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Machine Politics in New York City

IN New York City, as in most of our other great municipalities, the direction of political affairs has been for many years mainly in the hands of a class of men who make politics their regular business and means of livelihood. These men are able to keep their grip only by means of the singularly perfect way in which they have succeeded in organizing their respective parties and factions; and it is in consequence of the clock-work regularity and efficiency with which these several organizations play their parts, alike for good and for evil, that they have been nicknamed by outsiders "machines," while the men who take part in and control, or, as they would themselves say, "run" them, form now a well-recognized and fairly well-defined class in the community, and are familiarly known as machine politicians. It may be of interest to sketch in outline some of the characteristics of these men and of their machines, the methods by which and the objects for which they work, and the reasons for their success in the political field.

The terms machine and machine politician are now undoubtedly used ordinarily in a reproachful sense; but it does not at all follow that this sense is always the right one. On the contrary, the machine is often a very powerful instrument for good; and a machine politician really desirous of doing honest work on behalf of the community is fifty times as useful an ally as is the average philanthropic outsider. Indeed, it is of course true that any political organization (and absolutely no good work can be done in politics without an organization) is a machine; and any man who perfects and uses this organization is himself, to a certain extent, a machine politician. In the rough, however, the feeling against machine politics and politicians is tolerably well justified by the facts, although this statement really reflects most severely upon the educated and honest people who largely hold themselves aloof from public life, and show a curious incapacity for fulfilling their public duties.

The organizations that are commonly and distinctively known as machines are those belonging to the two great recognized parties, or to their factional subdivisions; and the reason why the word machine has come to be used, to a certain extent, as a term of opprobrium is to be found in the fact that these organizations are now run by the leaders very largely as business concerns to benefit themselves and their followers, with little regard to the community at large. This is natural enough. The men having control and doing all the work have gradually come to have the same feeling about politics that other men have about the business of a merchant or manufacturer; it was too much to expect that if left entirely to themselves they would continue disinterestedly to work for the benefit of others. Many a machine politician who is today a most unwholesome influence in our politics is in private life quite as respectable as any one else; only he has forgotten that his business affects the state at large, and, regarding it as merely his own private concern, he has carried into it the same selfish spirit that actuates the majority of the mercantile community. A merchant or manufacturer works his business, as a rule, purely for his own benefit, without any regard whatever for the community at large; the merchant uses all his

influence for a low tariff, and the manufacturer is even more strenuously in favor of protection, not at all from any theory of abstract right, but because of self-interest. Each views such a political question as the tariff, not from the stand-point of how it will affect the nation as a whole, but merely from that of how it will affect him personally; and private business is managed still less with a view to the well-being of the people at large. If a community were in favor of protection, but nevertheless permitted all the governmental machinery to fall into the hands of importing merchants, it would be small cause for wonder if the latter shaped the laws to suit themselves, and the chief blame, after all, would rest with the supine and lethargic majority which failed to have enough energy to take charge of their own affairs. Our machine politicians, in actual life, act in just this same way; their actions are almost always dictated by selfish motives, with but little regard for the people at large; they therefore need continually to be watched and opposed by those who wish to see good government. But, after all, it is hardly to be wondered at that they abuse power which is allowed to fall into their hands owing to the ignorance or timid indifference of those who by rights should themselves keep it.

