

Controversy is still bitter, more profuse in personal imputations than one expects to find it where there are no grave issues to excuse excitement. But in this respect also there is an improvement. Partisans are reckless, but the mass of the people lends itself less to acrid partisanship than it did in the time of Jackson, or in those first days of the Republic which were so long looked back to as a sort of heroic age. Public opinion grows more temperate, more mellow, and assuredly more tolerant. Its very strength disposes it to bear with opposition or remonstrance. It respects itself too much to wish to silence any voice.

PART V

ILLUSTRATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

[This Part contains some illustrations, drawn from recent American history, of the working of political institutions and public opinion, together with observations on several political questions for which no fitting place could be found in the preceding Parts.]

CHAPTER LXXXVIII

THE TAMMANY RING IN NEW YORK CITY

ALTHOUGH I have described in previous chapters the causes which have induced the perversion and corruption of democratic government in great American cities, it seems desirable to illustrate more fully, from the recent history of two of those cities, the conditions under which those causes work and the forms which that perversion takes. The phenomena of municipal democracy in the United States are the most remarkable and least laudable which the modern world has witnessed; and they present some evils which no political philosopher, however unfriendly to popular government, appears to have foreseen, evils which have scarcely showed themselves in the cities of Europe, and unlike those which were thought characteristic of the rule of the masses in ancient times. I take New York and Philadelphia as examples because they are older than Chicago, Brooklyn, and St. Louis, far larger than Boston and Baltimore. And I begin with New York, because she displays on the grandest scale phenomena common to American cities, and because the plunder and misgovernment from which she has suffered have become specially notorious over the world.

From the end of last century the State and (somewhat later) the city of New York were, more perhaps than any other State or city, the seat of intrigues and the battle-ground of factions. Party organizations early became powerful in them, and it was by a New York leader — Marcy, the friend of President Jackson, — that the famous doctrine of "the Spoils to the Victors" was first formulated as the practice of New York politicians. These factions were for a long time led, and these intrigues worked, by men belonging to the upper or middle class, to whom the emoluments of office were desirable but not essential. In the middle of the century, however, there came

a change. The old native population of the city was more and more swollen by the immigration of foreigners: first of the Irish, especially from 1846 onwards; then also of the Germans from 1849 onwards; finally of Polish and Russian Jews, as well as of Italians and of Slavs from about 1883 onwards. Already in 1870 the foreign population, including not only the foreign born but a large part of their children who, though born in America, were still virtually Europeans, constituted a half or perhaps even a majority of the inhabitants; and the proportion of foreigners has since then varied but little.¹ These newcomers were as a rule poor and ignorant. They knew little of the institutions of the country, and had not acquired any patriotic interest in it. But they received votes. Their numbers soon made them a power in city and State politics, and all the more so because they were cohesive, influenced by leaders of their own race, and not, like the native voters, either disposed to exercise, or capable of exercising, an independent judgment upon current issues. From among them there soon emerged men whose want of book-learning was overcome by their natural force and shrewdness, and who became apt pupils in those arts of party management which the native professional politicians had already brought to perfection.

While these causes were transferring power to the rougher and more ignorant element in the population, the swift developments of trade which followed the making of the Erie Canal and opening up of railway routes to the West, with the consequent expansion of New York as a commercial and financial centre, had more and more distracted the thoughts of the wealthier people from local politics, which required more time than busy men could give, and seemed tame compared with that struggle over slavery, whereon, from 1850 to 1865, all patriotic minds were bent. The leading men, who fifty years earlier would have watched municipal affairs and perhaps

¹ In 1870 44 per cent of the population of New York were of foreign birth; in 1880, 39 per cent; in 1890, 42 per cent. The percentage of persons who were practically foreigners, as the sons of immigrants still imperfectly Americanized, was and is of course greater, because it must include many of the sons born in America of persons still imperfectly Americanized. It is true that some of the most recent immigrants had not yet obtained votes, but against this must be set the fact that the proportion of adults is much larger among the immigrants than in the whole population.

borne a part in them, were now so much occupied with their commercial enterprises or their legal practice as to neglect their local civic duties, and saw with unconcern the chief municipal offices appropriated by persons belonging to the lower strata of society.

