

# The Great American Shell Game

By LUDWIG LORE

In spite of the intense excitement that accompanied the last day of its session, the New York State Legislature accomplished nothing that was worthy of serious comment. It went into office with an extra good measure of liberal premises. Its record has been the usual one of clever manoeuvring to avoid putting these premises into actual fulfilment, slipping every attempt at progressive legislation in the bud.

The exciting show that was staged over the recall of the Mullan-Gage law had only one significance—it gave the more discerning an opportunity to view the motives and the influences that dominate all activity in Albany a little more closely, to see a little more clearly the personal interests that dominate so much of our state legislation.

It is a well known fact that Smith and his followers in the legislature were elected into office in the last election on a strictly anti-prohibition platform. The repeal of the Mullan-Gage act became, therefore, the dominant question before the legislature during the past session. Miller, Smith's opponent, tho personally a "wet," subordinated his personal views to his party platform, the more willingly, perhaps, because his chief hope of success lay with the farmer element up-state, which is notoriously in favor of the strict enforcement of the prohibition measure.

Nevertheless, Smith and his colleagues showed a marked reluctance to approach this exceedingly troublesome problem. On the contrary, they were so obviously inclined to shirk their duty to their electorate, that their republican opponents felt called upon to bring them to terms.

Not that the latter have had occasion to change their position. But they were astute enough to appreciate the difficult position into which the Democrats, and particularly Governor Smith, had placed themselves. Smith has conscientious scruples against an extended term in the gubernatorial chair. He is most emphatically in the field for a presidential nomination. This fact, however, makes him very reluctant to take a position that may cost him the support of the South, which, because of its disfranchised negroes, is still practically wholly democratic. Mr. Smith is therefore playing his game with the utmost care, for he realizes that one false move may easily end his usefulness as presidential candidate.

Let us see what happened. The democratic Senate presented a clean bill of health by adopting the repeal motion, relying upon the Republicans to defeat it in the Assembly, thus saving the democratic administration from the stigma of having refused to support the national prohibition amendment. But the Republicans were equally eager to establish an alibi. They, too, are looking forward to the presidential campaign, and desire nothing more ardently than to discredit Governor Smith, who is undoubtedly a redoubtable opponent. For this reason they are

straining every effort, to elect a number of additional assemblymen this fall in Greater New York, so that they may terrorize and discredit the Smith Administration. They, therefore, made tentative advances to the Democrats, offering them the necessary republican votes to secure the necessary two-thirds majority for the repeal.

The Democrats were thus forced into a position where they were compelled to act. What followed is well known. Whether the lateness of one democratic assemblyman, which almost wrecked the carefully built-up majority, was accidental or not, is hard to say. We are inclined to believe the latter. Be it as it may, the fact remains that the Republicans, in order to force the passage of the bill for the double purpose of strengthening their foothold in New York City and hurting the Democratic party, ordered its New York City delegation to vote to a man for the repeal of the Mullan-Gage amendment.

So the clever republican politicians have made an effective appeal for support on both sides. Nominally, on the strength of their platform, they can still claim unqualified support for the dry amendment. In New York City, on the other hand, their candidates can proudly point out the fact that it was their votes that saved the day for the repeal act. Governor Smith, however, is in no enviable position. He must sign the recall bill whether he wants to or not, there is no other way. True, he will put off the fateful moment as long as is possible. He has already announced his intention of taking a lengthy vacation, and of calling a hearing on this question. But dodge as he may, the nut is there, and will have to be cracked.

For the working-class the repeal of the Mullan-Gage law has no practical significance. To them it makes little difference who pays the grafters and hires the idlers that constitute our prohibition force. He knows, that neither the state nor the nation will succeed in enforcing prohibition, because its most ardent supporters are its most successful violators. In the hands of the politicians it is a sleight of hand trick with which he fools and amuses the public, and distracts the attention from the serious endeavors of life.