In a society properly constituted for true democratic government — in a society such as that seen in many of our country towns, for example — machine rule is impossible. But in New York, as well as in most of our other great cities, the conditions favor the growth of ring or boss rule. The chief causes thus operating against good government are the moral and mental attitudes towards politics assumed by different sections of the voters. A large number of these are simply densely ignorant, and, of course, such are apt to fall under the influence of cunning leaders, and even if they do right, it is by hazard merely. The criminal class in a great city is always of some size, while what may be called the potentially criminal class is still larger. Then there is the great class of laboring men, mostly of foreign birth or parentage, who at present both expect too much from legislation and yet at the same time realize too little how powerfully though indirectly they are affected by a bad or corrupt government. In many wards the overwhelming majority of the voters do not realize that heavy taxes fall ultimately upon them, and actually view with perfect complacency burdens laid by their representatives upon the tax-payers, and, if anything, approve of a hostile attitude towards the latter — having a vague feeling of hostility towards them as possessing more than their proper proportion of the world's good things, and sharing with most other human beings the capacity to bear with philosophic equanimity ills merely affecting one's neighbors. When powerfully roused on some financial, but still more on some sentimental, question, this same laboring class will throw its enormous and usually decisive weight into the scale which it believes inclines to the right; but its members are often curiously and cynically indifferent to charges of corruption against favorite heroes or demagogues, so long as these charges do not imply betrayal of their own real or fancied interests. Thus an alderman or assemblyman representing certain wards may make as much money as he pleases out of corporations without seriously jeopardizing his standing with his constituents; but if he once, whether from honest or dishonest motives, stands by a corporation when the interests of the latter are supposed to conflict with those of "the people," it is all up with him. These voters are, moreover, very emotional; they value in a public man what we are accustomed to consider virtues only to be taken into account when estimating private character. Thus, if a man is openhanded and warm-hearted, they consider it as a fair offset to his being a little bit shaky when it comes to applying the eighth commandment to affairs of state. I have more than once heard the statement, "He is very liberal to the poor," advanced as a perfectly satisfactory answer to the charge that a certain public man was corrupt. Moreover, working-men, whose lives are passed in one unceasing round of narrow and monotonous toil, not unnaturally are inclined to pay heed to

the demagogues and professional labor advocates who promise if elected to try to pass laws to better their condition; they are hardly prepared to understand or approve the American doctrine of government, which is that the state has no business whatever to attempt to better the condition of a man or a set of men, but has merely to see that no wrong is done him or them by any one else, and that all alike are to have a fair chance in the struggle for life — a struggle wherein, it may as well at once be freely though sadly acknowledged, very many are bound to fail, no matter how ideally perfect any given system of government may be.

Of course it must be remembered that all these general statements are subject to an immense number of individual exceptions; there are tens of thousands of men who work with their hands for their daily bread and yet put into actual practice that sublime virtue of disinterested adherence to the right, even when it seems likely merely to benefit others, and those others better off than they themselves are; for they vote for honesty and cleanliness, in spite of great temptation to do the opposite, and in spite of their not seeing how any immediate benefit will result to themselves.

REASONS FOR THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC DUTIES

This class is composed of the great bulk of the men who range from well-to-do up to very rich; and of these the former generally and the latter almost universally neglect their political duties, for the most part rather pluming themselves upon their good conduct if they so much as vote on election day. This largely comes from the tremendous wear and tension of life in our great cities. Moreover, the men of small means with us are usually men of domestic habits; and this very devotion to home, which is one of their chief virtues, leads them to neglect their public duties. They work hard, as clerks, mechanics, small tradesmen, etc., all day long, and when they get home in the evening they dislike to go out. If they do go to a ward meeting, they find themselves isolated, and strangers both to the men whom they meet and to the matter on which they have to act; for in the city a man is quite as sure to know next to nothing about his neighbors as in the country he is to be intimately acquainted with them. In the country the people of a neighborhood, when they assemble in one of their local conventions, are already mutually well acquainted, and therefore able to act together with effect; whereas in the city, even if the ordinary citizens do come out, they are totally unacquainted with one another, and are as helplessly unable to oppose the disciplined ranks of the professional politicians as is the case with a mob of freshmen in one of our colleges when in danger of being hazed by the sophomores. Moreover, the pressure of competition in city life is so keen that men often have as much as they can do to attend to their own affairs, and really hardly have the leisure to look after those of the public. Indeed, the general tendency everywhere is towards the specialization of functions, and this holds good as well in politics as elsewhere.

The reputable private citizens of small means thus often neglect to attend to their public duties because to do so would perhaps interfere with their private business. This is bad enough, but the case is worse with the really wealthy, who still more generally neglect these same duties, partly because not to do so would interfere with their pleasure, and partly from a combination of other motives, all of them natural but none of them creditable. A successful merchant, well dressed, pompous, self-important, unused to any life outside of the counting-room, and accustomed because of his very success to be treated with deferential regard, as one who stands above the common run of humanity, naturally finds it very unpleasant to go to a caucus or primary where he has to stand on an equal footing with his groom and day-laborers, and indeed

