

COUNT JOHN A. CREIGHTON PHILANTHROPIST AND BUILDER

Some of the Incidents in a Life that Has Been Largely Spent in Doing Good for Mankind and Which is Still Devoted to Making the World a Better Place to Live In

ONE pleasant morning in June, fifty years ago, a young man in a cart drawn by two horses reached the summit of one of the bluffs on the east side of the Missouri river near the present site of Council Bluffs. The sun had risen and shone brightly on the river which wound through the valley at the young man's feet, and upon the little village on the further side of the river, bravely raising its few roofs on the edge of the western wilderness. Did the young man at that moment possess a prophetic vision? Did he see a magnificent city growing up within a few years where the village then stood? Did he see bridges thrown across the river and a dozen railroads centering in the city? At any rate the young man chose this spot from the many he had visited throughout the country. He drove down from the bluff, crossed the river to the village and cast his lot with the few hardy pioneers already there.

This was John A. Creighton, farmer's boy, telegraph and railroad builder, early time freighter and trader, banker, manufacturer, millionaire and philanthropist. John A. Creighton was just 25 years of age when he saw the little village in the valley. He had already had experience in many parts of the country, being the able helper of his brother, Edward Creighton, in many of his big contracts for building telegraph lines through the wilderness and in grading roads and clearing forests for railways.

It was in 1854, when the future millionaire was 23 years of age, that he had begun the work by which he was to acquire the foundation of his fortune. Edward Creighton was engaged at that time in constructing a telegraph line from Cleveland to Toledo, O., and in this work John A. Creighton's ability to lead men soon became apparent. It was the work which he liked and for which he had early determined to fit himself by a course in college. Pursuant to this determination, he had left his farm home in Licking county, Ohio, in 1852 and began a course of study at St. Joseph's college, which had recently been established by the Dominican Fathers in Somerset, Perry county, Ohio. His college course was cut short by the death of his mother in 1854 and he immediately entered upon those activities which were to engross the greater part of his life. From the time of his mother's death until he arrived in Omaha he was engaged with his elder brother in various kinds of contract work. After the construction of the Cleveland-Toledo telegraph line they entered on a contract of street grading in Toledo and later cleared and graded several miles of the North Missouri railroad. After the completion of this last work John Creighton was sent by his brother to Keokuk, Ia., to sell a lot of horses which had been used in the contract work. The young man sold all but three of the animals, traded one of these for a vehicle, hitched up the other two and started over the prairies for the west and his fortune.

Omaha Looked Good to Him

John A. Creighton lost no time after his decision to settle at Omaha. He went to work immediately breaking up some ground near where is now Courtland Beach. He remained in Omaha four years, acting as clerk in the general store of J. J. Brown and R. A. Brown during a part of this time. Those were the days when Horace Greeley had given his well known advice to young men, "Go west." Many were following that advice. The excitement of '49 had not yet died out and reports came from the unknown country beyond the Missouri of gold and silver in great quantities which was to be found in the great wilderness. Young Creighton saw much of the traffic which went through the thriving village. Omaha had already come to be known as the "Gate City," because it was the main gateway from the east into the west. Every day wagon trains stopped at the store where he was employed and laid in supplies for the long, lonely journey along the trail to the west. Creighton's active mind was not long in seeing that here was a great business opportunity and he persuaded his employer to fit out a wagon train for Denver. Creighton engineered two such trains to the west with great profit.

About this time his brother Edward had taken the contract for the construction of 700 miles of the Pacific telegraph, the first line to be completed across the continent. He engaged the services of his younger brother for the actual superintendence of the work and ordered him to proceed to Fort Laramie, Wyo. Mr. Creighton still possesses a memorandum showing that he purchased as equipment for this trip 185 miles: One mule, \$100; one saddle, \$18.50; one pair boots, \$5; one revolver, \$30, and \$5 worth of "grub." He made the trip in five days in spite of the fact that three men whom he overtook on the way and invited to share his food partook of his hospitality with such voracity that the last two days of the journey were made with nothing to eat but a hawk which they shot.

