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Chicago: Half Free and Fighting On

Ever since these articles on municipal corruption have been appearing, readers of them have been asking what they were to do about it all. As if I knew, as if "we" knew; as if there were any one way to deal with this problem in all places under any circumstances. There isn't, and if I had gone around with a ready-made reform scheme in the back of my head, it would have served only to keep me from seeing straight the facts that would not support my theory. The only editorial scheme we had was to study a few choice examples of bad city government and tell how the bad was accomplished, then seek out, here and abroad, some typical good governments and explain how the good was done— not how to do it, mind you, but how it had been done. The bad government series is not yet complete, but since so many good men apparently want to go to work right off, it was decided to pause for an instance on the reform side. I have chosen the best I have found. Political grafters have been cheerful enough to tell me they have "got a lot of pointers" from the corruption articles. I trust the reformers will pick up some "pointers" from—Chicago.

Yes, Chicago. First in violence, deepest in dirt; loud, lawless, unlovely, ill-smelling, irreverent, new; an overgrown gawk of a village, the "tough" among cities, a spectacle for the nations—I give Chicago no quarter, and Chicago asks for none. "Good," they cheer, when you find fault; "give us the gaff. We deserve it and it does us good." They do deserve it. Lying low beside a great lake of pure, cold water, the city has neither enough nor good enough water. With the ingenuity and will to turn their sewer, the Chicago River, and make it run backwards and upwards out of the lake, the city cannot solve the smoke nuisance. With resources for a magnificent system of public parking, it is too poor to pave and clean the streets. They can balance high buildings on rafts floating in mud, but they can't quench the stench of the stockyards. The enterprise which carried through a World's Fair to a world's triumph is satisfied with two thousand five hundred policemen for two million inhabitants and one hundred and ninety-six square miles of territory, a force so insufficient (and inefficient) that it cannot protect itself, to say nothing of handling mobs, riotous strikers, and the rest of that lawlessness which disgraces Chicago. Though the city has an extra-legal system of controlling vice and crime, which is so effective that the mayor has been able to stop any practices against which he has turned his face—the "panel game," the "hat game," "wine rooms," "safe blowing"—though gambling is limited, regulated, and fair, and prostitution orderly; though, in short—through the power of certain political and criminal leaders—the mayor has been able to make Chicago, criminally speaking, "honest"—burglary and cruel hold-ups are tolerated. As government, all this is preposterous.

But I do not cite Chicago as an example of good municipal government, nor yet of good American municipal government; New York has, for the moment, a much better administration. But neither is Chicago a good example of bad government. There is grafting there, but after St. Louis it seems petty and after Philadelphia most unprofessional. Chicago is interesting for the

things it has “fixed.” What is wrong there is ridiculous. Politically and morally speaking. Chicago should be celebrated among American cities for reform, real reform, not moral fits and political uprisings, not reform waves that wash the “best people” into office to make fools of themselves and subside leaving the machine stronger than ever—none of these aristocratic disappointments of popular government—but reform that reforms, slow, sure, political, democratic reform, by the people, for the people. That is what Chicago has. It has found a way. All that I am sure of is that Chicago has something to teach every city and town in the country—including Chicago.

For Chicago is reformed only in spots. A political map of the city would show a central circle of white with a few white dots and dashes on a background of black, gray, and yellow. But the city once was pretty solid black. Criminally it was wide open; commercially it was brazen; socially it was thoughtless and raw; it was a settlement of individuals and groups and interests with no common city sense and no political conscience. Everybody was for himself, none was for Chicago. There were political parties, but the organizations were controlled by rings, which in turn were parts of state rings, which in turn were backed and used by leading business interests through which this corrupt and corrupting system reached with its ramifications far and high and low into the social organization. The grafting was miscellaneous and very general; but the most open corruption was that which centered in the city council. It never was well organized and orderly. The aldermen had “combines,” leaders, and prices, but, a lot of good-natured honest thieves, they were independent of party bosses and “the organizations,” which were busy at their own graft. They were so unbusiness-like that business men went into the city council to reduce the festival of blackmail to decent and systematic bribery. These men helped matters some, but the happy-go-lucky spirit persisted until the advent of Charles T. Yerkes from Philadelphia, who, with his large experience of Pennsylvania methods, first made boodling a serious business. He had to go right into politics himself to get anything done. But he did get things done. The aldermanic combine was fast selling out the city to its “best citizens,” when some decent men spoke up and called upon the people to stop it, the people who alone can stop such things.

And the people of Chicago stopped it; they have beaten boodling. That is about all they have done so far, but that is about all they have tried deliberately and systematically to do, and the way they have done that proves that they can do anything they set out to do. They worry about the rest; half free, they are not half satisfied and not half done. But boodling, with its backing of “big men” and “big interests,” is the hardest evil a democracy has to fight, and a people who can beat it can beat anything.

Every community, city, town, village, state—the United States itself—has a certain number of men who are willing, if it doesn’t cost anything, to vote right. They don’t want to “hurt their business”; they “can’t afford the time to go to the primaries”; they don’t care to think much. But they will vote. This may not be much, but it is enough. All that this independent, non-partisan vote wants is leadership, and that is what Chicago reformers furnished.