may discover that the latter, thanks to their faculty for combination, are rated higher in the scale of political importance than he is himself. In all the large cities of the North the wealthier, or, as they would prefer to style themselves, the "upper" classes, tend distinctly towards the bourgeois type; and an individual in the bourgeois stage of development, while honest, industrious, and virtuous, is also not unapt to be a miracle of timid and short-sighted selfishness. The commercial classes are only too likely to regard everything merely from the stand-point of "Does it pay?" and many a merchant does not take any part in politics because he is short-sighted enough to think that it will pay him better to attend purely to making money, and too selfish to be willing to undergo any trouble for the sake of abstract duty; while the younger men of this type are too much engrossed in their various social pleasures to be willing to give their time to anything else. It is also unfortunately true, especially throughout New England and the Middle States, that the general tendency among people of culture and high education has been to neglect and even to look down upon the rougher and manlier virtues, so that an advanced state of intellectual development is too often associated with a certain effeminacy of character. Our more intellectual men often shrink from the raw coarseness and the eager struggle of political life as if they were women. Now, however refined and virtuous a man may be, he is yet entirely out of place in the American body politic unless he is himself of sufficiently coarse fiber and virile character to be more angered than hurt by an insult or injury; the timid good form a most useless as well as a most despicable portion of the community. Again, when a man is heard objecting to taking part in politics because it is "low," he may be set down as either a fool or a coward; it would be quite as sensible for a militiaman to advance the same statement as an excuse for refusing to assist in quelling a riot. Many cultured men neglect their political duties simply because they are too delicate to have the element of "strike back" in their natures, and because they have an unmanly fear of being forced to stand up for their own rights when threatened with abuse or insult.

Such are the conditions which give the machine men their chance; and they have been able to make the most possible out of this chance, — first, because of the perfection to which they have brought their machinery, and, second, because of the social character of their political organizations.

ORGANIZATION AND WORK OF THE MACHINES.

The machinery of any one of our political bodies is always rather complicated ; and its politicians invariably endeavor to keep it so, because, their time being wholly given to it, they are able to become perfectly familiar with all its workings, while the average outsider becomes more and more helpless in proportion as the organization is less and less simple. Besides some others of minor importance, there are at present in New York three great political organizations, viz., those of the regular Republicans, of the County Democracy, and of Tammany Hall, that of the last being perhaps the most perfect, viewed from a machine standpoint. Although with wide differences in detail, all these bodies are organized upon much the same general plan; and one description may be taken, in the rough, as applying to all. There is a large central committee, composed of numerous delegates from the different assembly districts, which decides upon the various questions affecting the party as a whole in the county and city; and then there are the various organizations in the assembly districts themselves, which are the real sources of strength, and with which alone it is necessary to deal. There are different rules for the admission to the various district primaries and caucuses of the voters belonging to the respective parties; but in

almost every case the real work is done and the real power held by a small knot of men, who in turn pay a greater or less degree of fealty to a single boss.

