

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 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 spark his girl 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 cities.

Crime can be more readily perpetrated in the country than in the city. The farmer's house can be burglarized more easily than can city residences on the crowded thoroughfares, 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 bokkin dropped among a hundred thousand other bokkins, fashioned from a like metal and cut by the same machine, would be absolutely impossible of detection and identification. He recognizes that his safe-tabcuing place is in the city, where are 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 rid himself of bones and develop it; however skilled in rearing the ox so 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 former, while the latter could be easily made the tools of a few self-seeking rascals.

Thinking 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 abridged, 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, 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 bockhead is any less a bockhead because, by patience and hoarding, 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 carload 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 a very exact 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—that the salesmen who sell and ties up the yard or the pound. Your princely merchants are no more skilled in reading human nature—aye, not half so much 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 and quicken his faculties.

I can not agree with the distinguished gentleman (Mr. Ivins) 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 intimately 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 today 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 irreverable 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. *Esto permane* 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 grand heritage 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 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 carpings, 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. Ivins 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 Anglomania. It is in "good form"—English, you know. But of all modern follies I know none 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 of 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 lit the employe 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 *bus* 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; that corporations called municipalities are business corporations, whose scope and aim is to aid the citizens in the acquirement of wealth, and to protect them while doing so, and afterward in its enjoyment. Its duty is not that of directly fostering or encouraging arts and sciences, piety or morality. These things should be left to the academy, to the pulpit, to the lyceum, to the school, to the fireside, and to the mothers and sisters. A corporation should give facilities for education, and should protect the teacher and the preacher, the lecturer, 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 getitmen should remember that the hundred colonies of Athens poured into her harbor enormous wealth before the Parthenon was erected to be the admiration of all ages; before the Pentelic marble sprung into the godlike Apollo Belvedere, or the magus chisel enabled the cold stone to blush in womanly beauty in the form of Venus de Medici; that the argosies of Venice delved 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 Dan e made his descent *all Inferno* upon golden stairs; England was rich before her classics were written; New York is growing rich, but the other day found it difficult to rear a pedestal in her harbor for the statue to Liberty, which is to give light to the world; but her riches will yet enable her to foster genius and art, and New York and Chicago may yet be each a reflex of Athens and Florence in the patronage of letters, of arts, and sciences. Wealth is the handmaid to the higher genius of man.

Experience has taught me that the government of a great city is not the difficult thing that a great many people think, provided that the organic law or charter of the city be simple, and at the same time ample. Permit me to lay before you the charter under which the city of Chicago is governed. It is not a special charter, but is one under which any city in the State of Illinois can govern itself on the election of its people. Chicago has four executive officers, namely: a mayor, a treasurer, a city attorney, and a city clerk. They are elected for two years. It has thirty-six aldermen, two from each ward, one-half of them elected each year. The city council or legislative department of the city is composed of the mayor and aldermen, the mayor presiding and having the casting vote. The council has charge of all matters directly appertaining to the city's interest; in fact, its powers are plenary, under certain limitations, over all matters not under the jurisdiction of the State officials, and common to the cities of the country.

The powers of the City Council are, briefly: To control the finances, levy taxes for corporate purposes, limited to 2 per cent upon the last assessed valuation; to levy taxes for payment of bonds and interest, and for school and library purposes, outside of the 2 per

cent limitation; to borrow money under the limits fixed by the State Constitution; to regulate censuses, establish streets; to provide for lighting and cleaning the same, and to regulate traffic over them; to regulate the driving of vehicles and speed of same, as well as of railroad trains; to permit the laying of railroad tracks within a period of twenty years; to erect and control bridges, viaducts, tunnels, etc.; to regulate harbors and the commerce therein; to regulate theaters and places of amusement, the construction of buildings, and to define fire limits; to regulate storage of powder, etc.; to establish departments necessary to the city government, including fire, police, health, public works, etc.; and to define the duties of officers and employees of the city; to prevent disorderly assemblies; to prevent and punish cruelty to animals; to abate nuisances; to make all regulations necessary for the promotion of health; to establish and regulate cemeteries; to direct the location and regulate the management of packing houses, tanneries, soap factories, breweries, distilleries, and livery stables; to prevent any unwholesome business within a mile of the city; to provide for the construction of buildings for the city's use; to establish ferries, toll bridges, etc.; to prevent any practice or amusement having a tendency to annoy persons passing on the streets; to prevent and regulate the keeping of any combustible material within the fire limits; to pass all ordinances necessary to carry into effect the powers granted to cities, with such fines as may be deemed proper, but no fine or penalty must exceed \$2,000, and no imprisonment for one offense exceed six months.

In fine, the powers of the City Council are plenary as far as the purely municipal affairs of the city are concerned, within certain limitations in a few instances.