Even had these men of social position and culture desired to retain a hold in city politics, the task would not have been easy, for the rapid growth of New York, which from a population of 108,000 in 1820 had risen to 209,000 in 1830, to 813,000 in 1860, and to 942,000 in 1870, brought in swarms of strangers who knew nothing of the old residents, and it was only by laboriously organizing these newcomers that they could be secured as adherents. However laborious the work might be, it was sure to be done, because the keenness of party strife made every vote precious. But it was work not attractive to men of education, nor suited to them. It fell naturally to those who themselves belonged to the lower strata, and it became the source of the power they acquired.

Among the political organizations of New York the oldest and most powerful was the Tammany Society. It is as old as the Federal government, having been established under the name of the Columbian Society in 1789, just a fortnight after Washington's inauguration, by an Irish American called William Mooney, and its purposes were at first social and charitable rather than political. In 1805 it entitled itself the Tammany Society, adopting, as is said, the name of an Indian chief called Tamanend or Tammany, and clothing itself with a sort of mock Indian character. There were thirteen tribes, with twelve "sachems" under a grand sachem, a "sagamore" or master of ceremonies, and a "wiskinski" or doorkeeper. By degrees, and as the story goes, under the malignant influence of Aaron Burr, it took a strongly political tinge as its numbers increased. Already in 1812 it was a force in the city, having become a rallying centre for what was then called the Republican and afterwards the Democratic party; but the element of moral aspiration does not seem to have become extinct, for in 1817 it issued an address deploring the spread of the foreign game of billiards among young men of the upper classes. At one time, too, it possessed a sort of natural history museum, which was ultimately purchased by the well-known showman,

P. T. Barnum. Till 1822 it had been governed by a general meeting of its members, but with its increased size there came a representative system; and though the Society proper continued to be governed and its property held by the "sachems," the control of the political organization became vested in a general committee consisting of delegates elected at primary meetings throughout the city, which that organization was now beginning to overspread. This committee, originally of thirty-three members, numbered seventy-five in 1836, by which time Tammany Hall had won its way to a predominant influence in city politics. Of the present organization I shall speak later.

The first sachems had been men of some social standing, and almost entirely native Americans. The general democratization, which was unfortunately accompanied by a vulgarization, of politics, that marked the time of Andrew Jackson, lowered by degrees the character of city politicians, turning them into mere professionals whose object was lucre rather than distinction or even power. This process told on the character of Tammany, making it more and more a machine in the hands of schemers, and thus a dangerous force, even while its rank and file consisted largely of persons of some means, who were interested as direct taxpayers in the honest administration of municipal affairs. After 1850, however, the influx from Europe transformed its membership while adding to its strength. The Irish immigrants were, both as Roman Catholics and in respect of such political sympathies as they brought with them, disposed to enter the Democratic party. Tammany laid hold of them, enrolled them as members of its district organizations, and rewarded their zeal by admitting a constantly increasing number to posts of importance as district leaders, committeemen, and holders of city offices. When the Germans arrived, similar efforts were made to capture them, though with a less complete success. Thus from 1850 onwards Tammany came more and more to lean upon and find its chief strength in the foreign vote. Of the foreigners who have led it, most have been Irish. Yet it would be wrong to represent it, as some of its censors have done, as being predominantly Irish in its composition. There have always been and are now a vast number of native Americans

among the rank and file, as well as a few conspicuous among its chiefs. It contains many Germans, probably more than half of the German voters who can be reckoned as belonging to any party. And to-day the large majority of the Russian and Polish Jews (very numerous in some parts of the city), of the Czechs and other Austro-Hungarian Slavs, and possibly also of the Italians, obey its behests, even if not regularly enrolled as members. For the majority of these immigrants are Democrats, and Tammany has been and is the standard bearer of the Democratic party in the city. It has had rivals and enemies in that party. Two now extinct rival Machines, — Mozart Hall, formerly led by Mr. Fernando Wood, and the "County Democracy," guided for some years by the late Mr. Hubert O. Thompson, — at different times confronted, and sometimes even defeated it; while at other times "making a deal" with it for a share in municipal spoils. Once, as we shall presently see, it incurred the wrath of the best Democrats of the city. Still it has on the whole stood for and been at most times practically identified with the Democratic party, posing on the Fourth of July as the traditional representative of Jeffersonian principles; and it has in that capacity grown from the status of a mere private club to be an organization commanding more than 130,000 votes, a number usually sufficient to turn the balance in the great State of New York, and thereby, perhaps, to determine the result of a Presidential election.

