

# Essence of Good City Government

By C. J. Bonaparte, President of the American Municipal League

**T**HAVE a good city government in the United States we must, first of all, and before all else, have good citizens. Burke's well known words have been often quoted; they have been even quoted more than once by me; but we cannot too steadily remember that, as he said, "There was never long a corrupt government of a virtuous people." When we find any self-governing community afflicted with chronic misgovernment, we can safely and fairly believe that it does not deserve a better fate. It may indeed wish to be well governed, just as many a drunkard, in his seasons of repentance and headache, wishes he were temperate, just as many a defaulter, as yet undetected, in saner moments wishes he could repay what he has taken, and feel himself once more an honest man. But as such men do not wish hard enough to keep away, the first from the bar, the second from the faro table or Wall street, so much a nation, state or city, does not wish hard enough for good government to make bad government impossible.

I remember the story of a man who had been run over in the street; a sympathizing crowd gathered around him, and many expressions of compassion were heard. A preoccupied man, hurrying to his business, stopped, took in the situation with a rapid glance, and said: "Well, friends, I pity him \$1 worth for a hack to take him home; how much do you pity him?" Of course, we are all patriots, especially in a presidential year, but what is the value in dollars and cents, in sacrifice of money, time or personal inclination, of our patriotism? We long to see good and wise men in public office, the people's burdens lighten, the people's work well done; but if we put this longing in the scales, what will overbalance it? Will blind and paltry prejudices of party or race or class or creed outweigh it? Will some mean and trivial gratification to self-interest or vanity outweigh it? Will the hope of quartering an incompetent relative or dependent on the taxpayers for support; will the prospect of becoming a presidential elector or a colonel or general on the governor's staff. Will sheer indolence and cowardice outweigh it? Will the dread of unaccustomed distasteful work; the fear of abuse and personal enmity. Will it be found wanting when matched against the mere squeamishness which runs away from coarse and ugly surroundings, however vital the task to be done in their midst, much as a man might rather die of typhoid fever than clean out a sink? If such is the measure of our patriotism, if such is the moral avoirdupois of our citizenship, we need not wonder, we ought not to complain, if, while we are finding excuses for not doing the work of our government in our interest, some one else does it for us in his own. You have all heard the well known fable of the man who sells his soul to the devil; satan is to give him wealth and high station and worldly prosperity in return, and does it; the other party to the contract,

after getting the agreed price, always tries to cheat him out of the goods sold, but the devil is too bright for him and enforces specific performance, according to the letter of the bond. We should like thus to deal with those who rule us, to have them spare us all the burdens of our freedom, and yet give us all its benefits; but they don't do it.

Because we cannot expect a perfect government, whether of an American city or of anything anywhere else unless and until the people governed are also perfect, which is not likely to happen here or elsewhere, in our time, the conclusion is not infrequently drawn that meantime any improvement is hopeless; but this is a grave mistake. No doubt, as there never has been, so there never will be, a perfect government of men by men; but there has been, there are now, much better governments of great cities than those we live under in the United States of today, and I believe that there might be better city governments now and here than any which the world has known in this country or any other. The true lesson is that the question of good government in American cities is essentially a moral and only incidentally a political one; indeed, this is true of all governments in all countries, but more clearly and emphatically true of a popular municipal government than that of any other. I mean by this that what the friends of good government in America, and especially in American cities, have to do is much less to devise methods for the efficient and economical administration of public affairs than to clearly and frequently set forth and constantly and forcibly impress on the attention of their fellow-citizens the true and admitted ends and principles of government and the daily manifest and grievous derelictions of duty on the part of public officers and of the voters. If, for example, one finds some great department of a city government, through which millions of dollars of public money are annually spent, in a welter of confusion, extravagance and suspected peculation, the remedy is, not to give its head a new name or to put it in the hands of three men instead of one or vice versa, but to thoroughly expose its abuses, adequately punish the man or men responsible for them, and give it a head (how called and whether made up of one person or of more than one are matters of very subordinate importance) under whom such abuses shall become, and be seen by all to have become impossible for the future.

I must not be understood to mean that constitutional provisions and laws and ordinances or systems and rules of administration may not be material factors in the problem; what I wish to make clear is that they are not vital factors; the one thing indispensable, the one thing without which good government of any kind or degree is impossible, and which, under reasonable limitations, takes the place and supplies the want of all others, is good men. If you have as public officers men thoroughly honorable and conscientious and also suffi-

ciently educated to understand and discharge their duties, you will have, whatever the defects of your statutes or customs, a good government; if your places of public trust are filled by ignorant, incompetent, self-seeking or unscrupulous men, you may multiply checks and balances, you may devise all sorts of ingenious and complicated safeguards, but, whatever its scientific merits in theory, your machine of government will, in practice, work ill. Institutions are in politics what fortifications are in war; each, if well planned, may aid good and brave men to do their duty; neither can take the place of such men. It was not breastworks or rifle pits that stopped Pickett at Gettysburg; a brave enemy will ever have a picnic with forts and big guns and all sorts of elaborate engines of destruction whose defenders take to their heels; and in administration, no less than warfare, it is, after all, the human element that counts.

