

The Eyes of America

by Geoffrey A. Landis

It was an enlightened year, a young century from which to spring forward into the future, a year in which people pushed the new boundaries of freedom.

It was an era of marvels, and who knew what could or could not be done? Men had sent their signals by etheric wave across the English Channel, and the mighty Niagara had been tamed and harnessed to the yoke of man. Locomotive rails tunneled across and under the great Rocky Mountains, and America, the stripling giant, had beaten the tired empire of Spain to the ground in a war of only three months. Men now talked of airships that would fly to the moon, and of telephones to breach the vapory wall between worlds.

It was 1904. Who knew what marvels would be next?

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The room was smoke-filled, but that was no surprise; the rooms where real decision making occurred were always smoke-filled.

"Damn Democrats," Horovitz said. "They're going to ruin everything we fought for."

"Indeed," Hanna said. Marcus Hanna, the Ohio senator, was the chairman of the Republican party, but Horovitz was its invisible leader. "You are only stating the obvious. But who have we got?"

"Damn that communist, that anarchist, that swine," Horovitz said. "Why'd he have to shoot Teddy? Couldn't he have shot McKinley? Damn it to hell, we need Teddy now, more than ever."

Levi Horovitz—Leggy, to his friends, of which he had few, at least inside politics—was short and rotund. He was rarely seen in public, and never without a soggy cigar clamped in his teeth. For nearly twenty years, Horovitz had been the hidden power behind the Republican party—since 1884, when, with the aid of a handful of carefully paid newsmen, he had orchestrated his candidate Jimmy Blaine into the Republican nomination over the incumbent Chester Arthur.

Horovitz was bitterly aware that he would never serve in office himself. He could never get elected, not in this century, not in the next. Not a Jew. Not even in America, the most enlightened country in the world. But he had adapted, and presidents and generals danced to his orders.

"Roosevelt's not much good to us now, six feet under," Hanna said. In Hanna's private opinion, Roosevelt had never been any good for the Republicans; the damned cowboy had been unsafe and erratic. But there was no percentage in talking against a war hero, especially a dead one; Hanna had learned that lesson well. "Better come up with somebody else."

"Damn that anarchist," Horovitz muttered again. "Damn him to hell."

"That's redundant; he's there already," Hanna said. "Now, who have you got?"

"Damn that Bryan, too."

"Bryan's got the masses behind him," Hanna observed.

"Swine." Horovitz spit out his cigar and ground it under his foot. "They're all a bunch of swine."

That was the problem facing the Republicans, all right. With Theodore Roosevelt dead, shot by a drug-crazed anarchist, who did they have? William Jennings Bryan was mobilizing the country yokels with his damned populist talk. The man was tireless, crossing and recrossing the country by rail, stopping at every cow-flop town on the tracks, talking about American imperialism as if it were a bad thing, asking the people whether they had ever seen the "full dinner pail" that McKinley had promised them. With his high-flown diction and rash promises, Bryan was raising their expectations—and harvesting their votes. He could motivate the rabble, old Bryan could; Horovitz would give him that. What a silver-tongued peacock he was at oration, with his talk of America "crucified upon a cross of gold" and his avowal of "plowshares of peace!"

If only the man had been a Republican, a true patriot, instead of a Democrat—one step away from being a communist. Or worse.

"Here's my thought," Hanna said. "We run John Hay."

"Against William Jennings Bryan?" Horovitz dismissed him with a wave, and pulled a crumpled new cigar from his vest pocket. "You're joking. Bryan would crumple him up like a page from last year's Sears & Roebuck catalog and wipe his ass with the man."

"Henderson, then?"

"Wouldn't stand a chance. None of those old guys can stand against Bryan. We need somebody new."

"Then who?"

"The boy genius," Horovitz said. "The hero of America, the maestro of electricity." At Hanna's blank look, he said, "The wizard of Menlo Park."

"You mean"—Hanna gasped—"Edison?"

Horovitz pulled a newspaper from his valise and dropped it onto the desk. The headline said, EDISON ANNOUNCES REST, HE IS TIRED OUT AND WILL STOP INVENTING FOR A WHILE. "He's not tinkering," Horovitz said. "He might as well run for president."

"But—the man has no knowledge of politics."

Horovitz lit his cigar, drew deeply, exhaled a cloud of smoke, and smiled. "So much the better."

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"No," Edison said, "I have too much work to do. Wouldn't think of it."

He was no longer any sort of boy genius, not at fifty-five years of age, but his eyes had the restless, playful energy of a boy, darting away as if he were already bored with the conversation and itching to go outside to play. His suit was a stylishly cut

gabardine, but wrinkled as if he had slept in it, and his tie was carelessly knotted and slightly askew.

Horovitz persisted.

"No," Edison said, "I have no interest in politics. Gentlemen, I am duly flattered, but I do believe that you are importuning the wrong man." He stood up and turned to the window, his back to Horovitz, pointedly gazing out across the East River.

It was intended as a gesture to dismiss Horovitz from his East Side office. Yet Horovitz persisted.

"Are you deranged," Edison said, "or just deaf?" He turned back to Horovitz, his eyes blazing with irritation. "No, confound it, no, and again no! Why me?"

The question was exactly the opening that Horovitz was waiting for.

"Mr. Bryan is kind-hearted, Mr. Edison, but he is a man stuck deeply into the mire of the past," he said. "He will lead us down from the heights we have scaled, and, in the name of his working man, will take us back into darkness. He is a fool, a fool who believes with utter sincerity that he is guided by God, and he will be the ruin of America."

Horovitz was careful, telling Thomas Alva Edison just exactly what he wanted to hear. He worked words as carefully as playing a fish, in a net of flattery and sense in equal proportions.

"It is a century of science, Mr. Edison," he concluded. "And if we cannot get leadership from a man of science, a man of your standing, what hope do we have? We come to you with our hats in our hands. So tell us, where is your equal? Is there another man of your caliber and perseverance? Give me but the name of this man, and we shall go on our knees and beg him to serve as candidate. No one but a man of science can help us. Join us, Mr. Edison. Lead us. Tell us how to steer America. You are our only hope."

Edison slowly nodded. "A century of science. Yes, that it is. That, it most certainly is."

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"I love elections," said Samuel Clemens. "It is the great American spectacle, featuring bloviating and drum-beating unmatched in the world, and it is always a thrill to see whether the hypocrites will beat the fools, or vice versa."

Sam Clemens was in the barber shop. He was, as ever, resplendent in a white linen suit. For the new century, he had decided that he would wear only white; it made him look distinguished and dazzled the crowds, and Sam was a showman, every Missouri inch of him.

"Quiet down a bit now, please, Mr. Twain," one of the men said. "We're listening to Mr. Edison talk."

Sam wasn't in the barbershop for a haircut—he was cultivating the lion's mane look that year—but had come to watch the men play checkers, listen to the election talk, and maybe join in and pontificate a bit about current events. Or perhaps he might

pick up some gossip or some good lines he could use in an article or a speech. But this time he was being upstaged, and upstaged by a doll, at that.