They had no such definite idea when they began. They had no theory at all—nothing but wrath, experience, common Chicago sense, and newspapers ready to back reform, not for the news, but for the common good. Theories they had tried; and exposures, celebrated trials, even some convictions of boodlers. They had gone in for a civil service reform law, and, by the way, they got a good one. probably the best in any city in the country. But exposés are good only for one election; court trials may punish individuals, but even convictions do not break up a corrupt system; and a “reform law” without reform citizenship is like a ship without a crew. With all their “reforms,” bad government persisted. There was that bear garden—the city council; something

ought to be done to that. Men like William Kent, John H. Hamlinc, W. R. Manierre, A. W. Maltby. and James R. Mann had gone in there from their “respectable” wards and their presence proved that they could get there; their speeches were public protests, and their votes, “no,” “no,” “no” were plain indicators of wrong. But all this was not enough. The Civic Federation, a respectable but inefficient universal reforming association, met without plans in 1895. It called together two hundred representative men, with Lyman J. Gage at their head, “to do something.” The two hundred appointed a committee of fifteen to “find something to do.” One of the fifteen drew forth a fully drawn plan for a new municipal party, the old, old scheme. “That won’t do,” said Edwin Burritt Smith to Mr. Gage, who sat beside him. “No, that won’t do,” said Gage. But they didn’t know what to do. To gain time Mr. Smith moved a sub-committee. The sub-committee reported back to the fifteen, the fifteen to the two hundred. And so, as Mr. Smith said, they “fumbled.”

But notice what they didn’t do. Fumblers as they were, they didn’t talk of more exposures. “Heavens, we know enough,” said one. They didn’t go to the legislature for a new charter. They needed one, they need one today, and badly, too, but the men who didn’t know what, but did know what not to do, wouldn’t let them commit the folly of asking one corrupt legislature another corrupt legislature out of existence. And they didn’t wait till the next mayoralty election to elect a “business mayor” who should give them good government.

They were bound to accept the situation just as it was— the laws, the conditions, the political circumstances, all exactly as they were—and, just as a politician would, go into the next fight, whatever it was, and fight. All they needed was a fighter. So it was moved to find a man, one man, and let this man find eight other men, who should organize the “Municipal Voters League.” There were no instructions; the very name was chosen because it meant nothing and might mean anything.

But the man! That was the problem. There were men, a few, but the one man is always hard to find. There was William Kent, rich, young, afraid of nothing and always ready, but he was an alderman, and the wise ones declared that the Nine must not only be disinterested, but must appear so. William Kent wouldn’t do. Others were suggested; none that would do. “How about George H. Cole?” “Just the man,” said Mr. Gage, and all knew the thought was an inspiration.

George H. Cole described himself to me as a “second-class business man.” Standing about five feet high, he knows he is no taller; but he knows that that is tall enough. Cole is a fighter. Nobody discovered it, perhaps, till he was past his fiftieth year. Then one Martin B. Madden found it out. Madden, a prominent citizen, president of the Western Stone Company, and a man of tremendous political power, was one of the business men who went into the council to bring order out of the chaos of corruption. He was a Yerkcs leader. Madden lived in Cole’s ward. His house was in sight of Cole’s house. “The sight of it made me hot,” said Cole, “ for I knew what it represented.” Cole had set out to defeat Madden, and he made a campaign which attracted the attention of the whole town. Madden was reelected, but Cole had proved himself, and that was what made Lyman J. Gage say that Cole was “just the man.”

“You come to me as a Hobson’s choice,” said Mr. Cole to the committee, “as a sort of forlorn hope. All right,” he added, “as a last chance. I’ll take it.”

Cole went out to make up the Nine. He chose William H. Colvin. a wealthy business man. retired; Edwin Burritt Smith, publicist and lawyer; M. J. Carroll, ex-labor leader, ex-typesetter, an editorial writer on a trade journal; Frank Wells, a well-known real estate man; R. R. Donnelly, the head of one of the greatest printing establishments in the city; and Hoyt King, a

young lawyer who turned out to be a natural investigator. These made, with Cole himself, only seven, but he had the help and counsel of Kent, Allen B. Pond, the architect. Judge Murray F. Tuley, Francis Lackner, and Graham Taylor. “We were just a few commonplace, ordinary men,” said one of them to me, “and there is your encouragement for other commonplace, ordinary men.” These men were selected for what they could do, however, not for what they “represented.” The One Hundred, which the Nine were to complete, was to do the representing. But the One Hundred never was completed, and the ward committee, a feature of the first campaign, was abandoned later on. “The boss and the ring” was the model of the Nine, only they did not know it. They were not thinking of principles and methods. Work was their instinct and the fighting has always been thick. The next election was to be held in April, and by the time they were ready February was half over. Since it was to be an election of aldermen, they went right out after the aldermen. There were sixty-eight in all—fifty-seven of them “thieves,” as the League reported promptly and plainly. Of the sixty-eight, the terms of thirty-four were expiring, and these all were likely to come up for reelection.