Neither would I discourage the careful and scientific study of questions of government; no more worthy or more promising field of inquiry can be offered to the mind of man. Indeed a very striking and encouraging phenomenon in American society is the general and increasing interest in such questions at all of our leading seats of learning; moreover, I, at least, see in the widespread popular concern with this subject, to which I have already referred, the fruit, in great part, of much quiet reading and thinking, writing and talking, in such regions during the last decade. In no small measure the "literary fella's" have "gone into politics," though not precisely as the politicians would understand the term, and the results of their doing so are good for them and good for the American people.

But whilst I would be the last to discountenance the most painstaking research or the collation of all attainable information on these topics, I would interpose one word of warning: by all means study, but in the meantime act. The science of medicine has made immense progress during this century, but, while men of research have repeatedly revolutionized it by their inventions and discoveries, men of action have all the time fought disease, eased pain, saved life by methods which next year become obsolete but this year served their ends. They could not tell a mother whose child had diphtheria that, when they had learned by a few months more experiment just what to think of anti-toxine, they would come and treat him; the merits of the treatment would scarcely interest her as she returned from laying flowers on his grave. As with our bodily ailments, so with those of our body politic; we must cure them as best we can while we learn how to cure them better. Those who have leisure and learning and a facile pen can with great profit to all of us write monographs and pamphlets and magazine articles on proportional representation and referendum and the Gothenburg liquor system, and their work will tell in time, but while they read and think and write this rascal has

been nominated by a packed convention chosen at fraudulent primaries and that rascal has been caught with arms up to the elbow in the people's money box, and the ordinary every-day citizen is saying, with our old friend Tweed: "Well, what are you, you reformers, going to do about it?"

The question is a fair one, for in the cases supposed, and they occur daily, there is something to be done, and, I must add, that reformers are too often prone to overlook this necessity, while they explain how nothing of this kind could happen, if only their favorite panacea for all existing or conceivable evils had been or were now applied. This may be cumulative voting or minority representation or direct legislation or female suffrage or prohibition or the single tax or any one of many schemes to usher in the millennium; all of which are earnestly and intelligently and eloquently advocated, none of which I am here to criticize; but, whatever it may be, the beauties visible to the eye of faith in the more or less distant day of its practical acceptance, in no wise help us to deal with the scoundrel who yonder winks and leers at us while he pockets the salary we pay. He must be hauled now, not in a future golden age, and if we wait until he and his kind have voluntarily made their own prosperity and continued existence impossible, we shall wait long and very much to his and their satisfaction.

I was much impressed by a sermon I once heard on the gospel story of the paralytic to whom was said: "Arise, take up thy bed and go into the house." The clergyman who preached it suggested that the invalid might most reasonably have replied: "Sir, I have not walked for years; for this did I come to Thee; heal me first and most gladly will I then obey Thy words." Such an answer would have been reasonable, and had he made it, the sick man had not been healed. So if we wait for existing evils to be cured by Providence or to cure themselves, wait for some great change to come somehow at some time, we know not how or when; and, while it is coming, content ourselves with telling what we will do when it comes or would do were it here, it will simply not come at all, and we shall lie as we lay before, prostrate and helpless.

But if, letting Utopia take care of itself, dealing with a present duty, which, of a surety, needs and deserves our full strength, we obey the voice of honor and conscience within us and do what we know ought to be done now and here, that which seemed impossible may well come to pass, indeed it will surely come to pass if we but try and try without ceasing to bring it about. As we strive to gain a better government, we shall come to deserve one and as when we deserve this we shall have this. Freedom is not the birthright of slumberers.

These serve truth best who to themselves are true.

And what they dare to dream of dare to do. Such men, and such only, will remain truly freemen. Baltimore, Md.

## James J. Hill Says Asia is the Hope of American Farmers

**J**AMES J. HILL believes that the hope of the American farmer lies in an Asiatic market.

"Suppose," he said to a representative of this paper, "our wheat trade with China alone to amount to 1 per cent per capita for each day in the year, that would amount to \$4,000,000 a day—nearly \$1,500,000,000 a year."

Mr. Hill believes that an Asiatic market can be secured for the American farmer's wheat. He bases this belief on the fact that "wherever wheaten flour has been introduced to any race, with the single exception of the black race, they are ready to consume it from that time on." He believes this so firmly that he is building the five largest steamers that the world has ever seen to carry the wheat of the Pacific coast to China, Japan, the Straits Settlements and other Oriental lands.

In short, his scheme is to make wheat scarce by opening new markets, thus advance its price at home and abroad, and thus put more money in the pocket of the man who has been called the nation's backbone—the farmer.

Mr. Hill's views on an Asiatic market for America, in view of the present international concern over the "open door" in the East, are exceedingly timely. He says:

"The question of a market is next in importance to the question of raising the commodities we have to sell. We have extended the areas from which our agricultural products are raised, until we have practically created a supply that is in excess of the demand for a large portion of the time.