A talking doll. Sam had an Edison phonograph, of course; who hadn't? They were all the rage. But this doll was a little Edison himself, a foot and a half tall, and spoke with Edison's blunt, homespun voice. "I mean to put America to work," the tiny Edison said. "Nothing great is accomplished without honest sweat, and I say America is great because we ain't afraid of work."

"Well, well," Samuel Clemens said to it. "Truth, many folk as I know would sweat and toil and try just about anything to avoid honest work. I allow as the folk Mr. Edison knows must be a different kind of people entirely."

"We shall enter the glorious future," the Edison doll recited, "standing tall and proud."

"Well, bully," Sam told it. "That's a fair promise, I'd say, about as honest as I've ever heard from a politician." For a moment the men in the barbershop looked at him and not the talking Edison, and Sam went on, "We will enter the future, indeed. I reckon that will happen no matter which buffoon is elected. And glorious? Sure. 'Course, you can call a pig glorious, if you like."

To tell the truth, Sam didn't know what to make of Edison. He certainly admired him as an inventor, of course; Sam considered himself an inventor, but Edison was, no doubt about it, the top dog. But what in blazes was the man thinking of, running for president, and as a Republican, no less? Sam purely hated Republicans. Republican imperialism and jingoism, in his opinion, were likely to be the ruin of America. Was Edison too blind to know that only fools, charlatans, and con men ever ran for public office? Not that Sam necessarily minded a good confidence man; some of them were plain music to hear talk, and anyway, who else would he play pool with? But Edison?

He had to go see that Edison, he did. Give him a good talking to, let him know how he was being used.

He wondered if Edison played pool.

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William Jennings Bryan was working like a mule; crisscrossing the country by rail, making fifteen and even twenty railroad-stop speeches a day, every day, save only Sunday, the sabbath, when he restricted himself to one speech, after church. To keep up his strength, he was eating six meals a day, and his campaign crew gave him a rubdown after each speech in a hopeless attempt to keep him fresh and vigorous.

Still, the Edison dolls were bringing the Republican campaign into every salon, barbershop, and cafe in America. After some desperate seeking, Bryan's campaign found that the Victor grapho-phone company would make a talking machine small enough to hide inside a William Jennings Bryan doll, using a Victrola circular-platter instead of an Edison cylinder. The Edison company sued, but while the lawyers talked, the Bryan dolls battled the Edison dolls for the ears of America.

For that summer, the great American entertainment was to stage debates between

the two dolls. The Bryan doll explained that the issue was the principles of democracy and rights for the working man against the plundering plutocracy and imperialism of the Republican party. The Edison doll talked about the future, the wonderful role America would have in bringing the engines of enlightenment to the world, as earlier electricity had distributed light. (Neither doll talked about real issues, as far as Sam Clemens could see.)

The talking cylinders were selling like blazes. "No band of train robbers ever planned a robbery upon a train more deliberately or with less conscience," the tiny Bryan squeaked forth, "than the robbery the plutocrats plan upon this great nation." "Innovation, confound it, innovation and pure honest sweat are what build American fortunes, and that is open to Americans of all cities," the miniature Edison responded.

Edison set his team in the laboratory twenty-four hours a day trying to find ways to make reproductions of cylinders quickly and cheaply; inventing new materials to take the place of the fragile wax. As fast as he could innovate, the Victor talking-machine company matched Edison's cylinders with new grapho-phone disks of Bryan's speeches, and there was a new speech for sale for the dolls to talk every week.

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"Edison is beating me," Bryan said, "with light." He was standing in the small office of the private railway car the campaign had hired. A pile of newspapers lay piled at the foot of the plumply cushioned armchair from which he had just arisen; he had scanned each one rapidly and discarded it. "It is not enough that the plutocrats are spending every dollar that they have stolen from the honest workingmen, but now Edison has started promising to bring electrification to every farmhouse in the country. The farmers are buying his electrical-miracle talk wholesale. He cannot do it, of course, but ever I fail to convince them."

"Then promise electricity as well," said Calhoun, his closest campaign adviser. Bryan was famed as a campaigner who revealed his strategies to no one, but Cal, who had no ambitions of his own but to be secretary to the great man, was one of the few that Bryan would trust to reveal his doubts to. "Just think what a benefit it would be for the common man, no longer to live under the tyranny of the sun!"

"I will not disparage the sun, which is God's gift," Bryan said curtly. "And, further, though all my advisers tell me to, I will cozen my people with no lies. The cost of the copper alone would bankrupt the nation, unless we are to implement a new tax, and that I will not do. I shall and will promise nothing that cannot be delivered."

"There is a man," Calvin said, "who has said—well, I don't know myself, but he has said that he can send power without wires. He can control the lightning."

"Who is this?" Bryan said.

"His name is Nikola Tesla."

"And the problem?"

"Well," Cal hesitated. "I've heard people say he's mad."

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Nikola Tesla was Edison's greatest rival—in the field of electrical inventing, his most vexing and only rival. Where Edison had electrified New York with direct-current electricity, Tesla's alternating current, backed by Mr. Westinghouse, was electrifying the nation.

If the mad Serb said he could command the powers of lightning, it was no more or less a marvel, in its way, than Herr Daimler's pneumatic-tired gasoline automobile.

Tesla had agreed to meet Bryan at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York, where he kept his room. Bryan had engaged a small private meeting room, decorated with a cabbage-rose wallpaper and an elaborate marble-topped table with an ormolu clock featuring the metaphorical figures of Time and the Lovers.

"I can create, or I can destroy," Tesla said. He was impeccably dressed, in a dark suit whose shirt bore detachable cuffs and an elaborately knotted silk cravat of the palest blue. "I can make the Earth sing like a bell. I can excite the powers of resonance, and like that"—he snapped his fingers—"I could destroy buildings, cities, whole continents." His stare was piercing, almost frightening in its intensity, like that of a preacher in the throes of the rapture. "I could split the Earth itself in two. Electricity? I can call forth the lightning from the deep blue sky and stand untouched in the electrical fires. God? You talk of God? I will show you God, the God of lightning. Give me only my dynamo, and I hold the powers of God in the palm of my hand."

"Your talk is blasphemous," Bryan said calmly. "If you wish to continue in this fashion, please absent yourself from my presence. And furthermore, I have no interest in your engines of destruction. America is no imperial war power; we are a power of peace, not a sower of human discord."

Tesla was momentarily taken aback. "And what, then, do you want of me?"

"You seek backing. I am told that you want financial backers for your idea to create electrical power and send it through the ether across the Earth. Is this true?"

Tesla nodded. "Resonance," he said. "Resonance is the secret; nothing works without resonance."

"I think that without wires, there can be no meters, and without meters, the electricity would be free to all," Bryan said. "And so, with no promise of fat remuneration, none of the plutocrats will finance your scheme."

