

POST Weekly Picture Magazine SECTION

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Blind Champion of a Global Alphabet

By OLIVER PILAT
Washington.

Back in 1861, young Bobby Owen watched soldiers drilling in his home town of Lynchburg, Va. The soldiers were about to travel north to engage in battle at Manassas, but the boy of five knew nothing of that.

What fascinated Bobby was that one man could tell so many others what to do. "Unless I can be the captain," he told his mother, "I won't go to war."

Reviewing life now with the perspective of 88 summers, Robert Latham Owen is inclined to find the key to his career in that boyish feeling for leadership. "I wanted always to be the captain," he says.

As a young man he went west. He became spokesman for the Cherokee Indians and the organizer of business and social life among early white arrivals in the Indian Territory, eventually to be admitted to the Union as the state of Oklahoma.

Blind For 10 Years He's Active as Ever

For 18 years (1907-1925) Owen served as U. S. Senator from Oklahoma and as the leader in the Senate of a variety of liberal causes which put fundamental laws on the statute books in such fields as the regulation of banks, extension of Federal loans to farms, and the setting up of a national public health service.

He was the eloquent advocate of many movements to widen democratic expression, including the initiative and recall, the preferential ballot, government of cities by commission, woman suffrage and the direct election of Senators.

When he dropped out of public life in 1925 (he was never defeated in an election), Sen. Owen remained in Washington as a lawyer and lobbyist for reform. He has been blind for a decade, but today is more active than ever before, in a new cause—that of selling the world the idea of a "global, phonetic, stenographic alphabet" which will wipe out illiteracy.

Phonetic alphabets (alphabets in which every letter represents a single vocal sound) are not new. A Christian missionary, Dr. Frank C. Laubach, used such an alphabet to teach the Moros in the Philippines to read their own language after a few hours of instruction, and followers of Laubach have applied the principle in India, East Africa, the Near East, the Caribbean islands and Latin America.

During the last 20 years Soviet Russia has pretty well conquered illiteracy by teaching its citizens to read and write a phonetic alphabet in 58 languages.

Gandhi and Shaw Show Interest in His Alphabet

What Sen. Owen has done is to devise a new phonetic alphabet of 42 letters, which look like something cribbed from a stenographer's notebook but which can be printed on any standard monotype machine. With this alphabet, he says, people can go from their own language to any other language by mastering a simple bilingual booklet costing maybe a quarter.

The Owen global alphabet has the endorsement of Dr. Laubach, the conditional approval of such



ROBERT L. OWEN foresees a world ruled by intelligence through the adoption of the alphabet which he developed in response to "a psychic message."

world citizens as Gandhi and Shaw, and the enthusiastic support of several teachers who have tried it out in their classes.

The inertia to be overcome by any such scheme remains enormous. Sen. Owen uses every channel of propaganda, from getting communications printed in the Congressional Record, to writing round-robin letters to managing editors of newspapers.

He works best at night. Knowing he will sleep only four or five hours, he retires early and gets up late. The sleepless period is devoted to planning.

"After all, I see as well at night as I do during the day," he says. His features have an Indian sterness, not surprising since he is part Indian. At 88, his hair is beginning to turn grey.

He lives with great simplicity. Apples and potatoes please him beyond any other foods. His blindness came about through glaucoma, but he blames it partly on "improvidence in eating," now conquered. His only indulgence

these days is an occasional glass of port, which he likes for its flavor as well as for its mild stimulation.

His Mother Was a Cherokee Indian

Two women serve as his eyes, a wife and a secretary. His wife is an Oklahoma girl whom he married 55 years ago. His fondness for her may be measured by his reply to a question as to his primary ambition in life.

"It's to be Mrs. Owen's second husband," he says.

Sen. Owen first saw Daisy Hester at a ball in Maytabee Springs, Okla., 60 years ago. "She was obviously the most distinguished woman to cross the floor." He didn't try to meet her then. "I had no means to propose to any woman at that time."

Five years later, when he had become established as the Indian agent for the Five Civilized Tribes, he met and proposed to Miss Hester, who promptly accepted. They have a married

daughter, living in Columbus, O.

Sen. Owen's father, after whom he was named, was a surveyor, early organizer and then president of what became the Norfolk & Western Railroad. His mother was Narcissa Chisholm Owen, of the Cherokee Nation.

"She was by far the greatest influence in my life," he says. "She was a woman of great social integrity, an artist, and a wonderful gardener."

Woodrow Wilson stands out as the most influential and valuable public figure encountered by Sen. Owen. The most vital reading matter in his life, he says, has been the 14th Chapter of St. John. It was the first material set up in global type by him.

Sen. Owen acknowledges a strong religious impulse. His sponsorship of a phonetic alphabet, he believes, is in response to "a psychic message of some sort, such as Marconi received in developing radio."

"The need for a global alphabet is just as patent to my eyes," he

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says, "as the Washington Monument is to yours."

"Russia has developed a phonetic alphabet which can be learned in one day. It has removed illiteracy, and people who were unproductive before are now producing the supplies to overwhelm the Germans."

"By following the Russian example, we can increase the productivity of the world four-fold in a decade."

If the U. S. takes leadership in sponsoring a global alphabet, Sen. Owen predicts it can make English a world language inside of two years, with the help of radio.

"What I am doing," he says, "is providing a way whereby people all over the world can receive a message from Washington, a message that will make us a leader in truth, righteousness and loving kindness, and help create a world ruled by intelligence rather than ignorance."

Know Thyself

By Wells Carr

Have You Forgotten Your 'Public'?

You may think of them only as friends, fellow workers and neighbors, but they're your public! If you become lazy toward them and fail to keep up appearances, they know it—and they don't like it! Your back-sliding shows you care less about them and their sensibilities than you did when you first met them.

A score between 16 and 30 exposes you as one who cares little what anybody thinks of his inconsiderate behavior. If your rate between 5 and 15, you think that you can fool others because you can dress up when necessary, in the right clothes and manners. Watch out, you're becoming slovenly. You, who keep your score under 5, have the self-respect, pride and refinement that keep you up to par in the eyes of your public! (Add 3 for Yes; subtract 2 for No; score 0 for sometimes or doubtful. Then total your score.)

1. Do you show people you're bored by picking up a newspaper or book when they're speaking? ()
2. Is your yard or your room an untidy eyesore? ()
3. Are you a little lazy about bathing often enough, keeping your hair and nails clean or dressing neatly—and appropriately? ()
4. Are you irritatingly offhand, slow and careless when it comes to business dealings with your friends? ()
5. Are you high-handed in your treatment of those who serve you at work, in the stores, trains, restaurants, etc.? ()
6. Do your friends, the longer they know you, have to make more allowances for your rudeness or neglect? ()
7. Are good manners becoming more and more like putting on your Sunday best? ()
8. Do you become so undignified and unrestrained in your humor that you often embarrass others? ()
9. Do you drink even though you know it makes you silly, oversentimental or ugly? ()
10. Do you carry on your family quarrels and conduct your private business so openly that you embarrass others? ()

(Press Alliance, Inc.)