I must, however, return to those early days when Tammany was young and comparatively innocent, days when the Machine system and the Spoils system were still but half developed, and when Chancellor Kent could write (in 1835), that "the office of assistant alderman would be pleasant and desirable to persons of leisure, of intelligence, and of disinterested zeal for the wise and just regulation of the public concerns of the city"! In 1834 the mayoralty was placed in the direct gift of the people. In 1842 all restrictions on the suffrage in the city were removed, just before the opening of an era when they would have been serviceable. In 1846 the new constitution of the State transferred the election of all judges to the people. In 1857 the State legislature, which had during the preceding twenty years been frequently modifying the municipal arrangements, enacted

a new charter for the city. The practice of New York State had been, and still is, to pass special laws regulating the frame of government for each of its cities, instead of having one uniform system for all municipalities. It is an unfortunate plan, for it goes far to deprive New York of self-government by putting her at the mercy of the legislature at Albany, which, already corrupt, is apt to be still further corrupted by the party leaders of the city, who are able to obtain from it such statutes as they desire. As I am not writing a municipal history of New York, but merely describing the action in that history of a particular party club, no more need be said of the charter and statutes of 1857 than that they greatly limited the powers of the Common Council. The chief administrative functions were vested in the mayor and the heads of various departments, while the power of raising and appropriating revenues was divided between a body called the Board of Supervisors and the legislature. Of the heads of the departments, some were directly chosen by the people, others appointed by the mayor, who himself held office for two years. To secure for their adherents some share in the offices of a city with a large Democratic majority, the legislature, then controlled by the Republicans, created a number of new boards for city administration, most of whose members were to be appointed by the Governor of the State. The police of the city in particular, whose condition had been unsatisfactory, were now placed under such a board, wholly independent of the municipal authorities, a change which excited strong local opposition and led to a sanguinary conflict between the old and the new police.

This was the frame of municipal government when the hero who was to make Tammany famous appeared upon the scene. The time was ripe, for the lowest class of voters, foreign and native, had now been thoroughly organized and knew themselves able to control the city. Their power had been shown in the success of a demagogue, the first of the city demagogues, named Fernando Wood, who by organizing them had reached the mayoral chair from beginnings so small that he was currently reported to have entered New York as the leg of an artificial elephant in a travelling show. This voting mob were ready to follow Tammany Hall. It had become the

Acropolis of the city; and he who could capture it might rule as tyrant.¹

William Marcy Tweed was born in New York in 1823, of a Scotch father and an American mother. His earliest occupation was that of a chair-maker — his father's trade; but he failed in business, and first became conspicuous by his energy in one of the volunteer fire companies of the city, whereof he was presently chosen foreman. These companies had a good deal of the club element in them, and gave their members many opportunities for making friends and becoming known in the district they served. Tweed had an abounding vitality, free and easy manners, plenty of humour, though of a coarse kind, and a jovial, swaggering way which won popularity for him among the lower and rougher sort of people. His size and corpulency made it all the easier for him to support the part of the genial good fellow; and it must be said to his credit, that though he made friends lightly, he was always loyal to his friends. Neither shame nor scruples restrained his audacity. Forty years earlier these qualities would no more have fitted him to be a popular leader than Falstaff's qualities would have fitted him, to be the chancellor of King Henry the Fifth; and had any one predicted to the upper classes of New York that the boisterous fireman of 1845, without industry, eloquence, or education, would in 1870 be ruler of the greatest city in the western world, they would have laughed him to scorn. In 1850, however, Tweed was elected alderman, and soon became noted in the Common Council, a body already so corrupt (though the tide of immigration had only just begun to swell) that they were commonly described as the Forty Thieves. He came out of it a richer man, and was presently sent to Washington as member for a district of the city. In the wider arena of Congress, however, he cut but a poor figure. He seems to have spoken only once, and then without success. In 1857 he began to repair his fortunes, shattered at the national capital, by obtaining the post of Public School Commissioner in New York, and soon afterwards he was elected to the Board of Supervisors, of which he was four times chosen president. There his opportunities