"All too true, I have found," Tesla said ruefully. "I must admit it."

"Help me win this election." Bryan's eyes blazed with the strength of his sincerity. "Help me win, and I promise you, your electrical broadcast towers will be built."

"Sir, I am yours." Tesla bowed. "If invention is your requirement, you may have no fear of Edison, for in that respect I am his master. Only tell me what I must do, and I shall be at your most dedicated service."

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"Tesla? A fraud and a confidence man," Edison said. He was dapper in a

hundred-dollar silk suit now, sitting behind a marble-topped mahogany desk. His tie was still askew, probably from his having taken a nap on the desktop earlier.

Horovitz looked unconvinced. Edison was proving to be harder to manage than even Roosevelt had been; he had too many of his own ideas, some of them tending disastrously toward progressivism. But a victory by the populist Bryan would be far worse of a disaster.

Edison said, "Forget about Tesla. He will promise them the sky, anything, but he will take their money and deliver nothing but dreams and spun-sugar. Believe me, I know; he worked for me, and he was nothing but trouble. Scientific research requires discipline and methodical experimentation. There is no place in electricity for a man with no discipline. Toys, that's what he makes, gee-gaws to impress the masses. He is no inventor. And as for his vaunted etheric power beams—I say bah, and double-bah, and bah again. A fraud and a connivance. It will be like his alternating-cycle electrical tension; something that will kill people who use it, mark me well. It will kill people."

Tesla's joining the Bryan campaign as the candidate's "electrical advisor" was in all of the news, and the excited journalists clearly hoped to pump up the rivalry between Tesla and Edison, harking back to the glorious days of the war between Edison's direct-current and Tesla's alternating electrical current. Perhaps Edison would electrocute somebody, as he had in the earlier war of the currents?

This worried Horovitz: Tesla had won that battle, or at least his patron Mr. Westinghouse had, and he wondered what new tricks Mr. Tesla might have in store. Tesla was just exactly what Horovitz feared: an upstart immigrant, and one who indubitably held the views of anarchists and Fabians. Horovitz kept his own origins quiet, most particularly his arrival in America in the arms of immigrant parents and the fact that he had never spoken a word of English until he was nearly six. He was an American, damn them, fully an equal of Pierpont Morgan and Andrew Carnegie; he had nothing in common with the dirty, starving immigrants in their consumption-riddled tenements.

But Edison didn't seem to be worried about Tesla. Horovitz relaxed slightly and turned his mind to the question of how he would run Edison. The man was a bull moose quite as headstrong as Roosevelt had been, and it would take some connivance to get him into line.

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Fifty miles away, Samuel Clemens and Sarah Bernhardt were also discussing Tesla. Sam had had no luck getting in to see Mr. Edison. When he had come for an interview, a man named Horovitz had quizzed him for nearly half an hour, asking him detailed questions about the Philippines and the Standard Oil Trust. These were issues about which he had quite definite opinions, and he'd given the man quite an earful, he had, quite pleased to show off his detailed command of current events—but after all his talking, rather than showing him to Edison, the man had taken him to see a receptionist, who told him that Mr. Edison was busy and could receive no visitors this month, or next, or, for that matter, the following year.

But it was a rip-snorting campaign, no denying that, and Sam was enjoying it hugely. On Sunday, Bryan's campaign had projected an enormous optical show to the curious viewers in Madison Garden, powered by calcium lights. In the middle of the

city, a three-story-high projection of Bryan had towered over the bustling city, the projector operator deftly switching the glass slides to make the candidate wave to the crowd. It was, perhaps, not enough to beat Edison's continuous showing of kinesiographic images in hired dance halls, showing off the inventor along with fanciful images of the wonders of electricity as a taste of what was to come, but it demonstrated that Bryan wasn't out of the great game yet.

When the newspapers had announced Tesla's joining up with Bryan, Clemens had brightened up. When he had been in New York, young Tesla had been a quite friend of his, and it would be a gay thing now to go meet the mad Serb and see what his views were on the election.

Sarah Bernhardt, the celebrated French actress, also knew Tesla. Sam had met with her on the train up from New York City, and as she was also heading for Tesla's Long Island laboratory, when she hired an electric brougham for the ride from the station, she invited him to share the ride. They spent the short trip discussing their acquaintance Nikola Tesla and the political campaign. Now they were in the vestibule of the Tesla's laboratory building. A dozen pigeons scattered from the stoop and fluttered around their heads as they entered the vestibule.

"Mad as a hatter, *n'est pas?*" Samuel Clemens said, nodding toward the door, a completely unprepossessing wooden door with a simple brass plate reading NIKOLA TESLA, ELECTRICAL LABORATORY. "But for all that, a most entertaining fellow. Wonder how in the world he gets along with that prig Bryan?"

"He's not really mad," Sarah Bernhardt said, in her elegant French accent. "Eccentric, of course, but not mad. It's just that his enthusiasms are more intense than other people's. He gets an idea, and he just can't get it out of his head; he has to go to his lab and do it. He told me that often while he's working on one idea, he has another idea, and another and another, and they come so fast and thick, in swarms like mosquitoes, that he cannot work on them fast enough."

But then Sarah Bernhardt herself was somebody who was at the edge of madness, Sam thought. Her eccentricity was more than just the whimsy of a diva. She always insisted on her own private railway car, and one reason for this was so that she could take with her the coffin that she would sleep in when she had her headaches. Some people said that she took her paramours in the coffin as well, but perhaps that was only a scurrilous rumor about the flamboyant diva. And as for her relationship with Tesla—"We are friends, nothing more," she haughtily said when the representatives of the Hearst papers pressed her for more details. "He amuses me."

Sam, who had always wondered a bit over Tesla's views on women, expected that this was exactly it, that regardless of what Bernhardt might have wanted from him, their relationship was likely to be no more than just words. Sam had touched his arm once, and Tesla had jerked away in horror. Tesla had a fear of being touched.

Sam Clemens wasn't at all sure of Tesla's sanity himself. He had seen Tesla in his laboratory once charge himself up to ten million volts of electrical pressure, shooting lightning bolts out of his fingers to burn holes through sheets of plywood. It had looked like great fun to Sam, and he had begged Tesla to let him try it, but Tesla had solemnly demurred, telling him it was too dangerous for a man untrained in electricity.

"Is he as eccentric as he used to be, or has he calmed down a bit, I wonder?" Sam asked, and rang the bell.

Mr. Czito, Nikola Tesla's assistant, opened the door, and after greeting them, ushered them into the laboratory. It was a cavernous, dimly-lit space, a building hollowed out to be just a shell, with the bare girders and a ceiling a hundred feet overhead, filled with dynamos and transformers and switching gear and elaborately wound copper coils.

