

## Rayburn

RAYBURN. Rayburn who hated the railroads, whose freight charges fleeced the farmer, and the banks, whose interest charges fleeced the farmer, and the utility companies, which refused to extend their power lines into the countryside, and thus condemned the farmer to darkness. Rayburn who hated the "trusts" and the "interests"—Rayburn who hated the rich and all their devices. Rayburn who hated the Republican Party, which he regarded as one of those devices—hated it for currency policies that, he said, "make the rich richer and the poor poorer"; hated it for the tariff ("the robber tariff, the most indefensible system that the world has ever known," he called it; because the Republican Party "fooled . . . the farmer into" supporting the tariff, he said, the rich "fatten their already swollen purses with more ill-gotten gains wrung from the horny hands of the toiling masses"); and hated it for Reconstruction, too: the son of a Confederate cavalryman who "never stopped hating the Yankees," Rayburn, a friend once said, "will not in his long lifetime forget Appomattox"; for years after he came to Congress, the walls of his office bore many pictures, but all were of one man—Robert E. Lee; in 1928, when his district was turning to the Republican Hoover over Al Smith, and he was advised to turn with it or risk losing his own congressional seat, he growled: "As long as I honor the memory of the Confederate dead, and revere the gallant devotion of my Confederate father to the Southland, I will never vote for electors of a party which sent the carpetbagger and the scalawag to the prostrate South with saber and sword." Rayburn who hated the railroads, and the banks, and the Republicans because he never forgot who he was, or where he came from.

Forgetting would have been difficult. He was born, on January 6, 1882, on a forty-acre farm in Tennessee whose worn-out soil could not support so many children—he was the eighth of eleven—and in 1887, the Rayburns moved to a forty-acre farm in Texas, in Fannin County, northeast of Dallas. (The thousand-mile train trip to Texas provided him with one of his most enduring memories; from the train windows, he was to recall, he saw "the

people . . . on their trek west, all their earthly belongings heaped on covered wagons, men in plainsmen's outfits with wide-brimmed hats and guns on their shoulders, leading the oxen.") The first year in Texas almost finished the Rayburns: floods covered the fields, and boll weevils feasted on the cotton that survived—and out of the forty acres, only two-and-a-half bales. Although Fannin County soil was deep, rich loam, and the rainfall plentiful, forty acres was inadequate for a large family when the interest on the mortgage was 10 percent and cotton was selling for nine cents a pound. The Rayburns managed to hold the farm year after year only because the whole family, even five-year-old Sam, worked in the fields.

Except for four months each year in a one-room, one-teacher schoolhouse, Sam Rayburn spent his boyhood in the cotton rows. In the Spring, he plowed—plowed while he was still so small that his weight couldn't keep the plow point in the ground and he had to strain to hold it down as the mules yanked it forward. In the Summer, under the searing Texas sun, he worked with a hoe, chopping at the plants to thin them out, going to bed at night with an aching back, knowing that at daybreak he would be out with the hoe again. And in September, he would be in the rows on his knees—crawling down the rows, dragging behind him a long sack, while he picked the cotton—in the rows day after day, knees raw and bleeding from the crawling, hands raw and bleeding from the picking, back aching even worse than from the chopping. "I plowed and hoed from sun till sun," Sam Rayburn was to recall. "If some of our city friends who talk about the beauty and romance of farm life would go out and bend their backs over a cotton row for ten or twelve hours per day and grip the plow handles that long, they would see how fast this romance they have read in the novels would leave, and how surely it would come down to a humdrum life of work and toil." Work and toil—and little to show for it, thanks to the government's tariff and currency policies. The injustice that farmers felt was embodied in these policies—and that made northeast Texas a stronghold of the People's Party—was exemplified by the inclusion of steerhides on the "free" (unprotected by tariff) list, which meant that farmers received little for their steerhides, and the inclusion of the shoes manufactured from steerhides on the protected list, which forced farmers to pay high prices for shoes. Cotton prices were kept low, too. When, after a year's work in the fields by the entire family, its cotton went to the gin, the Rayburns might have left, after paying the furnishing merchant and the mortgage holder and the railroad's cruelly high freighting charges, *in a good year*, as much as twenty-five dollars to show for the year's labor.

And it wasn't the work and toil—or the poverty—from which he suffered most. Except when telling stories about the war (the most prominent object in the living room was a framed picture of General Lee), his father, the bearded Confederate veteran, was a gentle but very silent man, and his mother ("Hard Boss," the family called her because of her rigidity), who

loved and was devoted to her children, was careful to conceal her affection; to Sam's parents, a biographer says, "any show of sentiment toward young children was a sign of weakness." All through his boyhood, Sam's life was the cotton fields—the fields and little else. If, Sunday, chores were light, they were supposed to be replaced not by play but by piety. "Many a time when I was a child and lived way out in the country," Sam Rayburn later recalled, "I'd sit on the fence and wish to God that somebody would ride by on a horse or drive by in a buggy—just anybody to relieve my loneliness." Terrible as were the toil and the poverty, the loneliness was worse. Poverty, he was to say, only "tries men's souls"; it is loneliness that "breaks the heart. Loneliness consumes people."

IN THE BLEAKNESS and boredom of Sam Rayburn's childhood, there stood out a single vivid day.

Fannin County's Congressman was Joseph Weldon Bailey, who, as Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, "dominated the Democratic minority like an overseer and conducted himself like a conqueror," and was expected, if the Democrats won control of Congress, to become Speaker. Bailey was one of the greatest of the great Populist orators. When he spoke in the House, it was said, "his tones lingered in the chamber like the echo of chimes in a cathedral." In 1894, when Sam Rayburn was twelve, Bailey spoke in Bonham, the county seat. And Sam Rayburn heard him.

He was to remember, all his life, every detail of that day: how it was raining so heavily that his mule took hours to cover the eleven miles to town; how he felt when he arrived at the covered tent "tabernacle" of the Bonham Evangelical Church, where Bailey was speaking. "I didn't go into that tabernacle. I'd never been to Bonham since we bought the farm, and I was scared of all the rich townfolks in their store-bought clothes. But I found a flap in the canvas, and I stuck there like glue while old Joe Bailey made his speech." And most vividly of all, he remembered Joe Bailey. "He went on for two solid hours, and I scarcely drew a breath the whole time. I can still feel the water dripping down my neck. I slipped around to the entrance again when he was through, saw him come out, and ran after him five or six blocks until he got on a streetcar. Then I went home, wondering whether I'd ever be as big a man as Joe Bailey."

Passing the barn the next morning, his brothers heard a voice inside. Looking through the door, they saw their little brother standing on a feeding trough, practicing a political speech. From the day he heard Joe Bailey, Sam Rayburn knew what he was going to be. Knew precisely. He told his brothers and sisters, and friends; as one recalls his words, "I'm going to get myself elected to the State Legislature. I am going to spend about three terms there and then I want to be elected Speaker. After that, I am going to run for

Congress and be elected." He would be in the House of Representatives, he said, by the age of thirty. And eventually, he said, he would be its Speaker, too. Sam's ambition became a joke on the Rayburn farm; his brothers and sisters would stand outside the barn and laugh at the speeches being made inside. But the speeches went on. And in 1900, when he was eighteen years old, Sam Rayburn, standing in a field with his father one day, told him he wanted to go to college.

His father said that he had no money to send him. "I'm not asking you to send me, Pa," Sam said. "I'm asking you to let me go." The cavalryman's back was stooped from the fields now; he was old; two of his eight sons had already left the farm; the loss of a third pair of strong hands would be hard to bear. "You have my blessing," he said. On the day Sam left, his clothes rolled up and tied with a rope because he had no suitcase, his father hitched up the buggy and drove him to the railroad station. A silent man, he stood there silently until the train arrived and his son was about to board it. Then he suddenly reached out and pressed some bills into his son's hand. Twenty-five dollars. Sam never forgot that; he talked about that twenty-five dollars for the rest of his life. "God knows how he saved it," he would say. "He never had any extra money. We earned just enough to live. It broke me up, him handing me that twenty-five dollars. I often wondered what he did without, what sacrifice he and my mother made." And he never forgot the four words his father said to him as he climbed aboard the train; he was to tell friends that he had remembered them at every crisis in his life. Clutching his son's hand, his father said: "Sam, be a man!"

Tuition at East Texas Normal College, a handful of buildings on a bleak prairie, was twelve dollars a month; to supplement his parents' gift, he got a job sweeping out a nearby elementary school, and became the college's bellringer, running up to the bell tower every forty-five minutes to signal the end of a class period. Unable even with those jobs to stay in school, he dropped out, and taught for a year in a one-room school to earn money, then returned, to take a heavy load of courses and graduate with his class. (He was so ashamed of his only suit and its frayed elbows that he tried to avoid attending the graduation ceremony.) Then he got another teaching job, this one in Fannin County, held it for two years, and in 1906, at the age of twenty-four, announced for the Legislature.

HE CAMPAIGNED on a little brown cow pony, riding from farm to farm. Unable to make small talk, he discussed farm problems, a short, solid young man with a hairline that was already receding, and earnest brown eyes. At each farm, he asked who lived on the next farm, so that when he got there, he could call them by name. Two incidents in the campaign showed that he had not forgotten his father's four words of advice. A man approached him

one day and said that a ten-dollar contribution to an influential farmer would ensure the votes of the farmer's relatives. "I'm not trying to buy the office," Rayburn replied. "I'm asking the people to give it to me." He and his opponent, Sam Gardner of Honey Grove, became friends and, near the end of the campaign, rode from town to town together in a one-horse buggy; arriving in a town, they would take turns standing in the back of the buggy and speaking. In one town, Gardner became ill and spent three days in bed. Although Gardner appeared to be leading, Rayburn didn't use the three days to campaign; he spent them with Gardner, nursing him. Gardner was to be a friend of Sam Rayburn's all his life.

The votes were cast on a Saturday, but, because the ballot boxes had to be brought in to the county clerk's office in Bonham, and the ballots counted by hand, the results would not be announced until Tuesday. Sam arranged for a friend with a fast horse to bring the news the eleven miles to the Rayburn farm. On Tuesday, he sat with his family in the living room, waiting for the hoofbeats that would announce his destiny. It was victory, by 163 votes.