The mere work to be done on election day and in preparing for it forms no slight task. There is an association in each assembly district, with its president, secretary, treasurer, executive committee, etc.; these call the primaries and caucuses, arrange the lists of the delegates to the various nominating conventions, raise funds for campaign purposes, and hold themselves in communication with their central party organizations. At the primaries in each assembly district a full set of delegates are chosen to nominate assemblymen and aldermen, while others are chosen to go to the State, county, and congressional conventions. Before election day, many thousands of complete sets of the party ticket are printed, folded, and put together, or, as it is called, "bunched." A single bundle of these ballots is then sent to every voter in the district, while thousands are reserved for distribution at the polls. In every election precinct — there are probably twenty or thirty in each assembly district — a captain and from two to a dozen subordinates are appointed. These have charge of the actual giving out of the ballots at the polls. On election day they are at their places long before the hour set for voting; each party has a wooden booth, looking a good deal like a sentry-box, covered over with flaming posters containing the names of their nominees, and the "workers" cluster around these as centers. Every voter as he approaches is certain to be offered a set of tickets; usually these sets are "straight," that is, contain all the nominees of one party, but frequently crooked work will be done, and some one candidate will get his own ballots bunched with the rest of those of the opposite party. Each captain of a district is generally paid a certain sum of money, greater or less according to his ability as a politician or according to his power of serving the boss or machine. Nominally this money goes in paying the subordinates and in what are vaguely termed "campaign expenses," but as a matter of fact it is in many instances simply pocketed by the recipient; indeed, very little of the large sums of money annually spent by candidates to bribe voters actually reaches the voters supposed to be bribed. The money thus furnished is procured either by subscriptions from rich outsiders, or by assessments upon the candidates themselves; formerly much was also obtained from office-holders, but this is now prohibited by law. A great deal of money is also spent in advertising, placarding posters, paying for public meetings, and organizing and uniforming members to take part in some huge torchlight procession — this last particular form of idiocy being one peculiarly dear to the average American political mind. Candidates for very lucrative positions are often assessed really huge sums, in order to pay for the extravagant methods by which our canvasses are conducted. Before a legislative committee of which I was a member, the Register of New York county blandly testified under oath that he had forgotten whether his expenses during his canvass had been over or under fifty thousand dollars. It must be remembered that even now — and until recently the evil was very much greater — the rewards paid to certain public officials are out of all proportion to the services rendered; and in such cases the active managing politicians feel that they have a right to exact the heaviest possible toll from the candidate, to help pay the army of hungry heelers who do their bidding. Thus, before the same committee mentioned above, the County Clerk testified that his income was very nearly eighty thousand a year, but with refreshing frankness admitted that his own position was practically merely that of a figure-head, and that all the work was done by his deputy, on a small fixed salary. As the County Clerk's term is three years, he should nominally receive nearly a quarter of a million dollars; but as a matter of fact two-thirds of the money probably goes to the political organizations with which he is connected. The enormous emoluments of such officers are, of course, most effective in debauching politics. They bear no

relation whatever to the trifling quantity of work done, and the chosen candidate readily recognizes what is the exact truth, — namely, that the benefit of his service is expected to inure to his party allies, and not to the citizens at large. Thus, one of the county officers who came before the same committee above mentioned, with a naive openness which was appalling, testified, in answer to what was believed to be a purely formal question as to whether he performed his public duties faithfully, that he did so perform them whenever they did not conflict with his political duties! — meaning thereby, as he explained, attending to his local organizations, seeing politicians, fixing primaries, bailing out those of his friends (apparently by no means few in number) who got hauled up before a justice of the peace, etc., etc. This man's statements were valuable because, being a truthful person and of such dense ignorance that he was at first wholly unaware his testimony was in any way remarkable, he really tried to tell things as they were; and it had evidently never occurred to him that he was not expected by every one to do just as he had been doing, — that is, to draw a large salary for himself, to turn over a still larger fund to his party allies, and conscientiously to endeavor, as far as he could, by the free use of his time and influence, to satisfy the innumerable demands made upon him by the various small-fry politicians.

"HEELERS"

The "heelers," or "workers," who stand at the polls, and are paid in the way above described, form a large part of the rank and file composing each organization. There are, of course, scores of them in each assembly district association, and, together with the almost equally numerous class of federal, State, or local paid office-holders (except in so far as these last have been cut out by the operations of the civil-service reform laws), they form the bulk of the men by whom the machine is run; the bosses of great and small degree chiefly merely oversee the work and supervise the deeds of their henchmen. The organization of a party in our city is really much like that of an army. There is one great central boss, assisted by some trusted and able lieutenants; these communicate with the different district bosses, whom they alternately bully and assist. The district boss in turn has a number of half subordinates, half allies, under him; and these latter choose the captains of the election districts, etc., and come into contact with the common heelers. The more stupid and ignorant the common heelers are, and the more implicitly they obey orders, the greater becomes the effectiveness of the machine. An ideal machine has for its officers men of marked force, cunning and unscrupulous, and for its common soldiers men who may be either corrupt or moderately honest, but who must be of low intelligence. This is the reason why such a large proportion of the members of every political machine are recruited from the lower grades of the foreign population. These henchmen obey unhesitatingly the orders of their chiefs, both at the primary or caucus and on election day, receiving regular rewards for so doing, either in employment procured for them or else in money outright. Of course it is by no means true that these men are all actuated merely by mercenary motives. The great majority entertain also a real feeling of allegiance towards the party to which they belong or towards the political chief whose fortunes they follow; and many work entirely without pay and purely for what they believe to be right. Indeed, an experienced politician always greatly prefers to have under him men whose hearts are in their work and upon whose unbribed devotion and intelligence he can rely; but unfortunately he finds in most cases that their exertions have to be seconded by others which are prompted by motives far more mixed.