The experience gained by young Creighton in the far west during this work of building the telegraph line was invaluable to him. After the work was done he took charge of his brother's stock and cattle and located at Fort Bridger. Discoveries of gold in the Salmon river valley had drawn a great number of miners thither, and Creighton determined to undertake an expedition into the valley for trading purposes. Backed by his brother Edward he bought 1,000 sacks of flour. But just as he was about to start reports of an Indian outbreak came and at the same time it was rumored that the mines had given out. The expedition was, therefore, abandoned. Young Creighton sold his flour to Brigham Young, the Mormon leader, for \$20,000, half in gold and half in drafts on Ben Halliday's stage line. He placed the gold coin in two shot sacks and made the trip by stage to Omaha without mishap.

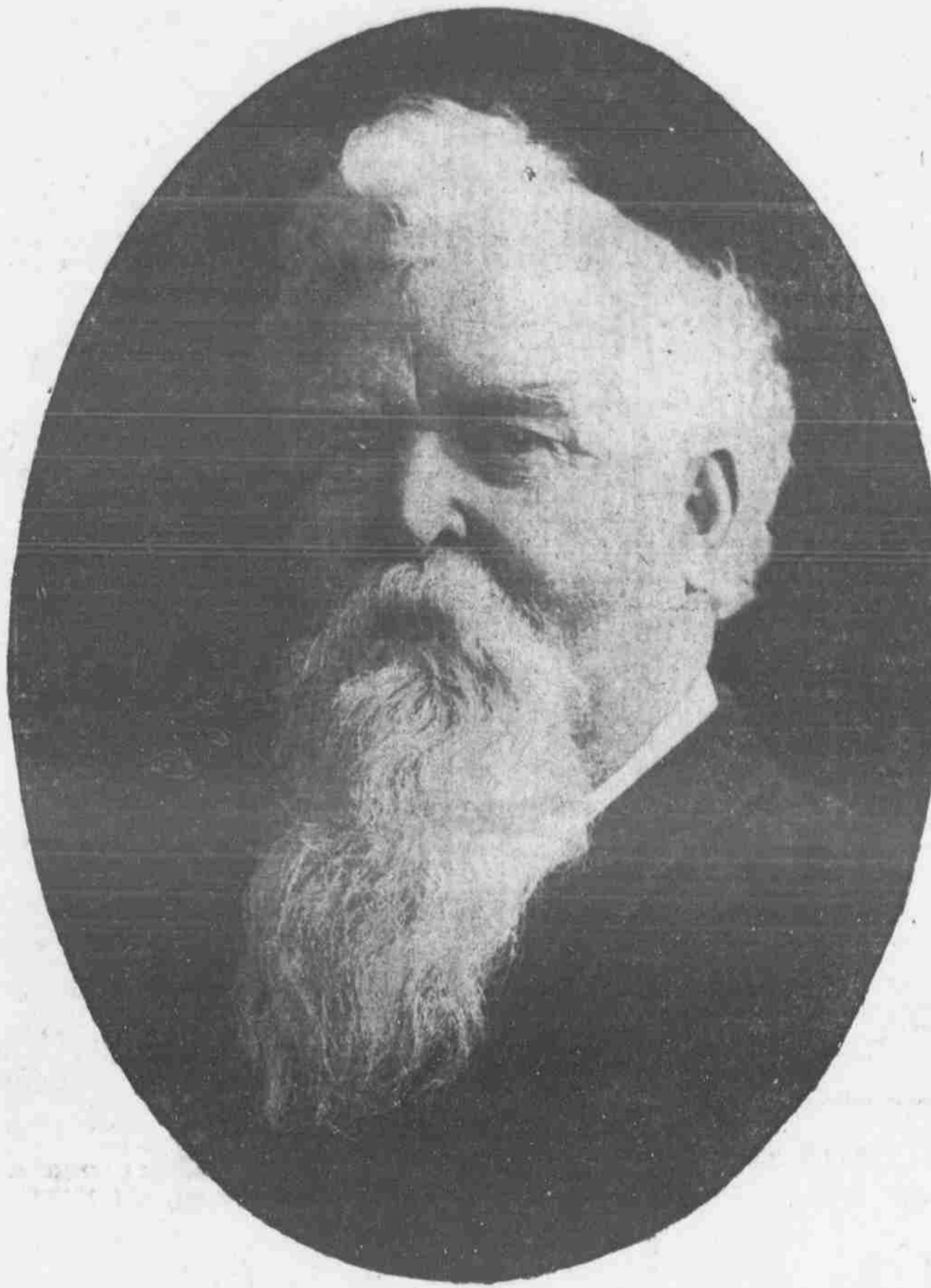
Popular Boy in Montana

This is illustrative of the kind of stuff of which John A. Creighton was made. His heart was kind and he was well disposed toward all men, but there was a look in the firm face that made the "bad men" of those early days beware and refrain from attacking him. He was one of the five men who organized the famous vigilance committee in Montana. This committee executed summary justice on forty-seven of the malefactors and desperadoes who were disturbing the peace and dignity of the new country. The esteem in which the honest, capable and masterful young man was held in the new country is evident in newspaper articles regarding him which are still extant. He had broken a leg in the overturning of a stage coach. The local paper contained the following:

"We are happy to announce to the public that John Creighton, who was so severely injured by the overturning of the stage, is now fast recovering. John is decidedly averse to 'surrendering' and has arranged diverse slings and conveniences around him he has cut a hole in the wall, through which he views the imposing scenery of the Rocky mountains and indulges in a little light chaff with the outside wayfarers. Surrounded by kind friends, he lives like the son of an Irish king, laughing misfortune out of countenance. He will soon be about again. We believe that the only way to kill John Creighton would be to cut off his head, and then carry away the body."

While he was at Virginia City, Mont., that town was connected with the rest of the world by telegraph largely through Creighton's efforts. In token of their appreciation of his public spirit his fellow citizens presented him with a watch. The village paper describes it as "One of Charles Frodsham's superb chronometer watches, selected at Tiffany & Co.'s, New York, the finest time-piece in the establishment." This watch is