In Austin, Sam Rayburn didn't forget where he came from. Enlisting in the small band (which included, of course, Sam Ealy Johnson, then in his second term in the Legislature) which fought "The Interests" and talked of "The People," he introduced bills to regulate railroads and banks. Unlike some of that band, he never sold out. Years later, when someone mentioned that Rayburn's father had not left him much of an inheritance, Rayburn quickly corrected him—his father, he said, "gave me my untarnished name." He kept it untarnished. He wouldn't drink at the Driskill, and wouldn't live there; rooming at a cheap boardinghouse below the Capitol, he shared a small room to save his five-dollar-per-day salary for tuition at the University of Texas Law School. After paying his tuition, he was to recall, he had so little money that once, after offering to buy a soda for a Representative named Pharr, he realized that he had only a nickel to his name; "so when we got to the counter, I told Pharr I wasn't feeling so well and would not take anything. He went on and got his drink and I paid for it. . . . I don't know what I'd have done if he had ordered a dime drink." But when, shortly after he had obtained his law degree and joined a law firm, one of his partners handed him the largest check he had ever seen as his share of a monthly retainer from the Santa Fe Railroad, he handed it back—and added that he would never "accept a dollar of the railroad's money." To his partner's request for an explanation, he replied: "I said to him that I was a member of the Legislature, representing the people. . . ." Legislators were routinely presented with free railroad passes; Rayburn returned his, even though, at the time he refused his pass, he was desperately lonely in Austin and unable to return home because he could not afford the fare. (His mother approved. "We often wish for you to be with us," she wrote, "but we would rather wait

a little longer than for you to accept free passes.") It was while he was in Austin, where legislators were bought wholesale, that there was first heard a saying that men would be repeating for fifty years: "No one can buy Sam Rayburn."

He didn't forget where he came from—or where he was going. He discussed his ambitions with his fellow members of the Texas House of Representatives as bluntly as he had done, years before, with his brothers and sisters. He wanted to be Speaker of the House, he said, and he told them quite frankly why: "I've always wanted responsibility because I want the power responsibility brings."

Not only did he know what he wanted, he knew—seemed to know instinctively—how to get it. Like Sam Johnson, he had an instinctive gift for the legislative process, but, unlike Sam Johnson, he was not a romantic or a dreamer. When he helped someone, he insisted on help in return, even when the recipient of his aid was his idol.

Arriving in Austin, Rayburn found his idol on trial there: debate was raging over the threatened legislative investigation of Joseph Weldon Bailey, now a United States Senator accused of selling out to the railroads and to Standard Oil. Rayburn, who throughout his life was to refuse to believe those charges, offered his support to Bailey's legislative lieutenants, pointing out that, as the representative from Bailey's old district, his opinion might carry more weight than that of the average freshman legislator. But in return for his support, he said, he wanted more than might be given the average freshman legislator. He gave his support—and proved, during his first days in the Legislature, a very effective, if quiet, figure in Bailey's defense. And he got what he wanted in return. The backing of Bailey's lieutenants gave him, in his first term in the Legislature, the chairmanship of a key legislative committee.

A committee chairman's power was used to build more power. Legislators who received favors from him were expected to give favors in return. And the favors Rayburn asked for were, like the favors he gave, shrewdly chosen. Hardly had he arrived in the Texas House, it seemed, when he was a power in it, thanks to a gift—a rare gift—for legislative horsetrading.

He had other gifts, too—in particular, a very unusual force of personality.

In part, that force was physical. Sam Rayburn was a short man—five-foot-six-inches—but his body was broad and massive, the chest and shoulders so broad and thick that they bulged through the cheap fabric of his suits. His head, set on a bull neck, was massive, too, and seemed even more massive than it was, for already, in his twenties, he was going almost completely bald, so that the loom of the great bare skull was unsoftened by hair. His wide, heavy face could be pleasant in private, but in public it was expressionless, immobile, grim; so hard were the thin line of the lips and the

set of the wide, jutting jaw that, except for the eyes that smoldered in it, it might have been the face of a stone statue—and it exuded an immense, elemental strength.

That aura was not dispelled by Sam Rayburn's character.

Already men were whispering about his temper. When he lost it, and he lost it often, a deep flush would rise along the bull neck and completely cover the great head, and the lips, so grim, would twist in a snarl, and the voice, so low, would rasp. "In dark moods," one observer was to write, "his profanity was shattering," and as he cursed, he spat—and, as the observer tactfully put it, "If a . . . cuspidor was handy, that was fine. If there wasn't, it was too bad." In a rage, "Mr. Rayburn's face blackened in a terrible scowl and his bald head turned deep red. . . . That was the way he looked in a rage, and few cared to see such a mien turned upon themselves." When he lost control of that temper, he was deaf to reason; not even considerations of career or ambition could stand before it. The most feared figure in Austin was the recently retired Governor, Tom Campbell; the ruthlessness he had exhibited in the Statehouse, rumor had it, had not been tempered since he had become lobbyist for the state's banking interests—and the power of those interests still enabled him to punish opponents. Rayburn, fighting bank-sponsored legislation in his committee, and pushing his own, became an opponent. Campbell planted in cooperative newspapers stories that Rayburn was fighting in committee because he was afraid to fight in the open—articles that Rayburn considered an attack on his personal honor. Friends aware of his temper urged him not to lose it; Campbell, they warned him, had destroyed the careers of other men who had opposed him even indirectly. Rayburn thereupon took the floor of the House with a speech that was not indirect. His own bills, he said, "are in the interest of the people, and I will stand here day by day and vote for them. . . . It matters not to me what Mr. Campbell's views are." Pausing, he raised his great head and stared straight at Campbell, who was sitting in the gallery, not speaking again until everyone in the Chamber was staring at Campbell, too. Then he said: "It matters not to me whether Tom Campbell stands for a measure or against it. Tom Campbell, in my opinion, is the least thing to be considered in legislation." The temper, the aura of immense strength, the legislative cunning, the implacable standards: in Austin, men learned that they couldn't buy Sam Rayburn—and that they couldn't cross him.

Nor was his temper the only striking aspect of Sam Rayburn's character. His colleagues talked not only of his rage but of his rigidity.

His standards were very simple—and not subject to compromise. He talked a lot about "honor" and "loyalty," and he meant what he said. "There are no degrees in honorableness," he would say. "You are or you aren't." Harsh though that rule was, he lived up to it—says one of his fellow legislators: "He had a reputation for honesty and fair dealing. You could always swear by anything Sam told you"—and he insisted that others live up to it,

too. "Once you lied to Rayburn, why, you'd worn out your credentials," an aide says. "You didn't get a second chance." His colleagues learned, however, that if they paid Sam Rayburn what they owed him, they would never be short-changed; his friendship, they learned, was a gift to be cherished. "If he was your friend, he was your friend forever," one man was to say. "He would be with you—*always*. The tougher the going, the more certain you could be that when you looked around, Sam Rayburn would be standing there with you. I never met a man so loyal to a friend."

He used the words "just" and "fair" a lot, and his colleagues learned that he meant those words, too. "Whether or not he liked an issue was actually immaterial," a friend said. "He kept saying he wanted to find out what was *right*—and after a while, you realized: by God, he was trying to do just that."

He would spend "about three terms" in the Legislature, he had told his brothers and sisters so many years before, and then he would be elected Speaker. During his third term, he ran for Speaker. His speech in the well of the House was to the point. "If you have anything for me," he told his colleagues, "give it to me now." It was a personal appeal, and the response was personal. Bailey's weight was behind him, but that was not a decisive factor—not for a candidate supported by none of the state's major power interests. "Sam Rayburn was elected," says one of his colleagues, "because of the simple respect everyone had for him." (For a moment, the iron façade cracked and the emotion beneath it showed—but only for a moment. When the vote was announced, recalls a friend, "Sam jumped up and gave a cotton-patch yell and then sat down real quick—like he was ashamed of himself." There was another brief crack—during his acceptance speech. "Up in Fannin County there is an old man already passed his three score, and by his side there sits an old woman at whose feet I would delight to worship," he said. "For them also I thank you.")

A Speaker's power was used to get more. That power (the Speaker's "rights and duties") had been undefined; when, at his direction, they were defined now—by a committee of his friends—the definition gave the Speaker unprecedented power. He had no reluctance to use it. He himself recalled that "I saw that all my friends got the good appointments and that those who voted against me for Speaker got none." Even supporters could not threaten him; when he turned down their nominee for a clerkship, their spokesman told him, "If you don't appoint her, I'll get up a petition signed by a majority." "I don't give a damn if every member signs your petition," Rayburn replied. "I still won't appoint her." And he knew what he wanted to use his power for: during his single year as Speaker, the Texas House of Representatives passed significant legislation regulating utilities, railroads and banks—including bills whose passage the Populists had been urging, without hope, for years.

A single year: he had, after all, told his brothers and sisters that he

would be in Congress by the age of thirty, and now, in 1912, he was thirty. He appointed a committee to redraw the boundaries of congressional districts, and the committee removed from the Fannin County district the home county of the State Senator who would have been his most formidable opponent. Running for Congress, he evoked his destiny. "When I was a school-boy," he said, "I made up my mind that I was going to run for Congress when I was thirty. . . . I have reached that age, and I am running for Congress. I believe I have lived to be worthy of your support. I believe I will be elected." He displayed a quiet but effective wit: "I will not deny that there are men in the district better qualified than I to go to Congress, but, gentlemen, these men are not in the race." And he was elected.

DECADES LATER, when Sam Rayburn was a legend, one aspect of the legend, fostered by the brief, almost cryptic terseness of his rare speeches, was taciturnity, at least in public. And the reporters who created the legend, who had not known Sam Rayburn when he was a young Congressman, assumed that such taciturnity had always been a Rayburn characteristic.

It hadn't. He had been in Congress less than a month, in fact, when he took the floor. He was aware, he said, of "the long-established custom of this House, which . . . demands that discussions . . . shall be left . . . to the more mature members," but he was going "to break" that custom—to "refuse to be relegated to that lockjawed ostracism." He was refusing, he said, because he represented 200,000 people, and they needed someone to speak for them—and, in his speech, which lasted for almost two hours, he did indeed speak for them, pouring out all the bitterness and resentment that had, a generation before, made the northeast corner of Texas a stronghold of the Texas Alliance and of the People's Party.

The issue was the tariff. The House, newly Democratic, was, under the spur of the newly inaugurated Woodrow Wilson, debating the Underwood Bill, which would begin to reform the tariff laws that Populists hated by, for example, placing shoes as well as steerhides on the free list.

The Republicans "talk about the hard deal the producer is getting in this bill," Rayburn said. The Republican Party, he said, is always "willing and anxious to take that small rich class under its protective wing, but unwilling at all times to heed the great chorus of sad cries ever coming from the large yet poor class, the American consumer." What's wrong, he demanded, with reducing the price of the shoes a man "must buy to protect the feet of his children?" The system that kept that price high was "the most indefensible system the world has ever known." Under it, "the poor man . . . is compelled to pay more than the rich man," and "manufacturers fatten their already swollen purses with more ill-gotten gains wrung from the horny hands of the toiling masses," from the people who "have forever been ground under the heel of taxation with a relentless tread."