¹ The nature and modes of action of Rings in general have been described in Part III., Chapters LIX.—LXV. See also as to city government, Chapters L.—LII. in Part II.

for jobbery and for acquiring influence were much enlarged. "Heretofore his influence and reputation had both been local, and outside of his district he had hardly been known at all. Now his sphere of action embraced the whole city, and his large figure began to loom up in portentous magnitude through the foul miasma of municipal politics."¹

Tweed was by this time a member of Tammany Hall, and in 1863 he was elected permanent Chairman of the General Committee. Not long after he and his friends captured the inner stronghold of the Tammany Society, a more exclusive and hitherto socially higher body; and he became Grand Sachem, with full command both of the Society, with its property and traditional influence, and of the political organization. This triumph was largely due to the efforts of another politician, whose fortunes were henceforward to be closely linked with Tweed's, Mr. Peter B. Sweeny, a lawyer of humble origin but with some cultivation and considerable talents. The two men were singularly unlike, and each fitted to supply the other's defects. Sweeny was crafty and taciturn, unsocial in nature and saturnine in aspect, with nothing to attract the crowd, but skilful in negotiation and sagacious in his political forecasts. He was little seen, preferring to hatch his schemes in seclusion; but his hand was soon felt in the arrangement by which the hostility of Mozart Hall, the rival Democratic organization, was removed, its leader, Fernando Wood, obtaining a seat in Congress, while Tammany was thus left in sole sway of the Democratic vote of the city. The accession of Mozart Hall brought in another recruit to the Tammany group, Mr. A. Oakey Hall. This person was American by origin, better born and educated than his two associates. He was a lawyer by profession, and had occasionally acted as a lobbyist at Albany, working among the Republican members, for he then professed Republican principles,—as Mr. Sweeny had worked occasionally among the Democrats. He had neither the popular arts, such as they were, of Tweed nor the stealthy astuteness of Sweeny, and as he never seemed to take himself seriously, he was not taken seriously by others. But he was quick and adroit, he had acquired some influence among the

¹ Mr. C. F. Wingate in the *North American Review*, No. CCXLV. (1874), p. 368.

Mozart Hall faction; and his position as member of a well-known legal firm seemed to give a faint tinge of respectability to a group which stood sadly in need of that quality. He had been elected District Attorney (public prosecutor) in 1862, by a combination of Mozart Hall with the Republicans (having been previously Assistant District Attorney), and had thus become known to the public. A fourth member was presently added in the person of Richard B. Connolly, who had become influential in the councils of Tammany. This man had been an auctioneer, and had by degrees risen from the secretaryship of a ward committee to be, in 1851, elected County Clerk (although not then yet naturalized as a citizen), and in 1859 State Senator. His friends, who had seen reason to distrust his exactness as a counter of votes, called him Slippery Dick. His smooth manner and insinuating ways inspired little confidence, nor do his talents seem to have gone beyond a considerable skill in figures, a skill which he was soon to put to startling uses. Another man of importance, who was drawn over from the Mozart Hall faction, was Albert Cardozo, a Portuguese Jew, only twenty-six years of age, but with legal talents only less remarkable than the flagrant unscrupulousness with which he prostituted them to party purposes. He was now, through Tammany influence, rewarded for his adhesion by being elected to one of the chief judgeships of the city; and two other equally dishonest minions of the Tweed group were given him as colleagues in the persons of George Barnard and John H. McCunn.

In 1865 Tweed and the other Tammany chiefs, to whom fortune and affinity of aims had linked him, carried for the mayoralty one of their number, Mr. John T. Hoffman, a man of ability, who might have had a distinguished career had he risen under better auspices; and at the election of 1868 they made a desperate effort to capture both the State and the city. Frauds of unprecedented magnitude, both in the naturalizing of foreigners before the election and in the conduct of the election itself, were perpetrated. The average number of persons naturalized by the city courts had been, from 1856 to 1867, 9200. In 1868 this number rose to 41,000, and the process was conducted with unexampled and indecent haste by two of the judges whom Tammany had just placed on the

