Politics, like industry, banking, education, and certain other forms of activity, has a habit of raising very mediocre men to very high estate — to seats, so to speak, of the mighty. This phenomenon has been remarked by various observers of democracy at various stages of the world's history, and it has long been apparent to the average American of any education at all that small-calibre individuals frequently wind up as Presidents of the United States, as Cabinet officers and in other such soft spots.

There was a time when the American people had a mind of its own and resented this procedure. As recently as March 4, 1845, this resentment was voiced by mobs of people who had been told that in order to have a voice in choosing their rulers all they had to do was to be white, male and twenty-one. On that day, in the streets of Washington, thousands of them paraded, filling the air with a derisive bellow — "Who is James K. Polk?" James K. Polk was President of the United States — was installed, in fact, that very day; but otherwise the question was a fair one. The bosses had decided, as one wag put it, to interrupt Mr. Polk's steady progress from obscurity to oblivion and place him in the White House while they ran the country "safely."

But in 1933 we are inured to this sort of goings-on. We expect nothing from the straw men who are assigned to the mahogany desks, and if we get less than that we take it with a shrug. We understand, in addition, that it takes money and labor to swing elections and that the gents who put up the money and perform the labor are not impelled, by and large, by some Utopian urge to improve the common weal. They do it because the election of their man means higher tariffs or bigger contracts or a juicy appointment.

A routine dispatch from Washington, two or three paragraphs in length, reported a few weeks back that one Robert H. Gore "of Chicago and Florida" had been chosen by the President to be Governor of Porto Rico. So far as I was concerned, and I think I represented a cross-section of public opinion, anyone who wanted to be Governor of Porto Rico had a right to be; what, after all, is Porto Rico between friends? There were those among us, I felt sure, who did not know if Porto Rico is east or west of Suez and who, what was more, did not care.

Along with some several millions of American citizens with troubles of their own, I felt a strong, an almost overpowering, disinterest in Porto Rico, not to mention the Governor thereof. But being of a strange turn of mind, as epileptics and writing people sometimes are, I decided to find out what manner of Chicagoan, or semi-Chicagoan, it was to whom Toastmaster-General Farley had leased out the welfare of our little brown brothers in Porto Rico, if indeed they are little, brown or our brothers.

The first thing I learned was that Robert H. Gore was the Man Almost Nobody Knows. My most reliable source of information reported him as "a bird who made a lot of money in some phoney sort of insurance, bought a couple of newspapers in Florida and jumped on the Roosevelt bandwagon early enough to get a job." Another person of parts, a Mr. Glotz, let us say, had only one recollection of the man. Mr. Glotz had been at an insurance convention, probably at French Lick Springs, and heard Mr. Gore answer a roll call as "Robert H. Gore of Illinois, Florida, Kentucky and Indiana." The newspaper fraternity, or sorority, as it is rapidly becoming, could provide only routine information, such as accumulates in reference rooms around the name of any successful business man.

By this time one characteristic of Robert H. Gore was clear: he was not a publicity fiend. That is always to the credit of a man, but it offers no very complete portrait. Maybe no one knew anything about Mr. Gore simply because there was nothing to know about him. On the other hand, it is true that a great many men whom there is nothing to know about have become intriguing figures by dint of hiring press agents and serving bottled goods to newspaper people; in this way does more than one prize fighter, picture actor or politician inflate and float up to Olympus.

(Reprinted From THE CHICAGOAN, July 1933).
Mr. Gore still did not look any too good: a gentleman with a bulky share of the world's goods who had purchased three small papers in Florida and served as a brevet second lieutenant under General Farley in the historic Biltmore campaign back in the fall of '32; a heeler in the national organization of a party that is crowded to the scuppers with heelers; the recipient of a purely political appointment — the governorship of an insignificant island that was discovered by Admiral Columbus in 1493, was prodded in vain by Ponce de Leon on his quest for goat glands a few years later, and has not been heard from since. So I took the bull by the horns and turned to the G's in the telephone book. Down the line a way I found:

GORE R H ins 209 S LaS.

Mr. Gore told me, in a voice that proved nothing except that he spoke American like a native, to come on over. No 209 S. LaS. is a familiar address to anyone who in the boom days was prudent enough to invest his savings in Middle West Utilities bonds, and I was soon there. The building is an old pile occupied principally by stock brokers, and the inscription "The Rookery" above the entrance has nothing to do with the practice of rooking investors that goes on inside, but refers to a lodging house for birds that once stood on the spot.

