

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT.

Remarks of Chicago's Mayor Before the Nineteenth Century Club of New York.

Results of Eight Years' Experience as Chief Officer of a Great City.

The following is the address by he Hon. Carter H. Harrison, Mayor of Chicago, on "Municipal Government," before the Nineteenth Century Club of New York, on the 23d of November, which has provoked such wide discussion and comment:

For many years there have been constantly reports in the newspapers of the waste and extravagance of municipal governments throughout the country, and every now and then the people have been startled by the announcement in some city of malversation, peculation, if not downright robbery, by municipal officials. The people, too, have noticed that there has been a constant tendency of population toward great centers. Farmers till their land by their own labor and that of their minor children, with such aid as they can get from hired laborers of foreign birth. American-born men seem to dislike being hired as farm-hands.

The farmer's lad, who formerly looked forward with longing to the attainment of his majority that he might share his land and vote for the President of the United States, freed from parental restraint, now does so in the hope of seeking the city, there to imitate a Gould or a Vanderbilt, and make his fortune and enjoy it in the young springtime of his life. The dissolute and idle, the ambitious and adventurous, the vicious and criminal young men alike seem to desire residence where they may be crowded in mighty hives.

Crime can be more readily perpetrated in the country than in the city. The farmer's house can be burglarized more easily than city residences on the crowded thoroughfare, but the criminal can be more easily detected in the sparsely settled country than in the cities. The criminal has learned that while it may be nearly impossible to find a needle in a haystack, yet that perseverance and patience, with a lamp and sieve, can ultimately recover the smallest needle lost in the largest haystack; but that a bodkin dropped among a hundred thousand other bodkins, fashioned from a like metal and cut by the same machine, would be absolutely impossible of detection and identification. He recognizes that his safe-abiding place is in the city, where masses of his congeners, among whom his identification will be difficult, unless from his own imprudence or the treachery of his pals.

Thus, not only does population tend generally toward cities, but the tendency of the adventurous, the reckless, the idle, and unfortunately the criminal, is also toward the center of population. This tendency toward centralization has been vastly accelerated since the ending of the great war which came so near shaking our Government into fragments.

The heterogeneous masses thrown into cities are supposed to be by many persons unable to choose their rulers and magistrates. To escape the effect of this, many of the best inhabitants of cities have been willing that they should be governed by the Legislature of their State and by its Governor, instead of by their own citizens. Here in New York this experiment was tried, and proved an ignominious failure.

You are half governed by yourselves and half at Albany, and have been so ill-governed that you have been robbed almost into bankruptcy. Wise heads ought to have foreseen this; they ought to have known that a Legislature drawn from the farms and the fields, however capable in the science of deep furrowing and scientific farming, however capable of forcing the pig to roll himself of bones and develop his highly skilled in rearing, as ox as to lay the lean and fat in streaks as regular as are rainbow colors, yet were not fitted to judge of the daily necessities of the denizens of large cities, and how they should be governed. I would rather trust the management of a city to a distant Legislature of wise scoundrels than of ignorant or foolish, though honest men. It would be very difficult to purchase the majority of a large body of the people, while the latter could be easily made the tools of a few self-seeking rascals.

Think men ought to have foreseen the failure of the experiment. It ought to have failed; for it was in violation of the very fundamental principles of our system of government, in disregard of the genius of our institutions, which claim that men should be governed by their own consent.

This experiment proving a failure, some good men have jumped to the conclusion that the denizens of cities might be trusted with their own government, provided the right of suffrage should be indirectly secured, not by taking from any man the right to vote, but by giving to some men a cumulative vote in proportion to their property. This, they think, will make the ballot more conservative, and therefore more wise. This, too, would be in violation of every spirit of free government, which rests the suffrage upon manhood, and not upon property qualification. I have never yet found that a biped ass is any less an ass because of quadruped asses filling his stalls, or that a lion is any less a lion because, because, by patience and hounding, by prudence or luck, he has become the owner of blocks of brick and mortar. My own observations are that the man who reared a fortune by buying cheap by the bale and selling dear by the yard—that the man who buys coffee by the car-load and sells it by the pound—however skilled he may be in the rise and fall of commodities and the prospect of markets, is not to any extent a better judge of human nature or of the intelligence and capabilities of men than the porter who rolls his bale or the truckman who hauls his sack—than the salesman who sells and ties up the yard or the pound. Your princely merchants are no more skilled in reading human nature—aye, not half so much so as are their drummers and traveling salesmen whose bread comes from a knowledge of human nature. Besides, property and wealth oftentimes narrow a man's views instead of enlarging them; the poor man's necessities sharpen his skill in reading human nature.

I can not agree with the distinguished gentleman (Mr. Evans) who has just concluded his able lecture, when he says: "It is useless to quote Jefferson and the fathers; they spoke for their time and a state of facts which were familiar to them, not for our day and a condition of things they never dreamed of." Jefferson and the fathers spoke not that which grows old, and not for a particular time. They spoke for all ages, and said that which is ever fresh and vigorous, the truth, which lives forever. They laid down the rule that government was for the greatest good to the greatest number—injuring none. That the governed were the best judges of their own needs, and should and could be trusted with the management of their own affairs.