All of these men, whether paid or not, make a business of political life and are thoroughly at home among the obscure intrigues that go to make up so much of it; and consequently, they have quite as much the advantage when pitted against amateurs as regular soldiers have when matched against militiamen. But their numbers, though absolutely large, are, relatively to the entire community, so small that some other cause must be taken into consideration in order to account for the commanding position occupied by the machine and the machine politicians in public life. This other determining cause is to be found in the fact that all these machine associations have a social as well as a political side, and that a large part of the political life of every leader or boss is also identical with his social life.

THE SOCIAL SIDE OF MACHINE POLITICS

The political associations of the various districts are not organized merely at the approach of election day; on the contrary, they exist throughout the year, and for the greater part of the time are to a great extent merely social clubs. To a large number of the men who belong to them they are the chief social rallying-point. These men congregate in the association building in the evening to smoke, drink beer, and play cards, precisely as the wealthier men gather in the clubs whose purpose is avowedly social and not political — such as the Union, University, and Knickerbocker. Politics thus becomes a pleasure and relaxation as well as a serious pursuit. The different members of the same club or association become closely allied to one another, and able to act together on occasions with unison and *esprit de corps*; and they will stand by one of their own number for reasons precisely homologous to those which make a member of one of the upper clubs vote for a fellow-member if the latter happens to run for office. "He is a gentleman, and I'll support him," says the swell club man. "He's one of the boys, and I'm for him," replies the heeler from the district party association. In each case the feeling is social rather than political, but where the club man influences one vote the heeler controls ten. A rich merchant and a small tradesman alike find it merely a bore to attend the meetings of the local political club; it is to them an irksome duty which is shirked whenever possible. But to the small politicians and to the various workers and hangers-on, these meetings have a distinct social attraction, and attendance is a matter of preference. They are in congenial society and in the place where by choice they spend their evenings, and where they bring their friends and associates; and naturally all the men so brought together gradually blend their social and political ties, and work with an effectiveness impossible to the outside citizens whose social instincts interfere, instead of coinciding, with their political duties. If an ordinary citizen wishes to have a game of cards or a talk with some of his companions, he must keep away from the local headquarters of his party; whereas, under similar circumstances, the professional politician must go there. The man who is fond of his home naturally prefers to stay there in the evenings, rather than go out among the noisy *habitués*, whose pleasure it is to see each other at least weekly, and who spend their evenings discussing neither sport, business, nor scandal, as do other sections of the community, but the equally monotonous subject of ward politics. The strength of our political organizations arises from their development as social bodies; many of the hardest workers in their ranks are neither office-holders nor yet paid henchmen, but merely members who have gradually learned to identify their fortunes with the party whose hall they have come to regard as the headquarters in which to spend the most agreeable of their leisure moments. Under the American system it is impossible for a man to accomplish anything by himself; he must associate himself with others, and they must throw their weight together. This is just what the social functions of the political

clubs enable their members to do. The great and rich society clubs are composed of men who are not apt to take much interest in politics anyhow, and who never act as a body. The immense effect produced by a social organization for political purposes is shown by the career of the Union League Club; and equally striking proof can be seen by every man who attends a ward meeting. There is thus, however much to be regretted it may be, a constant tendency towards the concentration of political power in the hands of those men who by taste and education are fitted to enjoy the social side of the various political organizations.