He was especially bitter about the Republicans' attempt, then in full stride, to persuade the farmer that tariffs were really in his best interest. The Republicans "talk about the farmer," he said. What did they know about the farmer? "What consideration have they shown him?" They would find that they underestimated the farmer, he said; they would learn, to their shock, that "they are dealing with a thinking and intelligent class." The Democratic Party, "the party of the masses," was in power at last. Its representatives were "men who came from every walk of life, and who were fresh from the people, who knew their hopes and their aspirations, and their wants, and their sufferings." Its President was "clean and matchless" with "the great heart and mind that he could interpret the inarticulate longings of suffering humanity." The Democrats would pass the Underwood Bill, reduce the tariffs, break up the "swollen fortunes," destroy the "trusts," lift the load from the bending backs, the "stooped and weary backs," of the farmers and laboring class.

Decades later, when Sam Rayburn was a legend and reporters constantly quoted his advice to young Congressmen—"To get along, go along"—one aspect of the legend was the assumption that when *he* was a young Congressman, he had "gone along," that he had subordinated his own views to those of his party and its leaders.

He hadn't. As a young Congressman, he had "gone along" with no one—not even with the President, the President of his own party, whom he idolized.

During his second year in the House, he wrote—himself, with no staff assistance—a bill embodying the old People's Party dream of intensified government regulation of railroads, by giving the government authority over the issuance of new securities by the railroads. Happening, by chance, to see the bill, Louis D. Brandeis, then one of President Wilson's advisors, thought it so good that, says Wilson biographer Arthur Link, it was made one of the three measures that formed the centerpiece of the President's campaign against the trusts. Despite the opposition of the senior member of the Texas delegation, the popular and powerful John Nance Garner, Rayburn pushed the bill to passage in the House; in a note hand-delivered to Rayburn, the President said he had watched Rayburn's fight "with admiration and genuine appreciation," and for some months thereafter invited him frequently to the White House. But the heady moment passed. Railroad lobbyists killed the bill in the Senate, and by the following year, Wilson had had second thoughts; Rayburn was told that the President did not want the bill re-introduced. Although he knew that without White House support the cause was lost—as, indeed, it proved to be—Rayburn refused to stop fighting for it; he introduced the bill anyway. This was an embarrassment to the White House; Rayburn was told the President did not want the bill actively pushed. Rayburn actively pushed it. The President sent the message again—via a messenger whose orders he was sure would be obeyed; the leader of

Rayburn's own state delegation, Cactus Jack Garner himself. Rayburn continued pushing. Then Wilson summoned the obstinate freshman to the White House to give him the order face to face. If Wilson received an answer at all, it was a short one; Rayburn was to recall replying in a single sentence: "I'm sorry I can't go along with you, Mr. President." Turning his back on his "clean and matchless" idol, he walked out of the room without another word.

Angered by his recalcitrance, President Wilson threw the weight of the White House behind Rayburn's opponent in the next Democratic primary. Holding his seat nonetheless, Rayburn, on his return to Congress, introduced half a dozen railroad bills against the President's wishes, secured the passage of several, and was eventually to play a crucial role in winning the eight-hour day for railroad workers. Admiring colleagues gave him a nickname: "The Railroad Legislator." And he was active—defiantly and eloquently active, often against the wishes of party leaders—in other areas, including the creation of the Federal Trade Commission.

One aspect of the legend that *was* true was his personal integrity. Men learned in Washington what they had learned in Austin: no one could cross Sam Rayburn—and no one could buy him. Lobbyists could not buy him so much as a meal. Not even the taxpayer could buy him a meal. Spurning the conventional congressional junket, Rayburn would during his forty-eight years in Congress take exactly one overseas trip—a trip to inspect the Panama Canal that he considered necessary because his committee was considering Canal legislation—and on that trip he insisted on paying his own way. He refused not only fees but travel expenses for out-of-town speeches; hosts who, thinking his refusal *pro forma*, attempted to press checks upon him quickly realized they had made a mistake: the face, already so hard, would become harder; Rayburn would say, "I'm not for sale"—and then he would walk away without a backward glance, as he had walked away from a President. His integrity was certified by his bankbook. At his death, at the age of seventy-nine, after decades as one of the most powerful men in the United States, a man courted by railroad companies and oil companies, his savings totaled \$15,000.

Sam Rayburn's blocky figure—pounding along the Capitol corridors with strides that one observer likened to the pumping of a piston—seemed broader now, even more massive, the face beneath the bald skull even more grim and hard. The impression of physical strength was not misleading. Once, two big Congressmen—one was a 230-pound six-footer, Thomas Blanton of Texas, the name of the other has been lost in time—got into a fistfight. Stepping between them, Rayburn pushed them apart. Then, bunching each man's lapels in one hand, he held them apart, his arms rigid. Standing between two men almost a head taller who were thrashing furiously in his grip, he held them, each with one hand, until they had quieted down, as effortlessly as if they had been two crying babies. But it was not his physical

strength that most impressed his colleagues. About his integrity, one said: "Amidst the multitude, he was the incorruptible." About his accomplishments when he was still new on the Hill, another said, introducing him on the floor for a speech in 1916, during his second term in Congress, "He is a member young in years, but old in accomplishment." In a body in which seniority or powerful friends ordinarily determined a member's standing, Sam Rayburn, who possessed neither, was already, solely because of the strength of his personality, a formidable figure.

HE WAS GOING to need this strength.

As a boy, he had vowed that he would become Speaker of the House of Representatives. Now, as he stood each day amidst the milling and confusion of the House floor, there loomed above him, so aloof and alone on the topmost tier of the triple-tiered white marble dais, the single, high-backed Speaker's chair. From the day he arrived in Congress, he wanted to be in that chair, wanted the Speaker's gavel in his hand. He knew how he would wield it—just as he knew for whom: for the People, against the Interests. For years, no Speaker had dominated the House, and the result was confusion and ineffectiveness; it was during his early years in the House that Sam Rayburn, in a private conversation, suddenly burst out: "Someday a man will be elected who'll bring the Speakership into respectability again. He'll be the real leader of the House. He'll be master around here, and everyone will know it." He knew himself to be capable of such mastery: had he not, after all, demonstrated it already, in another Speaker's chair? He felt, moreover, that the high-backed chair and the gavel were his destiny; had not every other element of his boyhood prediction—election to the Texas House, to its Speakership, to the national Congress—already been fulfilled?

His first years in the House may have given him the illusion that the fulfillment of that destiny was not far off. During those years, he had dealt with a President and with presidential advisors, had seen his name in the Eastern press, had become somewhat of a figure in the House. Now reality set in—the long reality.

In 1918, the Democrats lost control of the House of Representatives. They were not to regain it for twelve years. For twelve years, Sam Rayburn would be in the minority.

A minority Congressman of insignificant seniority had power to realize neither his dreams for others nor his dream for himself. There was no way of circumventing, no way of battering down, this fact. John Garner had said, "The only way to get anywhere in Congress is to stay there and let seniority take its course." Rayburn had not wanted to believe that. Now he learned that he had no choice. As the prosperity of the Twenties waxed brighter, so did the fortunes of the Grand Old Party, the party identified



with the glow: Harding was succeeded by Coolidge, and Coolidge by Hoover, and Republican majorities in Congress grew and grew and grew again—and Democratic Congressmen were allowed little voice in its affairs. Sam Rayburn, who had rushed toward his destiny, was going to have to wait.

The waiting was made harder by the lack of assurance that it would ever be rewarded. Rayburn could remember when, at thirty, he had been the youngest Congressman; he had still been young—thirty-six in 1918—when the waiting began. Now he was no longer so young: he passed forty and then forty-five. And instead of growing closer, his goal seemed to be receding before him. After the 1928 elections, when Hoover beat Smith, there were only 165 Democrats left in the House, to 269 Republicans; never had the party's prospects of regaining control of the House seemed more remote. Nor, of course, would a Democratic victory in itself end Rayburn's waiting. He was not the first Democrat in line for the Speakership; he was not even first within the Texas delegation—if the Democrats turned to Texas for a Speaker, they would turn to the delegation's most powerful and most senior member, the popular Garner, who had been in Congress since 1902.

If a Democratic victory did come to pass, moreover, would he still be in a position to take advantage of it? Would he still be in Congress? He had already had several close primary races, and it seemed to him, pessimistic as he was by nature, inevitable that he would one day lose. "My ambition has been to rise in the House," he wrote to one of his sisters in 1922. "But nobody can tell when the Democrats will come into power and then a race every two years—they will finally get a fellow in a district." So many men had waited patiently for the tides of history to turn—and had been defeated before the turn came. Had been defeated, or had become ill, or had died. So many men who had once dreamed of rising to the Speaker's chair had died without achieving their ambition. Was he to be only one of these?

Waiting was hard enough. He had to wait in silence. Seniority might one day lift him to the chairmanship of his committee. Seniority alone would never enable him to climb the triple dais. The Speaker was elected by a vote of the majority party, a vote based not only on seniority but on popularity, particularly among the party's influentials. He needed friends. He couldn't make enemies. He needed friends not only for his own dreams but for the dreams he dreamed for what he had referred to as "the large yet poor class." Even if he became committee chairman—even if he became Speaker—the forces which would oppose him, the Interests he hated, would be strong. If he wanted not just to hate them but to beat them, he would need allies among his colleagues; he would need, in fact, every ally—every friend—he could get. The savagery with which he fought made enemies. He would have to stop fighting. Sam Rayburn, who had never bided his time, who had rushed to fight the oppressors of "the People," was going to have to bide his time now. This man who so hated to be licked, who said that being

licked "almost kills me," was going to have to take his lickings now—take them in silence.

He waited. He had made so many speeches during his first six years in the House; during these next twelve, he made so few; entire sessions would pass without the representative of Texas' Fourth Congressional District taking the floor. And he was hardly more loquacious in private. He took to standing endlessly in the aisle at the rear of the House Chamber, his elbows resting on the brass rail that separated the aisle from the rows of seats, greeting passing members courteously, listening attentively to their problems, but saying very little himself; if he was pressed to say something, his words would be so few as to be cryptic. Those twelve years were the years in which the legend of Sam Rayburn's taciturnity was born. The heavy lips compressed themselves into a thin, hard line, so grim that even in repose the corners of his mouth turned down. The Republicans passed legislation raising the tariffs again, helping the railroads; the lips of the "Railroad Legislator" remained closed. Men who had not known him before had no idea how much strength it took for him to keep them closed. When Silent Cal Coolidge noted that "You don't have to explain something you haven't said," Rayburn told people that that was "the smartest thing he'd ever heard outside of the Bible." He took to quoting the remark himself; he talked sometimes about men who "had gotten in trouble from talking too much." Was he reminding himself what he was doing—and why he had to do it?

