

HON. HOKE SMITH

He will be thirty eight years old next September. He stands six feet two in his stockings and weighs 220 pounds. He is as straight as a Lake Superior oak, and a line dropped from the back of his big round head would just kiss the heels of his polished boots. I refer to the Hon. Hoke Smith, the new Secretary of the Interior. He is the biggest, strongest and healthiest personality who has been at the head of this department for years. Noble was fat and flabby, Vilas was lean, nervous and irascible, Lamar was absent-minded and dyspeptic, and both Teller and Schurz would not together weigh much more than Hoke Smith. I spent an hour with him at the Interior Department this morning. It was my first meeting with him, and I found him a far different man than the papers have painted. Hoke Smith is not fat, though he does weigh over 200 pounds. His big frame is padded symmetrically with muscular flesh and his body looks to be as firm as that of Corbett, the prize fighter. He sits up straight in his chair and stands firmly on his feet. There are no crow's feet of worry at the corners of his dark blue eyes and his brunette complexion has a healthy tinge. He has a large forehead, a good strong nose and a firm mouth. He is smooth shaven and his dress shows that he keeps a good tailor. There are no frills and furbelows about him, and he impressed me as a man physically and intellectually sound.

HOW HOKE SMITH WORKS.

Secretary Smith is one of the hardest workers we have had in the cabinet for years. I have made a number of inquiries about him at the department and I am told that he spends twice as many hours there as any of his clerks. He gets to the Interior Department about 9 o'clock in the morning and works away steadily until 6 or 7 in the evening. After dinner he comes back and his light is often burning in his office until after midnight. During my talk with him I noted no signs of overwork on his features, and I asked him how he managed to keep in such good condition and put in so many hours. He replied that he did not think that work hurt any man, and that he had learned to work without worry. Said he: "I do my best thinking about a matter when it is before me. I try to look upon all sides of it, and when I have passed upon it it is settled for good as far as I am concerned. I think that worry is largely a matter of habit and that concentration of mind can be acquired by training. I never let anything outside of the matter at issue bother me. If anything else comes up I put it aside instead of making a note of it. I have a fixed time every day for thinking over the little things that I ought to do, and at this time I jot them down. I have trained myself so that I can go to sleep as soon as I go to bed. I never talk or read in bed and I don't think except when I am sitting or standing up. If my mind seems to run on any one subject I dismiss it, and the result is I am never troubled with insomnia. I have worked right along on legal cases until 3 o'clock in the morning and then turned in and slept like a baby."

HOKE SMITH AS A LAWYER.

The conversation here turned to law and Mr. Smith spoke very modestly of

himself as a lawyer, saying that he liked the practice and that he would go back to it as soon as the present administration was over. He is, you know, one of the ablest lawyers of the United States, and an intimate friend of his told me the other day that his fees from the law during the past year had footed up just about \$40,000. He is thoroughly grounded in the law and he has one of the finest private law libraries in the United States. His study has been of the law, not of cases, and he keeps adding to his legal knowledge by constant application. Not long ago he took a fancy to the decisions of Judge Cooley of Michigan and bought all the Michigan state reports in order that he might read these decisions. He annotates his books while reading, and not long ago a famous equity case came up in the Georgia courts and he was called upon to plead. He had only a few hours for preparation, and he surprised every one by his mastery of the case in hand. He gave reference after reference to decisions bearing on the subject and the court gazed with open mouth on what it considered an effort of memory. As he left the court for his office his brother, who is also a good lawyer, asked him how he was able to prepare such a case in so little time. He replied that he had just been reading equity cases and that his notes just fitted into this case.

HIS FIGHT WITH GAMBLERS.

Mr. Smith's early law practice was full of incident. There was nothing of the coward about him, and though every inch of his six feet two is made up of good breeding, he has shown himself to be a brave man. Said one of his friends yesterday: "Hoke Smith was the first lawyer to fight the gamblers of Atlanta. It was when he was twenty-two, when his blood was hotter than it is now, that he was called upon to prosecute a gambler for shooting a man in the back. The cause was the improper relations between the murdered man and the gambler's wife, and Hoke Smith sent the gambler to the penitentiary for life. There were a number of the gambler's friends in the court room, and they were all looked upon as dangerous men. Mr. Smith defied them. He told them that they were a set of scoundrels, cowards and bullies, who went about shooting men in the back whom they were afraid to fight face to face. He told them that he supposed they would attempt to shoot him in the back if he had not his face turned toward them. The result of this plea was such that this unusual verdict was given. After the case was over it was currently reported about Atlanta that these gamblers said they would shoot Hoke Smith on sight. That night he concluded to give them a chance. He was wearing a sack coat, and he put two pistols in his coat pockets and walked down to Chisholm's saloon, which was their chief resort, and ordered at the bar a glass of lemonade. A crowd of gamblers were present, but they did not dare molest him."

THE FIGHTING TEACHER.

"I have heard of another case of his nerve," continued this man, "which happened when he was acting as school teacher at the head of the Waynesborough High School. He was only sixteen at the time. But he was over six feet and was lean and wiry. One of the boys of the school was unruly, and

Mr. Smith gave him a good country school thrashing. The father of the boy objected, and proposed to wipe up the ground with Mr. Smith, but the boy school teacher whipped him as well, and that in such a way that during the remainder of his term the Waynesborough High School was the quietest and most orderly in Georgia, and Mr. Smith got the title of the fighting teacher. I don't think he likes to talk about these incidents of his youth. He is a very quiet man and has nothing of the bully about him. I don't think he would stand imposition, however, and I believe that he has the courage to do what he thinks best and right."

HE TALKS OF THE LAW.

Secretary Smith is worth, I am told, about \$300,000. He has made the most of his money in law practice, and he practices law because he likes it. His newspaper has been merely a side issue in his life, and he tells me that he expects to sell the *Atlanta Journal* and to give up his connection with it before many years. While chatting with him today I asked him when he had first decided to become a lawyer. He replied: "I can't remember when I did not expect to study law. It was my earliest ambition to be a good lawyer, and I began my practice very young. At the age of twenty-five I think I had about the best practice in Georgia, and I am never happier than when working on legal questions. I had no idea of being a member of President Cleveland's cabinet, and when I found I was to be offered a position in it I hoped that the place given me would be that of attorney general. But I find that the interior department has about as much law connected with it as the attorney general's office. Legal questions are constantly coming up and the work is much the same."

HOW HE WAS MADE CABINET MINISTER.

"Please tell me something of the circumstances of your appointment, Mr. Secretary," I asked.

"I don't know that there is a story worth publishing connected with them," was the reply. "I had never met President Cleveland until a few weeks before his election and I had no idea of accepting any place or of entering official life. I became active in politics in Georgia largely through President Cleveland. I have taken part in them to a certain extent all my life, though I never wanted nor would I have accepted office. In 1888, however, when President Cleveland put forth his free trade message a number of the leading newspapers of the state advocated the Randall views of the party and were for protective tariff. Some time before this I had become interested in the *Atlanta Journal*. It was being published in a building which I had bought for my law offices. It had only about 2,000 circulation and I found that the man who owned it wanted to sell. I thought there was room for a good newspaper which should advocate different principles than those espoused by the other papers and be run on different lines. The result was that I bought the paper for \$12,000 and I made a stock company of it. I got a good business manager, who was at the head of one of the printing offices of the town, and a managing editor, who was then city editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*. Each of these men took twenty-five per cent of the stock in the