THE LIQUOR-SELLER IN POLITICS

It is this that gives the liquor-sellers their enormous influence in politics. Preparatory to the general election of 1884, there were held in the various districts of New York ten hundred and seven primaries and political conventions of all parties, and of these no less than six hundred and thirty-three took place in liquor-saloons, — a showing that leaves small ground for wonder at the low average grade of the nominees. The reason for such a condition of things is perfectly evident; it is because the liquor-saloons are places of social resort for the same men who turn the local political organizations into social clubs. Bartenders form perhaps the nearest approach to a leisure class that we have at present on this side of the water. They naturally are on semi-intimate terms with all who frequent their houses. There is no place where more gossip is talked than in bar-rooms, and much of this gossip is about politics — that is, the politics of the ward, not of the nation. The tariff and the silver question may be alluded to, but the real interest comes in discussing the doings of the men with whom they are personally acquainted: why Billy so-and-so, the alderman, has quarreled with his former chief supporter; whether "old man X" has really managed to fix the delegates to a given convention; the reason why one faction bolted at the last primary; and if it is true that a great downtown boss who has an intimate friend of opposite political faith running in an uptown district has forced the managers of his own party to put up a man of straw against him. The bar-keeper is a man of much local power, and is, of course, hail-fellow-well-met with his visitors, as he and they can be of mutual assistance to one another. Even if of different politics, their feelings towards each other are influenced by personal considerations purely; and, indeed, this is true of most of the smaller bosses as regards their dealings among themselves, for, as one of them once remarked to me with enigmatic truthfulness, "there are no politics in politics" of the lower sort — which, being interpreted, means that a professional politician is much less apt to be swayed by the fact of a man's being a Democrat or a Republican than he is by his being a personal friend or foe. The liquor-saloons thus become the social headquarters of the little knots or cliques of men who take most interest in local political affairs; and by an easy transition they become the political headquarters when the time for preparing for the elections arrives; and, of course, the goodwill of the owners of the places is thereby propitiated — an important point with men striving to control every vote possible.

The local political clubs also become to a certain extent mutual benefit associations. The men in them become pretty intimate with one another; and in the event of one becoming ill, or from any other cause thrown out of employment, his fellow-members will very often combine to assist him through his troubles, and quite large sums are frequently raised for such a purpose. Of course, this forms an additional bond among the members, who become closely knit together by ties of companionship, self-interest, and mutual interdependence. Very many members of these associations come into them without any thought of advancing their own fortunes; they work very hard for their party, or rather for the local body bearing the party name, but they do it quite

disinterestedly, and from a feeling akin to that which we often see make other men devote their time and money to advancing the interests of a yacht club or racing stable, although no immediate benefit can result therefrom to themselves. One such man I now call to mind who is by no means well off, and is neither an office-seeker nor an office-holder, but who regularly every year spends about fifty dollars at election time for the success of the party, or rather the wing of the party, to which he belongs. He has a personal pride in seeing his pet candidates rolling up large majorities. Men of this stamp also naturally feel most enthusiasm for, or animosity against, the minor candidates with whom they are themselves acquainted. The names at the head of the ticket do not, to their minds, stand out with much individuality; and while such names usually command the normal party support, yet very often there is an infinitely keener rivalry among the smaller politicians over candidates for local offices. I remember, in 1880, a very ardent Democratic ward club, many of the members of which in the heat of a contest for an assemblyman coolly swapped off quite a number of votes for President in consideration of votes given to their candidate for the State Legislature; and in 1885, in my own district, a local Republican club that had a member running for alderman, performed a precisely similar feat in relation to their party's candidate for Governor. A Tammany state senator openly announced in a public speech that it was of vastly more importance to Tammany to have one of her own men Mayor of New York than it was to have a Democratic President of the United States. Very many of the leaders of the rival organizations, who lack the boldness to make such a frankly cynical avowal of what their party feeling really amounts to, yet in practice, both as regards mayor and as regards all other local offices which are politically or pecuniarily of importance, act exactly on the theory enunciated by the Tammany statesman; and, as a consequence, in every great election not only is it necessary to have the mass of the voters waked up to the importance of the principles that are at stake, but it also unfortunately is necessary to see that the powerful local leaders are convinced that it will be to their own interest to be faithful to the party ticket.

