

of some members of the Ring, Commissioners for the carrying out of each improvement were appointed by the Ring judges, — in the famous case of the widening of Broadway by Cardozo in a perfectly novel manner. Those members and their friends then began quietly to purchase property in the spots which were eventually taken by the Commissioners, and extravagant compensation was thereupon awarded to them, while other owners, who enjoyed no secret means of predicting the action of the Commissioners, received for similar pieces of land far smaller sums, the burden of betterment also being no less unequally distributed as between the ringsters and other proprietors. In this way great sums passed from the city to those whom the Ring favoured, in certain cases with commissions to some of its members.¹ Among the numerous contracts by which the city treasury was depleted, not a few were afterwards discovered to have been given for printing to three companies in which Tweed and his intimates were interested. Nearly \$3,000,000 were paid to them within two years for city printing and stationery. Other contracts for wood-paving and concrete were hardly less scandalous.

The claims outstanding against the Board of Supervisors, previous to 1870, furnished another easy and copious source of revenue, for under a statute which the Ring had procured these claims, largely fraudulent or fictitious, were to be examined and audited by an *ad interim* Board of Audit composed of the Mayor, the Comptroller, and Tweed. The board delegated the duties of auditing to an ex-bankrupt creature of Tweed's named Watson, who had been appointed city auditor, and who went to work with such despatch that in three and a half months he had presented warrants for claims to the amount of \$6,312,000 to the members of the *ad interim* board — for the board itself seems to have met only once — on whose signature these bills were accordingly paid out of the city treasury.² Subsequent investigation showed that from 65 to 85 per cent of the bills thus passed were fictitious, and of the whole Tweed appears to have received 24 per cent. But all the other financial achievements of the Ring pale their ineffectual

¹ Details may be read in *North American Review*, Vol. CCXLVI., pp. 131-135.

² *North American Review*, July, 1875 (No. CCXLVIII., pp. 116-120).

fires beside those connected with the erection and furnishing of the County Court House. When designed in 1868 its cost was estimated at \$250,000. Before the end of 1871 a sum variously estimated at from \$8,000,000 to \$13,000,000 (£1,600,000 to £2,600,000) had been expended upon it, and it was still unfinished. This was effected, as was afterwards proved in judicial proceedings, by the simple method of requiring the contractors, many of whom resisted for a time, to add large sums to their bills, sums which were then appropriated by Tweed, Connolly, and their minions or accomplices.¹ Nothing could have been more direct or more effective. The orders were given by Tweed, the difference between the real and the nominal charge was settled by the contractor with him or with the auditor, and the bills, passed and signed by the members of the Board of Supervisors or Board of Apportionment (as the case might be), were approved by the auditor Watson and were paid out of the city funds at the bank. The proceeds were then duly divided, his real charges, or perhaps a little more, going to the contractor, and the rest among the Boss and his friends.

Under such a system there was nothing surprising in the growth of the city debt. Fresh borrowing powers as well as taxing powers had been obtained from the State legislature, and they were freely used. According to the published report of the committee which subsequently investigated the city finances, the bonded debt of the city rose from \$36,293,000 at the beginning of 1869, to \$97,287,000 in September, 1871; that is, by \$61,000,000. Adding to this the floating debt incurred during the same two years and eight months, viz. \$20,000,000, the total price which the city paid for the privilege of being ruled by Tammany during those thirty-two months reached \$81,000,000 (£16,200,000), or more than twice the amount of the debt as it stood in 1868.² And for

¹ Among the items in the bills for fitting up and furnishing the Court House (amounting to more than \$6,000,000, besides more than \$2,000,000 for repairs), the items of \$404,347 for safes, and \$7500 for thermometers were found amusing when eventually disclosed.

² I take these figures from the report of Mr. Andrew H. Green (then comptroller of the city) made in October, 1874. Of the unliquidated debt claims, many of which were then still outstanding, the report says: "Only a small proportion of this monstrous legacy of corruption and misgovernment was

all this there was hardly anything in the way of public improvements to show.

