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***Terse and Terrible Texts***

“Of all the maligned and slandered citizens in Christendom,” said the reformed politician, “the ward worker is the most silent and long-suffering. He is called a rascal and a bunco-steerer and a second story man and a grafter and a highwayman and a buccaneer and a burglar and a thief, and yet, though he could prove his guiltlessness on every count of the indictment, he keeps mum and permits the knockers to knock him to their black hearts’ uttermost content.”

“Isn’t it true, then, that ward workers are crooked?” asked the neophyte in surprise. “Not a bit of it,” replied the reformed politician. “As a matter of fact, young man, they are the only honest and disinterested patriots in politics.

“Most of them are men who would scorn to work a graft or even to make a back hand touch. For pure love of their party they slave and labor with the rank and file. Long before the primaries they must be up and doing. They must make lists of all the voters in their precincts, white, black, Democratic and Republican. They must compare these lists with former lists, and seek out those who have moved or died or married or been hanged or appointed to office. Then they must select precinct workers and see to it that every voter is ‘seen.’

“When the day of the contest comes ‘round, they must direct the party runners and keep tabs upon every man capable of marking a ballot. Those who are ignorant they must instruct and if you had ever tackled this job you would not marvel at Darwin’s doctrine that man is descended from the mud turtle. Then they must go into the highways and byways and smooth over the rough places and puff hot air and throw cups. In dealing with the voters who are holding off they must be diplomatic and crafty and cunning. They must arise at 4 o’clock in the morning to catch the honest hod carriers before the 7 o’clock whistle blows, and they must remain on watch until midnight in order to bank the party faith into the heads of reluctant believers.

“They must wage the factional fights and be prepared to accept defeat with good grace and to fight as hard for their erstwhile enemies as they fought for their friends. They must learn to subordinate their personal leanings to the will of the majority and to lie with killing calm and earnestness. When the great day of days rolls ‘round they must open the party bar’l and see that its contents are distributed judiciously and carefully, For all of this they receive as a reward the execration of the public.”

“Don’t they get a share of the bar’l?” asked the neophyte.

“Not a cent,” answered the reformed politician. “The real ward worker labors for nothing. Nine out of ten of them are honest men and good citizens who have no hankering for easy jobs. If one of them were detected in the act of bleeding the bar he would be dropped overboard like a dead marine. The ward executive is expected to receive something for his trouble, but the worker can hope for little. If he wants a job he may possibly get it, but, as I have said, he very often doesn’t want it.

‘Neither is he likely to receive a nomination for an elective office. Were he put forward as a candidate he would be attacked, in 99 cases out of 100, on the ground that he is merely a ‘ward heeler.’ Now, the politicians of the modern school have no liking for such attacks, and so they endeavor, whenever possible, to shield themselves behind the names of gentlemen of ‘eminent respectability.’ Besides, they know that the ‘eminently respectable’ guy is to be led with far greater ease than the down-trodden worker. The latter, from being something of a power in politics himself, is apt to have opinions regarding matters of party policy, and when allowed a big lead he is given to setting up factions of his own.’

“Why, then, does the ward worker hustle?” asked the neophyte.

“That,” replied the reformed politician, “may be set down among the Problems Unanswerable. Nobody knows, not even the ward worker himself.”

And then he fell to discussing the habits and customs of the ward executive.