The thing to do was to beat the rascals. But how? Mr. Cole and his committee were pioneers; they had to blaze the way and, without plans, they set about it directly. Seeking votes, and honest votes, with no organization to depend upon, they had to have publicity. “We had first to let people know we were there,” said Cole, so he stepped “out into the limelight” and, with his short legs apart, his weak eyes blinking, he talked. The League was out to beat the boodlers up for reelection, he said with much picturesque English. Now Chicago is willing to have anybody try to do anything worthwhile in Chicago; no matter who you are or where you come from Chicago will give you a cheer and a first boost. When, therefore, George B. Cole stood up and said he and a quiet little committee were going to beat some politicians at the game of politics, the good-natured town said: “All right, go ahead and beat ’em; but how?” Cole was ready with his answer. “We’re going to publish the records of the thieves who want to get back at the trough.” Alderman Kent and his decent colleagues produced the records of their indecent colleagues, and the league announced that of the thirty-four retiring aldermen, twenty-six were rogues. Hoyt King and a staff of briefless young lawyers looked up ward records, and “these also we will publish,” said Cole. And they did; the Chicago newspapers, long on the right side and ever ready, printed them, and they were “mighty interesting reading.” Edwin Burritt Smith stated the facts; Cole added “ginger” and Kent “pepper and salt and vinegar.” They soon had publicity. Some of the committee shrank from the worst of it but Cole stood out and took it. He became a character in the town. He was photographed and caricatured; he was “Boss Cole” and “Old King-Cole,” but all was grist to this reform mill. Some of the retiring aldermen retired at once. Others were retired. If information turned up by Hoyt King was too private for publication, the committee was, and is today, capable of sending for the candidate and advising him to get off the ticket. This was called “blackmail,” and I will call it that, if the word will help anybody to appreciate how hard these reform politicians played and play the game.

While they were talking, however, they were working, and their work was done in the wards. Each ward was separately studied, the politics of each was separately understood, and separately each ward was fought. Declaring only for “aggressive honesty” at first, not competence, they did not stick even to that. They wanted to beat the rascals that were in, and, if necessary, if they couldn’t hope to elect an honest man, they helped a likely rascal to beat the rascal that was in and known. They drew up a pledge of loyalty to public interest, but they didn’t insist on it in some cases. Like the politicians, they were opportunists. Like the politicians, too, they were non-partisans. They played off one party against another, or, if the two organizations

hung together, they put up an independent. They broke many a cherished reform principle, but few rules of practical politics. Thus, while they had some of their own sort of men nominated, they did not attempt, they did not think of running "respectable" or "business" candidates as such. Neither were they afraid to dicker with ward leaders and "corrupt politicians." They went down into the ward, urged the minority organization leader to name a "good man" on promise of independent support, then campaigned against the majority nominee with circulars, house-to-house canvassers, mass-meetings, bands, speakers, and parades. I should say that the basic, unstated principle of this reform movement, struck out early in the practice of the Nine, was to let the politicians rule, but through better and better men whom the Nine forced upon them with public opinion. But again I want to emphasize the fact that they had no fine-spun theories and no definite principles beyond that of being always for the best available man. They were with the Democrats in one ward, with the Republicans in another, but in none were they respecters of persons.

Right here appeared that insidious influence which we have seen defeating or opposing reform in other cities—the interference of respectable men to save their friends. In the Twenty-second Ward the Democrats nominated a director (now deceased) of the First National Bank and a prominent man socially and financially. John Colvin, one of the "Big Four," a politician who had gone away rich to Europe and was returning to go back into politics, also was running. The League preferred John Maynard Harlan, a son of Justice Harlan, and they elected him. The bank of which this candidate was a director was the bank of which Lyman J. Gage, of the League, was president. All that the League had against this man was that he was the proprietor of a house leased for questionable purposes, and his friends, including Mr. Gage, were highly indignant. Mr. Gage pleaded and protested. The committee was "sick of pulls" and they made short work of this most "respectable" pull. They had "turned down" politicians on no better excuse, and they declared they were not going to overlook in the friend of their friends what they condemned in some poor devil who had no friends.

There were many such cases, then and later; this sort of thing has never ceased and it never will cease; reform must always "go too far," if it is to go at all, for it is up there in the "too far" that corruption has its source. The League, by meeting it early, and "spotting it," as Mr. Cole said, not only discouraged such interference, but fixed its own character and won public confidence. For everything in those days was open. The League works more quietly now, but then Cole was talking it all out, plain to the verge of brutality, forcible to the limit of language, and honest to utter ruthlessness. He blundered and they all made mistakes, but their blundering only helped them, for while the errors were plain errors, the fairness of mind that rejected an Edward M. Stanwood, for example, was plain too. Stanwood, a respectable business man, had served as alderman, but his reelection was advised against by the League because he had "voted with the gang." A high public official, three judges, and several other prominent men interceded on the ground that "in every instance where he is charged with having voted for a so-called boodle ordinance, it was not done corruptly, but that he might secure votes for some meritorious measure." The League answered in this style: "We regard this defense, which is put forward with confidence by men of your standing, as painful evidence of the low standard by which the public conduct of city officials has come to be measured by good citizens. Do you not know that this is one of the most insidious and common forms of legislative corruption?" Mr. Stanwood was defeated.

The League "made good." Of the twenty-six outgoing aldermen with bad records, sixteen were not renominated. Of the ten who were, four were beaten at the polls. The League's

recommendations were followed in twenty-five wards; they were disregarded in five; in some wards no fight was made.

A victory so extraordinary would have satisfied some reformers. Others would have been inflated by it and ruined. These men became canny. They chose this propitious moment to get rid of the committee of One Hundred respectables. Such a body is all very well to launch a reform, when no one knows that it is going to do serious work; but, as the Cole committee had learned, representative men with many interests can be reached. The little committee incorporated the League, then called together the big committee, congratulated it, and proposed a constitution and by-laws which would throw all the work—and all the power—to the little committee. The little committee was to call on the big committee only as money or some "really important" help was needed. The big committee approved, swelled up, adjourned, and that is the last time it has ever met.