What, it may be asked, did the people of New York, and in particular the taxpayers at whose expense these antics were proceeding, think of their rulers, and how did they come to acquiesce in such a government, which, not content with plundering them, had degraded justice itself in the person of the Ring judges, and placed the commerce and property of the city at the mercy of unscrupulous and venal partisans? I was in New York in the summer of 1870, and saw the Ring flourishing like a green bay-tree. Though the frauds just described were of course still unknown, nobody had a word of respect for its members. Tweed, for instance, would never have been invited to any respectable house. I was taken to look at justices Barnard and Cardozo as two of the most remarkable sights of the city; and such indeed they were. I inquired why such things were endured, not merely patiently, but even with a sort of amused enjoyment, as though the citizens were proud of having produced a new phenomenon the like whereof no other community could show. It was explained to me that these things had not come suddenly, but as the crown of a process of degradation prolonged for some fifteen years or more which had made corruption so familiar as to be no longer shocking. The respectable leaders of the Democratic party had, with few exceptions, winked at the misdeeds of those who commanded a vote which they needed for State and national purposes. The press had been largely muzzled by lavish payments made to it for advertising, and a good many minor journals were actually subsidized by the Ring. The Bench, though only partially corrupt, was sufficiently in league with the Ring for the sanction which the law required from it in certain cases to be unavailable as a safeguard. As for the mass of citizens, on whose votes this structure of iniquity had been reared, nearly half of them were practically strangers to America, amenable to their own clubs and leaders,

free from evidence of the most ingeniously and diabolically contrived frauds. For three years the million-headed hydra has been struggling to force the doors of the treasury. It has bought, bribed, and brought to its aid by the offer of a division of profits in case of success, the fraud, the craft, and the greed of the most unscrupulous lawyers, legislators, and plotters in the community. It has tainted the press and dictated political nominations." (p. 7.)

but with no sense of civic duty to their new country nor likely to respond to any appeals from its statesmen. Three-fourths or more of them paid little or nothing in the way of direct taxes and did not realize that the increase of civic burdens would ultimately fall upon them as well as upon the rich. Moreover, the Ring had cunningly placed on the pay rolls of the city a large number of persons rendering comparatively little service, who had become a body of janizaries, bound to defend the government which paid them, working hard for it at elections, and adding, together with the regular employés, no contemptible quota to the total Tammany vote.¹ As for the Boss, those very qualities in him which repelled men of refinement made him popular with the crowd.

I asked what under such circumstances the respectable citizens proposed to do. My friends raised their eyebrows. One, of a historical turn, referred to the experience of Rome in the days of Clodius and Milo, and suggested the hiring of gladiators.

"These be thy gods, O Democracy: these are the fruits of abstract theory in politics. It was for this then that the yoke of George the Third was broken and America hailed as the day-spring of freedom by the peoples of Europe—that a robber should hold the keys of the public treasury, and a ruffian be set to pollute the seat of justice." So might the shade of Alexander Hamilton have spoken, if permitted to revisit, after seventy years, the city his genius had adorned. Yet it was not such a democracy as Jefferson had sought to create and Hamilton to check that had delivered over to Tweed and to Barnard the greatest city of the Western World. That was the work of corruptions unknown to the days of Jefferson and Hamilton, of the Spoils system, of election frauds, of the gift of the suffrage to a host of ignorant strangers, and above all of the apathy of those wealthy and educated classes, without whose participation the best-framed government must speedily degenerate.