Up in the far reaches of the building the best part of a whole floor is tenanted by the North American Accident Insurance Co. Following the arrows on a long succession of cut glass doors I at last got to one that said ENTRANCE, and entered. The room extended for half a block and was lined with a double file of oak desks, all alike, as in a wholesale law office, but all empty. There was a gal at the switchboard who told me that Mr. Gore would be in in a moment, adding with a gesture toward the empty desks, "We don't work on Saturday." A man came in, medium height, a little over medium weight. He was Mr. Gore. He led me through the long room, between the empty desks, and into a small office at the corner of the building.

He sat down, with his panama hat still on, behind an old desk. On the desk were some books in the Spanish language. The office was antique and inartistic, with an actual coal fireplace in one corner, with a mantle above it. On the mantle was a cardboard cut-out photograph of Roosevelt. On the wall were photographs — one of Farley, another of Farley presenting Gore with a loving cup, another the newspaper photograph of Cermak supported by two men just after he had been shot.

There were no preliminaries. "I know what you want," Gore said, and began talking. It was business-like, yet it was unhurried. I felt comfortable and easy — and welcome, although the man had not smiled or bowed or taken my hat or reached me a chair. He sat there tipped back in his swivel chair, his legs crossed, his hat on. He was a man with a round, full face, but the face was neither too round nor too full to be simple. It was something of a hard face, an Irish face, in the manner of speaking. But it did not have the unhealthy fatty flush that is associated with Irish faces in the late forties. The impressive thing about the man was his contagious ease, his obvious contempt for formality — a contempt that was unostentatious, and ingratiating because it was unostentatious. Pretty soon I knew what made this business man — as I assumed he was — so easy for a newspaperman to sit with. He was a newspaperman.

He did all the talking, in a strong, even voice. Everything he said was clear, and it was clear that what his position prevented his discussing clearly he did not mention at all. He spoke as easily as an old newspaperman writes, and as simply. Without any effort to avoid cursing, he spoke entirely without epithets, except once — and he repeated this from time to time: "Don't have anything to do with a cheap so-and-so. That's about the best rule I know."

"I've been lucky," he said. "I've worked hard, but I've been lucky. I think I've got good reason to believe in luck." And he told me why.

Bob Gore belongs to that still unorganized association of men who in the far days of knee pants hauled water for the elephants and got so tired hauling water for the elephants that they never saw the circus because they fell asleep on the seat. He was born forty-seven years ago on Queen Victoria's birthday. He said it, but he said it. In Owensboro, Ky., when you're ten years old and your father is dead, you don't have much choice. There were no rich folks in Owensboro, and Bob Gore's mother was poor even for Owensboro. But she had been a school teacher; her children weren't going to drive grocery wagons all their lives. Gore remembers the night
TO-DAY IS DEMOCRACY'S DOLLAR DAY

Today—Saturday, October 22 — everyone will have the opportunity to become a Shareholder in America—the nationwide movement in support of the campaign to elect Franklin Roosevelt and John Garner.

Each member of Shareholders in America contributes One Dollar and receives a Membership Certificate and an official Roosevelt-Garner Medallion, the insignia of the Shareholders organization. One million members by November the 8th is the objective of the Shareholders Campaign. One million men and women pledged to work and vote for Roosevelt and Garner.

Join the Shareholders in America today! Enlist in the Great Cause—help reclaim your interest in America and restore the fundamental principles of true democracy upon which this country in the past has prospered. Your contribution of One Dollar is needed to support the national campaign.

Join The Shareholders in America
BUY YOUR MEDALLION TOMORROW
HELP ELECT
ROOSEVELT AND GARNER

Robert H. Gore placed advertisements in newspapers throughout the United States to tout his Shareholders in America Campaign. This advertisement appeared in the COALDALE OBSERVER, Coaldale, Pennsylvania, October 22, 1932. (Broward County Historical Commission).
he fell asleep and the horse went back to the stable. The boy's mother looked all over Owensboro for him and found him asleep on the wagon, the horse trying to get into the stall without being unhitched.

There was another poor kid in Owensboro who was saving his money to go to college too. He and Bob Gore weren't pals, so early, but they had something in common: they were both orphans, and they both wanted to get somewhere in the world. The other kid's name — just fancy — was George Gaw.

When he was sixteen, Bob Gore went away to St. Mary's, a small, and poor, Catholic college. George Gaw went too. Before them Richard Muldoon, wondering if he would ever be a Bishop, had gone to St. Mary's, and Edwin Morrow, wondering if he would ever be Governor of Kentucky. After them came a kid named Abel, who wanted to be a surgeon, and a Polish boy named Menc Szymczak, who had an aptitude for the law and for economics and who had long before decided he would never "Americanize" his name. They were all poor.