Thus free of "pulls," gentlemanly pulls, but pulls just the same, the "nine" became nine by adding two—Allen B. Pond and Francis Lackner—and prepared for the next campaign. Their aldermen, the "reform crowd" in the city council were too few to do anything alone, but they could protest, and they did. They adopted the system of William Kent, which was to find out what was going on and tell it in council meetings.

"If you go on giving away the people's franchises like this," Alderman Harlan would say, "you may wake up some morning to find street lamps are useful for other purposes than lighting the streets." Or, "Some night the citizens, who are watching you, may come down here from the galleries with pieces of hemp in their hands." Then he would picture an imagined scene of the galleries rising and coming down upon the floor. He made his descriptions so vivid and creepy that they made some aldermen fidget. "I don't like dis business all about street lamps and hemp—vot dot is?" said a German boodler one night. "We don't come here for no such a business."

"We meant only to make headlines for the papers," said one of the reform aldermen. "If we could keep the attention of the public upon the council we could make clear what was going on there, and that would put meaning into our next campaign. And we certainly did fill the galleries and the newspapers."

As a matter of fact, however, they did much more. They developed in that year the issue which has dominated Chicago local politics ever since—the proper compensation to the city for public franchises. These valuable rights should not be given away, they declared, and they repeated it for good measures as well as bad. Not only must the city be paid, but public convenience and interest must be safeguarded. The boodlers boodled and the franchises went off; the protestation hurried the rotten business; but even that haste helped the cause. For the sight, week after week, of the boodle raids by rapacious capital fixed public opinion, and if the cry raised then for municipal ownership ever becomes a fact in Chicago, capital can go back to those days and blame itself.

Most of the early Chicago street railway franchises were limited, carelessly, to twenty-five years—the first one in 1858. In 1883, when the earliest franchises might have been terminated, the council ventured to pass only a blanket extension for twenty years—till July 30, 1903. This was well enough for Chicago financiers, but in 1886-7, when Yerkes appeared, with Widener and Elkins behind him, and bought up the West and North side companies, he applied Pennsylvania methods. He pushed bills through the legislature, saw them vetoed by Governor Altgeld, set about having his own governor next time, and in 1897 got, not all that he wanted (for

the people of Illinois are not like the people of Pennsylvania), but the Allen bill which would do—if the Chicago City Council of 1897 would give it force.

The Municipal Voters' League had begun its second campaign in December, 1856, with the publication of the records of the retiring aldermen, the second half of the old body, and, though this was before the Allen bill was passed, Yerkes was active, and his men were particularized. As the campaign progressed the legislation at Springfield gave it point and local developments gave it breadth. It was a mayoralty year, and Alderman John Maynard Harlan had himself nominated on an independent, non-partisan ticket. "Bobbie" Burke, the Democratic boss, brought forward Carter H. Harrison, and the Republicans nominated Judge Nathaniel C. Sears. Harrison at that time was known only as the son of his father. Scars was a fine man; but neither of these had seized the street railway issue. Mr. Harlan stood on that, and he made a campaign which is talked about to this day in Chicago. It was brilliant. He had had the ear of the town through the newspaper reports of his tirades in the council, and the people went to hear him now as night after night he arraigned, not the bribed legislators, but the rich bribers. Once he called the roll of street railway directors and asked each what he was doing while his business was being boodled through the state legislature. Earnest, eloquent, honest, he was witty too. Yerkes called him an ass. "If Yerkes will consult his Bible," said Harlan, "he will learn that great things have been done with the jaw-bone of an ass." This young man had no organization (the League confined itself to the aldermen); it was a speaking campaign; but he caught the spirit of Chicago, and in the last week men say you could feel the drift of sentiment to him. Though he was defeated, he got 70,000 votes, 10,000 more than the regular Republican candidate, and elected Harrison. And his campaign not only phrased the traction issue in men's minds; it is said it taught young Mayor Harrison the use of it. At any rate, Harrison and Chicago have been safe on the city's side of it ever since.

The League also won on it. They gave bad records to twenty-seven of the thirty-four outgoing aldermen. Fifteen were not renominated. Of the twelve who ran again, nine were beaten. This victory gave them a solid third of the council. The reform crowd combined with Mayor Harrison, the president of the council, and his followers and defeated ordinances introduced to give effect to Yerkes's odious Allen law.

Here again the League might have retired in glory, but these "commonplace, ordinary men" proposed instead that they go ahead and get a majority, organize the council on a non-partisan basis, and pass from a negative, anti-boodling policy to one of positive, constructive legislation. This meant also to advance from "beating bad men" to the "election of good men," and as for the good men, the standard was to be raised from mere honesty to honesty and efficiency too. With such high purposes in view, the Nine went into their third campaign. They had to condemn men they had recommended in their first year, but "we are always ready to eat dirt," they say. They pointed to the franchise issue, called for men capable of coping with the railways, and with bands playing, orators shouting, and Cole roaring like a sea-captain, they made the campaign of 1898 the hottest in their history. It nearly killed some of them, but they "won out"; the League had a nominal majority of the city council.

Then came their first bitter disappointment. They failed to organize the aldermen. They tried, and were on the verge of success, when defeat came, a most significant defeat. The League had brought into political life some new men, shopkeepers and small business men, all with perfect records, or none. They were men who meant well, but business is no training for politics; the shop-keepers who knew how to resist the temptations of trade, were untried in those of politics, and the boodle gang "bowled them over like little tin soldiers." They were persuaded

that it was no more than right to “let the dominant party make up committees and run the Council”; that was “usage,” and, what with bribery, sophistry, and flattery, the League was beaten by its weak friends. The real crisis in the League had come.