The tendencies of all governments are to one or the other of two things—toward centralization, consolidation, greater strength and ultimate despotism, or toward decentralization, greater freedom and ultimately license and destruction. The two extremes ultimately meet. The despotism of the one man tumbles into the despotism of the mob. The despotism of the mob ends in the despotism of the one strong man. It is the part of statesmanship to so guide Governments as to retard the march toward these, their logical tendencies; to stave off the evil day, so as to make the rule of happiness as long as possible.

We may flatter ourselves that we are not as other men have been, and that our governmental fabric is not controlled by the universal

law of growth and decay. Decay sets in immediately when growth ceases. Men are to-day what men were a thousand years ago, and what they will be a thousand years hence, modified only by circumstances, but sternly and irresistibly controlled by the same irrevocable laws. Governments are but aggregations of men, and subject to the same logical forces.

Our Government will follow other Governments—it will grow and then decay. *Ergo per se* was a grand appeal, but it was Webster's oratorical peroration, not the divine prophecy of genius. Let us hope that we will live and many generations will follow us, happy in our country's growth, and that its decay will be in the dim and far-off future. To make our hope a fruition, let us tie to the moorings pointed out to us by Jefferson and the fathers. We are anchored upon the people. When our anchor ceases to be trusted, then will the rot have set in, and our government will no longer give us a land of freedom. The people may be crazed for a day; they may go astray for a term, but their sober second thought is that vox populi is vox Dei. They may get drunk and grow wild, but we can appeal from Philip drunk to Philip sober. The masses have a wonderful instinct in looking into men's characters and reading them aright. General Jackson was criticized and condemned, if not contemned, by the learned of his day, but the people trusted him, and now the world concedes that the people were true to their instinct and put not their trust in vain. In the dark days from 1861 to 1865 carping criticism laughed at and derided Lincoln. The people put their trust in old Abe, and now the sternest thinkers admit that what was termed weakness in the President was his strength, and that it saved the Union.

Mr. Evans seems to me to lay too much stress upon civil service reform. A proper civil service is indispensable in all governments. But many men have civil service reform on the brain. It is to them a sort of panacea for all the ills of government, whether national, State or municipal.

Every now and then a craze comes over the people—now over the ignorant and unlearned, and then over those who think themselves the upper stratum, the very antipodes of the common people. This is one of the latter sort of crazes. It is a sort of Anglomaniac. It is in "good form"—English, ye know, and now the modern follies I know one so foolish as some of the examinations by which it is attempted to find if a man can carry a letter or keep a set of books. Hold the city heads of departments responsible for the good management of the matters in their charge, and let them discharge at will all their employees for incompetence, and you will not need any commission of learned snobs to pass upon their capabilities. I am no believer in the spoils system. "To the victor belong the spoils," was not Old Hickory's maxim, and ought not to be of any good citizen. But a life tenure of office is not in accord with the views of our people. They know that bureaucracy tends to lift the employee out of sympathy with the masses, and the more moderate the position the greater the effect of certain tenure of office upon the holder of the position. Any one who has had much intercourse with the lower classes of foreign employes has seen how they are lifted from the people. That is one of the causes of the great demand of our foreign-born citizens for official place. They have seen the strut and pride of office-holders abroad. From tidewater up it is a species of ill-bred aristocracy. Our people want none of it. They wish their officials to be their servants, and to keep them so they may have the opportunity of every now and then changing the *ins* and putting in the *outs* fresh from themselves.

This much I have felt it proper to say on the subject of general government. I will now ask your kind attention to the subject under discussion to-night—Municipal Government.

In appearing before you, I do not propose to deliver a labored essay upon municipal government drawn from reading or study, but simply the ideas of a practical man formed from his practical experience during eight years' administering the affairs of the third city in America. I will make no pretension to any erudition, but will give you my views plainly, and as tersely as possible; will describe to you, as nearly as possible, the theories of municipal government drawn from actual experience, and will endeavor thereby to aid you in reaching just conclusions on the momentous question that is now occupying the thoughts of so many intelligent men in our land.

We may assume as a fundamental axiom that cities consist of masses of men aggregated together in pursuit of material wealth, and in the endeavor to have themselves protected in the acquirement of that wealth, and afterward in enjoying it during their lives, and in handing it down to their children, mainly by the means of the real estate, the corporations and municipalities, the business, the mother and the sister. When material prosperity becomes the rule of a city, then the others will follow, as natural results and logical consequences. I know there are those who sentimentally decry our modern cities, and compare them unfavorably with the great cities of ancient times and of medieval ages, where letters, arts, and the sciences reigned, and have spread their effulgent light over the days that followed them; but these gentlemen should remember that the hundred colonies of Athens poured into her harbor enormous wealth before the Parthenon was erected to the admiration of all ages; before the Pentelicon marble sprung into the godlike Apollo Belvedere, or the magic chisel enabled the cold stone to blush in womanly beauty in the form of Venus de Medici; that the argosies of Venice delivered upon the rialto the world's wealth before Titian was able to paint the creations of his pencil, surpassing those of nature herself; before the San Marco was erected to be the admiration of all lovers of florid architecture; that Florence was the seat of wealth, and that her merchants had become princes, before Angelo fashioned his mighty productions, and that Dante made his descent *Ad Inferno* upon golden stairs; 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