"It was at St. Mary's that we started calling him 'Science,'" George Gaw recalls. "He earned part of his tuition by ringing the bell for study hours. He wasn't a sissy — nobody was at St. Mary's — but he studied harder than any kid in the school. The old rascal used to talk about things none of the rest of us could understand. I remember a debating contest we had. Bob licked every kid in the school. There were 26 points to be given in each debate. In the finals, Bob got all 26 points — the other kid didn't get any."

Back in Owensboro, with the four year course knocked down in two, the college graduate went to work in a wagon shop. He wanted to be a newspaperman — a journalist. He marshaled his nerve and went to the office of the Inquirer and asked for a job. There was none. Twelve hours later the man who covered the depot beat broke his leg, and Bob Gore was hired. His first Saturday night on the desk, the rest of the boys on the Inquirer decided to initiate him with an old trick. It was cold and the snow was piling up. A telephone call came in, the voice said that a man had been killed at Smoke Hill. Smoke Hill was five miles away, and the roads were impassable. Gore started walking down the track — it was the only way he could get there. A mile out of Owensboro he stumbled on a body. It was a fellow who was supposed to have been killed a year before — his wife had collected the insurance. He had been working in Henderson and sneaking home to his wife every Saturday. This Saturday night he had been killed by a train. Gore hid the body until morning and scooped the Owensboro paper on the story. There was a raise and a promotion and an offer to go to Evansville as city editor of the paper there. He had been in Evansville a few months when a man named Scripps, who already owned a few papers in the East, started the Evansville Press. Gore liked the Scripps paper and went over and asked for a job. He was getting $35 a week, and the Scripps editor offered him $12 a week. He took the job. He had married his best — and only — girl, and there were two kids already; and the salary was $12 a week.

The Press sent Gore to Boonesville a few months later, where a farmer and his wife and child had been killed in bed with axe. The boys from the Indianapolis and Chicago papers played poker in the sheriff's parlor; Gore sat in the sheriff's kitchen telling the sheriff's wife that he had never tasted such cookies. The sheriff's wife gave him a chair and told him to go up the back steps to a room on the second floor and climb on the chair and look in the transom. Through the transom Gore saw Willie Lee — a son of the murdered framer — signing a confession.

That was another scoop. The boys from Indianapolis and Chicago went on playing poker in the sheriff's parlor. Bob Gore spent most of his time making telephone calls — all sorts of telephone calls — and just incidentally kidding the Boonesville 'phone girl. One day Bob Gore was cut into a telephone conversation between the sheriff and the warden of the state prison; they were going to get Willie Lee out of Boonesville to forestall a lynching.

That was another scoop. Scripps made Bob Gore managing editor of the Press. And there was another baby. In 1912 Gore organized the Bull Moose movement in southern Indiana, and the Press supported Teddy Roosevelt. The Press flourished, but the Terre Haute Post was in a bad way. Scripps asked Gore to take it over. When Gore went to the Post, the paper's circulation was 6,000. And it didn't go up. And there was another baby.

One dreary day a friend from Chicago dropped in at the Post and told Gore about a stunt a fellow had in St. Louis. It had to do with selling accident insurance along with subscriptions. It wasn't working very well but the man from Chicago thought there was something in it. Gore went to St. Louis found out why the scheme wasn't working, revised it and brought it back to Terre Haute. The first month he tried it, he made $4200. He put the $4200 in the Post treasury and got a letter from Scripps asking what the $4200 was for. Gore told him. Scripps wrote back, "we are in
the newspaper business, not the insurance business," and told him to withdraw the $4200.

Gore continued peddling accident insurance, but not through the Post. The insurance business grew, and Gore was making a hundred thousand a year in it. But it took too much time, and he wanted to stay with the paper. He met a fellow he liked and offered him a 49 per cent interest in the business to take over the active management. The fellow agreed, and they decided to sign the papers the next day. They sat around talking and the fellow pulled half a dozen fountain pens out of his pocket — he manufactured them and showed them to Gore. Gore said, "I need a fountain pen." The fellow didn’t offer him one. The next day Gore called the insurance deal off "Don’t have anything to do with a cheap so-and-so."

While he was wavering between quitting Scripps and quitting the insurance business, the fall of 1920 came around, and the Democratic candidate for President and Vice-President came to Terre Haute. Gore wrote an editorial in the Post:

"The Democrats have got their ticket twisted. Roosevelt ought to be the head and Cox the tail . . . Roosevelt has the Presidential temper and the Presidential mind . . . He won’t be Vice-President, but some day he will be President."