Nikola Tesla turned to meet them. He was thinner than Sam Clemens had remembered him. He'd always been slender, but now he was almost frighteningly gaunt. "Living on bread and water, but without the bread," as they'd have put it in the mining camps. "Straight up and down like six o'clock." He's still handsome enough to set a few pulses to fluttering, though, Sam thought, and snuck a glance over at Sarah Bernhardt.

"Ah, Mr. Twain," Tesla said, and smiled. "So glad you could come."

"Sam, please," Clemens responded.

"And the divine Mademoiselle Bernhardt." Tesla bowed deeply and said a few words of welcome to her in a cascading waterfall of French too fluent for Sam to follow. Turning to them both, he said, "A pleasure; indeed, a pleasure and an honor both for me to be visited by luminaries of the page and the stage. I must tell you that my laboratory is off limits to journalists, but for you, Mr. Twain, I make an exception."

"Good to see you too, Nick," Sam said. It was his ritual; if Tesla would insist on calling him Mr. Twain, by damn he would call him Nick. "I'm just my lovable own self today. I'm not in the reporting racket any more these days; no money in it."

"And Miss Bernhardt?"

"Why, I am here to see you, Mr. Tesla, and enjoy the exquisite pleasure of your company and conversation." She smiled at him. She wore only the simplest of her costumes today, with a plain silver necklace and no earrings; clearly dressing to please Tesla, who detested earrings and elaborate women's dress.

Tesla seemed for a moment to be taken aback, but then he bowed again and said, "Enchanted, as always."

"So, Nick, what do you think of Mr. Bryan?" Sam asked as they walked into the laboratory. "A real firecracker, would you say?"

"I would say," Tesla said, stopping for a moment to consider his words, "he has a poetic soul."

"A poet?" Sam laughed. "Now, I expect you're spinning me a bit of a stretcher there."

"A man of peace." Then Tesla shook his head. "But no science." He looked across at Clemens. "And you? What do you think of Mr. Bryan?"

"Well," said Sam, "you may know, I don't have much regard for politicians. The Almighty made tadpoles, and he made politicians, and as they're both slimy and pretty-near brainless, you can't much tell the one from the other. 'Cept that one day a tadpole might grow into a noble frog, and a politician don't grow into nothing." He

paused and pretended to ponder for a moment. "Still, Mr. Bryan hasn't lied to me yet, and it does 'pear that he supports the little man against the robbers, thieves, and bandits running the country right at this moment, so I guess I like him as much as I like any of the bunch. Which is not to say I'd stop watching my wallet if I knew he was in the room."

"Still the cynic, Mr. Twain."

Sam nodded. "I'd hate to disappoint my audience."

"Would you like to see the lab?"

"I'm here, ain't I?" Sam said.

"Oh, please," Miss Bernhardt said. "I would be delighted."

Tesla smiled. "One moment." He reached into the darkness and pulled three switches in quick succession. With a barely perceptible hum, a glow arose, emanating from long tubes of glass all about the laboratory. Some glowed pale white, others purple, or pink. A few were twisted into fanciful spirals and curlicues. Tesla picked one up from a benchtop and held it in the air. As he raised it, the pink light inside brightened and flowed around the place where his hand gripped it.

Tesla was showing off, Sam knew. Unlike Edison's lamps, Tesla's needed no wires. Sam had seen Tesla's rarefied gas lamps before, but he enjoyed watching Miss Bernhardt's expression of delight. The Tesla luminescent lamps really were quite something, he thought, with gay colors far more congenial than the harsh yellow light of Edison bulbs. He wondered if you could twist the tube into any shape you desired. Could a glassblower make one that would spell out words? That would really be some feat; you could make a sign in luminous color, bright red or glowing purple: "Eat at Joe's" or "Vote for Bryan."

And that was the hitch, Clemens thought. That would be just exactly the thing that they would do. It would spoil the magic. Better not bring the idea up.

Tesla handed him a tiny lamp, barely larger than a match head. Clemens turned it over in his hand. "Cunningly enough made," he said, "but what's it for?"

Tesla smiled. "Isn't it enough just to be what it is? But watch."

On a sheet of pine, a hundred and twenty of the tiny lamps had been mounted in a rectangular grid. Tesla turned a transformer dial, and every other one of the tiny bulbs glowed to life, a deep blood red. "Observe," Tesla commanded. He turned the bulbs down, then rotated another rheostat, and the other half of the bulbs glowed to light in emerald green.

"Very pretty," Sam commented.

"Wait." Tesla turned both rheostats together, and now the sheet glowed, not a greenish-red, nor some reddish-green, but instead a lemony yellow.

"Huh." Sam Clemens moved forward to examine it. Seen from close up, the individual lights were clearly still red and green, but moving back away from them, the light seemed to blur into yellow. "Now, doesn't that just beat all," he said.

"Keep watching." Tesla moved to a bank of sliding switches and played his slender

fingers over them like an organ. The colored lights danced, and shapes of red and yellow appeared, curves and then an expanding square, and then dancing diagonal stripes. The red faded and green took its place. The effect was strangely hypnotic. A point of light expanded into a diamond shape, with another in the center, and another, each one growing to the edge of the rectangle and fading away.

"Ah," Sarah said. "You have made a symphony, a symphony made of light."

In answer, Tesla's fingers danced even more swiftly, and the lights responded to his touch with a paroxysm of color, pulsating shapes changing color in almost sensuous waves. At last he turned to them and bowed. "Do you like it?"

"Ah, it is magnificent," Sarah gushed. "Truly, the work of an artist, an outpouring from the soul of a poet of the electrical force."

Sam said, "Are you done? Can I try it now?"

With quite a bit of experimenting, Sam discovered, he could write letters in colored light. With great effort, he slowly spelled out S-A-M, Tesla and Sarah Bernhardt shouting out each letter as he formed it on the grid.

"I don't think that the typesetting boys have much to worry about yet," he said with a smile. "But it's a gimcrack toy. Reckon you could sell it? I bet Wall Street could use it to flash out stock prices."

"Where the man of electricity sees electrical light, the man of letters finds letters," observed Tesla. "And Mademoiselle, *voulez vous*? What will the woman of the stage see?"

With a little coaxing, Sarah Bernhardt was persuaded to try it, and she came up with a stick figure of a man. With great concentration, she made one hand wave up and down, as Tesla and Clemens laughed in glee, and then, to everybody's amazement, even her own, she made it totter off the side of the rectangle.

"I think that the lady has you beat, Mr. Twain," Tesla announced. "For a picture, you know, beats a thousand words."

"I don't think it has the jump on Edison's kinoscope for entertainment," Clemens said, "but it's a crackerjack diversion." He realized the moment he said it that he shouldn't have brought up Edison.

But Tesla waved off the reference to his rival. "Edison won't be inventing much any more, I don't think."

"Oh? Why?"

