

THE LITERARY DIGEST

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TOPICS OF THE DAY

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A TEXAS TWISTER BREWING FOR "MA" FERGUSON

THE TERRIFYING SIGHT of an approaching tornado whirling assorted live stock, farm implements, and the wreckage of barns and houses through the air, seems duplicated in the political twister menacing Gov. Miriam Amanda Ferguson of Texas, as we discern, churning and tossing about, through the din and confusion, charges of wasting public money, of grossly abusing the pardoning power, and of failing to enforce the Prohibition Law. We also glimpse amid the flying débris the question of woman's fitness for high office, and the specter of the Ku Klux Klan.

It was an anti-Klan campaign, it will be remembered, that carried Mrs. Ferguson into the Governorship less than a year ago. So it is not surprising that her first comment on the demand for a special session of the Legislature to investigate certain phases of her Administration with a view to possible impeachment proceedings was: "I guess the Klan is trying to discredit my Administration." But it is interesting to note that the leader of the anti-Ferguson forces, Attorney-General Dan Moody, is himself a famous foe of the Klan, having sent a number of Klansmen to the penitentiary by his vigorous prosecution of a flogging case; and that many others who call for a special investigatory session are no less hostile to a Klan domination of Texas than Governor Ferguson herself. "If Mrs. Ferguson wants to locate the enemy that has done more to make trouble for her Administration than all the Klansmen between the two oceans, she can find him in her own family circle," says the *Houston Post-Dispatch*, a Texas paper which predicted during the campaign that if Mrs. Ferguson should be elected, the State actually would be governed by her husband, the impeached ex-Gov. James E. Ferguson. Believing its prophecy fulfilled, this paper now declares that if Texas is ever again to welcome a married woman as Governor, "we must

first have a law for a State allowance for her husband of \$10,000 a year, and require him to leave for a two-year trip around the world on Inauguration Day." In the Texas capital, where "Jim" Ferguson has been referred to as "Mussolini the Second," the *Austin American* affirms that "the six million people of Texas do not hold Gov. Miriam A. Ferguson personally responsible, because she is the Governor in name only." But the same paper thinks it "fair to assume that the majority of the people in Texas do desire that former Gov. James E. Ferguson

cease to function as Governor of Texas and that he retire as far as possible from participation in the affairs of government." Leaders of the feminist movement in Texas, the *Austin* correspondents tell us, have little sympathy with Governor "Ma" Ferguson in her political troubles, which they say she has brought on her own head by her acceptance of the rôle of "slave wife" and figurehead. An *Austin* dispatch to the *New York Herald Tribune* quotes Mrs. Kate G. Winston, State treasurer of the National Woman's party, as saying:

"This is not a case of a woman failing in public office. Mrs. Ferguson was elected as a figurehead and she has served as a figurehead. She never has really been in public office. A thing like this could

never happen again in a thousand years—a situation in which a woman with little interest in civic affairs is elected. Why, there are many women in Texas with a fine grasp upon governmental affairs and with natural ability who would have made excellent Governors.

"This case must not be taken by the rest of the country as an example of the Texas women in government or as a test of women in public office."

And in the *New York World* Miss Edith Johnson, another prominent Texas feminist, is quoted as saying:

"Feminist leaders are logical in their repudiation of her, for



P. & A. photograph

"JIM" AND "MA"

Former Gov. James E. Ferguson, of Texas, and his wife, Gov. Miriam A. Ferguson. When asked to call a special session of the Legislature to investigate her Administration, she is reported as saying: "Let them assemble if they want to. Let them start something. I'll still be here at the finish. They want me to throw myself to the wolves. Not on your life! I know them too well. I was born and raised with them. I know them."

no woman could have played the rôle of tool for her husband more convincingly than she. She had a chance to win the admiration of the whole country, but as an old-fashioned slave-wife, the prospect is that by her weakness she will defeat both herself and her hero, Jim."

The real fight in Texas, as the *Milwaukee Journal* sees it, is "to put an end to the Governorship by proxy of an impeached Governor who has hidden behind his wife's skirts." According to this Wisconsin paper, "Mrs. Ferguson refers to her husband as her 'adviser,' but the word at the capitol is 'See Jim.'" Let us glance back at some of the events leading up to this situation.

James E. Ferguson, serving his second term as Governor in 1917, was impeached on the charge of mishandling State funds. Last year his wife entered the gubernatorial race "to vindicate her husband," and was elected, taking office in January of this year. She was the first woman to be elected Governor in the United States. One of her earliest public acts was to sign an amnesty bill restoring his civil and political rights to Jim.