There was no more breaking of House customs, no more defiance of party leaders. He had disregarded Garner's advice once. Now he sought it, became the older Texan's protégé. His hotel, the Cochran, was the Washington residence of many prominent members of the House. In the evenings, they would pull up easy chairs in a circle in the lobby and talk; Rayburn made it his business to become part of that circle: a respectful, advice-asking, attentively listening part. If he felt he knew as much as they, they never knew it. In later years, he would frequently quote a Biblical axiom: "There is a time to fish and a time to mend nets." This was net-mending time for him—and he mended them. The House hierarchy came to look upon him with paternalistic fondness. And these older men learned that on the rare occasions on which Sam Rayburn did speak, there was quite a bit of sense in what he had to say. They saw, moreover, that he had what one observer was to call an "indefinable knack for sensing the mood of the House"; he seemed to know, by some intuitive instinct for the legislative process, "just how far it could be pushed," what the vote on a crucial bill would be if the vote was taken immediately—and what it would be if the vote was delayed a week. Asked decades later about this knack, he would reply: "If you can't feel things that you can't see or hear, you don't belong here." He never discussed this knack then—or admitted he had it—but the older men saw he did. And the older men learned they could depend on him—once he gave his word, it was never broken; Garner tendered him his ulti-

mate accolade: "Sam stands hitched." Garner and other Democratic leaders admitted him to the inner circles of House Democrats, "employed him," as one article put it, "to do big jobs in tough fights, and were repaid by his hard-working loyalty." It was during these years that, when some young member asked him for advice on how to succeed in Congress, he began to use the curt remark: "To get along, go along."

He used his growing influence to make friends among young Congressmen, but the alliances thus struck were made very quietly. Recalls one Congressman: "He would help you. If you said, 'Sam, I need help,' he might say, 'I'll see what I can do.' He might just grunt. But when the bill came up, if you had needed some votes changed, the votes were changed."

More and more now, other Congressmen turned to him. Said one, Marvin Jones:

The House soon spots the men . . . who attend a committee session where there isn't any publicity, who attend during the long grind of hearing witnesses, who day after day have sat there. . . . Men will come in and out of an executive session, but there are only a few men who sit there and watch every sentence that goes into the bill and know why it went in. . . . The House soon finds out who does that on each committee.

A Congressman, required to vote on many bills he knows little about, "learns to rely heavily on those few men," Jones was to say. "I could give you some of the names of those men. . . . There was Sam Rayburn. . . ."

"TO GET ALONG, GO ALONG"—wait, wait in silence. It was hard for him to take his own advice—how hard is revealed in the letters he wrote home. "This is a lonesome, dark day here," he wrote.

You wouldn't think it, but a fellow gets lonelier here, I think, than any place almost. Everybody is busy and one does not find that congeniality for which a fellow so thirsts. . . . It is a selfish, sourbellied place, every fellow trying for fame, perhaps I should say notoriety . . . and are ready at all times to use the other fellow as a prizepole for it. . . . I really believe I will here, as I did in the Texas Legislature, rise to a place where my voice will be somewhat potent in the affairs of the nation, but sometimes it becomes a cheerless fight, and a fellow is almost ready to exclaim, "what's the use!"

He wrote that letter in 1919. The cheerless fight had just started. He would have to fight it for twelve more years. But he fought. He took his own ad-

vice. He waited in silence, waited and went along, for twelve years, acquiring not only seniority but friends, until on December 7, 1931, the day on which, thanks to Dick Kleberg's election, the Democrats regained control of Congress, the day Lyndon Johnson came to Washington, he became not Speaker—it would be another nine years before Sam Rayburn became Speaker—but chairman of the House Interstate Commerce Committee. One more year of waiting was required, because of the general governmental paralysis during Herbert Hoover's last year in office. But on March 4, 1933, the new President was sworn in—and then, after all those years of waiting, Sam Rayburn showed what he had been waiting for.

At Roosevelt's direction, legislation had been drafted giving the federal government authority to regulate the issuance of securities for the protection of those who bought them. Rayburn, who had seen so many financially unsophisticated farmers invest the little spare cash they had been able to scrape together in worthless stocks or bonds, had fought for similar legislation more than twenty years before—not only in Austin but in Washington; it was, of course, over his attempt to give the federal government authority over the issuance of railroad securities that the freshman Congressman had defied Woodrow Wilson. That attempt had been unsuccessful, as had decades of Populist outcry for meaningful federal legislation; in the face of Wall Street opposition, the most Populists could get was state "Blue Sky" laws (the Texas law had, of course, been authored by the Gentleman from Blanco County). But when he had made that attempt, Rayburn had been a junior member of the Interstate Commerce Committee. Now he was its chairman. There was uncertainty over which committee had jurisdiction over Roosevelt's proposed "Truth-in-Securities" Act, but Speaker Henry Rainey was a friend of Rayburn's. "I want it," Rayburn told him. Rainey gave it to him.

His first difficulty was with the legislation itself, a poorly drafted bill as confusing as the problems it was trying to solve, and almost completely lacking in any effective enforcement measures. Attempts to patch it up had been hamstrung by Roosevelt's reluctance to offend the man he had asked to draft it, an old Wilsonian Democrat, Huston Thompson, and since no one knew what to do, the measure seemed likely to die. Then Rayburn paid a visit to Raymond S. Moley, one of Roosevelt's advisors.

Rayburn knew what to do, Moley was to recall. The bill "was a hopeless mess," Rayburn said, and the patching-up should stop. A new bill should be written from scratch, he said, and it should be written "under [his] direction" by new draftsmen, experts in the complicated securities field.

Moley agreed with Rayburn's analysis, but felt he could not bring in new draftsmen unless he could find a way around Roosevelt's reluctance to ease out Thompson. Moley was unwilling to spell out the problem—but he found that he didn't have to. Before he "went ahead on the draftsmen business," he said, "it would have to be understood that I was acting directly on



his, Rayburn's, authorization, not the President's. For all his seeming slowness, there isn't much Sam misses. He laughed appreciatively. 'All right,' he said, 'you've got it.' On a Friday in early April, three young men began working on a new bill: a Harvard Law School professor, James M. Landis, and two lawyers expert in the securities field, Thomas G. Corcoran and Benjamin V. Cohen. On Monday, they presented their work to the Interstate Commerce Committee.

Questions from the puzzled committee members about the immensely technical draft lasted all day. All day, the committee's chairman sat silent. Trying to read his face for clues, the young men found none. They were discouraged. Moley had learned what lay behind the seeming slowness, but they hadn't, and to them Rayburn seemed, in Cohen's word, a "countryman"—incapable of understanding so complex a subject. At the end of the day, the chairman asked the young men to wait outside; after a while, he came out, and told them that the committee had approved their work and wanted them to turn it into a finished bill. He said no more; only later did Landis learn that "it was Sam Rayburn who decided that this was a bill worth working on."

Rayburn said he wanted them to work with a House legislative draftsman, Middleton Beaman. Beaman was a Rayburn man. "I had thought I knew something of legislative draftsmanship until I met him," Landis was to say. "For days," in his office, "deep in the bowels of the old House Office Building," Beaman, a "rough, tough guy, would not allow us to draft a line. He insisted instead on exploring the implications of the bill to find exactly what we had or did not have in mind. He probed. . . ." This was, Landis recalls, "exasperating." The young men began to suspect "that this delay bore symptoms of sinister Wall Street plotting." Rayburn's demeanor did not alleviate their suspicions. Dropping by Beaman's office, he would pick up a draft paragraph and stand there studying it. He didn't, Landis could see, "know anything about securities," and they felt he didn't understand what he was reading; if he did, he certainly gave no sign of it. Sometimes he gave them a word or two of advice, but it was advice so simple, so unsophisticated, that they could hardly keep from laughing at it. He said that "He wanted a strong bill, but he wanted to make sure it was right, that it was fair, that it was just," Cohen says. He gave no sign of approval, either. The grim face beneath the gleaming bald skull was as immobile as a mask. They didn't know what to make of him, this man of whom Beaman, and Beaman's assistants—and everyone else they talked to—seemed so unaccountably afraid, but he certainly didn't seem to be on their side.

Their suspicions were seemingly confirmed when Rayburn agreed to Wall Street demands that its representatives be given a hearing to present their views on the draft bill. Suspicion turned to apprehension when they heard that the Street's views would be presented by three of its most prom-

inent attorneys, led by the feared John Foster Dulles himself. They would have to rely for their defense on this slow, stolid farmer.

And then came the hearing. "I confess that when I went in that morning to the hearing, I was scared," Landis was to recall. "After all, I was something of a youngster." The hearing was closed, and no records of it exist, but those who were there agree. Two men, John Foster Dulles of Sullivan & Cromwell and Sam Rayburn of Bonham, were the principal antagonists—and the Dulles who stalked into that hearing room slunk out of it. And after the hearing, there came the moment that, Landis was to say, "I'll never forget," the moment when he found out what was behind the mask.

"I went back to my little cubbyhole down in the sub-basement. . . . About twenty minutes later, I got a call from Sam Rayburn, to come up to his office. Well, naturally, I was worried. I thought maybe all our work was down the drain." But Rayburn said that the work was just fine, and that they should get right on with it. For the first time, there was an expression on Rayburn's usually expressionless face. It was a snarl. He began talking about Dulles and about Wall Street lawyers, and he cursed them, "in very obscene language."

"Now Sam didn't know anything about securities," Landis was to say, recalling that meeting, "but Sam was an expert on the integrity of people. . . . He knew when a man . . . was telling the truth. . . . He had no patience for men who were not sincere and honest. And this is what he expressed to me, at that time. . . ." He had not, Landis was to say, known Rayburn "too well up to that time. I got to know him quite well later on. He was an expert in . . . procedure—oh, absolutely an expert in matters of procedure! He was an expert in procedure, and sizing up the motives of what made human beings tick."