Mr. Cole resigned. He took the view that the League work was done; it could do no more; his health was suffering and his business was going to the dogs. The big corporations, the railroads, great business houses and their friends, had taken their business away from him. But this boycott had begun in the first campaign and Cole had met it with the declaration that he didn’t “care a d—n.” “I have a wife and a boy,” he said. “I want their respect. The rest can all go to h—1.” Cole has organized since a league to reform the legislature, but after the 1898 campaign the Nine were tired, disappointed, and Cole was temporarily used up.

The Nine had to let Cole and Hoyt King go. But they wouldn’t let the League go. They had no successor for Cole. None on the committee would take his place; they all declined it in turn. They looked outside for a man, finding nobody. The prospect was dark. Then William Kent spoke up. Kent had time and money, but he wouldn’t do anything anyone else could be persuaded to do. He was not strong physically, and his physicians had warned him that to live he must work little and play much. At that moment he was under orders to go west and shoot. But when he saw what was happening, he said:

“I’m not the man for this job; I’m no organizer. I can smash more things in a minute than I can build up in a hundred years. But the League has got to go on, so I’ll take Cole’s place if you’ll give me a hard-working, able man for secretary, an organizer and a master of detail.”

Such a secretary was hard to find, but Allen B. Pond, the architect, a man made for fine work, took this rough and tumble task. And these two, with the committee strengthened and active, not only held their own, they not only met the receding wave of reactionary sentiment against reform, but they made progress. In 1899 they won a clear majority of the council, pledged their men before election to a non-partisan organization of the council, and were in shape for constructive legislation. In 1900 they increased their majority, but they did not think it necessary to bind candidates before the election to the non-partisan committee’s plan, and the Republicans organized the house. This party maintained the standard of the committees; there was no falling off there, but that was not the point. Parties were recognized in the council, and the League had hoped for only one line of demarcation: special interests versus the interests of the city. During the time of Kent and Pond, however, the power for good of the League was established, the question of its permanency settled, and the use of able conscientious aldermen recognized. The public opinion it developed and pointed held the council so steady that, with Mayor Harrison and his personal following among the Democrats on that side, the aldermen refused to do anything for the street railway companies until the Allen bill was repealed. And, all ready to pass anything at Springfield, Yerkes had to permit the repeal, and he soon after closed up his business in Chicago and went away to London, where he is said to be happy and prosperous.

The first time I went to Chicago, to see what form of corruption they had, I found there was something the matter with the political machinery. There was the normal plan of government for a city, rings with bosses, and a grafting business interest behind. Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, are all governed on such a plan. But in Chicago it didn’t work. “Business” was at a standstill and business was suffering. What was the matter? I beleaguered the political leaders with questions: “Why didn’t the politicians control? What was wrong with the machines?” The “boss” defended the organizations, blaming the people. “But the people could be fooled by any capable politician,” I demurred. The boss blamed the reformers. “Reformers!” I exclaimed. “I’ve seen some of your reformers. They aren’t different from reformers elsewhere,

are they?" "No," he said, well pleased. But when I concluded that it must then be the weakness of the Chicago bosses, his pride cried out. "Say," he said, "have you seen that blankety-blank Fisher?"

I hadn't, I said. "Well, you want to," he said, and I went straightway and saw Fisher—Mr. Walter L. Fisher, secretary of the Municipal Voters' League. Then it was that I began to understand the Chicago political situation. Fisher was a reformer: an able young lawyer of independent means, a mind ripe with high purposes and ideals, self-confident, high-minded, conclusive. He showed me an orderly bureau of indexed information, such as I had seen before. He outlined the scheme of the Municipal Voters' League, all in a bored, polite, familiar way. There was no light in him nor anything new or vital in his reform as he described it. It was all incomprehensible till I asked him how he carried the Seventeenth Ward, a mixed and normally Democratic ward, in one year for a Republican by some 1,300 plurality, the next year for a Democrat by some 1,800, the third for a Republican again. His face lighted up, a keen, shrewd look came into his eyes, and he said: "I did not carry that ward; its own people did it, but I'll tell you how it was managed." And he told me a story that was politics. I asked about another ward, and he told me the story of that. It was entirely different, but it, too, was politics. Fisher is a politician—with the education, associations, and the idealism of the reformers who fail, this man has cunning, courage, tact, and, rarer still, faith in the people. In short, reform in Chicago has such a leader as corruption alone usually has; a first-class executive mind and a natural manager of men.