"Why, he'll be too busy being president to invent!" At Clemens' shocked look, Tesla continued, "Ah, Mr. Twain, I spend perhaps too much time in the laboratory, but I don't entirely miss what it is the newspapers say. Within a week, Mr. Edison's kinoscopes will be in every dance hall and Sunday school in America, and Mr. Edison will address each voter in person. Without a miracle, Mr. Bryan is unlikely to win."

"And what exactly kind of miracle does Mr. Bryan need, then?" Sam asked. He was playing with Tesla's device, concentrating on making a picture to beat Miss Bernhardt's.

"Something to upstage Mr. Edison's kinetoscope."

Sam Clemens had the knack of it now. On the screen of lights, he had drawn a cartoon of a face. The eyes grew from dots to little squares, and then they grew eyebrows, and the mouth opened in an "O." "You should do something with this, Nick," Sam said, amusing himself by making the mouth of the little face open and shut in time with his words. "Play around a bit, I bet you could make something of it."

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The campaign stop was a real jamboree. There was a mounted parade of Civil War veterans in full uniform on horseback, and at least five brass bands, followed by fifteen carriages—mayors and minor politicians, Sam Clemens guessed, people who hoped something of the pomp of the occasion might rub off on them. Several hundred people in full top hats and brass-buttoned jackets marched on foot, each waving (somewhat incongruously) a palm-frond fan. These were followed by a choir of women standing on a flatbed truck decorated with red, white, and blue silk and drawn by four sweating plow horses in flower-bedecked harness. Bryan pumped every outstretched hand thrust at him, what seemed like unending millions of them, trying to conserve his voice, which was on the verge of breaking.

"There is no greater entertainment in the world than a political campaign," Sam remarked to Miss Bernhardt, who was in his company again that day. Nikola Tesla had promised them something special, and he wondered what it would be. Drums rang out and trombones blared in five different tunes, with horses snorting and whinnying with no regard to the rhythm or tune. He couldn't even hear the women singers—the Morristown Presbyterian Choir, according to the sign—except for a stray note on occasions when the trombones paused.

They stood on the reviewing stand along with a half-dozen other notables. Miss Bernhardt was basking in her element, wearing an outrageous purple dress and an elaborate hat with at least three feet of magenta ostrich plume on it, waving to the crowd and smiling. Sam enjoyed the attention as well, in an absent fashion, but would have rathered that they got on with the show, whatever it was. He was in his trademark white linen suit, with a white panama hat and a diamond-studded bolo-tie, a gift from an admirer in Nevada.

Nikola Tesla had escorted them to the stand. He had stood with them for a moment to survey the crowd dispassionately, surrounded by pigeons, but then vanished along with Mr. Czito, promising only that they should have a surprise if they stayed to sunset.

It was nearly sunset now, as best Sam could tell, the day being rather overcast, and Mr. Bryan was still shaking hands, working his way slowly toward them. At last he reached the platform and climbed the wooden steps to the podium, shaking hands on the way with each of the dignitaries on the platform. "Mr. Mark Twain," he said. "A pleasure. I'm a great admirer of your work, a great admirer. I'm glad to see you joining us doing the great work of God."

"I'd be pleased for you to call me Samuel, Mr. Bryan," Sam said. "By God, it's an honor to meet a politician who isn't a skunk and a god-damned liar. Give 'em hell."

Bryan's brow furrowed a moment as if he'd been gravely insulted, and he seemed

about to say something, but then he reconsidered, replying only, "I see you live up to your reputation." He turned to kiss Miss Bernhardt's hand. "A pleasure to meet you, Madam. *Enchanté*."

Behind them, something odd was going on. A wooden scaffolding was being erected with cranes and pulleys, and strings of Tesla lamps were being stretched along the beams, a thousand of them or more. As the crowd began to notice something was going on, a murmur went through them. Sam could hear a steam engine chuff to life somewhere in the distance. The pulleys had now raised an entire curtain of Tesla lamps, filling out a rectangle fifty feet high.

In front of William Jennings Bryan, Mr. Czito had set up some sort of contraption of lenses and a spinning disk. An Edison kinoscopic camera? No, the device had no reels of kinoscopic film, but instead a spaghetti tangle of electrical wiring snaked away toward the electrical screen that rose behind the candidate. This was something stranger.

The crowd was chanting now, "Bryan! Bryan! Bryan!" The candidate raised his hand, and the chant intensified.

Bryan began to speak, and his voice, louder than a mountain, boomed out across the square like the voice of God. By gum, Sam thought, damned if Tesla hasn't found a way to electrically magnify the human voice. The crowd subsided into a moment of awed silence.

But the electrical voice magnification was the least of Tesla's surprises. Behind the candidate, the giant matrix of Tesla lamps dawned into fluorescence. Ten thousand tiny electrical lamps glowed, and waves of color rippled across the screen. The crowd gasped with one voice, thinking that this was itself an electrical miracle, but in a moment the swirling colors settled down, and a fuzzy shape was visible in the patterns of dark and light made by the glowing lamps.

It was impossible to make out at first. The eye had no standards by which to measure such an image; nothing like it had ever been seen in the world. Was that a face? Yes, a face, definitely a face. The face of William Jennings Bryan! The murmur of the crowd grew to a rumble, and then a roar of delight. Yes, yes, now it was clear indeed, clear as any picture; it was a picture painted from ten thousand points of light! It was the candidate, and it moved! The electrically magnified voice spoke, and the lips on the picture of light moved with it, almost as if the image itself spoke!

"Does this contraption work?" the voice said. "By Goodness, I can hear myself! Mr. Tesla, you are indeed a genius."

Not great first words for such a marvelous occasion, Sam thought. Mr. Bryan has missed a chance; he should have had something prepared, like perhaps, "What hath God wrought?" But the crowd laughed and roared its approval, and Bryan continued stolidly on.

"Ladies of the choir and gentlemen of the band, veterans of the war and people of the great State of New Jersey," the magnified voice said, and above him, the portrait of light moved and spoke. "I come to you a humble supplicant, asking for only one thing, one small thing. Give me but your vote, your one vote, and we shall bring this nation to the greatness which God above in his infinite wisdom has decreed and intended."

And every single eye was transfixed, every living brain mesmerized, by the flickering illusion of life.

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Tesla's moving images were instantly the talk of the nation. "An artwork of light unprecedented in history," the *Herald* said. "Mr. Tesla states that soon he will be able to beam these images across the ether," the story continued. "These broadcast images, which he names tele-videon, or 'distance sight'—"

Horovitz threw down the newspaper. "If Tesla can beam these images on electrical waves, Bryan will campaign in towns where he's never even been," Horovitz declared. "That will beat the talking dolls and even the kinoscope to hell and gone. He'll outcampaign us ten to one. A hundred to one! How many of these tele-videon screens can he make?"

"Surely each tele-videon screen is expensive," Hanna said, waving his cigar dismissively. "I hear tell each of those rarefied-gas lamps costs ten cents. How many are there in a screen, ten thousand? That would mean a tele-videon screen must cost a thousand dollars! At that price, they won't afford very many."

