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# THE SILENT PARLIAMENT.

By ROBERT BARR.

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**SYNOPSIS OF INSTALMENTS I. to V.**  
—The reader is introduced to a travelling lecturer, Richard Stanford, who is sitting on the steps of his van smoking. He is a man about twenty five years of age, with firm mouth and stubborn jaw. To him comes a horseman—the son of the owner of the surrounding land—who peremptorily orders him to move on, which after a friendly conversation, he does. He stops again in a quiet hamlet, and lectures to the villagers. A beautiful lady reclining in a boat on the edge of a lake, is assailed by a rough tramp who, in pursuit of money, is about to carry out his threats of violence, when Stanford draws to the spot by the lady's cries for help, and sends the tramp off. An interesting conversation ensues, which is, however, terminated by the tramp who sends Stanford a blow which sends him into the water. He is rescued by some of Mrs Greenhow's men, and carried to the Hall, where the doctor attends him. Of retaining consciousness he finds the lady of the adventure by his side, and before he goes holds a discussion with his hosts on the subject of his life work. Although he hardly convinces her of the feasibility of his scheme of reformation, she is so impressed by his own genuineness that she offers £100,000 to finance the movement.

## CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

Alice Greenhow seemed pleased when Stanford mentioned that he was thinking of her, but she arched her eye-brows while he was speaking.

"It is not pleasant to lose money," she said. "But there are worse things in the world than that."

"What, for instance?"  
"Well, to lose faith. I have met so few people who have faith in anything, that it is refreshing to converse with a cause. Now, the money question being settled, tell me what you are going to do?"

"I shall go immediately back to London and rent an office, which will be my headquarters."

"Do you not, then, intend to work with the Land Nationalisation Society?"

"No. They are doing their work, and doing it very well, but as you said before, I should have too many persons to please, and I don't believe in committees and directors. I want to go my own way in this matter. Whatever is to be done can be done by one strong man."

"And you think you are the strong man?" she asked.

"I am sure of it," answered Stanford confidently.

Alice Greenhow laughed.

"You do not lack self esteem."  
The young man looked at her with surprise in his eyes.

"Oh, it is not self esteem at all, it is belief and faith in my cause."

"Well, I don't believe in the success of anything where there is no faith; but now that I am to be your company, I hope you will tell me something more of your plans. I have, as you see, a great appetite for detail. I don't seem to have brain enough to comprehend things in the mass; I like people to come down to particulars. You are going to have a number of men under your direction, and it will be impossible for you to see, personally, whether each one is attending to his duty. You will, therefore, have to trust these men, so how do you propose to go about the choosing of them?"

"There is one condition," said Stanford, "that I shall make in all cases. Every man of them must possess a bicycle, and know how to ride it."

"A bicycle! Good gracious! What has that to do with Land Nationalisation?"

Stanford rubbed his chin medita-

tively, and wrinkled his brow as if in deep thought. At last he said:

"A great deal. In the first place, we must save money, and so get over the ground quickly and inexpensively. A cyclist sees more of the land than anyone else. It is a healthy exercise which brings a man into the open air, and that is good for him; besides, I am going to make a bid for the bicycle vote, which is becoming an important element in this country."

"Very well, having secured your cyclists, how are you going to assure yourself that they won't bicycle about the country for pleasure?"

"I will select a number of young men with bicycles, and then apponment to each a certain section of the country that I know pretty well myself. I shall give each candidate some of our pamphlets and ask him to study the question of Land Nationalisation; then I will ask him to bicycle down to his district and find out all he can from the people regarding the great question. I shall ask him to write out his report, to take his time about it, and to state exactly the time he has taken. Now this will give him an excellent opportunity, as you say, for bicycling about the country and enjoying himself, but if he does that, I shall know it, when I read his report. If his report is unsatisfactory, then I will pay him what I agreed to, and dismiss him, but if satisfactory, then he is the man I want. You see, we must begin work at once. The present Government has kept its place only by a very precarious majority, and there is sure to be a dissolution soon. I want to have a candidate in every constituency where we have a chance of winning, so I hope the present Government may be able to hold its place for some time longer, until I get my men into training."

"A very good plan," said Mrs Greenhow. "And how many members do you expect to get elected to the new Parliament?"

"Fifty or sixty."

"I think you are over sanguine, but we shall see when the votes are in. Supposing, however, you have your fifty or sixty men in Parliament, what do you propose to do with them? Are you going to try to get what you wish from one party or the other?"

"Oh, no. We can get nothing of what we want from either of the old parties."

"And are your members to sit there and do nothing during the next Parliament?"

"Not precisely that. I shall have them look out for the interests of cyclists all over the country."

"And will your bicycle brigade vote with the Conservative party or the Liberals?"