"The population of this country doubles about every thirty years. In the year 1930 we shall have a population of from 150,000,000 to 160,000,000. All the people must be occupied. If the population continues to increase in the ratio indicated, where are we to put them all and what are they to do?"

"Our country is expanding in population. What has been done to expand our markets? What intelligent work has been done since the civil war—and that is as far

back as most of us remember or need to go—to add to our foreign market?"

"I have given the subject some attention and am free to say that I have failed to find a single intelligent sentence, written or spoken by any one, in an endeavor to improve our market for agricultural products.

"With our great growth of population we must consider how the people must be employed so that they may be intelligent, prosperous and happy. We sell 60 or 70 per cent of our entire products to one country—Great Britain. If for any reason that country were not able to buy from us, our people would realize very quickly the situation they are in. Where can we sell our wheat crop? In France, Italy, Austria or Germany we are met with hostile legislation. We are not welcome. To take our wheat to Russia would be like carrying coal to Newcastle. That country has a surplus to sell.

"If only one-third of the people of the world are wheat eaters and the other two-thirds live on rice or maize or rye, we must find our markets with people who are not now consumers of our crop. I believe that wherever wheaten flour has been introduced to any race, with the single exception of the black race, they are ready to consume it from that time on. The Asiatic rice eaters are as fond of flour as the white race and as ready to eat it, if they can get it at a fair price.

"The question may arise, How can people who work for wages of from 10 to 15 cents a day, and have lived for centuries on just such wages, buy flour which must be carried across the Pacific ocean? If they did buy flour, even at the rate of one bushel per capita, we in this country would have to go to eating corn pone. We simply could not sell it to them. If we sell them one bushel per capita it would take 450,000,000 bushels to supply China and Japan alone, to say nothing of the Straits Settlements and the other countries having large populations.

"In the north and west parts of China

there is an excellent farming country, where corn and wheat can be raised, but the products are so far from the dense population on the seacoast that it cannot be carried there. We may perhaps fear that Russia, with the Siberian railway completed, may enter into competition with us for the Asiatic flour or wheat trade. The transportation question settles that. The average rate on the Russian state railroads is 1.8 cent per ton per mile. If the actual cost of operation amounted to but two-thirds of this figure—1.2 cents per ton per mile—this rate, applied to the distance from that part of Siberia where the wheat is grown, would give a transportation charge of \$4.50 per barrel on flour, while it should be carried from our Pacific ports to Yokohama, Nagasaki, Kobe, Shanghai and Hong Kong for 25 cents a hundred, \$5 a ton, 50 cents a barrel.

"Russia is not in a position to compete with us at all, even if the wheat and flour were carried for the naked cost of its transportation to the Government. What applies in this respect to our wheat applies to cotton from the south and to every other article we export, even to iron and steel.

"If your home market, which we have nursed so long for iron and steel industries, is of so much value, let us now go on and take some care of our agricultural interests and not leave them where they are today—without an iota of assistance from any point.

"A year ago you could buy nails for \$1.25 a keg; now they are \$3.25. You know how lumber has gone up and all other articles of prime necessity on the prairie farm. Fuel has advanced. Everything made of iron has advanced. But the wheat crop has not advanced, because it is sold in open competition with the product of the world. And until we get other people to eat wheat it will not advance and we will go on hoping against hope. We will not get a high price for our wheat until wheat is made scarce. If we could increase our export to the Orient by 50,000,000 bushels I have not the slightest doubt that it would

advance the price of what we do send to Europe 15 or 20 cents.

"In the first place, what we would send to the Orient would go from the Pacific coast. The grain of that coast is handled at present in a manner entirely different from that which prevails east of the Rocky mountains. Having to cross the equator twice, it must be carried in sacks to prevent heating, and not in bulk in the hull of the ship, as on the Great Lakes or the Atlantic. The grain is practically all bought by three concerns, two of them located in Liverpool and also interested in a line of steamers, so that they can furnish their own shipping. The wheat is sent to England and sold for what it will bring. It acts as a damper—a wet blanket—on the entire market. The voyage around the Horn is four months long, and by the time the first cargoes are reaching port the last are leaving, so that it is all afloat at the same time. The buyer in Europe knows what is afloat. Thus, the manner in which the crop is handled breaks the market down more than twice the same amount from Atlantic ports. There the buyer must send over and place his order in advance of shipment. With the Pacific coast grain it must sell for what it will bring. The ship cannot be delayed and the grain cannot be stored in sacks.

"We can never get away from the practical proposition that we are in competition with every wheat raiser in every country—the peasants on the steppes of Russia, the ryots of India, and the Argentine farmers, most of whom went from Italy. We are in competition with them on an even hifftree. We always will be so long as we have to sell outside of our own country; and that our own country will ever consume our entire product no intelligent man will believe at least for half a century.

"Our farmers can do nothing in the way of getting a market. I can do very little. The price of transportation has come down.

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