In the autumn of 1870 the Ring seemed securely seated. Tweed, the master spirit, was content to scoop in money, and

¹ Mr. Tilden (*Origin and Fall of the New York Ring*) observes that the Ring had at its disposal "the whole local government machinery, with its expenditure and patronage and its employment of at least 12,000 persons, besides its possession of the police, its influence on the judiciary, its control of the inspectors and canvassers of the elections."

enjoy the licentious luxury which it procured him; though some declared that he had fixed his eyes upon the American legation in London. Sweeny preferred the substance to the ostentation of power; and Connolly's tastes were as vulgar as Tweed's, without the touch of open-handedness which seemed to palliate the latter's greed. Cardozo, however, had his ambitions, and hungered for a place on the Supreme Federal Bench; while Hall, to whom no share in the booty was ever traced, and who may not have received any, was believed to desire to succeed Hoffman as Governor of the State, when that official should be raised by the growing influence of Tammany to the Presidency of the United States. No wonder the Ring was intoxicated by the success it had already won. It had achieved a fresh triumph in re-electing Hall as Mayor at the end of 1870; and New York seemed to lie at its feet.

Its fall came suddenly; and the occasion sprang from a petty personal quarrel. A certain O'Brien, conspicuous as a leader in a discontented section of the Democratic party, was also personally sore because he had received an office below his hopes, and cherished resentment against Sweeny, to whom he attributed his disappointment. A henchman of his named Copeland, employed in the auditor's office, happened to find there some accounts headed "County Liabilities" which struck him as suspicious. He copied them, and showed them to O'Brien, who perceived their value, and made him copy more of them, in fact a large part of the fraudulent accounts relating to the furnishing of the Court House. Threatening the Ring with the publication of these compromising documents, O'Brien tried to extort payment of an old claim he had against the city: but after some haggling the negotiations were interrupted by the accidental death of Watson, the Auditor. Ultimately O'Brien carried his copies to the *New York Times*, a paper which had already for some months past been attacking Tammany with unwonted boldness. On the 8th of July, 1871, it exposed the operations of the Ring; and denounced its members, in large capitals, as thieves and swindlers, defying them to sue it for libel. Subsequent issues contained extracts from the accounts copied by Copeland; and all were summed up in a supplement, published on July 29th, and printed in German as well as English, which showed that

a sum of nearly \$10,000,000 in all had been expended upon the Court House, whose condition everybody could see, and for armoury repairs and furnishings. Much credit is due to the proprietor of the *Times*, who resisted threats and bribes offered him on behalf of the Ring to desist from his onslaught, and perhaps even more to the then editor, the late Mr. Louis J. Jennings, whose conduct of the campaign was full of fire and courage. The better classes of the city were now fully aroused, for the denials or defences of the mayor and Tweed found little credence. On September 4th a meeting of citizens was held, and a committee of seventy persons, many of them eminent by ability, experience, or position, formed to investigate the frauds charged, which by this time had drawn the eyes of the whole State and country. It is needless to recount the steps by which Connolly, the person most directly implicated, and the one whom his colleagues sought to make a scapegoat of, was forced to appoint as deputy an active and upright man (Mr. A. H. Green), whose possession and examination of the records in the comptroller's office proved invaluable. The leading part in the campaign was played by Mr. Samuel J. Tilden, chairman of the Democratic party in the State, afterwards Governor of the State, and in 1876 candidate for the Federal Presidency against Mr. Hayes. Feeling acutely the disgrace which the Ring had brought upon the Democratic party, he was resolved by pursuit and exposure to rid the party of them and their coterie once for all; and in this he was now seconded by all the better Democrats. But much was also due to the brilliant cartoons of Mr. Thomas Nast, whose rich invention and striking drawing presented the four leading members of the Ring in every attitude and with every circumstance of ignominy.¹ The election for State offices held in November was attended by unusual excitement. The remaining members of the Ring, for Connolly was now extinct and some of the minor figures had taken to flight, faced it boldly, and Tweed in particular, cheered by his renomination in the Democratic State Convention held

¹ Tweed felt the sharpness of the weapon. He said once: "I don't care a straw for your newspaper articles: my constituents don't know how to read, but they can't help seeing them damned pictures"; and indeed there was always a crowd round the windows in which *Harper's Weekly* (then admirably edited by the late Mr. George William Curtis) was displayed.