For a time all seemed to be going well with "Ma" Ferguson's Administration. But during recent weeks rumblings of a gathering storm began to reach the outside world, culminating in serious charges against the Highway Commission, the most powerful of the State boards. This commission controls the spending of about \$20,000,000 for building, improving, and maintaining highways. It consisted of three members, appointed by Governor Ferguson, but two of them resigned after Attorney-General Moody began action for the annulment of some of their contracts. Tho not a member of this board, James E. Ferguson, it is said, had been in the habit of attending its meetings. Says Harvey Anderson in a Consolidated Press dispatch from Austin:

"Extravagance is the prime charge against the Commission. The fight, which resulted in the unseating of Jim Ferguson nine years ago, started in the highway department and over the use of funds. The fight on his wife, who ran for office just to vindicate him, has begun in the same place."

When the Governor was first approached with the suggestion that she call a special session to investigate the actions of the Highway Commission, she replied: "Go to the grand jury with your charges. If there is guilt, then that body can indict and bring to trial." Later the Speaker of the House, Lee Satterwhite, in response to a petition signed by fifty members, announced his intention to call a special session if the Governor failed to act. This petition was prompted by charges that "State money is being wasted in enormous sums." Because Texas receives more than \$4,500,000 a year from the Federal Government for roads, a Federal investigation of the Highway Commission's contracts has also been begun.

One road-making corporation sued by Attorney-General Moody abandoned its defense and agreed to disgorge \$600,000.

If the work contracted for by this company had been completed on the terms made with it by the Highway Commission, says the Attorney-General, its profit would have been \$1,800,000 on a \$2,600,000 job.

From James E. Ferguson, however, we get a different version of Mr. Moody's dealings with this corporation. "As a result of the great legal gymnastics of the youthful Attorney-General," says Mr. Ferguson, "the State will sustain a loss of \$1,800,000" on this particular contract. These figures are based on estimates

of what it would have cost the corporation to fulfil its contract, and of what it will now cost the State to get the work finished. Mr. Moody calls them "an attempt to throw a smoke-screen over the highway scandal."

But the case against Governor Ferguson, her critics remind us, does not end with the question of road contracts. On Thanksgiving Day, we are told, she released 105 prison inmates, bringing the total number of pardons issued during her Administration to 1,126, making an average of more than 100 a month. "Ma Ferguson's pardoning exploits indicate that in Texas the quality of mercy is not strained—or even sifted," comments the *New York Herald Tribune*. The *Pittsburgh Gazette Times* remarks: "If so many Texas convicts may reasonably be adjudged 'worthy,' what is to be thought of justice in the Lone Star State?" And in Texas the *Houston Post-Dispatch* comments as follows on the Governor's 105 Thanksgiving pardons:

"The people of Texas have been good to Mrs. Ferguson. They bestowed upon her the highest honor within their gift. When she came with a plea for a chance to vindicate her family

name, they granted her that chance.

"How does she repay the people of the State? While the people were gathering in their temples of worship and in their homes to express their gratitude for the good things that had come to them during the year, the Governor of their State was opening the prison doors and bidding a horde of murderers, rapists, liquor-law violators, thieves, and other enemies of society, to come forth and go their way.

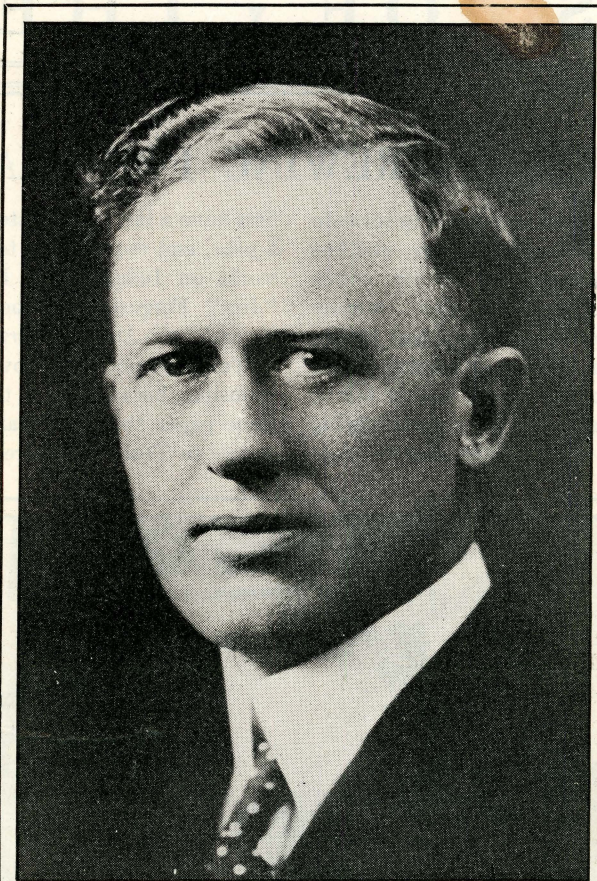
"It is worth while to analyze that list of clemency proclamations. Approximately half of those who received pardons, conditional pardons or paroles, had been convicted of the most heinous offenses in the category of crime.