"Don't put it beyond Mr. Westinghouse," Horovitz said. "It's no secret that he's backing Tesla. And he's a cunning one, no naif to manufacturing. If anybody will find a way to lower the cost, Westinghouse will."

And, indeed, in factories in the Lower East Side, Westinghouse was putting women to work manufacturing the miniature Tesla lamps, and next to them children worked with nimble fingers to string them together into the screens. The idea of broadcasting tele-videon images using Marconi telegraphy was crazy, one of Tesla's endless supply of utopian speculations, but Westinghouse had long ago decided to ignore Tesla's more speculative flights of fancy. He had a better idea anyway; one that would work. America was crisscrossed with telegraph lines, and they could send the tele-videon signals across the telegraph lines to every city and every village, every railroad stop in America.

Campaigning in Wisconsin, Thomas Edison found out about it with the morning newspapers. Edison was surprised, but nobody could get one up on Edison, not for long. He sent a long telegram to his West Orange laboratory, with a series of investigations that he wanted done on cathode-ray phosphors, and followed it up by cutting short his upcoming campaign stops and, within the week, headed back for West Orange laboratory to work. He normally slept for two, sometimes even three hours a day, but when he was challenged, and his gumption was up, he didn't waste time sleeping. On the train east, he studied the tele-videon fiercely and pondered hard on the workings of it. Before long, he had set his ideas in order for how he would improve on it. If his ideas bore out, he could use his fluoroscope technology together with electron beams to make an Edison-effect ray-tube. It would have far better definition than Tesla's flickering lamps; anybody who saw the new Edison images would laugh at Tesla's crude dot pictures.

He would have the first patents drawn up in a day or so, and then they would be ready. Yes, if Tesla wanted an invention fight, he'd find a fight on his hands, all right.

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"We're watching your ratings, sir, and it doesn't look so good."

"Ratings, young man?" William Jennings Bryan said to the assistant. "I don't believe I follow."

"How people rate the show."

Bryan cocked his head and frowned. "I daresay some people consider politics to be a show, but I assure you, young man, a showman I have never been. If it is a show, then what I show is only the truth."

Sunday was his day for relaxing, but although he was nominally resting in his private railroad car, that only meant that the cameras and the press weren't in with him right at the moment. Bryan knew well enough that, for a serious campaigner, there would be no real relaxing until after November. This young man should have respected his privacy, but the tele-videon crew had been conferring in their equipment room all day, and he had been expecting somebody to barge in sooner or later. He put down his pen and turned the full force of his attention to the young man.

"That's the problem in a nutshell, sir," the young man said. "You're no showman. We've been doing the tele-videon show for a week now ..." Seeing Bryan's wince, he paused for a second, but went on: "Sorry, sir, but that's what the staff call it. A show. We're watching the ratings. You see, sir, that first time, the novelty of the tele-videon holds them, but when it wears off, your speech ... Well, it's not a show, that's it. It's—"

"Boring," Bryan said.

"Well, yes, sir. Boring."

"My speeches are too long."

The young man was apparently oblivious to the hint of sarcasm in Bryan's affectless delivery and nodded enthusiastically in agreement. "Gaseous." He flinched at Bryan's suddenly darkened expression, but he didn't back off. "That's the word we hear. Gaseous."

Bryan sighed. "And you want?"

"Not such a long sermon, sir. Couldn't you do, maybe, some shorter bits, something that people can bite off more easily?"

"I will think on it."

"Sir, if—"

Bryan raised his hand. "Enough. I will think on it, I said, and so I will do. Enough. Leave me."

When the young man left, Bryan scowled. So they thought him gaseous, did they? What did they desire, real political reform, or did they want just appearances?

Ah, that was the question, wasn't it, what the people wanted. He knew what they needed: reform, breaking the railroad monopolies, a turning away from the poisoning tentacles of imperialism, and a turning toward God. But what they

wanted? He had once thought that a leader should shape the wills of the people, but long years in politics made him doubt his own vision.

But then Reverend Conroy came in, and Bryan stood up and smiled, a genuine smile. "Reverend Conroy, do come in. I am quite pleased to see you."

The reverend took off his hat. "Thank you kindly. Your offer was a most kind one, a very generous offering of your time."

Bryan laughed. "Why, I should say the same to you. It's not so often that a man of the cloth gives up his pulpit, and I am quite cognizant of the honor, I assure you."

"I have heard you talk and do believe you to be a man of God."

"I do my best, Reverend Conroy."

"And that is more than most people, I assure you. My flock will be happy to hear from you, if only as a respite from hearing me drone on. May I ask, have you a title for the sermon you will be giving? No politics in it, I do hope?"

"Indeed you may ask. I will talk on the subject of the Menace of Evolution."

"You'll be taking on monkey-ism!" Conroy's face broke out into a huge grin. "Ah, I've heard tell that you are a fighter, and I'm pleased as a bear with a watermelon to hear you'll wrestle them atheists head-on!" He pumped Bryan's hand. "I'm looking forward to it, I tell you, looking forward to it."

"And I as well," Bryan said. "After a week surrounded by sycophants, office-seekers, and the jackals of the press, it will be a joy to spend a few hours among simple pious Christians, a joy indeed."

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Bryan's sermon was a wonderful success. He had kept the audience spellbound, alternately making them angry and then releasing their anger with laughter, for nearly two hours. So the tele-videon crew thought people wanted short sound bites, did they? But these were his people, the simple and believing farmers and workers of America, not the atheists and agnostics who ran politics.

Afterward, they hadn't wanted to leave, coming forward in a huge press to shake his hand, tell him how they liked his sermon, even coming to offer money for the campaign against Darwinism, which he diverted to the church offering box. One earnest young man with a waxed handlebar mustache had even wanted to debate him, and he had put that man in his place with half a dozen well-chosen sentences, skewering his poorly thought-out Darwinism and sending up peals of laughter from the crowd. Finally Reverend Conroy had managed to take him away to his private office for a moment of relaxation.

"That was a fine talking, Mr. Bryan," the Reverend said. "Indeed, about the finest I've ever heard."

"Thank you most kindly."

"I was wondering ..." The Reverend hesitated.

"Please, do speak freely."

"Well, it occurs to me that you have used this new tele-videon to bring your political message to the people. Could you not use the same invention to bring the word of God? The people are starving for the Gospel, and I thought ..."

Bryan raised his hand. "The tele-videon is a wonderful device, no mistaking, but it is not mine to do with as I wish. Were I to use it on my own behalf, it would be misdirection of campaign money, and dishonesty of any sort, no matter how well intentioned, is something I will have no truck with."

"Perhaps ... we could pay for the use of the equipment? Lease it, as it were?"

Bryan laughed. "Have you any idea how expensive it is? Why, it would cost over fifty dollars an hour to lease the tele-videon alone—not even counting the money to lease telegraph wires and halls to show the image."