*An expert on human beings.* With the full twenty-four-member committee susceptible to Wall Street pressure, he delegated the Truth-in-Securities Bill to a subcommittee—the right subcommittee; as its chairman, he named himself; as its other four members, he named four Congressmen he knew he could dominate, four who would bow to his personality rather than to Wall Street. When, in the showdown, they did, and reported the young men's bill favorably to the full committee, he told the young men which committee members to approach, and how to approach them. Says Thomas Corcoran, whose expertise in handling men was to become legendary in Washington: "Sam was a genius in handling men. He would send you to see a guy, and he would tell you exactly what the guy was going to say, and in what order, and he'd tell you how to answer each point. And the guy would say exactly what Sam had told you he was going to say, and if you just answered exactly what Sam told you to answer, you could just see these conservative sons-of-bitches coming around right before your

eyes." He told them which committee members not to bother approaching—because they would never come around. And these he handled in a different manner; his weapon was the gavel, and, almost half a century later, the young men can still remember its harsh crash as their champion swung it in their defense. During the Hundred Days, his chairmanship was a "temporary dictatorship," writes Michael E. Parrish in his *Securities Regulation and the New Deal*. "Even under normal circumstances a powerful chairman, [he] dominated the . . . committee as never before." Still other committee members didn't understand the incredibly complex bill, with its pages of detailed technical regulations governing securities issuance—but they felt it was not necessary that they understand. Rayburn told them it was a good bill, and they trusted Sam. The hearings the committee held on the bill—before reporting it favorably to the full House—were so brief that Moley years later was to write incorrectly that none had been held.

*An expert in procedure—oh, absolutely an expert in matters of procedure.* The young men had anticipated problems in the full House because of the legislation's complexities; "If you amended Section 7, it might have an effect on Section 2 and 13, and so on," Landis was to say. But, thanks to Rayburn, the complexities made passage easier, not harder. As Landis recalls: "Because of its complexities, and the danger that an unstudied amendment, apparently fair on its face, might unbalance the articulation of its various sections," the bill was introduced under a special rule that "permitted the consideration of amendments only if they had the approval of the committee chairman." No such approval was forthcoming. Landis, watching with apprehension from the gallery, saw that "Rayburn had complete control of the situation." To his astonishment, the bill passed "with scarcely a murmur of dissent."

The young men had anticipated more problems—all but insoluble problems—in the conference committee, in which five-member delegations from the House and the Senate met to try to reconcile their conflicting versions of the same bill, for the Senate bill was, in effect, Huston Thompson's original, "hopeless" bill, which was thoroughly approved by the distinguished chairman of the Senate delegation, Duncan U. Fletcher, of Florida. But there were procedures for a conference committee also.

Few men knew them. "If they exist, and documentary evidence to that effect is to be found in *Hine's Precedents*, they are observed as much in breach as in conformance," Landis was to write years later, after he had become a veteran of conference committees. But one of the men who knew them was Sam Rayburn.

Taking advantage of them was made easier because Fletcher, a courtly Southern gentleman, suggested that Rayburn be chairman for the first meeting. Rayburn said that the first question to be decided was, as Landis puts it, "what document"—House version or Senate version—"you would work from, which was a very important issue, really a basic issue." Rayburn

"quietly asked Senator Fletcher if he did not desire to make a motion on this matter." Apparently unaware of the trap into which he was walking, the seventy-five-year-old Fletcher replied that he certainly did so desire: he moved that the Senate bill be made the working draft.

"Motion moved," Rayburn said quickly. "Motion seconded?" It was seconded. "Vote on the motion." The vote was, of course, a tie; all five Senate members voted in favor of the motion; all five House members voted against it. Since it was a tie, Rayburn said, the motion was lost; consequently, the House bill would become the basic draft. Had a House member made the motion, and a tie vote resulted—as, of course, it would have—the Senate bill would have become the basis for negotiations; by luring a Senator into making the motion, Rayburn had won a crucial point before the conferees had more than settled into their seats. "Except for an occasional reference to its provisions," Landis was to reminisce, "that was the last we heard of the . . . Senate bill."

The Senate delegation included not only Fletcher but such big names as Carter Glass of Virginia, James Couzens of Michigan and Hiram Johnson of California. "The House had no such distinguished personalities except for Sam Rayburn," Landis was to say. But that one was enough. While Fletcher had apparently intended that, at succeeding meetings, he and Rayburn would alternate in the chair, he was too much of a gentleman to put himself forward; and, as Landis puts it: "Absent any request from him, Rayburn continued to guide the proceedings."

Aides were guided with an iron hand. Once, desperate because their handiwork was being ignored, two Senate staffers who had worked on the Thompson bill attempted to put their draft in front of the committee members. Rayburn spoke to them, in Landis' phrase, "rudely but firmly"; the attempt was not repeated. Senators were guided with deference: deference in tone, in solicitation of their opinions—in all matters except matters of substance. The atmosphere of most conference committees is tense, Landis was to write: in this committee, "thanks to Rayburn's guidance," and the respect he showed for everyone's opinions, "friendships developed," and the tension dissolved. And so did the opposition. On every crucial point, the final bill was the House bill. On May 27, 1933, Roosevelt signed it into law—and after decades of fruitless discussion, government regulation of the issuance of securities was a reality. In the public mind, Rayburn was associated hardly at all with the dramatic months immediately after Roosevelt's inauguration, during which so much legislation that was to change the shape of American life was rushed through Congress. But to the young men who had seen what he did, he was one of the heroes of the Hundred Days.

The next year brought the introduction of legislation for governmental regulation of the exchanges on which securities were traded. Tough as the fight had been in 1933, the fight in 1934—for the creation of a Securities and Exchange Commission, and an end to the operation of the Stock Exchange

as a private club, run by and for the benefit of its members, often at the expense of the public—was tougher. The business community moved against Rayburn in his own committee, and almost beat him there. He had to use every ounce of persuasiveness he possessed—and every lever of power—to break the revolt in the committee. Then, in angry scenes on the House floor, he compromised and compromised and compromised again—and never compromised on the crucial point. He maneuvered like a master in another conference committee. And the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 joined the Securities Act of 1933 on the nation's statute books.

1935 was the year of the Public Utilities Act—the bill to curb the power of giant utility holding companies over their operating subsidiaries. To Populists, these holding companies symbolized the entrenched economic power of the Northeast—and its effect on “The People” throughout the country. Electric rates were unjustly high for consumers—and particularly for farmers—because of the siphoning off of local power companies' cash by the holding companies up in New York; electricity was unavailable to most farmers because the decision-makers in New York, interested only in profit potential, saw too little in rural electrification. For decades, Populist legislators had attempted to enact state legislation to curb utilities—and had been defeated in almost every significant attempt by the utilities' awesome power in state capitals; as a member of the Texas State Legislature twenty years before, Rayburn himself had fought unsuccessfully against them. Rayburn knew now that only the power of the federal government could curb the power of the holding companies, and now, at last, there was a President who knew it, too (as Governor of New York, Roosevelt had fought these giants in their lair, and had lost). The President demanded, and Corcoran and Cohen drafted, and Rayburn and Senator Burton K. Wheeler, the old Populist from Montana, introduced legislation that included a clause—dubbed the “Death Sentence” clause—which gave the Securities and Exchange Commission power to compel the dissolution of holding companies.

The mere mention of lobbyists brought the deep red flush to Rayburn's head; wrote a friend, “He hates [them] with a venomous hatred.” 1935 was the year of the utility lobby. “You talk about a labor lobby,” Roosevelt said. “Well, it is a child compared to this utility lobby. You talk about a Legion lobby. Well, it is an infant in arms compared to this utility lobby.” This was, he said, “the most powerful, dangerous lobby . . . that has ever been created by any organization in this country.”

The lobbyists played dirty—it was during the Death Sentence fight that there began the first widespread whispers that the President was insane—and they played rough. The flood of almost a million messages that inundated Congressmen was reinforced by the threat direct: Congressmen were told bluntly that money, as much as was needed, would be poured into their districts to defeat them in the next election if they voted for the

Public Utilities Act. This time, Rayburn's control of his committee was broken. When, after six weeks of bitter hearings, the bill was reported out, it came to the floor with the Death Sentence provision removed, and the bill emasculated.

*I hate to be licked. It almost kills me.* Three times, against the wishes of congressional leaders of his own party, Rayburn demanded a roll call on the Death Sentence. He had the White House on his side—on Roosevelt's orders, Corcoran was working tirelessly beside him—and Senator Hugo Black's hearings were providing the White House with new ammunition as they revealed that the utilities had spent \$1.5 million to generate the “spontaneous” mailings, which had actually been produced by using names picked broadscale from telephone directories. But in Texas, newspapers were calling him a Communist, and accusing him of trying to “murder” a great enterprise. John W. Carpenter, president of Texas Power & Light, asked a banker in Rayburn's district “to estimate how much it would cost to beat Sam Rayburn. . . . He said they had the money to do anything.” With a storm of abuse rising about him in the House Chamber (and with Carpenter and other utility executives sitting in the House gallery, their presence a silent warning to the Congressmen), he lost all three roll-call votes by overwhelming margins. But there was still the conference committee. No friends were made in this one; so bitter did feelings run during its two months of meetings that other members barred Cohen and Corcoran, the bill's drafters, from the committee room. But the bill that emerged from the conference—and that was passed—while far short of what Roosevelt and Rayburn had originally hoped for, nonetheless contained the mandate they wanted for the SEC to compel holding companies' reorganization. Sam Rayburn issued a rare public statement: “With the Securities Act of 1933, the Stock Exchange Act . . . of 1934, and this Holding Company bill to complete the cycle, I believe that control is restored to the government and the people, and taken out of the hands of a few, and that the American people will have cause to believe that this administration is trying and is establishing a government of the people, by the people and for the people.”

Rayburn received little credit at the time for his role in the passage of this legislation. “Few people, if they depend on the public prints for their information, know much about him,” the *New York Times* noted. “It is doubtful if there is any member of his ability who is less conspicuous, less self-heralded, and less known outside the influential group with which he is immediately in contact.” And he has received little credit from history, in part because he left almost no record of his deeds in writing; not in memoirs, not even in memos—as David Halberstam says, he “did all his serious business in pencil on the back of a used envelope.” (When asked how he remembered what he had promised or what he had said, he would growl: “I always tell the truth, so I don't need a good memory to remember what I said”)—in part because, shy, he shrank from publicity: “Let the other

fellow get the headlines," he said. "I'll take the laws." It is possible to read detailed histories of the New Deal and find hardly a reference to Sam Rayburn.