shortly beforehand, and by his re-election to the chairmanship of the General Committee of Tammany, now neither explained nor denied anything, but asked defiantly in words which in New York have passed into a proverb, "What are you going to do about it?" His reliance on his own district of the city, and on the Tammany masses as a whole, was justified, for he was re-elected to the State Senate and the organization gave his creatures its solid support. But the respectable citizens, who had for once been roused from their lethargy, and who added their votes to those of the better sort of Democrats and of the Republican party, overwhelmed the machine, notwithstanding the usual election frauds undertaken on its behalf. Few of the Ring candidates survived, and the Ring itself was irretrievably ruined. Public confidence returned, and the price of real estate advanced. Sweeny forthwith announced his withdrawal from public life, and retired to Canada. The wretched Connolly was indicted, and found so few friends that he remained in jail for six weeks before he could procure bail. Tweed, though dispirited by the murder of his boon-companion, the notorious Fisk (who had been carrying through the scandalous Erie frauds by the help of the Ring judges), stood his ground with characteristic courage, and refused to resign the office to which the mayor had appointed him. However, in December he was arrested,¹ but presently released on insignificant bail by Judge Barnard. The State Assembly, in which the reformers had now a majority, soon afterwards took steps to impeach Barnard, McCunn, and Cardozo. Cardozo resigned; the other two were convicted and removed from the bench. The endless delays and minute technicalities of the courts of New York protracted Tweed's trial till January, 1873, when, after a long hearing, the jury were discharged because unable to agree. He was thereupon rearrested, and upon his second trial in November, when special efforts had been made to secure a trustworthy jury, was found guilty and sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment. After a while the Court of Appeals released him, holding the sentence irregular, because cumulative; he was then rearrested in a civil suit by the city, escaped, was caught in Spain, identified by a caricature, and

¹ When asked on being committed to state his occupation and creed, he answered that he was a statesman, and of no religion.

brought back to prison, where he died in 1876. Hall was thrice tried. On the first occasion the death of a jurymen interrupted the proceedings; on the second the jury disagreed; on the third he obtained a favourable verdict. Connolly fled the country and died in exile. None of the group, nor of Tweed's other satellites, ever again held office.

This was the end of the Tweed Ring. But it was not the end of Tammany. Abashed for the moment, and stooping earthward while the tempest swept by, that redoubtable organization never relaxed its grip upon the New York masses. It was only for a few months that the tempest cleared the air. The "good citizens" soon forgot their sudden zeal. Neglecting the primaries, where indeed they might have failed to effect much, they allowed nominations to fall back into the hands of spoilsmen, and the most important city offices to be fought for by factions differing only in their names and party badges, because all were equally bent upon selfish gain. Within five years from the overthrow of 1871, Tammany was again in the saddle, and the city government practically in the nomination of Mr. John Kelly, tempered by the rival influence of the ex-prize fighter Morrissey. In 1876 a vigorous pen, reviewing the history of the preceding eight years, and pointing out how soon the old mischiefs had reappeared, thus described the position:—

"A few very unscrupulous men, realizing thoroughly the changed condition of affairs, had organized the proletariat of the city; and, through the form of suffrage, had taken possession of its government. They saw clearly the facts of the case, which the doctrinaires, theorists, and patriots studiously ignored or vehemently denied. They knew perfectly well that New York City was no longer a country town, inhabited by Americans and church-goers, and officered by deacons. They recognized the existence of a very large class which had nothing, and availed themselves of its assistance to plunder those who had something. The only way to meet them effectually and prevent a recurrence of the experience is for the friends of good government equally to recognize facts and shape their course accordingly. The question then is a practical one.

"If New York, or any other great city in America which finds itself brought face to face with this issue, were an independent autonomy, — like Rome or many of the free cities of the Middle Ages, — the question would at once be divested of all that which in America makes it difficult of solution. Under these circumstances the evil would run its course, and cure itself in the regular and natural way. New York would have a Cæsar

within six months. Whether he came into power at the head of the proletariat or seized the government as the conservator of property would make no difference. The city would instinctively find rest under a strong rule. The connection which exists, and necessarily can never be severed, between the modern great city and the larger State, closes this natural avenue of escape. New York City is tied to New York State, and must stumble along as best it may at its heels. It is guaranteed a government republican in form, and consequently a radical remedy for the evil must be found within that form, or it cannot be found at all, and the evil must remain uncured.

