

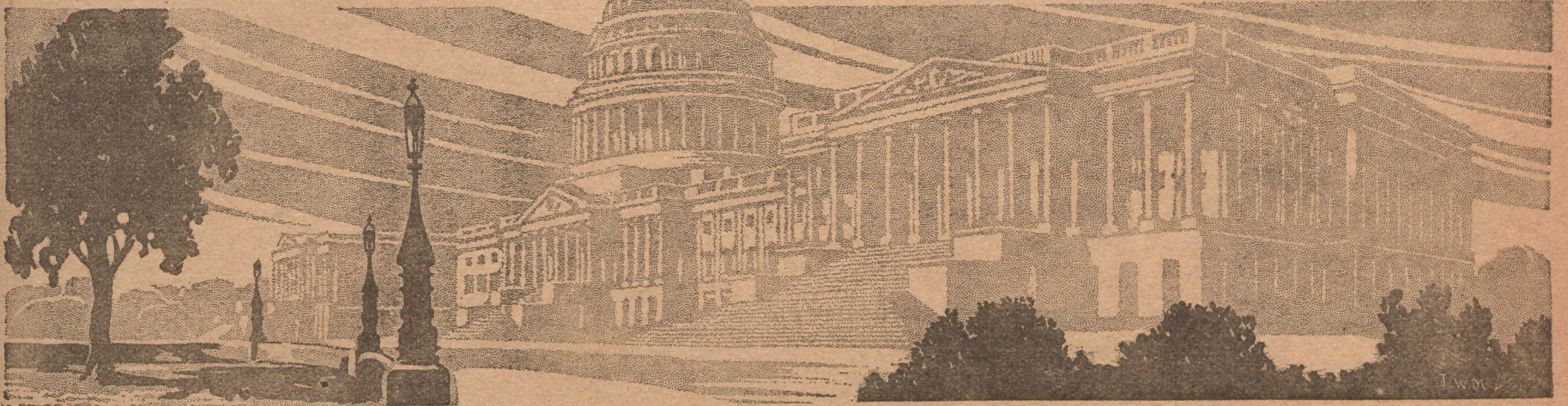
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CHAMP CLARK'S BIBLE CLASS



Washington, Feb. 22, 1917.

ABOUT the time this reaches the farthest out subscriber President Wilson will be king of the United States for about five hours. Both Houses of Congress will meet the President in front of the Capitol among a vast concourse of spectators on the preferred-list amphitheatre; and tens of thousands more on the campus below reaching out towards Colour-Town and the Potomac. The 235 senators will be arrayed in broadcloth and fine linen; the congressmen will be togged in Prince Alberts and morning coats and their wives from 48 states in the Union will shine forth like the flower-beds in the parks to see the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court swear in the President.

For that one day every four years Congress is a glorifying Magnificat; as pompous as any body of legislators in the world, a perfect pageant and a page from history that dates back to George Washington. Those 700 senators and representatives from the land of cotton and gold-bugs, wheat and pine trees, will forget that they ever fought with beasts at Ephesus on the floor of either House.

But—that's not Champ Clark's Bible Class, which is very likely the most interesting body of legislators in North America, the Parliament of Canada not excepted. Anybody who knows what our Parliament is, pretty well knows what Congress is not. There are senators and representatives. Cabinet? Oh yes, but it has no seats in the House. The Cabinet has its offices in the great administration buildings and the White House miles from the Capitol. They may have a war sprung on Germany before either House of Congress knows it except through the newspapers. Of course the President and the Cabinet can't declare war. Congress in both Houses assembled does that; technically at least. But if the Committee on Foreign Affairs from the Senate have advised the President enough or been advised enough by him, as the case may be, why the President marches to the chair of the Speaker in Congress and asks for authority to declare war, which means usually taking it first and then asking for it.

I suppose that's in form something like our Governor-General, who belongs to neither party or both, would do if Canada had the power to declare war as a sovereign state. But whenever we try to make a parallel between Parliament and Congress the comparison falls down because the democracy founded by Washington first in Philadelphia and afterwards in the city bearing his name, has managed to evolve a form of government as different from ours as ours is from the Reichstag.