Occasionally, when he was old, he would refer to what he had done. In 1955, Drew Pearson was interviewing him about the regulatory commissions when Rayburn suddenly blurted out: "I was in on the borning of every one of those commissions. . . . I wrote the law that passed the Federal Communications Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission. . . . I wrote the law for the Civil Aeronautics Board. . . ." But the people to whom he was speaking would not usually understand what the old man was talking about. During the Eisenhower administration, a young congressional aide was expounding on the brilliance of John Foster Dulles when Rayburn suddenly said: "I cut him to pieces once, you know." What do you mean? the aide asked. When was that? The old man grunted and refused to answer. But his name is on the Securities Act of 1933 (the Fletcher-Rayburn Act), and the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (the Fletcher-Rayburn Act), and the Public Utilities Act of 1935 (the Wheeler-Rayburn Act), and on other pieces of New Deal legislation that, for a while at least, took control "out of the hands of a few," and restored it to "the people." And those who fought beside him knew what he had done. SEC Chairman William O. Douglas was to recall that "[We] called it affectionately the 'Sam Rayburn Commission,' since he had fathered [it]." The three great pieces of legislation embodied principles for which the People's Party—the party of the great orators, Bryan and Tom Watson and Old Joe Bailey—had been fighting for half a century. But the Populist perhaps most responsible for the achievement represented by their collective passage was the least eloquent of Populists: the man who had achieved the power to bring their dreams to realization not by speeches but by silence. (Rayburn, of course, gave credit to someone else—in his own, quiet way. Although over the course of his many years in Washington, autographed photographs of many notables had joined the pictures of Robert E. Lee on his office walls, in his home back in Bonham, resting on his desk, there was, after all these years, still only one picture, the picture of Sam Rayburn's first hero. But now, when Congress adjourned and he came home and unpacked his suitcase, he lifted out of the suitcase and placed beside the picture of Robert E. Lee a picture of Franklin D. Roosevelt.)

EVEN BEFORE he had attained power, Sam Rayburn, with his grim face beneath the gleaming bald head, had been a formidable figure. Now there was power behind the presence—substantial power: the committee chairmanship as well as patronage on the grand scale, for he had been given not only the naming of some commissioners and top staff members of the new

regulatory agencies,\* but a voice in the White House dispensation of patronage to other Congressmen; a columnist noted that while his aversion to publicity made him "a man in the shadows," he was one of the handful of Congressmen "who made the wheels go around" in the House. The full force of his personality, held under check so long, was unleashed at last. On the issues he cared deeply about, he was immovable. "If you were arguing with him and raised a point, he'd give you an answer," says a fellow Congressman. "If you raised the point again, you'd get the same answer again. The exact same answer. You realized, that was the conclusive remark. That was the end of that conversation." He almost never raised his voice, and he never threatened; the most he might say—in a low, mild, almost gentle, tone—was, "Before you go on here, I want to tell you this—you are about to make a mistake, a very big mistake." And he never asked for anything, a vote or a favor, more than once. If you turned Sam Rayburn down once, men learned, he would never ask you again—for anything.

He would never ask a man to do anything against his own interests. "A Congressman's first duty is to get re-elected," he would say, and he would advise young Congressmen: "Always vote your district." If a Congressman said that a vote Rayburn was asking for would hurt him in his district, Rayburn would always accept that excuse. But Rayburn knew the districts. And if the excuse wasn't true, Rayburn's rage would rise. Once, for example, it erupted against a Congressman from a liberal district who took orders from the district's reactionary business interests only because he didn't want to offend them. The Congressman had often used the excuse of public opinion in his district, and, because Rayburn had never challenged him on it, and had stopped asking for his support, was under the misapprehension that Rayburn believed that excuse. One evening, however, after the Congressman had voted against a bill Rayburn supported, he approached Rayburn, who was standing with a group of friends, and with a winning smile said he sure wished he could have voted with him, but that such a vote would have hurt him in his district. Rayburn did not reply for a long moment, while the deep red flush started to creep up his head. Then, says one of the men who were standing with Rayburn, in a recollection confirmed by another, Rayburn said:

"Now, I never asked for your vote on this bill. I never said a word to you about this bill. I knew you wouldn't vote for this bill, and I never said a word to you about it. But you came across the room just now and told me you wish you could have voted with me.

"So I'm going to tell you something now. You *could* have voted with me. I've known that district since before you were born, and that vote

\* Roosevelt allowed him, for example, to name one of the commissioners of both the Federal Communications Commission and the Interstate Commerce Commission.

wouldn't have hurt you one bit. Not one bit. You didn't vote with me because you didn't have the guts to."

The flush on the huge head was so dark now that it looked almost black. The men standing with Rayburn backed away. "So don't you come crawling across the room telling me you wish you could have voted for the bill. 'Cause it's a damn lie. It's a damn lie. And you're a damn liar. You didn't vote for the bill 'cause you didn't have the guts to. You've got no guts. Let me tell you something. I didn't raise the issue, but you did. You came across the room. So let me tell you something. The time is coming when the people are going to find out that all you represent is the Chamber of Commerce, and when they find that out, they're going to beat your ass."

A young state legislator who had considered challenging the Congressman for his seat had dropped the idea because he didn't have enough political clout. Not a week after his confrontation with Rayburn, the Congressman walked into the House Dining Room for lunch and saw the legislator sitting there—at Rayburn's table. When the legislator returned home, he had all the clout he needed, and the Congressman's political career was over. Rayburn drove him not only out of Congress, but out of Washington. He tried to stay on in the capital, looking for a government job or a lobbying job, but no job was open to him. And none would ever be—not as long as Sam Rayburn was alive.

The temper—backed by the political power—made men afraid of Rayburn. They tried to gauge his moods. "When he would say 'She-e-e-e-t,' drawing the word out, I knew he was still good-natured," recalls House Doorkeeper "Fishbait" Miller. "But if he said it fast, like 'I don't want to hear a lot of shit from you,' I knew I was in trouble." Some Congressmen, says House Sergeant-at-Arms Kenneth Harding, were "literally afraid to start talking to him." Says Harding: "He could be very friendly. But if he was frowning, boy—stay away. I mean, if he was coming down a corridor and he was frowning, people were literally afraid to start talking to him. They feared to get close to him. They were afraid of saying the wrong thing." And if the great heavy head wore not only a frown but that dark red flush, "when he came down a corridor," it was "a stone through a wave. People would part before him."

BUT IF MEN WHO SAW SAM RAYBURN only in the halls of Congress feared him, men who also saw him outside those halls pitied him.

As a child, loneliness had been what he dreaded most. "Loneliness breaks the heart," he had said. "Loneliness consumes people." Now he was a man, who had attained the power he had so long sought. But he had learned that even power could not save him from what he dreaded.

During the hours in which Congress was in session, of course, he was

surrounded by people wanting to talk to him, clamoring for his attention, hanging on his every word.

But Congress wasn't always in session. It wasn't in session in the evenings, or on weekends. And when Congress wasn't in session, Sam Rayburn was often alone.

He had wanted so desperately not to be alone. He had wanted a family—a wife and children. Driving through the Washington suburbs with a friend not long after he first arrived in the capital, he had said, as they passed the Chevy Chase Country Club, "I want a house that big," and when the friend asked him why, he said, "For all my children." Adults, another friend says, "were scared of Rayburn, but children weren't. They took to him instinctively. They crawled all over him and rubbed their hands over his bald head." He would sit talking to a little girl or boy for hours—with a broad, gentle grin on that great, hard face to which, it sometimes seemed, no man could bring a smile. Friends who saw Sam Rayburn with women realized that his usual grim demeanor concealed—that, in fact, the grimness was a mask deliberately donned to conceal—a terrible shyness and insecurity. He was always afraid of looking foolish; he would never tell a joke in a speech because, he said, "I tried to tell a joke once in a speech, and before I got through, I was the joke." And this fear seemed accentuated when he was with women. He had fallen in love once—with the beautiful, dark-haired, eighteen-year-old sister of another Texas Congressman, his friend Marvin Jones; Rayburn was thirty-six at the time. Although he wrote Metze Jones regularly, nine years passed before he asked her to marry him; friends say it took him that long to work up the nerve. And when—in 1927, when Rayburn was forty-five—they finally became engaged, he asked her to make the engagement short; "I was in a great hurry to get married . . . before she changed her mind," he wrote a friend. The marriage lasted three months. Rayburn never spoke of what had happened; so tight-lipped was he on the subject that most men who met him in later years never learned he had been married. (Once, when he was an old man, he was talking to a group of Girl Scouts, one of whom asked why he wasn't married. "Oh, I'm so cranky that nobody would have me," he said. "I'll marry you," one of the girls said. Rayburn laughed.) Fishbait Miller, who knew about the marriage—in working with Rayburn for thirty years, he learned things about Rayburn despite Rayburn—says that even after Metze remarried, Rayburn "kept watch over her from a distance"; when her daughter from the second marriage contracted polio, the girl was admitted immediately to the famed polio treatment center at Warm Springs despite the long waiting list. ("It is true that someone can be powerful and you can feel very sorry for him," Miller says. "I felt sorry for Rayburn because he lost the woman he loved.") For years thereafter, Rayburn had not a single date. He may, in fact, never have had more than a few scattered dates; no one really knows.

After Metze left him, Sam Rayburn was alone. He moved into two rooms in a small, rather dingy apartment house near Dupont Circle, where he lived for the rest of his life.

He could, of course, have gone to parties, but his belief that he could not make small talk, his fear that he would make a fool of himself if he tried, made parties an ordeal; he talked for years about the first Washington cocktail party he had gone to, back when he was a freshman Congressman. "I never felt that [the hostess] knew, or cared, whether I was there or not. So I stopped going [to parties]."

He tried to prolong the hours he spent on Capitol Hill. Jack Garner's old "Board of Education" had been disbanded, but a few congressional leaders still gathered for a drink at the end of the day, and Rayburn was always there. But the others would leave rather quickly; they had wives, and families, and social engagements, to go to. (Rayburn tried never to let them see that he did not; he never asked them to stay, often made a point of leaving early himself, as if he too had somewhere else to go.)

"The tough time was the weekends, when everyone went home to his wife," says D. B. Hardeman, who was to become his aide during the 1950's. During those later years, Rayburn's position as Speaker provided him with a staff, and on weekends he would telephone its members, aides like Hardeman and John Holton, House Doorkeeper Miller or Sergeant-at-Arms Harding; he would sound very jovial on the phone, asking them to go fishing with him in some lakes down near the Maryland shore, or to come over for Sunday breakfast and read the Sunday papers with him. Asking was very hard for Sam Rayburn, however, and although the aides would accept his invitations ("Sometimes I had something planned, but I would come because I knew he had nothing to do," one says), he did not ask often. The pride which made it so hard for him to issue an invitation made it hard for him even to accept one: his aides would, of course, invite him to their homes, but he could not accept too often; he didn't want anyone to get the idea that he didn't have anything to do. (His aides knew the truth, however; Rayburn would sometimes instruct Hardeman or Holton to come to the office on a Sunday, on the pretext that there was work to do, but, often, there wasn't; the young men would watch him opening all the drawers of his desk, and taking out every paper, "looking for something to do.") Says Ken Harding: "He had many worshippers, but very few close friends. You held him in awe. You didn't dare get close to him. People feared to get close to him, because they were afraid of saying the wrong thing. And because people were afraid to get close to him, he was a very lonely guy. His life was a tragedy. I felt very, very sorry for Sam Rayburn."