The Roosevelt in question was Franklin D., and the year was 1920. The next year Bob Gore quit the newspaper business. The Post’s circulation was 22,000. On Nov. 18, 1921, he received a letter:

MY DEAR GO RE: I shall be very sorry if conditions cause your separation from my institution. I shall be more sorry on personal grounds than on business grounds . . . I would have to be very inconsistent if I should not advise you, as I have advised all young men, that it is better to make ten cents working for one’s self and being independent and free, than to make a dollar as an employee . . .

It was signed E.W. Scripps. On Nov. 23, he received a letter from F.R. Peters, president of the Scripps papers in Indiana:

". . . I think your record has again demonstrated what a tremendous opportunity the Scripps concern offers to men of untiring pluck and determination to succeed. I recall that you came to the Evansville Press at a salary of $12 per week and although you had a growing family to provide for you stuck and advanced. When the opportunity came to you four years ago to go to Terre Haute you grabbed opportunity by the forelock and led her uphill on a run. I am sure that none will begrudge you any fair reward for your success . . ."

Just a couple of letters from bosses who were satisfied with a hired man’s work, but if Gore was the kind of man you didn’t believe instinctively, they would serve as documentary evidence.

The accident insurance business kept growing. And there were more babies — nine of them altogether. But babies were no longer a problem. In the ten years after he left Scripps Gore made a round $2,000,000 with the accident insurance scheme. And the scheme — he makes this clear — was not his. He liked Florida and bought a farm at Fort Lauderdale. He liked newspapers and bought three, at Fort Lauderdale, Daytona Beach and Deland. He liked Oak Park and built a house there. He liked Barrington and bought a farm there. He likes flowers — at Oak Park and Barrington he had 800 varieties of iris and 117 varieties of lilacs, and the Fort Lauderdale place is a tropical garden. When he sees people standing outside his gate and looking at the flowers, he brings them in and spends anywhere from an hour to an afternoon showing them the blooms he’s proudest of.

The Gore papers in Florida were Democratic, of course, and their owner came to know the Democrats in Chicago. The Democrats in Chicago were a pretty bad parcel, and whether for that reason or because he had no absorbing interest in local politics Gore does not say, but one way or the other he did not take a hand in the game until 1930. In 1930 the man who had looked like a President to him before was elected governor of New York. Gore wrote him offering his own services and the services of his papers. Roosevelt invited him to Albany and asked him to organize Florida for the 1932 convention. How well Florida was organized is a matter of recent, and familiar, record.

After the convention Gore went to New York and spent three months, at his own expense, as a member of the party’s finance committee. When the campaign was over, Jim Farley presented him with a loving cup. Mr. Farley has presented almost as many loving cups as there are Democrats, but on this occasion he said something that made another little item to be filed under Gore, R.H., in the newspaper reference rooms: "You are
entirely responsible for the unity of the Democratic party."

Gore liked Cermak. Farley and Roosevelt, to put it mildly, were not in complete harmony with the Democratic leaders in Chicago. What part Gore played in bringing the conflicting interests together he does not, naturally, say. Cermak and Farley and he went together most of the time during Cermak's fatal visit to Florida.

Another fact that Gore does not mention to a man he doesn't know is that he wanted to be Commissioner of Internal Revenue. Why? You will have to write to the Governor's Mansion, San Juan, P. R., to find out. I didn't ask. Farley offered him the job of Treasurer of the United States. He turned it down. Why? Same address. Then the two of them hit on Porto Rico. Gore knows and likes the tropics. He is a Catholic, and Porto Rico is almost entirely Catholic. Having formed my opinion of the man, I wondered why Mr. Roosevelt wanted so good a man in so humdrum a place as Porto Rico.

The World Almanac, whence all wisdom cometh, explains that. Porto Rico is crammed full of Porto Ricans — 450 persons to the sq. mi. compared with 40 in the States proper and 200 in crowded France. The population increased 19 per cent between 1920 and 1930. That is one problem. The second problem is the unhappy condition of the 450 Porto Ricans on each sq. mi. of the island. They never recovered from the hurricane of September 13 and 14, 1928, that left a million — one-third of the population — destitute and homeless and ruined 30 per cent of the sugar crop and 80 per cent of the coffee. The depression, of which we have heard, came a year later.

A few days ago Governor Gore and party of eight flew from Miami to San Juan to go to work on Porto Rico. The party of eight included six of those babies that kept coming, the best girl who fed two of those babies and ran a house on her husband's $12 a week, and the mother who wasn't going to let her children drive grocery wagons all their lives. The three oldest babies are remaining in Chicago, one son running the farm, another the business, and a daughter married.

Porto Rico may be heard from during the next four years for the first time since its discovery.