When, after the aldermanic campaign of 1900, Messrs. Kent and Pond resigned as president and secretary of the League's executive committee, Charles R. Crane and Mr. Fisher succeeded in their places. Mr. Crane is a man with an international business, which takes him often to Russia, but he comes back for the Chicago aldermanic campaigns. He leaves the game to Mr. Fisher, and says Fisher is the man, but Crane is a backer of great force and of persistent though quiet activity. These two, with a picked committee of experienced and sensible men—Pond, Kent Smith, Frank H. Scott, Graham Taylor, Sigmund Zeisler, and Lessing Rosenthal—took the League as an established institution, perfected its system, opened a headquarters for work the year around; and this force, Mr. Fisher with his political genius has made a factor of the first rank in practical politics. Fisher made fights in the "hopeless" wards, and won them. He has raised the reform majority in the city council to two-thirds; he has lifted the standard of aldermen from honesty to a gradually rising scale of ability, and in his first year the council was organized on a non-partisan basis. This feature of municipal reform is established now, by the satisfaction of the aldermen themselves with the way it works. And a most important feature it is, too. "We have four shots at every man headed for the Council," said one of the League—"one with his record when his term expires; another when he is up for the nomination; a third when he is running as a candidate; the fourth when the committees are formed. If he is bad he is put on a minority in a strong committee; if he is doubtful, with a weak or doubtful majority in an important committee with a strong minority—a minority so strong that they can let him show his hand, then beat him with a minority report." Careful not to interfere in legislation, the League keeps a watch on every move in the council. Cole started this. He used to sit in the gallery every meeting night, but under Crane and Fisher, an assistant secretary—first Henry B. Chamberlain, now George C. Sikes—has followed the daily routine of committee work as well as the final meetings.

Fisher has carried the early practice of meeting politicians on their own ground to a very practical extreme. When tact and good humor failed, he applied force. Thus, when he set about preparing a year ahead for his fights in unpromising wards, he sent to the ward leaders on both

sides for their lists of captains, lieutenants, and heelers. They refused, with expressions of astonishment at his "gall." Mr. Chamberlain directed a most searching investigation of the wards, precinct by precinct, block by block, and not only gathered a rich fund of information, but so frightened the politicians who heard of the inquiries that many of them came around and gave up their lists. Whether these helped or not, however, the wards were studied, and it was by such information and undermining political work, combined with skill and a fearless appeal to the people of the ward, that Fisher beat out with Hubert W. Butler the notorious Henry Wulff, an ex-state treasurer, in the ward convention of Wulff's own party, and then defeated Wulff, who ran as an independent, at the polls.

Such experience won the respect of the politicians, as well as their fear, and in 1902 and 1903 the worst ot them, or the best, came personally to Fisher to see what they could do. He was their equal in "the game of talk," they found, and their superior in tactics, for when he could not persuade them to put up good men and "play fair," he measured himself with them in strategy. Thus one day "Billy" Loeffler, the Democratic leader in the Democratic Ninth Ward, asked Mr. Fisher if the League did not want to name the Democratic candidate for alderman in his ward. Loeffler's business partner, "Hot Stove" Brenner, was running on the Republican ticket and Fisher knew that the Democratic organization would pull for Brenner. But Fisher accepted what was a challenge to political play and suggested Michael J. Preib. Loeffler was dazed at the name; it was new to him, but he accepted the man and nominated him. The Ninth is a strong Hebrew ward. To draw off the Republican and Jewish vote from Brenner, Fisher procured the nomination as an independent of Jacob Diamond, a popular young Hebrew, and he backed him too, intending, as he told both Preib and Diamond, to prefer in the end the one that should develop the greater strength. Meanwhile the League watched Loeffler. He was quietly throwing his support from Preib to Brenner. Five days before election it was clear that, though Diamond had developed unexpected strength, Preib was stronger. Fisher went to Loeffler and accused him of not doing all he could for Preib. Loeffler declared he was. Fisher proposed a letter from Loeffler to his personal friends asking them to vote for Preib. Loeffler hesitated, but he signed one that Fisher dictated. Loeffler advised the publication of the statement in the Jewish papers, and, though he consented to have it mailed to voters, he thought it "an unnecessary expense." When Fisher got back to the League headquarters, he rushed off copies of the letter through the mails to all the voters in the ward. By the time Loeffler heard of this it was too late to do anything; he tried, but he never caught up with those letters. His partner, Brenner, was defeated.

A politician? A boss. Chicago has in Walter L. Fisher a reform boss, and in the Nine of the Municipal Voters' League, with their associated editors and able finance and advisory committees, a reform ring. They have no machine, no patronage, no power that they can abuse. They haven't even a list of their voters. All they have is the confidence of the anonymous honest men of Chicago who care more for Chicago than for anything else. This they have won by a long record of good judgments, honest, obvious devotion to the public good, and a disinterestedness which has avoided even individual credit; not a hundred men in the city could name the Committee of Nine.

Working wide open at first, when it was necessary, they have withdrawn more and more ever since, and their policy now is one of dignified silence except when a plain statement of facts is required; then they speak as the League, simply, directly, but with human feeling, and leave their following of voters to act with or against them as they please. I have laid great stress on the technical, political skill of Fisher and the Nine, not because that is their chief reliance; it isn't: the study and the enlightenment of public opinion is their great function and force. But other

reform organizations have tried this way. These reformers have, with the newspapers and the aldermen, not only done it thoroughly and persistently; they have not only developed an educated citizenship; they have made it an effective force, effective in legislation and in practical politics. In short: political reform, politically conducted, has produced reform politicians working for the reform of the city with the methods of politics. They do everything that a politician does, except buy votes and sell them. They play politics in the interest of the city.

And what has the city got out of it? Many things, but at least one great spectacle to show the world, the political spectacle of the year, and it is still going on. The properly accredited representatives of two American city railway companies are meeting in the open with a regular committee of an American board of aldermen, and they are negotiating for the continuance of certain street railway franchises on terms fair both to the city and to the corporations without a whisper of bribery, with composure, reasonableness, knowledge (on the aldermen's part, long-studied information and almost expert knowledge); with an eye to the future, to the just profit of the railways, and the convenience of the people to the city. This in an American city—in Chicago.