"I think I shall divide them equally between the two. I will keep the new Parliament in power long enough to find out what mistakes they have made, and to give us time to organise ourselves still more thoroughly in the different constituencies. Then, when we are ready, our bicycle brigade will vote solidly with the Opposition and force on another election."

"Dear me! How interesting! I am afraid that neither Liberals nor Conservatives will like that and that they will band against you as against a common danger."

"Ah, but that is just what they never will do. We shall be silent members. I shall not allow any one of my brigade to speak on any subject whatever, unless it be on some question relating to the bicycle. Even when we come into power in the House we will have no speeches. We shall sit there silently and record our votes."

"I'm afraid you'll find a difficulty in that," said Mrs Greenhow.

"Why?"

"You won't be allowed to sit and record your votes, you know. You'll have to move to the voting lobby," and she laughed at the seriousness of the young man, who never seemed to be able to understand a joke. He looked at her with reproachful astonishment whenever she said anything flippant.

"Well," he said at last, rising and holding out his hand, "I must return to London at once. I will leave my pony at the village inn and send a man down to take up the van."

"Very good," responded Mrs Greenhow, also rising. "You are going to inaugurate a most interesting era in British politics. I don't believe you will succeed, but it will all be very exciting while it is going on. I will pay into any bank you name to your credit twenty thousand pounds to begin with. As soon as that shows signs of exhaustion let me know and I will deposit another twenty thousand. When the hundred thousand is gone we will then take stock—I think that is the correct commercial term—and see where our Land Nationalisation scheme stands. Good-bye."

Richard Stanford lost no time in getting to work. He did not choose an office near the Houses of Parliament, as is generally done by political associations. He secured two rooms in an old building on Essex-street, where quietness reigned there being no thoroughfare except for foot passengers from the Strand to the Embankment. He engaged a confidential clerk who could write shorthand and manipulate the typewriter. Stanford felt that there was no time to be lost. The Government was tottering, and it was only a question of a little time until it fell.

One morning there appeared in most of the papers the following advertisement:—"Wanted a young man between the ages of twenty-one and thirty. Must have a sound Board School education, and own and be able to ride a bicycle. To work outside of London. Wages thirty shillings a week. Apply in first instance, enclosing copies of testimonials, to B. Head, 405, Essex-street, Strand."

The number of answers to this advertisement showed how many young men were out of employment. Stanford made appointments with about twenty a day, and sent as many as ten each day out into the districts of the country where they were to gather the information he desired. In two weeks' time he had a hundred young

men selected. He had some thought at first of binding them together in a sort of secret association, with an oath to be sworn and a solemn agreement to be signed, but he finally contented himself with the agreement. This was a cast iron contract and bound the signer hand and foot, making him virtually the slave of Stanford. Stanford knew that if any newspaper obtained possession of this document there would be likely to be sarcastic comments upon it; but he took the chance of that, although he charged each of the young men to keep absolute secrecy regarding all their operations, telling them their salary of thirty shillings a week depended largely upon their silence.

It is one of the peculiarities of commercial England that clerks understand the necessity of keeping a shut mouth and a silent tongue, so Stanford felt he had reasonable security that his candidates would gossip as little as possible.

Selecting constituencies for each of his candidates, Stanford despatched his young men, each on his bicycle, to his own particular division. He felt confident that if the dissolution did not take place immediately, he would be almost certain to hold the balance of power in the new Parliament. Fortune favoured him in this, and he had his own time for preparing his candidates and for reviewing their reports. Each member of his bicycling brigade sent him in glowing reports of the work, and although Stanford took off some discount from them he felt justifiably encouraged, and wrote to Mrs Greenhow that the outlook was distinctly favourable.

One morning as he opened his paper he saw the startling headline, "Defeat of the Government." Scarcely waiting to read the account of the adverse vote he hurried into Essex-street and put himself into instant communication with his candidates. Everything had turned out exactly as he wished, and he regretted now that he had not two or three hundred contestants in the field.

The defeated Government did not resign, but resolved at once to appeal to the country, and soon the air was full of the noise of combat. Stanford received daily reports from his bicycle brigade, and everything was going as well as could be expected. In each constituency where his men were placed there was a Liberal and a Conservative candidate, and in some instances a labourer or a socialist stood, adding to the uncertainty and still further dividing the vote.

Stanford himself did not attempt to enter Parliament on this occasion. He contented himself with directing operations from the outside. He knew that at any moment when it became necessary for him to enter the House he could easily get one of his candidates to apply for the Chiltern Hundreds, and so allow the leader to take his place.

The general election was now held on one day, and that day Saturday, instead of being spread over many weeks, as was formerly the case. On the following Monday the result of the vote was known. It had been a very close election and the Conservative Government came into power with a majority variously stated to be from ten to fifteen. In the election returns Stanford looked in vain for the names of his lieutenants. Not a single one of them had been elected to Parliament.

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