Often there will be intense rivalry between two associations or two minor bosses; and one may take up and the other oppose the cause of a candidate with an earnestness and hearty goodwill arising by no means from any liking to the man himself, but from the desire to score a triumph over the opposition. It not unfrequently happens that a perfectly good man, who would not knowingly suffer the least impropriety in the conduct of his canvass, is supported in some one district by a little knot of politicians of shady character, who have nothing in common with him at all, but who wish to beat a rival body that is opposing him, and who do not for a moment hesitate to use every device, from bribery down, to accomplish their ends. A curious incident of this sort came to my knowledge while happening to inquire how a certain man became a Republican. It occurred a good many years ago, and thanks to our election laws it could not now be repeated in all its details; but affairs similar in kind occur at every election. I may preface it by stating that the man referred to, whom we will call X, ended by pushing himself up in the world, thanks to his own industry and integrity, and is now a well-to-do private citizen and as good a fellow as any one would wish to see. But at the time spoken of he was a young laborer, of Irish birth, working for his livelihood on the docks and associating with his Irish and American fellows. The district where he lived was overwhelmingly Democratic, and the contests were generally merely factional. One small politician, a saloon-keeper named Larry, who had a good deal of influence, used to enlist on election day, by pay and other compensation, the services of the gang of young fellows to which X belonged. On one occasion he failed to reward them for their work, and in other ways treated them so shabbily as to make them very angry, more especially X, who was their leader. There was no way to pay him off until the next election; but

they determined to break his influence utterly then, and as the best method for doing this they decided to "vote as far away from him" as possible, or, in other words, to strain every nerve to secure the election of all the candidates most opposed to those whom Larry favored. After due consultation, it was thought that this could be most surely done by supporting the Republican ticket. Most of the other bodies of young laborers, or, indeed, of young roughs, made common cause with X and his friends. Everything was kept very quiet until election day, neither Larry nor the few Republicans having an inkling of what was going on. It was a rough district, and usually the Republican booths were broken up and their ballot-distributers driven off early in the day; but on this occasion, to the speechless astonishment of everybody, things went just the other way. The Republican ballots were distributed most actively, the opposing workers were bribed, persuaded, or frightened away, all means fair and foul were tried, and finally there was almost a riot, — the outcome being that the Republicans actually obtained a majority in a district where they had never before polled ten per cent, of the total vote. Such a phenomenon attracted the attention of the big Republican leaders, who after some inquiry found it was due to X. To show their gratitude and to secure so useful an ally permanently (for this was before the days of civil-service reform), they procured him a lucrative place in the New York post-office; and he, in turn, being a man of natural parts, at once seized the opportunity, set to work to correct the defects of his early education, and is now what I have described him to be.

BOSS METHODS

A politician who becomes an influential local leader or boss is, of course, always one with a genuine talent for intrigue and organization. He owes much of his power to the rewards he is able to dispense. Not only does he procure for his supporters positions in the service of the state or city — such as the custom-house, sheriff's office, etc. — but he is also able to procure positions for many on horse railroads, the elevated roads, quarry works, etc. Great corporations are peculiarly subject to the attacks of demagogues, and they find it greatly to their interest to be on good terms with the leader in each district who controls the vote of the assemblyman and alderman; and therefore the former is pretty sure that a letter of recommendation from him on behalf of any applicant for work will receive most favorable consideration. The leader also is continually helping his henchmen out of difficulties, pecuniary and otherwise; he lends them a dollar or two now and then, helps out, when possible, such of their kinsmen as get into the clutches of the law, gets a hold over such of them as have done wrong and are afraid of being exposed, and learns to mix bullying judiciously with the rendering of service.

But in addition to all this, the boss owes very much of his commanding influence to his social relations with various bodies of his constituents; and it is his work as well as his pleasure to keep these relations up. No *debutante* during her first winter in society has a more exacting round of social duties to perform than has a prominent ward politician. In every ward there are numerous organizations, primarily social in character, but capable of being turned to good account politically. The Amalgamated Hack-drivers' Union, the Hibernian Republican Club, the West Side Young Democrats, the Jefferson C. Mullin Picnic Association — there are twenty such bodies as these in every district, and with, at any rate, the master spirits in each and all it is necessary for the boss to keep on terms of intimate and, indeed, rather boisterous friendship. When the Jefferson C. Mullin society goes on a picnic, the average citizen scrupulously avoids its neighborhood; but the boss goes, perhaps with his wife, and, moreover, enjoys himself heartily, and is hail-fellow-well-met with the rest of the picnickers, who, by the way, may be by