How the American House of Commons looks and listens any average day to a Canadian in the Gallery

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

We can omit the Cabinet which doesn't have to be elected to Congress and is therefore no part of a responsible government. Also leave out the President who normally appears before Congress about as often as our Governor-General does before Parliament—though Wilson has made a practice of summoning both Houses oftener than any other President in memory. For the present exclude also the Senate which occupies one side of the Capitol with its block of senate offices connected up by underground subway and a trolley service. Consider only the House of Representatives; the 435 men, one for every known 210,000 people in any State.

First, the House itself—disappointing, plain as a barn, low-ceilinged, gallery on the sides and both ends; anterooms leading off from the floor of the House as openly as a parlour runs into a hallway; at the east wall the Speaker's chair under a small-sized Stars and Stripes—draped; below that the clerks; desks for the congressional reporters; above the Speaker the press gallery occupied by newspapermen from most of the capitals in the world; out beyond the Speaker's enclosure and the clerks' quarters an open arena with two small lecterns, on one of which any member who wishes may place his notes while he prances up and down the area from Democrat side to Republican and back again. All the seats of representatives are arranged in blocks and aisles radiating from the Speaker, exactly as do the streets of Washington from the Capitol. An aisle fair down the middle separates the sheep from the goats. Republicans, however, always on the left of the Speaker, Democrats on the right; different from our Parliament, where the Government desks are always to the right. There are no desks for congressmen as we have for our M.P.'s. There used to be. Congressmen used to write letters to their constituents from their seats in the House and shoot them to the page boys, or read newspapers as our members do when they don't want to hear a debate. But somebody discovered that congressmen are paid \$7,500 for a few months every year to do their office business in office hours, which are before Congress assembles at or about noon. So the desks were taken out. No congressman has any particular seat to himself—except Republican leader Mann, who usually sits on the end of one of the two large tables

just behind the rail in front of the seats. The seats are all on the level. So is Congress—supposed to be. Members stroll in and out without bowing to the Speaker. They sit down wherever they find anybody else worth being next to. Or they may decide to stand around in the space in front of the Speaker. In fact the whole House, if it wants to,

may stand up until the Speaker whacks the desk with the mallet and shouts, "The House will be in Order!"

Looked at from the members' gallery Congress resembles the wheat pit in Chicago. It isn't often as noisy. It may not be making or losing as much money. Just now the Democrats are the bulls and the Republicans the bears. When Uncle Joe Cannon was in the Chair it was the other way on. No congressman ever wears a hat in the House. Hence you are able to observe the percentage of bald heads, which is quite large. From noon until five or six the House continually sits. Members who have not been too busy in their offices to take lunch before the Roll Call break away any time up till 3 o'clock to have a bite in the restaurant below. They are always near by in case of a call for ayes and nos. If any green Congressman from 'way out west doesn't know what three or five bells mean he can ask the black waiter—who may in a pinch also tell him how he ought to vote whether he understands the question or not. The same gongs ring in the corridors of the offices away out across the grounds; in each corridor of the three floors a separate gong that fetches the members as horses to a fire, and if they don't know what it's all about they phone the party cloak room to make sure. Each member is given an office, just like every other one; all furnished and equipped. Each member gets an allowance for secretary, etc. Some congressman who has barrels of money round home may keep a staff of clerks. And in this huge office building of 400 or 500 rooms there is a heap of work done every forenoon between breakfast time in the hotels and the apartment flats until 11.30 or 12.00 a.m.

WHEN the House is assembled talk is the sole and only business. And Congress is the greatest talking-machine ever uninvented by Edison. It is a convention. Every time you go it has that kind of how-are-you-this-morning? atmosphere. Very few of the congressmen wear morning coats for one thing. They dress about as informally as many of them talk. Of course there are some nabobs. Even the pages are unliveried; just boys, lounging most of the time on the back benches, with little to do.

I have said before that Congress is an orchestra.