"The thing sought for then is to obtain a municipal government, republican in form, in which property, as well as persons, shall be secured in its rights, at the cost of a reasonable degree only of public service on the part of the individual citizen. The facts to be dealt with are few and patent. On the one side a miscellaneous population, made up largely of foreigners, and containing an almost preponderating element of vice, ignorance, and poverty, all manipulated by a set of unscrupulous professional politicians; on the other a business community, engrossed in affairs, amassing wealth rapidly, and caring little for politics. Between the two the usual civic population, good and bad, intent on pleasure, art, literature, science, and all the myriad other pursuits of metropolitan life. The two essential points are the magnitude and the diversified pursuits of the population, and its division into those who have and those who have not.

"Bearing these facts, which cannot be changed, in mind, then a few cardinal principles on which any successful municipal government, republican in form, must rest, may safely be formulated. In the first place, the executive must be strong and responsible; in the second place, property must be entitled to a representation as well as persons; in the third place, the judiciary must be as far removed as possible from the political arena. In other words, justice must be made as much as possible to descend from above. Curiously enough, each of these principles, instead of being a novelty, is but a recurrence to the ancient ways."¹

These counsels, and many others like them, have not been taken to heart. Since 1871 there have been many tinkering with the frame of municipal government. A comprehensive scheme of reform, proposed by a strong commission which Governor Tilden appointed in 1876, failed to be carried; and though something has been done in the way of better ballot and election laws, and of civil service reform, the Spoils system still thrives and election returns can still be manipulated by those who control the city government. There have been some excellent mayors, such as Mr. Hewitt, for the catastrophe

¹ *North American Review* for October, 1876 (No. CCLIII., p. 421), an unsigned article.

of 1871 has never been forgotten by Tammany, whose chiefs sometimes find it prudent to run reputable candidates. No more Barnards or Cardozos have disgraced the bench, for the Bar Association is vigorous and watchful; and when very recently a judge who had been too subservient to a suspected State Boss, was nominated by the influence of that gentleman to one of the highest judicial posts in the State, the efforts of the Association, well supported in the city, procured his defeat by an overwhelming majority.

Nevertheless, Tammany is still supreme; and the august dynasty of bosses goes on. When Mr. John Kelly died some years ago, the sceptre passed to the hands of the not less capable and resolute Mr. Richard Croker, once the keeper of a liquor saloon, and for some short time the holder of a clerkship under Tweed himself.¹ Mr. Croker, like Lorenzo de' Medici in Florence, holds no civic office, but, as Chairman of the Tammany sub-committee on organization, controls all city officials, while, by the public avowal of the Speaker of the House of Assembly, during the session of 1893, "all legislation (*i.e.* in the State legislature at Albany) emanated from Tammany Hall, and was dictated by that great statesman, Richard Croker."²

The reader will expect some further words to explain how the Tammany of to-day is organized, by what means it holds its power, and what sort of government it gives the city.

Each of the thirty "assembly districts" in the city annually elects a certain number of members, varying from 60 to 270, to sit on the General Committee of Tammany Hall, which has long claimed to be, and at present is, the "regular" Democratic organization of the city. The Committee is thus large, numbering several thousand persons, and on it there also sit the great chiefs who are above taking district work. Each district has also a "Leader" (not elected but appointed by the

¹ Full details regarding the career of Mr. Croker, of his henchman, Police Justice Patrick Divver, and of other Tammany "braves" of to-day, may be found in an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* for February, 1894, by Mr. H. C. Merwin, and more fully in the "Annual Records" of Assemblymen and Senators from New York City, published by the City Reform Club.

² Mr. D. G. Thompson, *Politics in a Democracy*, p. 127, an odd little book which purports to defend Tammany by showing that it gives the New York masses the sort of government they desire and deserve.