"Fifty dollars ..." Reverend Conway mused. "Why, that's not so much. Ten thousand people could watch a sermon. Fifty thousand! If each of ten thousand people were to be asked to contribute but a dime, and if only one in ten did so, why, we would cover our costs and even have money extra."

Bryan laughed. "Ah, you are, I think, a plutocrat in disguise! I accept your bargain. If you arrange it, I shall speak, and from the contributions, what is left over after paying the lease we shall split evenly, half for your church and half for my campaign."

Reverend Conway stood up and stretched out his hand. "Sir, it is done."

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Nikola Tesla introduced Sam Clemens to Bryan's campaign staff, and particularly to the tele-videon electrical crew. Then he and Mr. Czita headed back to his Long Island laboratory to work on perfecting his atmospheric radiations of electrical tension.

Miss Bernhardt had gone back with him. Sam was vaguely annoyed by that; since first Clara and then Livy had left him three years ago, he had not realized how much he had missed the comfort of feminine company. And it was not the crude physical pleasures of intimate interplay that he missed, but simply the gentle companionship. He had enjoyed Miss Bernhardt's company more than he'd thought possible.

He wondered what Miss Bernhardt got from the companionship of Tesla. Certainly not the human commerce of wit and passion that passed as the ordinary stuff of social intercourse; Tesla was a man of titanic passions, but his passions were of an ethereal nature wholly disconnected from ordinary corporeal lust.

But meanwhile, Clemens stayed on, interested in seeing the campaign from an insider's perch. He enjoyed the good fellowship of the tele-videon electrical crew, somewhat less refined company than that of Miss Bernhardt, but in their way enjoyable. The crew were a congenial bunch, most of them awkward boys barely older than puppies, all elbows and thumbs until they had their hands buried inside an electrical dynamo. All of them were fascinated by electricity and mechanisms, and all of them had dreams of riches as inventors and industrialists in the new century. The interior of the tele-videon electrical shack was supposed to be a secret, and

definitely off-limits to passersby, but Sam ignored the posted signs and spent half his time in the electrical shack, looking on with curiosity as the boys showed off their expertise with the tele-videon and entertaining them with stories of Tesla. Sam had been a bit of an inventor a few years back, and he told them the story of the typesetting machine, spinning the yarn out and discovering that he could milk it for laughs, although at the time it had meant years of work wasted, ending in frustration and bankruptcy.

The other half of his time he spent with the campaign's hangers-on (of which there were many) in his well-practiced role of the celebrated man of letters, accepting with smooth grace offers of an occasional glass of whisky or a good cigar.

The campaign was settled into the Hotel Gloriana now. The tele-videon shack was set up, along with its steam-powered electrical dynamo, in a vacant lot next door, but right at the moment the electrical boys were taking a break and had gone into town, and so he was sitting in the lobby, a place of antimacassar-clad flowered armchairs and elegant pink decorations that felt like being in a birthday cake.

He still didn't know what to make of Bryan. For a week now, the man had given his daily evangelistic speech over the tele-videon, and at the end of it had emphasized how the listeners should give money so that they could continue God's work.

God's work! Sam snorted. This tele-videon evangelism was the greatest flim-flam operation he'd ever seen worked; the people watching were completely mesmerized by the moving lights, and every time Bryan said that they needed to give money, cheques and pledges and ragged silver coins flowed in like a dam had burst. Bryan was no deliberate Chicago con man; he seemed completely sincere. But the daily evangelism was changing him. He was suddenly making far more money from his religious donors than he'd ever made from political donations. His political speeches were now more directly religious in tone, and in the latest one he had actually called for constitutional amendments, one to ban alcohol and another to forbid the teaching of Darwinism.

And now he was coming over here, drifting through the cloud of sycophants. Sam cut the end off of a cigar to prepare himself for the great man, struck a match and puffed it to life, and put it down.

"So, Mr. Clemens," Bryan said. "What do you think of my speech? Any words of wisdom?"

Sam shook his head. "Mr. Bryan. Quite a show you give, but I must allow as I'm too much of a reprobate to change entirely to your point of view."

"Nonsense, Mr. Clemens."

"If you ask me ..."

"Do speak, Mr. Clemens."

"Ask me, I think you should back off a little bit on the constitutional amendment talk."

Bryan laughed. "Certainly, with your well-known love of whisky, you would."

"Not just that one; I don't think much of the amendment to ban Darwinism, either."

"Atheists should be allowed to teach evolutionism to their heart's content, Mr. Clemens, but not in publicly funded schools. You are an intelligent man. Surely you are not descended from a monkey?"

Clemens took a draw from his cigar. "Hear my friends talk, I expect I am. Some people are nearer to monkeys than others, but seems to me, when we talk about being descended from monkeys, it's the monkeys ought to be offended."

"Mr. Clemens, I don't know whether to be outraged or amused. Are you secretly an atheist? I don't believe as I've heard you speak on your beliefs. What exactly is your stand?"

Clemens puffed again, to give him a pause before speaking. "Well, you know, Mr. Bryan, in my opinion you have your two kinds of opinions. You have your public opinions, that you talk about in the papers, and then you have your private opinions, that you don't spread about."

"No, Mr. Clemens, I think not. If I believe something, I tell everybody and keep nothing back. You are intimating, I think, that you believe all men to be liars."

"Not exactly liars. No sir, I wouldn't say that. Perhaps a little less private in some of their opinions than others, maybe."

"And tell me, then, these private opinions of yours. In the great war between God and Satan, where do you stand?"

Twain puffed at his cigar and looked at Bryan, in his vested wool suit, with his gold-chained watch, with his round and open face. The man was dressed like a politician, but he was a farmer, you could see that. To hell with it, Sam thought.

"You ask for truth, Mr. Bryan? I will tell you, then. I believe I just might take my stand with Mr. Satan."

"There are some matters too serious for humor, Mr. Clemens, and I believe this is one of them."

"Well, Mr. Bryan. Seems to me that religions write their books denouncing Mr. Satan, and say the most injurious things 'bout him, but we never hear his side."

"Quite to the contrary, Mr. Clemens. We hear Satan's voice every day. It is God's voice that is small, and we must be silent to listen."

"Bosh. The world's full of bible thumpers, and you're just another one of them, a little more successful than most. Can't cross the street some days without some revival preacher going on and on with smug and vaporous pieties. Can't hear yourself think. Satan? I am personally going to undertake his rehabilitation. He's been given a bum rap, I think, and I'm quite looking forward to meeting him myself to get his side of the story."

"I think you—"

"And as for preachers," Clemens continued, ignoring Bryan, "my experience is that they are for the main part con men. Slick talkers who extract money from people by promising paradise in the sky. I don't have much use for them."

"Mr. Clemens," Bryan said coldly, "I believe you have just called me a con man."

Sam nodded slowly. "Reckon maybe I did."

