr. Platt. He is simpatico and his worst enemy could not be with him long without yielding to the charm of his presence.

He attracts people and makes them like him.

This wonderful man's wife is one of the most charming and delightful of women. She is very handsome and has an imposing appearance, being tall and majestically formed, with a youthful face and sparkling blue eyes surmounted by lovely white hair.

Mrs. Platt dresses splendidly. She is devoted to her husband, whom she calls "Tom."

If her husband has charming manners she has even lovelier. Her voice is perfectly fascinating, low, distinct and musical. She speaks fluently and smoothly with the greatest ease, as if the words slipped from her lips as the dew falls from a rose.

Mrs. Platt likes to travel, is fond of reading and playing cards. To all animals she is devoted, but birds, dogs and cats, with cats in the lead, are her favourites.

All the subjects of the day are familiar to Mrs. Platt, and she is very liberal in her views. She believes in suffrage and wants to vote, and still she is decidedly the most womanly woman and the best bred I have met in a long time.

By the way, Mr. Platt's full name is Thomas Collier Platt. He was named for a very intimate friend of his father.

From a political standpoint I cannot discuss him, as I am not in the position to do so with knowledge.

I only know that while his enemies rail against him, that if you come to think of it you can't see their excuse for doing so. He makes no demands upon his party, he asks for no position and he does not make money by giving positions to others.

In other words, what he does he does purely from his love for the Republican party. I should call him a political fanatic, because he is the only hardworking politician I ever saw who did not want to make money out of his party.

"Do you hate to be called a boss?" I asked him at the end of our interview.

"I abhor it," he said emphatically.

"What do you want to be called—a leader?" I continued.

"No!" he replied, earnestly; "I only want to be called a Republican."