During the 1930's, he did not yet have a staff that he could telephone. For a while, he made an effort to round up weekend fishing parties from among the Texas Congressmen, driving down to the Maryland lakes on Saturday and sleeping over in cabins Saturday night. "Those who went

along for the first time were stunned by the change in Rayburn's personality," a friend writes. "Solemn, laconic and brief in the Capitol, on the road he was talkative, humorous and a great tease."

But how many times could he ask people to come—and if he was turned down once by someone, no matter how legitimate the excuse, how graciously it was made, how could Sam Rayburn ask again? So if he went to the Maryland lakes, he usually went alone; in a letter to a friend in Texas, these words burst out of him: "God what I would give for a tow-headed boy to take fishing!" And often, during the Thirties, he would spend his weekends in Washington, taking long walks, a lonely figure wandering for hours through the deserted streets, his face set grimly as if he wanted to be alone—as if daring anyone to talk to him.

WHEN LYNDON JOHNSON had first come to Washington, in December, 1931, he had made a determined effort to become friendly with Sam Rayburn. The entrée had been good—as it was with everyone who knew Lyndon's father; "Dear Sam," Rayburn was to write, "you are one member with whom I served in the Legislature who I remember with pleasure"—and Rayburn took a liking to the gangling young man. But his cordiality was limited by custom. A congressional secretary could visit a Congressman in his office only on the rare occasions when he had an excuse—a business reason—to be there. Sometimes, in the late afternoon, Kleberg and Roy Miller would go to Rayburn's office, or to Garner's (where Rayburn would be present). Watching them walk out, Johnson would tell Latimer or Jones, "Well, they're going to have some bourbon and branch water." He wanted to go, but he was never asked. And he had no excuse to see Rayburn outside the office.

After Lyndon and Lady Bird took their little Kalorama Road apartment in December, 1934, however, Lyndon could invite "Mr. Sam," as he called him, to dinner.

When he came, Lady Bird recalls, nothing was too good for him. This was, of course, the rule at many homes to which he was often invited—but to which he came infrequently, or, more probably, only once. At this apartment, however, although the hostess' smile never wavered, there was not only nervousness behind it but fear: Lady Bird was very much afraid at first of this fierce-looking man. And Sam Rayburn saw behind the smile, and made an effort for this shy, timid young woman, so small and slim that she looked like a little girl—how great an effort can be measured by the number of more sophisticated Washington hostesses for whom he would not make it—to put her at ease. When he saw—she never told him—how homesick she was, he tried to cheer her up by talking about Texas, and about his boyhood on the farm. He told her his favorite foods ("He liked to eat the things he had had at home as a boy: black-eyed peas, cornbread,



peach ice cream, good chili," she recalls), and when he came to dinner thereafter, she cooked them for him, and, she says, as he came more and more frequently, "learned to make them the way he liked them." And her sweetness and graciousness put *him*—this man who was seldom at ease without a gavel in his hand—at ease. He began to accept the Johnsons' invitations not only to dinner but to breakfast—to Sunday breakfast, breakfast on the weekends when he had nothing to do. After breakfast, Lady Bird would suggest that Lyndon and Mr. Sam read the Sunday papers together while she cleaned up, and he began staying longer and longer. Lyndon Johnson was provided with ample opportunity to exercise the talents that had led people to call him "a professional son" on this man who so desperately wanted a son. Other congressional secretaries found one Johnson gesture particularly unbelievable (although it would have been quite believable to San Marcos students who had seen Johnson pat feared Prexy Evans on the back): when, in the halls of Congress, Johnson met Sam Rayburn, he would bend over and kiss him on his bald head.

So strong was the wall that Sam Rayburn had built around himself that it was not easy even for Lyndon Johnson to break it down. But he broke it down. Although the Johnson living room contained a sofa and an easy chair, Mr. Sam always sat instead in a straight-backed kitchen chair, as if afraid to relax. But more and more often now, he would lean forward and put his hands on his knees and tell stories; "he was a great storyteller," Lady Bird recalls. "He remembered Woodrow Wilson and all these other figures." He began to invite Lyndon and Lady Bird to his apartment for breakfast.

And sometime in the late Spring of 1935—the exact date cannot be determined, but it was while Lady Bird, homesick, had returned to Karnack for a visit in May and June of that year—Lyndon Johnson developed pneumonia and was taken to a hospital. And when he awoke, sitting beside his bed was Sam Rayburn, his usually expressionless face twisted with anxiety. He was so agitated that he had forgotten he was smoking, and his vest was littered with cigarette ashes. "Now Lyndon," he said, "don't you worry. Take it easy. If you need money or anything, just call on me."

GIFTED THOUGH HE WAS at arousing paternal feelings—not only Rayburn's but those of Roy Miller and Rasch Adams and Alvin Wirtz—he had been unable to translate affection into advancement. On the very day in 1931 on which he had been appointed to his new job, he had begun planning to leave it. To Ella So Relle's congratulations on that day, he had replied that the post of congressional secretary was only "a stepping stone"—only the bottom rung on the political ladder he was so anxious to climb. Now, however, it was 1935—and he was still on the same rung. For almost four years he had been tirelessly ingratiating himself with Congressmen, agreeing with

their views, dancing with their wives, "always campaigning"—and where had the campaigning gotten him? Long aware of what the next rung should be (it had been years now since, hearing about a congressional secretary who had succeeded to his boss' seat, he had said: "That's the route to follow"), he had attempted to set out upon that route the moment he was eligible, subtly attempting, as his twenty-fifth birthday approached, to turn Congressman Kleberg into Ambassador Kleberg. Now the birthday approaching was his twenty-seventh, and the route was still blocked—blocked, since no one could beat a Kleberg in Kleberg Country, by an immovable object that was giving no signs of moving of its own accord. Dick Kleberg's lack of interest in his job had led Johnson to hope that he would tire of being a Congressman. To his dismay, however, he saw that, while Kleberg remained bored by Washington politics, he had discovered the attractive possibilities of Washington social life; with a sinking heart, Johnson was coming to realize that his boss had no intention of leaving his job. A South American Ambassadorship might still have changed his mind, of course, but an Ambassadorship was no longer a realistic possibility for a man whose hostility to the "Bolshevik" in the White House had become obvious.

If there was a longer route—to a higher peak than a Congressional seat—a route that only he saw, he had tried to start along that route too, had worked for the most radical as well as the most reactionary Congressman, had trimmed his sail to every wind, had done favors and created an acquaintance not just in his district but throughout Texas. But acquaintance had thus far borne no more fruit than had affection; he was no closer to achieving his great ambition in 1935 than he had been in 1931.

During his first months in Washington, Estelle Harbin had seen that "he couldn't stand not being somebody—just could not *stand* it." "I'm not the assistant type," he had said. But the little daily humiliations—having to step back when his Congressman stepped into the MEMBERS ONLY elevator, having to wait outside the Congressional cloakrooms because he was not allowed inside—reminded him daily that, after almost four years, an assistant was what he was; that he was not a somebody, but a nobody—just one of the crowd of low-paid, powerless congressional secretaries.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS, too, were making Johnson's life in Washington less pleasant than it had been.

Among his contemporaries, at least, he had been somebody: "the Boss of the Little Congress." But in 1935, that changed, too.

The whispers about the way in which Lyndon Johnson had won the organization's Speakership had not died away—because, with each succeeding election, invariably won by the candidate of "the Boss of the Little Congress," they started up again. The belief that elections were being, in

the word of his fellow secretary Wingate Lucas, "stolen," that the ballot boxes were being stuffed with the votes of mailmen, policemen and postmen who were not members of the Little Congress, and that Johnson was directing the stuffing, was widespread. And so was the belief that if such stuffing did not produce a majority for the Johnson slate, the votes would simply be miscounted by the organization's elected clerk, who was, of course, a Johnson man. "Everybody just knew this," Lucas says; "everybody said it. They said, 'In that last election, that damn Lyndon Johnson stole some votes again.'" This belief—and his domineering manner—had antagonized many of his fellow secretaries. His popularity among his Washington peers had, in fact, descended to a level little higher than it had been among his San Marcos peers. But his fellow secretaries had never challenged the control of the Little Congress by his "machine," the cadre of his supporters who accepted his dominance, in part because of fear of incurring his displeasure and thereby losing any chance of advancement in the only organization in which advancement was possible for a secretary. However, among the new secretaries who came to Washington with Congressmen elected in November, 1934, was a gawky youth, obviously fresh from the country, who arrived in Washington even younger than Johnson had three years before, and who possessed his own considerable "natural vocation" for politics; he was twenty-year-old James P. Coleman, a tall, skinny Mississippi farm boy who would shortly begin a whirlwind political career that would propel him to the Governorship of Mississippi at the age of forty-one. Coleman was sufficiently astute to be impressed by Johnson at the first Little Congress meeting he attended, in January, 1935. "He was a very tall fellow and had a very commanding personality when he stood up to talk. And he was extremely well-informed. He always knew the issues. And—well, he just had something. It sticks out on some folks and not on others."

His astuteness, however, allowed him to see through—and resent—Johnson's attempt to make friends with him by portraying himself in their first conversation as just another country boy. Coleman says he realized quickly that "He was one of those highly adaptable fellows. When he was up on the Hill, he dressed and acted like he came from the city, but when he met up with someone like myself who had come from a small town in the interior of Mississippi, he acted like a fellow who had grown up with me." Moreover, Coleman, who had decided that he wanted to become an officer of the Little Congress, also realized during their first conversation that Johnson would support only those who were "willing to knuckle under" to him—and he was not one for knuckling under. He decided to run for the Speakership at the next election, which would be held in March.

Rounding up support for his attempt to defeat Johnson proved unexpectedly easy—particularly among secretaries from Texas. Coleman was warned, however, that support did not necessarily mean victory; he was told about the alleged miscounting of votes, and about the rumors that votes

were cast by mailmen and policemen who were not members of the Little Congress. He and his three closest allies—Texans Lloyd Croslin, Wingate Lucas and Gore Hinzley—decided to demand that the votes be counted publicly, in front of the entire membership, and that ballots be signed, so that each voter's eligibility could be checked. (There was hesitancy among Coleman's supporters about insisting on signed ballots because of Johnson's methods toward beaten opponents; as Coleman puts it, "If people who voted against him could be identified, this, of course, gave the winners a chance for revenge on those who voted against them; I remember Croslin and Lucas and Hinzley telling me, 'You better win. We don't want to lose and have Lyndon Johnson's unhappiness about it.'")

