

**ISAAC H.
BROMLEY**

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Isaac H. Bromley by Norris G. Osborn

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INTRODUCTION

If those who knew Isaac H. Bromley were asked to define him in a single word they would say at once that he was a humorist. He was indeed a humorist, and sometimes, especially in the free and easy exchanges of conversation, his humor was its own and only excuse for being. But in the long series of his articles on the editorial page of the *New York Tribune* there were few which did not derive their inspiration from the serious purpose to expound a wholesome truth. A single example, drawn from the time when the Indians were an unsolved problem of government, is typical. "Nothing," he wrote, "so kindles the enthusiasm of the Interior Department as the knowledge that a Teton Sioux is wandering through Montana or Dakota in a state of savage unrest. Immediately a committee from the department goes for the Teton, finds him nomadic and discontented, says to him 'How many art thou, O Teton' and conjures him by his expectation of a lodge in the happy hunting grounds to enter into a treaty and consent to accept an appropriation from the government. Having obtained his reluctant consent to receive aid from the oppressor, the department gets an appropriation and divides it among deserving persons who support the administration on account of its admirable Indian policy." The truth and pungency of that satire are not important to the present generation, but it requires no explanation even now.

Bromley's blade was so keen and he wielded it with such dexterity that the man at whom it was directed seldom complained of being a victim, and sometimes was not even conscious at the moment that he was giving up the ghost. The innocent Governor of a great state, whose chance of attaining a still higher place vanished in the laughter which one of Bromley's articles evoked, called too promptly at the *Tribune* office to thank him for his assistance. It is a pleasure to add that the Governor himself cherished no resentment when he had become aware a little later of his own political demise.

The task of producing a daily newspaper can never have been accomplished without long hours of haste and stress, but there used to be more leisurely intervals than there are today, partly because the paper went to press much later. Those were oases in which Bromley flourished. He said at least twice as much that was worth printing as he printed. It was delightful to be interrupted by one of his divagations. "That man has the blind courage of a book agent," he remarked one day after the lingering farewell of a persistent visitor. At a time when reconstruction of the building had caused a shortage of desks he walked up to a member of the critical department who was never satisfied with merely condemning the objects of his disapproval but liked to blow them to pieces, and said: "If you are through with that desk just scrape off the blood and feathers and let me sit down." He was constantly raising a sunny ripple on the dull current of routine.

Though it was his special gift to express himself in terms of humorous exaggeration, Bromley was a singularly sane observer of the world about him. He was not dazzled by political or social bubbles, however

iridescent, and nothing pleased him better than to prick them. He had remarkable facility in detecting a sham and loved to expose it, even when, and sometimes because, exposure was inexpedient. Being a keen judge of situations and candidacies, he rarely felt even a brief enthusiasm over colors that were destined to come out in the wash. Conversely, he recognized at once the essential features of a cause or a personality which it would subsequently prove foolish to underestimate. He very seldom "dilated with the wrong emotion."

No other reputation is so perishable as that of the newspaper writer excepting that of the actor, which is hardly more so. All that the actor leaves behind him to attest his powers is the fallible and fading memory of his contemporaries. In the case of the journalist it is possible to appeal to the dusty and brittle files of the paper in which his writings are preserved for a period which the substitution of wood pulp for rags has much diminished. But it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that such an appeal is never taken. When, therefore, a newspaper writer who has exercised wide influence by means of compositions at once wise, delightful and of a wholly original flavor has finished his labors, it is fitting that the most competent of his surviving associates should put his recollections on record. That is the service which Colonel Osborn has performed in this book about Isaac H. Bromley.

HART LYMAN.

New York, July, 1920.