Those franchises which Yerkes tried to "fix" expired on July 30. There was a dispute about that, and the railways were prepared to fight. One is a Chicago corporation held by Chicago capital, and the men in it knew the conditions. The other belongs to New York and Philadelphia capitalists, whom Yerkes got to hold it when he gave up and went away; they couldn't understand. This "foreign" capital sent picked men out to Chicago to "fight." One of the items said to have been put in their bill of appropriation was "For use in Chicago—$1,000,000." Their local officers and directors and friends warned them to "go slow."

"Do you mean to tell us," said the Easterners, "that we can't do in Chicago what we have done in Philadelphia, New York, and—?"

Incredulous, they did do some such "work." They had the broken rings with them, and the "busted bosses," and they had the city on the hip in one particular. Though the franchises expired, the city had no authority in law to take over the railways and had to get it from Springfield. The Republican ring, with some Democratic following, had organized the legislature on an explicit arrangement that "no traction legislation should pass in 1903." The railways knew they couldn't get any; all they asked was that the city shouldn't have any either. It was a political game, but Chicago was sure that two could play at it. Harrison was up for reelection; he was right on traction. The Republicans nominated a business man, Graeme Stewart, who also pledged himself. Then they all went to Springfield, and, with the whole city and state looking on, the city's reform politicians beat the regulars. The city's bill was buried in committee, but to make a showing for Stewart the Republican ring had to pass some sort of a bill. They offered a poor substitute. With the city against it, the Speaker "gavelled it through" amid a scene of the wildest excitement. He passed the bill, but he was driven from his chair, and the scandal compelled him and the ring to reconsider that bill and pass the city's own enabling act.

Both the traction companies had been interested in this Springfield fiasco; they had been working together, but the local capitalists did not like the business. They soon offered to settle separately, and went into session with the city's lawyers, Edwin Burritt Smith, of the League, and John C. Mathis. The Easterners' representatives, headed by a "brilliant" New York lawyer, had to negotiate too. Their brilliant lawyer undertook to "talk sense" into the aldermanic committee. This committee had been out visiting all the large Eastern cities, studying the traction situations everywhere; on their own account they had drawn for them one of the most complete reports ever made for a city by an expert. Moreover, they knew the law and the finances of the

traction companies, better far than the New York lawyers. When, therefore, the brilliant legal light had made one of his smooth, elaborate speeches, some hard-headed alderman would get up and say that he "gathered and gleaned" thus and so from the last speaker; he wasn't quite sure, but if thus and so was what the gentleman from New York had said, then it looked to him like tommy rot. Then the lawyer would spin another web, only to have some other commonplace looking alderman tear it to pieces. Those lawyers were dumbfounded. They were advised to see Fisher. They saw Fisher.

"You are welcome, if you wish," he is said to have said, "to talk foolishness, but I advise you to stop it. I do not speak for the council, but I think I know what it will say when it speaks for itself. Those aldermen know their business. They know sense and they know nonsense. They can't be fooled. If you go at them with reason they will go a long way toward helping you. However, you shall do as you please about this. But let me burn this one thing in upon your consciousness: Don't try money on them or anybody else. They will listen to your nonsense with patience, but if we hear of you trying to bribe anybody—an alderman or a politician or a newspaper or a reporter—all negotiations will cease instantly. And nobody will attempt to blackmail you, no one."

This seems to me to be the highest peak of reform. Here is a gentleman, speaking with the authority of absolute faith and knowledge, assuring the representatives of a corporation that it can have all that is due it from a body of aldermen by the expenditure of nothing more than reason. I have heard many a business man say such a condition of things would be hailed by his kind with rejoicing. How do they like it in Chicago? They don't like it at all. I spent one whole forenoon calling on the presidents of banks, great business men, and financiers interested in public utility companies. With all the evidence I had had in other places that these men are the chief source of corruption, I was unprepared for the sensation of that day. Those financial leaders of Chicago were "mad." All but one of them became so enraged as they talked that they could not behave decently. They rose up, purple in the face, and cursed reform. They said it had hurt business; it had hurt the town. "Anarchy," they called it; "socialism." They named corporations that had left the city; they named others that had planned to come there and had gone elsewhere. They offered me facts and figures to prove that the city was damaged.

"But isn't the reform Council honest?" I asked.

"Honest! Yes, but—oh, h—1!"

"And do you realize that all you say means that you regret the passing of boodle and would prefer to have back the old corrupt council?"

That brought a curse or a shrewd smile or a cynical laugh, but that they regretted the passing of the boodle regime is the fact, bitter, astonishing—but natural enough. We have seen those interests at their bribery in Philadelphia and St. Louis; we have seen them opposing reforms in every city. Here in Chicago we have them cursing reform triumphant, for, though reform may have been a benefit to the city as a community of freemen, it is really bad; it has hurt their business!

Chicago has paid dearly for its reform, and reformers elsewhere might as well realize that if they succeed, their city will pay too, at first. Capital will boycott it and capital will give it a bad name. The bankers who offered me proof of their losses were offering me material to write down the city. And has Chicago had conspicuous credit for reform ? No, it is in ill-repute, "anarchistic," "socialistic" (a commercial term for municipal ownership); it is "unfriendly to capital." But Chicago knows what it is after and it knows the cost. There are business men there who are willing to pay; they told me so. There are business men on the executive and finance

committees of the League and others helping outside who are among the leaders of Chicago's business and its bar. Moreover, there are promoters who expect to like an honest council. One such told me that he meant to apply for franchises shortly, and he believed that, though it would take longer than bribery to negotiate fair terms with aldermen who were keen to safeguard the city's interests, yet business could be done on that basis. "Those reform aldermen are slow, but they are fair," he said.