"Mr. Clemens, I and my campaign have showed you hospitality. I don't believe that I am expected to tolerate insults. Please absent yourself. My assistants will be instructed that you are no longer a person who is desired in my presence, now or in the future."

Sam nodded. "You asked for my private opinions. You got 'em. Can't say you weren't warned. Oh, and about Darwin. I expect that I lean a little his way, too."

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The Edison campaign was foundering.

In only two weeks, Edison's laboratory had brought out fluorovision tubes to compete with the Tesla tele-videon. Now the two campaigns competed fiercely over which one could lease more telegraph wires to bring campaign speeches to the boroughs, engaging in a competition much to the profit of the telegraph companies.

But the political maps meticulously kept by Mr. Horovitz were pierced by an unhealthy infusion of red pins, the color of Bryan's Democrats, expanding slowly but inexorably from the heartland outward.

From the Alleghenies to the Rocky Mountains, farmers and working men were listening to Bryan. It was not Bryan's campaign speeches that were winning him converts, but his rapidly expanding tele-videon ministry. Bryan had somehow tapped directly into the American heart. He would tell his listeners about the healing power of Jesus and lead the faithful in prayer, and the next day a hundred newspapers reported how blind men began to see. He would lead the faithful in song, and if the papers were to be credited, the deathly sick would sit up from their deathbeds and join the singing. And when Bryan said that they needed money, across America the faithful opened their hearts and their wallets, sending money to Bryan by the barrel, by the ox-cart, by the freight load.

Edison's sermons, about how he would reform government by bringing in scientific management, went almost unheard.

Yet when Sam Clemens came (walking right past the receptionist who but a month ago had told him that Edison would never be available to see him), Edison was remarkably cheerful. "Mr. Mark Twain!" he said in a loud voice. "I am a great admirer of yours!"

"Thank you," Clemens said.

Edison turned his head. "Could you talk a little more distinctly? I have to admit, I have a slight difficulty in hearing."

Clemens cleared his throat and said more loudly, "I said, thank you."

"Ah, that's what I expected you'd say. Say, the way I heard things, you and Miss Bernhardt were the ones worked out inventing this tele-videon thing. Any truth to that rumor?"

"Maybe a tiny bit of truth, Mr. Edison," Clemens said. "Not so much."

"Truth, you say? Ah—that's a wonderful bit of inventing. Took me almost a week to match it. If you ever need a job, come up to my factory, I'll have Charles fix you up with a job. Tell him I sent you."

"I'm not in the inventing business these days," Clemens said. "I confess Nikola did the electrical part."

"Eh? Nikola? Ah, my erstwhile employee. Well, he's a tinkerer, reckon I have to give him that, but not much of a practical man." Edison's manner changed abruptly to business. "So, Mr. Twain, what is your purpose in coming to visit? I'm a busy man, I must say."

"Well, Mr. Edison, I'm here on business," Sam said. "Got something to sell, what turns out to be just exactly what I figure you need."

"And what, exactly, is this I need?"

"You have an invention, I see, but you don't rightly know just what to do with it, I reckon," he said. "The tele-what-is-it, that is."

"The fluorovision."

"That's the whatsit. You can send moving pictures out over the wires to everybody from Petunia Flats to East Hell, but you can't find anything to get them to watch."

Edison waved his hands. "My corporation is making films right now. Let Bryan use his tele-videon for superstition. The Edison fluorovision will bring education to the masses."

"And will this win the campaign for you, Mr. Edison?"

"No," Edison said emphatically. "No, that it will not."

"You need an entertainer. A performer. A showman."

Edison seemed about to object, but then paused a moment and said, "Perhaps I do. And you propose?"

"The best." Samuel Clemens smiled and bowed. "Myself, of course."

"And?"

"I will thrill the masses and bring laughter and music and culture to the people. And make them watch and listen ... and, in so doing, put them in a mood to hear your message."

"And you call this?"

Samuel Clemens smiled. "I will call it *The Mark Twain Variety Hour*."

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"And that's the story, every word of it unvarnished truth," Mark Twain said. "Or anyway, that's the way I heard it told, and now I'm telling you."

The live audience howled its laughter, and Clemens bowed and smiled. He dropped

out of his Mark Twain voice and turned to the camera.

"This wraps up today's *Variety Hour*," he said in his finest lecturing voice. "Turn to us next week, same time, same place, when we will bring you the celebrated vaudevillians Fields and Weber. Let me assure you, they're the funniest things on four legs. And we'll have the famous soliloquy from Shakespeare's masterpiece "Hamlet," acted out by the magnificent Mam'selle Bernhardt of Paris. We'll have the musical genius John Philip Sousa, and, last and, well, least," he paused for the laugh, "yours truly just perhaps might be convinced to read you a new story from Calaveras county.

"This will be a show you won't want to miss, gentlemen and ladies. Until then, try Cleveland Soap, it keeps you clean. And finally, tell all your friends: A vote for Edison is a vote for America."

The camera came in for its final close-up, and he gave it his famous wink and a smile and then signaled with his hands for the cut. Immediately his crew rushed in with a glass of whisky and a cigar, and he dropped into his easy chair.

"How'd I do?"

"You were great, Mr. Twain!" the camera boy said. "The best ever!"

It was an unnecessary question. He knew the show had done well today. He had put in two of Edison's messages and had managed to mention Cleveland Soap five times and Lydia Pinkham's Elixir for Ladies six times. Each mention was a hundred dollars in his pocket.

He was flush, he was in his stride, and he loved every minute of it. With the new televideon broadcasting, Samuel Clemens had found his element and was on top of the world. Did Mr. Bryan think he could hold them with his tele-evangelism? He would give Mr. Bryan a lesson on how to grab an audience, that he would, that he would indeed.

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Horovitz leaned forward and shut off the televideon. (It was an Edison fluorovision, of course, not the crude Tesla tele-videon, but the word televideon had somehow stuck.)

Mr. Westinghouse promised that within the year, he would have his improved televideons in the home of every man with ten dollars in his pocket—and now that Westinghouse was making a profit on them, he made sure that the programs sent out over the telegraph wires were compatible with both.

For all his hard work, the election was going to be too close to call, Horovitz knew, but already he was thinking far beyond that. Forget the election-- it didn't even matter any more, he reckoned. It was going to be the man on the televideon, not the president, who would be the real leader of this coming generation.

It was time to leave politics. He was tired of it anyway. Twain's variety show proved that people would watch, and Horovitz thought that this was just the beginning. Over the years, he had learned how to tell people what they wanted. If they would watch Mr. Twain tell jokes, would not people watch, say, a game of baseball on the

televideon? Or perhaps football? Wrestling? Which one would play better on the screen? Could he dramatize some of the penny-dreadful novels, perhaps some western gunfighter stories? The eyes of America were eagerly waiting.

Ah, the twentieth century! So many possibilities! He leaned back and lit his cigar. Barely three years old, and already it was turning out to be a doozy. He could hardly wait to find out what would come next.

The End

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