The aldermen are two from each ward, elected by the ward. It would be a great improvement in my opinion if one-half of them were elected from the ward and by the ward, the other half elected from the wards but by the city at large. Aldermen elected by the ward would be directly interested in the affairs of the ward; aldermen elected by the city at large would necessarily be more conservative and would look to the interest of the entire city more readily than the aldermen elected as they are at present, as there is a tendency for aldermen in their desire to gain that which they wish for their own people to trade with the aldermen of other districts giving them this special desire. This too frequently causes lavish expenditure and incongruous legislation. The present wards of Chicago, owing to the vast growth of the city are very unequal in size, the smallest containing not over 16,000 population, and the largest over 8,000. It is the duty of the aldermen under the charter to redistrict the city into wards as often as may be necessary to keep them equal, as near as possible, in population; but this charter provision is directory and not mandatory. It should be mandatory, and the old wards, instead of being divided up into more equal ones in population, should be increased as the city grows; for I am profoundly impressed with the necessity of prudence not being so large as to prevent the personal knowledge of the alderman by all of their denizens. A population of about twenty thousand to the ward would be the proper thing.

Our present charter forbids increasing the number of wards, and thereby increasing the number of aldermen. This was a grave mistake; a larger number of aldermen would be beneficial to the city's interests. The newspapers sometimes charge that aldermen are not so impervious to the lavishments of corporations as they should be, and that they levy tribute from them. It is not my part to make the criticism, but I will say that it would be much more difficult to corrupt a majority of a large number of aldermen than to corrupt the majority of a small number. A majority of our Council at present is nineteen. If the wards had about 20,000 population each, the whole number would be thirty-five. That would give seventy aldermen; a majority would be thirty-six. It would be more difficult to reach them by corrupt influences than to reach nineteen. Two-thirds of the aldermen can overrule the Mayor's veto; at the present time, it requires but five additional aldermen over the bare majority to do this. If our wards were thirty-five, it would be found much more difficult to win, by corrupt influences, eleven aldermen to override a veto than five, as is now necessary.

The charter should absolutely have forbidden any executive duty whatever to the legislative body of the city or its committees. The legislative and executive should be thoroughly separated. The legislative body should not have the right under the charter to make any contract whatever, or to dispose of or to purchase the city's property. It should simply determine when the contract should be made, and when property should be disposed of or bought, and then the executive should make the contract, or dispose of or buy the property by open and thorough competition after liberal advertising. Nothing is more demoralizing to the legislative body than permitting it to be also to any extent executive. The body which levies taxes and makes appropriations should never be permitted to expend the taxes levied or the moneys appropriated. This is so imperative a prohibition that it should be axiomatic when the formation of charters is being considered. All executive acts should be left to a responsible executive head, to whom the people look for execution, and whom they should hold responsible to them.

The general incorporation act of Illinois did not go into effect until 1873, and was adopted by Chicago and went into operation in 1875. This act being intended for large and small cities, left to the city council the duty of organizing departments of city government, and of creating the officials to have charge of the same, and also of discontinuing such departments, with the proviso that no department created should be discontinued till the end of the year. This gives the council the power, to a considerable extent, of coercing the executive; a power which may be exercised for party purposes, to the injury of the city. Experience shows that certain departments are essential to cities of large population. The charter should be so amended as to create these departments by the organic law, and thus render the executive still more independent of the city legislature. For a city council should be as far as possible precluded from the exercise of any political power. It should have no power whatever over elections. For it is not natural that the alderman will consider his own re-election of paramount importance, and by the attempt to help himself, and with the co-operation of his co-alderman, the purity of the ballot-box may be put in jeopardy. Aldermen in large cities have their time vastly more drawn upon than do legislators. The people have no right to expect their aldermanic servants to serve them without pay. The time has passed by when the honor is sufficient recompense. The alderman should be paid, and paid a living wage, and should not be called a scoundrel simply because printer's ink is cheap. It has been found wise to pay the directors of great railroad systems a handsome per diem, and this, too, though every director is a heavy stockholder in the corporation he helps to manage. The alderman of Chicago receives three dollars for each regular session of the council. He gets nothing for committee meetings, and for running to the departments in the interest of his constituents. His time is given to his constituents, for which he gets no regular pay, and he is damned because he accepts from corporations a Thanksgiving turkey. Under the circumstances there is no wonder that the people suspect that Thanksgiving days come oftener than the Governor's proclamation, and that the turkeys are of less regulation fatness.

Our Council fixes all salaries of city employees. This is proper, but there should be a maximum fixed by the charter. Aldermanic liberality is great, especially when the thousands who are employed by the city are voters and are naturally grateful. The State Legislature meets often enough to see that the city

may not suffer by reason of the meagreness of the maximum established. The employees of a city should be better paid than those of private establishments. For in the latter, experience becomes capital and growth of pay follows or the employee can set up for himself. But the pay should not be so large as to be too attractive. Policemen and firemen should be allowed by law a pension when disabled by age or infirmities. The tax-payers should take care of those grown old or incapable in their service.

The duties of City Clerk, Treasurer, and Attorney with us do not differ materially from those of like officers everywhere. I will therefore pass them and speak of the Mayor, the Chief Executive and a very responsible officer under our charter.