General Committee), who is always on the General Committee; and the thirty leaders form the Executive Committee of the Hall, which has also other committees, including that on finance, whereof Mr. Croker is chairman. Each election district has, moreover, a District Committee, with the "leader" as chairman and practically as director. This Committee appoints a Captain for every one of the voting precincts into which the district is divided. There are about 1100 such precincts, and these 1100 captains are held responsible for the vote cast in their respective precincts. The captain is probably a liquor-seller, and as such has opportunities of getting to know the lower class of voters. He has often some small office, and usually some little patronage, as well as some money, to bestow. In each of the thirty districts there is a party headquarters for the Committee and the local party work, and usually, also, a clubhouse, where party loyalty is cemented over cards and whiskey, besides a certain number of local "associations," called after prominent local politicians, who are expected to give an annual picnic, or other kind of treat, to their retainers. A good deal of social life, including dances and summer outings, goes on in connection with these clubs.¹

Such an organization as this, with its tentacles touching every point in a vast and amorphous city, is evidently a most potent force, especially as this force is concentrated in one hand—that of the Boss of the Hall. He is practically autocratic; and under him these thousands of officers, controlling from 120,000 to 150,000 votes, move with the precision of a machine.² However, it is not only in this mechanism, which may be called a legitimate method of reaching the voters, that the strength of Tammany lies. Its control of the city government gives it endless opportunities of helping its friends, of worrying its opponents, and of enslaving the liquor-dealers. Their licences are at its mercy, for the police can proceed against or wink at breaches of the law, according to the amount of loyalty the saloon-keeper shows to the Hall. From

¹ Full and clear descriptions may be found in Mr. H. C. Merwin's article already cited, and in Mr. Thompson's book, pp. 66 *sqq.*

² The highest total vote ever cast in New York was 285,000 (in 1892). In the city election of 1890 Tammany polled 116,000 votes out of 216,000 cast; in 1892 the Tammany candidate for mayor had 173,000, there being, however, no other Democratic candidate.

the contributions of the liquor interest a considerable revenue is raised; more is obtained by assessing office-holders, down to the very small ones; and, perhaps, most of all by blackmailing wealthy men and corporations, who find that the city authorities have so many opportunities of interfering vexatiously with their business that they prefer to buy them off and live in peace.¹ The worst form of this extortion is the actual complicity with criminals which consists in sharing the profits of crime. A fruitful source of revenue, roughly estimated at \$1,000,000 a year, is derived, when the party is supreme at Albany, from legislative blackmailing in the legislature, or, rather, from undertaking to protect the great corporations from the numerous "strikers," who threaten them there with bills. A case has been mentioned in which as much as \$60,000 was demanded from a great company; and the president of another is reported to have said (1893): "Formerly we had to keep a man at Albany to buy off the 'strikers' one by one. This year we simply paid over a lump sum to the Ring, and they looked after our interests." But of all their engines of power none is so elastic as their command of the administration of criminal justice. The mayor appoints the police justices, usually selecting them from certain Tammany workers, sometimes from the criminal class, not often from the legal profession. These justices are often Tammany leaders in their respective districts.² Says a distinguished publicist:—

"The police captain of the precinct, the justice of the police court, and the district leader of the Tammany organization are all leagued together to keep the poor in subjection and prevent the rich from interfering. Their means of annoyance for a poor man are endless. They can arrest him on small pretences, prevent his getting employment from the city, or city contractors, pursue him for allowing his goods to remain on the sidewalk, and for not cleaning off the snow promptly, tax him heavily, or let him go free. All these means of persecution are freely resorted to, so that the poor, and especially the foreign poor, are really as much in subjection to Tammany as the Italians to the Camorra. The source of it all is the character of the mayor. He appoints the police commissioners, and the commissioners appoint the captains, and he appoints the police jus-

¹ The recent Investigating Committee of the New York State Senate has cast a scorching light on this so-called "Police Protective Tariff," as to which see also an article in the *Forum* for August, 1894, by Mr. J. B. Leavitt.

² *Atlantic Monthly*, *ut supra*.