no means bad fellows; and when election day comes round, the latter, in return, no matter to what party they may nominally belong, enthusiastically support their friend and guest on social, not political, grounds. The boss knows every man in his district who can control any number of votes: an influential saloon-keeper, the owner of a large livery stable, the leader among a set of horse-car drivers, a foreman in a machine-shop who has a taste for politics — with all alike he keeps up constant and friendly relations. Of course this fact does not of itself make the boss a bad man; there are several such I could point out who are ten times over better fellows than are the mild-mannered scholars of timorous virtue who criticize them. But on the whole the qualities tending to make a man a successful local political leader under our present conditions are not apt to be qualities that make him serve the public honestly or disinterestedly; and in the lower wards, where there is a large vicious population, the condition of politics is often fairly appalling, and the boss is generally a man of grossly immoral public and private character, as any one can satisfy himself by examining the testimony taken by the last two or three legislative committees that have investigated the affairs of New York City. In these wards many of the social organizations with which the leaders are obliged to keep on good terms are composed of criminals, or of the relatives and associates of criminals. The testimony mentioned above showed some strange things. I will take at random a few instances that occur to me at the moment. There was one case of an assemblyman who served several terms in the Legislature, while his private business was to carry on corrupt negotiations between the excise commissioners and owners of low haunts who wished licenses. The president of a powerful semi-political association was by profession a burglar; the man who received the goods he stole was an alderman. Another alderman was elected while his hair was still short from a term in State prison. A school trustee had been convicted of embezzlement, and was the associate of criminals. A prominent official in the police department was interested in disreputable houses and gambling-saloons, and was backed politically by their proprietors.

BEATING THE MACHINE

In the better wards the difficulty comes in drilling a little sense and energy into decent people; they either do not care to combine or else refuse to learn how. In one district we did at one time and for a considerable period get control of affairs and elect a set of almost ideal delegates and candidates to the various nominating and legislative bodies, and in the end took an absolutely commanding although temporary position in State and even in national politics.

This was done by the efforts of some twenty or thirty young fellows who devoted a large part of their time thoroughly to organizing and getting out the respectable vote. The moving spirits were all active, energetic men, with common sense, whose motives were perfectly disinterested. Some went in from principle; others, doubtless, from good-fellowship or sheer love of the excitement always attendant upon a political struggle. Our success was due to our absolute freedom from caste spirit. Among our chief workers were a Columbia College professor, a crack oarsman from the same institution, an Irish quarryman, a master carpenter, a rich young merchant, the owner of a small cigar store, the editor of a little German newspaper, and a couple of employees from the post-office and custom-house, who worked directly against their own seeming interests. One of our important committees was composed of a prominent member of a Jewish synagogue, of the son of a noted Presbyterian clergyman, and of a young Catholic lawyer. We won some quite remarkable triumphs, for the first time in New York politics, carrying primaries against the machine, and as the result of our most successful struggle completely

revolutionizing the State convention held to send delegates to the National Republican Convention of 1884, and returning to that body, for the first and only time it was ever done, a solid delegation of Independent Republicans. This was done, however, by sheer hard work on the part of a score or so of men; the mass of our good citizens, even after the victories which they had assisted in winning, understood nothing about how they were won. Many of them actually objected to organizing, apparently having a confused idea that we could always win by what one of their number called a "spontaneous uprising," to which a quiet young fellow in our camp grimly responded that he had done a good deal of political work in his day, but that he never in his life had worked so hard and so long as he did to get up the "spontaneous" movement in which we were then engaged.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it may be accepted as a fact, however unpleasant, that if steady work and much attention to detail are required, ordinary citizens, to whom participation in politics is merely a disagreeable duty, will always be beaten by the organized army of politicians to whom it is both duty, business, and pleasure, and who are knit together and to outsiders by their social relations. On the other hand, average citizens do take a spasmodic interest in public affairs; and we should therefore so shape our governmental system that the action required by the voters should be as simple and direct as possible, and should not need to be taken any more often than is necessary. Governmental power should be concentrated in the hands of a very few men, who would be so conspicuous that no citizen could help knowing all about them; and the elections should not come too frequently. Not one decent voter in ten will take the trouble annually to inform himself as to the character of the host of petty candidates to be balloted for, but he will be sure to know all about the mayor, comptroller, etc. It is not to his credit that we can only rely, and that without much certainty, upon his taking a spasmodic interest in the government that affects his own well-being; but such is the case, and accordingly we ought, as far as possible, to have a system requiring on his part intermittent and not sustained action.