"Twenty-two of the number were serving time for the killing of fellow human beings. Six had been convicted of criminal assault. Thirty-one had been sentenced for burglary, theft or robbery, and twenty-five for violation of the liquor laws. The others were guilty of a variety of offenses.

"These are the Thanksgiving gifts of the Governor of Texas to the people of the State—105 proven criminals, all in a bunch.

"Small wonder it is that crime increases and thoughtful, patriotic citizens verge upon despair when they survey the prevalence of lawlessness."

The Texas conference of the Methodist Church, South, recently accused the public officials of Texas, "from constable up to the seat of authority in the Governor's chair," of "winking



Keystone View Company photograph

LEADER OF THE ANTI-FERGUSON FORCES

Attorney-General Dan Moody, whose charges against the Texas Highway Department led to the demand for a special session to investigate Governor Ferguson's Administration.

at wide-spread breaking of the Prohibition Law." The Governor, declaring that in Texas the rich drink their liquor unmolested while the poor are sent to jail, issued a formal statement offering a reward of \$500 for the arrest and conviction of any person violating the Prohibition Law, provided that person was worth \$5,000 or more. She also accused the owner of a Texas newspaper of having been intoxicated at a football game, and called upon him to resign from the board of directors of the Texas Technological College. At about this time the Governor's colored butler, a paroled convict, was arrested on the charge of being a bootlegger.

The storm that is raging around the Ferguson Administration, we are assured by the Governor's husband, is stimulated by "wicked liars." In an article written in Austin by a staff correspondent of the *New York Times*, we find this explanation of "Ma" Ferguson's pardon program:

"In her pardoning and paroling of more than a thousand penitentiary convicts she has carried out her pre-election promise, as announced by her husband. Ferguson took the position that there were a great many men and women in prison who were deserving of pardons or paroles. During the four years that her predecessor, Gov. Pat M. Neff, was in office, only about fifty pardons were issued."

The road contract scandals were the greater shock, remarks the *Houston Chronicle*, because the rest of the Ferguson Administration's record seemed so good. Here, according to this Texas daily, is the picture before the storm-clouds gathered:

"The Administration started well. We were assured that the deficit of over \$3,000,000 handed the Fergusons by the retiring Governor would be wiped out before the first year ended.

"There were no more prison scandals, and the penitentiary system was put on a cash basis for the first time in eight years. The farms made bountiful crops, all debts were paid, and we proudly recorded the fact that the Fergusons had made good.

"Harmony prevailed throughout the State. The Ku Klux Klan, which had been permitted to terrorize all Texas during the Neff Administration, had been forced to recognize the law. The courts and the constabulary of Texas were once more supreme.



THE FERGUSON FAMILY HORSE

—Ireland in the *Columbus Dispatch*.

"The State was on a cash basis. There was an assurance that by next year the Ferguson Administration would be able to announce a substantial reduction in the tax rate.

"There was a belief that finally Texas had a real business administration."

"The Ferguson Administration has, in many respects, been one of the best Texas has enjoyed in many years," says the *Wichita Falls Times*, and the chairman of the Farm Labor Political Conference telegraphs us as follows:

"The Fergusons took over the State in a bankrupt condition last January. Now the State is on a cash basis, and if the Ferguson Administration is not hampered, they will correct the highway muddle."

But we hear also hostile voices in the Texas press. "'Ma' Ferguson will be known in history as Texas' first woman Governor, but the memory will not be a fond one for the State," remarks the *Amarillo News*. "Attorney-General Dan Moody has accomplished the best single service for the State of Texas during the last ten years in breaking up the State highway scandal," says the *Waco News-Tribune*. "Mr. Moody's must not be the only official broom devoted to a clean-sweeping law enforcement," remarks the *San Antonio Express*, which is convinced of the need of a special session. The *Dallas Dispatch* suggests that the Governor should follow the example of her Highway Commissioners and resign. The Governor made a "monumental blunder" in the first place in trying to frustrate the efforts of the Attorney-General, remarks the *Dallas News*. Texas, thinks the *Dallas Times-Herald*, had little reason to expect good results from "an election won by prejudice." And in the *San Antonio American Forum*, a Klan organ, we read: "The people of Texas sowed to the wind last year because of manufactured prejudice against the Klan. They are now reaping the whirlwind."

The *Houston Press*, which claims to have been the first paper in the State to attack the Highway Department, warns the opponents of the Fergusons that they "must be careful not to go too far" and make a martyr of their first woman Governor. Says this paper: "Ferguson has turned one impeachment to his own advantage, and he may make political capital out of an attack upon his wife that oversteps itself."



HE LEARNED ABOUT WOMEN FROM HER

—Hanny in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.