# A Snapshot at the President

O. Henry

(It will be remembered that about a month ago there were special rates offered to the public for a round trip to the City of Washington. The price of the ticket being exceedingly low, we secured a loan of twenty dollars from a public-spirited citizen of Austin, by mortgaging our press and cow, with the additional security of our brother’s name and a slight draught on Major Hutchinson for $4,000.

We purchased a round trip ticket, two loaves of Vienna bread, and quite a large piece of cheese, which we handed to a member of our reportorial staff, with instructions to go to Washington, interview President Cleveland, and get a scoop, if possible, on all other Texas papers.

Our reporter came in yesterday morning, via the Manor dirt road, with a large piece of folded cotton bagging tied under each foot.

It seems that he lost his ticket in Washington, and having divided the Vienna bread and cheese with some disappointed office seekers who were coming home by the same route, he arrived home hungry, desiring food, and with quite an appetite.

Although somewhat late, we give his description of his interview with President Cleveland.)

I am chief reporter on the staff of THE ROLLING STONE.

About a month ago the managing editor came into the room where we were both sitting engaged in conversation and said:

“Oh, by the way, go to Washington and interview President Cleveland.”

“All right,” said I. “Take care of yourself.”

Five minutes later I was seated in a palatial drawing-room car bounding up and down quite a good deal on the elastic plush-covered seat.

I shall not linger upon the incidents of the journey. I was given carte blanche to provide myself with every comfort, and to spare no expense that I could meet. For the regalement of my inside the preparations had been lavish. Both Vienna and Germany had been called upon to furnish dainty viands suitable to my palate.

I changed cars and shirts once only on the journey. A stranger wanted me to also change a two-dollar bill, but I haughtily declined.

The scenery along the entire road to Washington is diversified. You find a portion of it on one hand by looking out of the window, and upon turning the gaze upon the other side the eye is surprised and delighted by discovering some more of it.

There were a great many Knights of Pythias on the train. One of them insisted upon my giving him the grip I had with me, but he was unsuccessful.

On arriving in Washington, which city I instantly recognized from reading the history of George, I left the car so hastily that I forgot to fee Mr. Pullman’s representative.

I went immediately to the Capitol.

In a spirit of jeu d’esprit I had had made a globular representation of a “rolling stone.” It was of wood, painted a dark color, and about the size of a small cannon ball. I had attached to it a twisted pendant about three inches long to indicate moss. I had resolved to use this in place of a card, thinking people would readily recognize it as an emblem of my paper.

I had studied the arrangement of the Capitol, and walked directly to Mr. Cleveland’s private office.

I met a servant in the hall, and held up my card to him smilingly.

I saw his hair rise on his head, and he ran like a deer to the door, and, lying down, rolled down the long flight of steps into the yard.

“Ah,” said I to myself, “he is one of our delinquent subscribers.”

A little farther along I met the President’s private secretary, who had been writing a tariff letter and cleaning a duck gun for Mr. Cleveland.

When I showed him the emblem of my paper he sprang out of a high window into a hothouse filled with rare flowers.

This somewhat surprised me.

I examined myself. My hat was on straight, and there was nothing at all alarming about my appearance.

I went into the President’s private office.

He was alone. He was conversing with Tom Ochiltree. Mr. Ochiltree saw my little sphere, and with a loud scream rushed out of the room.

President Cleveland slowly turned his eyes upon me.

He also saw what I had in my hand, and said in a husky voice:

“Wait a moment, please.”

He searched his coat pocket, and presently found a piece of paper on which some words were written.

He laid this on his desk and rose to his feet, raised one hand above him, and said in deep tones:

“I die for Free Trade, my country, and—and—all that sort of thing.”

I saw him jerk a string, and a camera snapped on another table, taking our picture as we stood.

“Don’t die in the House, Mr. President,” I said. “Go over into the Senate Chamber.”

“Peace, murderer!” he said. “Let your bomb do its deadly work.”

“I’m no bum,” I said, with spirit. “I represent THE ROLLING STONE, of Austin, Texas, and this I hold in my hand does the same thing, but, it seems, unsuccessfully.”

The President sank back in his chair greatly relieved.

“I thought you were a dynamiter,” he said. “Let me see; Texas! Texas!” He walked to a large wall map of the United States, and placing his finger thereon at about the location of Idaho, ran it down in a zigzag, doubtful way until he reached Texas.

“Oh, yes, here it is. I have so many things on my mind, I sometimes forget what I should know well.

“Let’s see; Texas? Oh, yes, that’s the State where Ida Wells and a lot of colored people lynched a socialist named Hogg for raising a riot at a camp-meeting. So you are from Texas. I know a man from Texas named Dave Culberson. How is Dave and his family? Has Dave got any children?”

“He has a boy in Austin,” I said, “working around the Capitol.”

“Who is President of Texas now?”

“I don’t exactly—”

“Oh, excuse me. I forgot again. I thought I heard some talk of its having been made a Republic again.”

“Now, Mr. Cleveland,” I said, “you answer some of my questions.”

A curious film came over the President’s eyes. He sat stiffly in his chair like an automaton.

“Proceed,” he said.

“What do you think of the political future of this country?”

“I will state that political exigencies demand emergentistical promptitude, and while the United States is indissoluble in conception and invisible in intent, treason and internecine disagreement have ruptured the consanguinity of patriotism, and—”

“One moment, Mr. President,” I interrupted; “would you mind changing that cylinder? I could have gotten all that from the American Press Association if I had wanted plate matter. Do you wear flannels? What is your favorite poet, brand of catsup, bird, flower, and what are you going to do when you are out of a job?”

“Young man,” said Mr. Cleveland, sternly, “you are going a little too far. My private affairs do not concern the public.”

I begged his pardon, and he recovered his good humor in a moment.

“You Texans have a great representative in Senator Mills,” he said. “I think the greatest two speeches I ever heard were his address before the Senate advocating the removal of the tariff on salt and increasing it on chloride of sodium.”

“Tom Ochiltree is also from our State,” I said.

“Oh, no, he isn’t. You must be mistaken,” replied Mr. Cleveland, “for he says he is. I really must go down to Texas some time, and see the State. I want to go up into the Panhandle and see if it is really shaped like it is on the map.”

“Well, I must be going,” said I.

“When you get back to Texas,” said the President, rising, “you must write to me. Your visit has awakened in me quite an interest in your State which I fear I have not given the attention it deserves. There are many historical and otherwise interesting places that you have revived in my recollection—the Alamo, where Davy Jones fell; Goliad, Sam Houston’s surrender to Montezuma, the petrified boom found near Austin, five-cent cotton and the Siamese Democratic platform born in Dallas. I should so much like to see the gals in Galveston, and go to the wake in Waco. I am glad I met you. Turn to the left as you enter the hall and keep straight on out.” I made a low bow to signify that the interview was at an end, and withdrew immiediately. I had no difficulty in leaving the building as soon as I was outside.

I hurried downtown in order to obtain refreshments at some place where viands had been placed upon the free list.

I shall not describe my journey back to Austin. I lost my return ticket somewhere in the White House, and was forced to return home in a manner not especially beneficial to my shoes. Everybody was well in Washington when I left, and all send their love.