bench to execute its behests. False registrations, repeating on a large scale, and fraudulent manipulation of the votes given rolled up for Tammany a majority sufficient to secure for its friend Hoffman the governorship of the State. The votes returned as cast in New York City were eight per cent in excess of its total voting population. The vacancy caused by Hoffman's promotion was filled by the election of Mr. Hall. Thus at the beginning of 1869 the group already mentioned found itself in control of the chief offices of the city, and indeed of the State also.¹ Hall was mayor; Sweeny was city chamberlain, that is to say, treasurer of the city and county; Tweed was street commissioner and president of the Board of Supervisors; Connolly, comptroller, and thus in charge of the city finances. Meanwhile their nominee, Hoffman, was State Governor, able to veto any legislation they disliked, while on the city bench they had three apt and supple tools in Cardozo, Barnard, and McCunn. Other less conspicuous men held minor offices, or were leagued with them in managing Tammany Hall, and through it, the city. But the four who have been first named stood out as the four ruling spirits of the faction, to all of whom, more or less, though not necessarily in equal measure, the credit or discredit for its acts attached; and it was to them primarily, though not exclusively, that the name of the Tammany Ring came to be thenceforth applied.²

Having a majority in the State legislature, the Ring used it to procure certain changes in the city charter which, while in some respects beneficial, as giving the city more control over its own local affairs, also subserved the purposes of its actual rulers. The elective Board of Supervisors was abolished, and its financial functions transferred to the recorder and aldermen.

¹ "On the 1st of January, 1869," said Mr. Tilden, "when Mr. A. Oakey Hall became mayor, the Ring became completely organized and matured." Pamphlet entitled *The New York City Ring: its Origin, Maturity, and Fall*, New York, 1873.

² Elaborate and unsparing portraits of these four gentlemen and of the three Ring judges, as well as of some minor Ringsters, may be found in Mr. Wingate's article in the *North American Review* for October, 1874 (No. CCXLV.). His analysis of their characters and conduct seems to have evoked from them no contradictions, and certainly gave rise to no legal proceedings. Reference may also be made for the history of the Ring generally to the collected speeches of Mr. Samuel J. Tilden (see especially the speech of Nov. 2nd, 1871, in Mr. Bigelow's edition), and to those of Mr. Henry D. Clinton (published as a pamphlet in 1872), as well as to Mr. Tilden's pamphlet already cited.

The executive power was concentrated in the hands of the mayor, who also obtained the power of appointing the chief municipal officers, and that for periods varying from four to eight years. He exercised this power (April, 1870) by appointing Tweed Commissioner of Public Works, Sweeny Commissioner of Parks, and (in pursuance of a subsequent enactment) Connolly Comptroller. In a new board, called the Board of Apportionment, and composed of the Mayor (Hall), the Comptroller (Connolly), the Commissioner of Public Works (Tweed), and the President of the Board of Parks (Sweeny), nearly all authority was now practically vested, for they could levy taxes, appoint the subordinate officials, lay down and enforce ordinances.¹ Besides his power of appointing heads of departments, the mayor had the right to call for reports from them in whatever form he pleased, and also the sole right of impeachment, and he had further, in conjunction with the comptroller, to allow or revise the estimate the board was annually to submit, and to fix the salary of the civil judges. The undisguised supremacy which this new arrangement, amounting almost to dictatorship (purchased, as was believed and may well be believed, by gross bribery, conducted by Tweed himself, in the State legislature at Albany), conferred upon the quatuorvirate was no unmixed advantage, for it concentrated public attention on them, and in promising them impunity it precipitated their fall.

In the reign of the Ring there is little to record beyond the use made by some of them of the opportunities for plunder, which this control of the municipal funds conferred. Plunder of the city treasury, especially in the form of jobbing contracts, was no new thing in New York, but it had never before reached such colossal dimensions. Two or three illustrations may suffice.

Large schemes of street-opening were projected, and for this purpose it became necessary to take and pay compensation for private property, and also, under the State laws, to assess betterment upon owners whose property was to be benefited. Sweeny, who knew something of the fortunes amassed in the rebuilding of Paris under the prefecture of Baron Haussmann, and was himself an admirer (and, as was said, an acquaintance) of Louis Napoleon, was credited with knowing how to use public improvements for private profit. Under the auspices

¹ *North American Review* for Jan. 1875 (Vol. CCXLVI., pp. 172-175).