The Mayor is elected for two years; has the functions of a Sheriff as custodian of the peace, with the additional power of calling out the militia. He appoints the Comptroller, Commissioner of Public Works, Collector, Superintendent of Buildings, Commissioner of Health, Chief of Police, and Chief of Fire Department, and designates the justices of the peace who are to act as justices of the police courts, the bailiffs and clerks of said courts, the inspector of gas, of weights and measures, and of oil—these all by and with the approval of the City Council—and can discharge any of them at will, but must give the Council, at its next regular meeting, his reasons for such discharge, when it may, by a two-thirds vote of all the Aldermen elected, reinstate such officer discharged. The several heads of departments above named appoint the heads of sub-departments, by and with the consent of the Mayor. Each head of sub-department appoints all employees, by and with the consent of the head of his respective department. The heads of the several departments can discharge all employees. Thus it will be seen that the Mayor is the fountain-head of all appointments, but the several heads of departments can discharge for incompetency or for any insubordination. Should this latter power, however, be used for improper motives, or on improper grounds, the Mayor can review the act, and, by his power of discharge, correct any such evil.

My own views are that the mayor should have the power to appoint and discharge, free from any intervention of the legislative branch of the city government. This vast power would seem to many at first blush too great to place in any one executive hand. Many will say it is undemocratic. We must remember, however, that the mayor is the people's servant; his term of office is short, and if his power be improperly used the people will condemn him at the end of his term. The people hold all the power and for the time being delegate him to execute their will. Power so delegated to one man is no less democratic than the same power placed in the hands of several persons. The people retain the power if delegated to one as much as if delegated to the Alderman by all of their denizens. A population of about twenty thousand to the ward would be the proper thing.

A major walk in the open light. His acts of yesterday are seen and criticised by the people to-day. The sphere of his authority is limited, and can be viewed and understood by each and every one of his fellow-citizens from day to day. He cannot escape condemnation if he misuses his power. It is difficult for him to please even when his every act is of the purest and the wisest. The people's opinions of matters immediately arising are as various as their different intelligences and their varied interests. The mayor's executive duties affect the citizens immediately. Few of his acts can fail to affect injuriously, or at least disagreeably some part or portion of his constituents. Nearly every duty performed offends some one or more, and this makes one more hostile to him. And in this way during his term of two years he will necessarily make many if not his enemies at least his very lukewarm friends, while he offends in many small matters. In this way he finds a ready and a harsh critic on every corner. His popularity cannot be maintained on this account, and if maintained at all it will be a purely official and not a personal popularity. That is, the people may re-elect him, not because they like him as an individual, but because as an official he protects their great interests.

Many have thought that such power, together with his patronage, will enable such a mayor to keep himself in office. What I have said is enough to answer one ground of these fears. The other, I think, is easily disposed of. Patronage is an element of weakness, not of strength, to a self-seeking man. When once in place a ward politician loses his influence. He is supposed to work for his own interests and thereby loses what he had before, and, being himself too often a self-seeker, he tries to hold his place by endeavoring to please all parties about the time of elections. He is a trimmer now, whereas he was a firm party man before he got his position. Of course, I refer to the patronage in a small sphere, such as is a city. The bitterness of all partisan complaints made to me since I have held office has been *no good* for the party.

Besides the benefits arising from the undivided responsibility being placed upon the one executive head, with full powers, there are others of equal consequence. The Mayor, who is the real head of all departments of the city, can enforce a unity of action and purpose, utterly impossible when there are boards and commissions, each independent of the single head. Given a board of police and fire, another of health, another of public works, and still another of streets and highways. Each of these independent departments looks only at its own interests, and thus makes a unity of city administration impossible. Let me illustrate this by considering the question of finance and economy, the most important of all in city affairs. Each department considers itself the important one and expends the city's funds to the full limit of its power, and no one but the people at the end of the term of office to inspect their action. Economy becomes impossible, and waste, or at least extravagance, necessarily follows. But one responsible head, deeply influenced by the city's interest, or, what will be equally effective, working for his reputation and good name, looks over the whole field, holds in check each department, giving to each all he feels consistent with the public good, knowing that he will stand or fall by the good conduct, honesty, and economy of all, runs the entire city as a wise merchant or great manufacturer runs his establishment, with prudence and with an eye to the prosperity of the whole.

A city may be likened to a great military camp in an enemy's country. How long would such camp be safe if every colonel or captain was clothed with full powers? A single head is necessary for the very existence of those in camp. A great city is always in an enemy's country. Its enemies, however, are within its own walls, and unless there be some responsible head, a turbulent citizenship may at any time, under some great excitement such as is constantly arising in our cities, bring calamity, if not ruin. Responsibility and power develop a man, and make him equal to a great emergency, even as he himself little dreamed of. These views are those of one who will shortly be out of office, and simply a private citizen. All I have is in the city whose chief magistrate I am. I wish to live there and have my children enjoy what I may give and leave them. I would have Chicago governed as I have indicated, when I shall have only the ballot of a single man.