The aldermen are fair. Exasperated as they have been by the trifling, the trickery, and past boodling of the street railways, inconvenienced by bad service, beset by corporation temptations, they are fairer today than the corporations. They have the street railways now in a corner. The negotiations are on, and they could squeeze them with a vengeance. What is the spirit of those aldermen? "Well," said one to me; "I'll tell you how we feel. We've got to get the city's interests well protected. That's first. But we've got more to do than that. They're shy of us; these capitalists don't know how to handle us. They are not up to the new reform, on-the-level way of doing business. We've got to show capital that we will give them all that is coming to them, and just a little more—a little more, just to get them used to being honest." This was said without a bit of humor, with some anxiety, but no bitterness, and not a word about socialism or "confiscating municipal ownership"; that's a "capitalistic" bugaboo. Again, one Saturday night a personal friend of mine who had lost a half-holiday at a conference with some of the leading aldermen, complained of their "preciseness." "First," he said, "they had to have every trivial interest of the city protected, then, when we seemed to be done, they turned around and argued like corporation lawyers for the protection of the corporation."

Those Chicago aldermen are an honor to the country! Men like Jackson and Mavor, Herrmann and Werno, would be a credit to any legislative body in the land, but there is no such body in the land where they could do more good or win more honor. I believe capital will some day prefer to do business with them than with blackmailers and boodlers anywhere.

When that day comes the aldermen will share the credit with the Municipal Voters' League, but all the character and all the ability of both council and League will not explain the reform of Chicago. The citizens of that city will take most of the glory. They will have done it, as they have done it so far. Some of my critics have declared they could not believe there was so much difference in the character of communities as I have described. How can they account then for Chicago? The people there have political parties, they are partisans. But they know how to vote. Before the League was started, the records show them shifting their vote to the confusion of well-laid political plans. So they have always had bosses, and they have them now, but these bosses admit that they "can't boss Chicago." I think this is partly their fault. William Lorimer, the dominant Republican boss, with whom I talked for an hour one day, certainly does not make the impression, either as a man or as a politician, that Croker makes, or Durham of Philadelphia. But an outsider may easily go wrong on a point like this, and we may leave the credit where they lay it, with the people of Chicago. Fisher is a more forceful man than any of the regulars, and, as a politician, compares with well-known leaders in any city; but Fisher's power is the people's. His leadership may have done much, but there is something else deeper and bigger behind him. At the last aldermanic election, when he discovered on the Saturday before election that the League was recommending, against a bad Democrat, a worse Republican, he advised the people of that ward to vote for the Socialist; and the people did vote for the Socialist and they elected him! Again, there is the press, the best in any of our large cities. There are several newspapers in Chicago which have served always the public interest, and their advice is taken by their readers. These editors wield, as they wielded before the League came, that old-fashioned power of the press which is supposed to

have passed away. Indeed, one of the finest exhibitions of disinterestedness in this whole reform story was that of these newspapers giving up the individual power and credit which their influence on public opinion gave them, to the League, behind which they stepped to get together and gain for the city what they lost themselves. But this paid them. They did not do it with that motive; they did it for the city, but the city has recognized the service, as another fact shows: There are bad papers in Chicago—papers that serve special interests—and these don't pay.

The agents of reform have been many and efficient, but back of them all was an intelligent, determined people, and they have decided. The city of Chicago is ruled by the citizens of Chicago. Then why are the citizens of Chicago satisfied with half-reform? Why have they reformed the council and left the administrative side of government so far behind? "One thing at a time," they will tell you out there, and it is wonderful to see them patient after seven years of steadfast fighting reform.

But that is not the reason. The administration has been improved. It is absurdly backward and uneven; the fire department is excellent, the police are a disgrace, the law department is expert, the health bureau is corrupt, and the street cleaning is hardly worth mention. All this is Carter H. Harrison. He is an honest man personally, but indolent; a shrewd politician, and a character with reserve power, but he has no initial energy. Without ideals he does only what is demanded of him. He does not seem to know wrong is wrong, till he is taught; nor to care, till criticism arouses his political sense of popular requirement. That sense is keen, but think of it: Every time Chicago wants to go ahead a foot, it has first to push its mayor up inch by inch. In brief, Chicago is a city that wants to be led, and Carter Harrison, with all his political ambition, honest willingness, and obstinate independence, simply follows it. The League leads, and its leaders understand their people. Then why does the League submit to Harrison ? Why doesn't the League recommend mayors as well as aldermen? It may some day; but, setting out by accident to clean the council, stop the boodling, and settle the city railway troubles, they have been content with mayor Harrison because he had learned his lesson on that. And, I think, as they say the mayor thinks, that when the people of Chicago get the city railways running with enough cars and power; when they have put a stop to boodling forever; they will take up the administrative side of the government. A people who can support for seven years one movement toward reform, should be able to go on forever. With the big boodle beaten, petty political grafting can easily be stopped. All that will be needed then will be a mayor who understands and represents the city; he will be able to make Chicago as rare an example of good government as it is now of reform; which will be an advertisement; good business; it will pay.