The March meeting was stormy. Coleman's opponent was William Howard Payne, but Coleman's allies made clear in their speeches in the House Caucus Room that the chief issue was Payne's chief supporter. "It was really Lyndon we were running against," Lucas says. Pointing to Johnson, who was sitting silently in a corner, Croslin shouted: "That's the man we're going to defeat. He's been boss too long. We're not going to be bossed!" Looking directly at Johnson, he said: "You're not going to tell us what to do." (Johnson said nothing.) Then Coleman's supporters proposed the new voting procedures; Lucas said: "We're going to have the ballots counted in the open, and we're going to have a membership list and check the ballots against it." Although Johnson again sat silent, his supporters opposed the new rules. Only after a long, angry debate were they adopted.

Their adoption meant that the March, 1935, meeting of the Little Congress would be the first time that the suspicions which had surrounded elections in which Lyndon Johnson had been involved—elections not only in Washington but at San Marcos—would be given objective scrutiny. And the first time the suspicions were checked, the result proved to be precisely what Johnson's opponents had charged it would be. When the signatures on the ballots were checked against the membership list—by two tellers, one from each side, sitting in front of the audience—a number of votes for Payne did, in fact, prove to have been cast by non-members. With these votes included, Johnson's candidate would have won. With those votes thrown out, Johnson's candidate lost.

JOHNSON'S REACTION to the defeat surprised those who had expected him to attempt a comeback in the next election—although it might not have surprised his boyhood playmates, who had known that "If he couldn't lead, he didn't care much about playing." Having lost the leadership of the Little Congress, Johnson displayed no further interest in it. The Caucus Room had been the only place in Washington in which he had possessed prestige and status of his own. Now he was only one of the crowd there, too.

(Not long thereafter, the old informal voting methods were reinstated,

and the checking of votes was abolished. "There was no more need to check," Lucas explains. A later Speaker of the Little Congress, James F. Swist, who came to the organization in 1939, years after Johnson had left it, expresses surprise that checking had ever been considered necessary. "My God," Swist says, "who would cheat to win the presidency of something like the Little Congress?"

IN HIS EFFORTS to "be somebody," he began frantically, almost desperately, to cast about in wider and wider circles. Welly Hopkins, to whom Johnson appealed for help, says, "He wanted to get ahead. He had that burning ambition. He wanted to climb that ladder. But he didn't know exactly how he was going to climb. Just what order he had in his mind I don't think he knew any more."

Despite previous statements to Hopkins that the real political future lay in national politics and that state government was a "dead end," he now asked Welly to get him a state job. "In a vague way, he wanted to come back to Texas, and [Alvin] Wirtz and I talked to Bill McCraw [newly elected State Attorney General], and Bill said he didn't know him, but if Wirtz and I wanted him to, he would find a place for him, and Wirtz and I told Lyndon that." But the job actually offered turned out to be at a level that Johnson considered humiliatingly low.

In his desperation, he even considered leaving politics. Wirtz, paternally fond of Johnson and impressed by his ability, had offered him a partnership in his Austin law firm if he obtained a law degree, and in September, 1934, he had enrolled in evening classes at Georgetown University Law School. At law school, however, his boyhood reluctance—refusal, almost—to study boiled over again. Extremely defensive about his education ("There we go again with that Latin," he would grumble under his breath to Russell Brown, who sat next to him in class. "Why don't they stick to plain English?"), he was nonetheless not prepared to make up his deficiencies by studying. Willing to learn specific rules of law, he was unwilling—defiantly, determinedly unwilling—to learn the historical or philosophical reasoning behind them. Johnson's law school career, during which, Brown says, "Lyndon never recited once in class," was, at any rate, ended after two months by his marriage. "He dropped out of law school to marry Lady Bird," L. E. Jones says.

The next job for which Johnson tried was a somewhat surprising choice, considering this lack of interest in formal education. His target was a college presidency. The thousand students at the ten-year-old Texas College of Art and Industries (Texas A&I) in Kingsville wore black blazers decorated with a golden Brahma bull, symbol of the King Ranch, whose funds had helped found the institution. Like most institutions in Kleberg Country, it was still dominated by the Klebergs, and Johnson persuaded

Dick Kleberg, who had once been chairman of its Board of Trustees, to support his candidacy. The scholarly Jones, who revered education, was "shocked" by Johnson's effrontery, not only because of his attitude toward education but because of his lack of qualifications: "All he had was a B.A. degree." And Jones was "horrified" when Johnson confided to him that he thought he was going to get the job. "There was a period of several weeks when he dreamed, talked about what he would do [as president], talked it all out—how he would revolutionize the college, slant it towards agriculture, make it the greatest college in the United States." In the event, however, cooler heads intervened, and Jones' fears—and Johnson's hopes—turned out to be unfounded.

Then a new path opened. Johnson, who so admired Roy Miller and Miller's fellow big-time lobbyists as "real operators," had often said, "I want to be a big lobbyist like Roy Miller." Now he got the chance. Miller's buddy, the reactionary General Electric string-puller Horatio H. ("Rasch") Adams, paternally fond of Johnson and impressed by his entrée into government departments, formally offered him a job at \$10,000 per year (a Congressman's salary) as his assistant—the Number Two lobbying job in Washington for giant GE. But with the chance actually before him, Johnson hesitated. According to those with whom he discussed Adams' offer, his reason for hesitating was not principle, but rather a consideration emphasized by Roy Miller. Speaking in terms of the Texas of that era (times would later change in Texas), Miller told Johnson, in several long, serious talks, that acceptance of the General Electric post might mean the end forever of Johnson's hopes for elective office, and for a career in the public side of politics. A man identified as a corporate lobbyist, Miller said bluntly, could never win a major office in Texas.

The offer was nonetheless a heady one for a twenty-six-year-old secretary then earning an annual salary of \$3,000. Accepting it would give him not only a salary equal to that of a Congressman but entrée that might well be superior. "Lyndon had stars in his eyes" at the offer, Jones says. "He was impressed. These lobbyists had the run of the Capitol, you know. For two or three weeks, he was speculating how nice it would be to be a big dog like this." More important, if the path opened to him by Adams was not the path of which Lyndon Johnson had dreamed, it seemed, during these anxious months of 1935, to be the *only* path open to him. All through his life, an indication of a crisis in Johnson's career would be a breakdown in his physical health. His first serious illness—the pneumonia that sent him to the hospital—occurred during these months. He was desperate to be "somebody," and this job would make him "somebody." Although accepting it would force him to leave, possibly forever, the field of politics which was his "natural vocation," he was, aides and friends agree, on the verge of accepting it.

But, as it turned out, he would not have to. His talent at arousing

paternal affection in powerful older men would, at the last minute, provide him with opportunity within his chosen field.

The General Electric job was offered in May or June of 1935. On June 26, 1935, with Johnson about to accept the offer, President Roosevelt announced the creation of a new governmental agency. It would be called the National Youth Administration, its annual budget would be \$50 million—and it would be administered in each state by a state director.

TEXAS SENATOR Tom Connally would have an important voice in the selection of the Texas NYA director. Sam Rayburn went to see him.

Connally was surprised by the visit. He and Rayburn had never been friends. He was surprised by the purpose of the visit, for he knew, as everyone on Capitol Hill knew, that Rayburn never asked even a friend for a favor. And he was surprised by Rayburn's demeanor, by the face of this man who never let his feelings show. For feelings were showing now.

"One day, Sam Rayburn, who had never been friendly toward me, came to see me," Connally was to recall. "He wanted me to ask President Roosevelt to appoint Lyndon Johnson. . . . Sam was agitated." He was, in fact, so agitated that he refused to leave Connally's office until, Connally says, "I agreed to do this."

Connally agreed, but the White House refused to accept his recommendation. It reacted with amusement to the very thought of entrusting a statewide program to a twenty-six-year-old utterly without administrative experience. It announced that the Texas NYA director would be DeWitt Kinard, a former union official from Port Arthur. Kinard was, in fact, formally sworn in to the post.

Sam Rayburn went to the White House. What he said is not known, but the White House announced that a mistake had been made. The NYA director for Texas was not DeWitt Kinard after all, the announcement said. It was Lyndon B. Johnson.

THE APPOINTMENT made Johnson the youngest of the forty-eight state directors of the NYA. He may, in fact, have been the youngest person to be given statewide authority for any major New Deal program. Was he pleased? Was his ambition satisfied—even for a moment? When his appointment was announced, other secretaries crowded into his office to congratulate him. What was his response?

"When I come back to Washington," he said, "I'm coming back as a Congressman."

## 19

# "Put Them to Work!"

THE NATIONAL YOUTH ADMINISTRATION was the inspiration not of Franklin Roosevelt, but of his wife, who said in May, 1934, "I have moments of real terror when I think we may be losing this generation."

"Lost generation" was a phrase occurring with increasing frequency in discussions of America's youth. Attendance at the nation's colleges had begun falling in 1931, with more and more parents unable to afford tuition, and with students having a steadily more difficult time obtaining part-time jobs to help pay their way. High school attendance had begun falling in 1932 because steadily increasing numbers of teen-agers had to drop out and go to work to help support their families (often at a dime an hour—the prevailing Depression wage for teen-age workers); or because their families couldn't spare them even the money necessary for books, or pencils, or bus fare—or shoes. "Again and again in many states," wrote the historians of the NYA, Betty and Ernest K. Lindley, "we heard the word 'shoes' used as the equation for going to school—'The children can get to school until it's snowtime; they can't go then unless they have shoes.' Underwear can be made from sugar sacks. Clothes can be patched and remade. Shoes seem the insurmountable obstacle to school attendance." While no attempt to collect statistics on the young was comprehensive, every attempt was instructive, as if, as the Lindleys put it, the attempts "sank scalpels far enough into the social organism to expose to view conditions far worse than most people had suspected." The United States had always been proud of its educational system; now, in 1935, with the Depression in its sixth year, a study—one which did not include the Deep South, where educational levels were traditionally low—would disclose that of 35,000 young people employed on NYA work projects, half had never gone to school a day beyond the eighth grade. Out of every hundred such young people, then, only fifty reached high school; out of that fifty, only ten graduated from high school; out of that ten, only three even began college; and out of those three, fewer than two graduated from college—two out of one hundred. As the Lindleys wrote: "The more