still in Mr. Creighton's possession and bears the inscription: "To John A. Creighton, from his friends of Virginia, Montana." On each link of the chain are engraved the initials, "J. A. C." While he was living in Virginia City he received the title of colonel. The Indians in the Yellowstone district "dug up the hatchet." General Thomas F. Meagher called for 500 volunteers and Mr. Creighton received the appointment as commissary general with the rank of colonel.

The young man had been in Virginia City five years when he



COUNT JOHN A. CREIGHTON.

decided to return to Omaha. He was 25 years of age at the time. Five years before he had met, at the home of his brother Edward, Miss Sara Emily Wareham, sister of Mrs. Edward Creighton. They were married soon after he reached Omaha, the ceremony being performed in St. Philomena's cathedral on June 9, 1863. They began housekeeping at once in a house which is still standing at the northeast corner of Eighteenth and Chicago streets. There they lived for a dozen years and in that house their only child was born and died. Soon after returning to this city the young man engaged in the grocery business with Frank C. Morgan, under the firm name of Creighton & Morgan.

Since that time he has resided continuously in Omaha and is one of the city's strongest financial and commercial mainstays. In 1878 he was one of the incorporators of the Omaha Nail Works

company, which started with a capital of \$50,000 and turned out 40,000 kegs of nails the first year. It was sold and moved to St. Joseph later. He is a heavy stockholder in the Cable Street Railway company. He is a heavy stockholder and vice president of the First National bank. He has had and still possesses a heavy interest in the Union Stock Yards of South Omaha. He was one of the incorporators of the Union Stock Yards company and has had an active part in organizing the Union Stock Yards bank, the Union Stock Yards railway and the South Omaha Land syndicate. In 1890 he was one of the incorporators of the Interstate Bridge and Street Railway company, with \$2,500,000 capital. The plans of this corporation were changed later, giving way to the project which resulted in the present East Omaha bridge.

Charity and philanthropy have been conspicuous characters of

John A. Creighton. He has given more money to the establishment and support of public institutions than any other citizen of Omaha. He was chiefly instrumental in the founding of Creighton university. The idea of this institution originated with Edward Creighton, but he died intestate. His wife, who died a year later, left a fund for the establishment of the institution, but upon the shoulders of John A. Creighton, as her executor, fell the work of selecting the site and managing the erection of the buildings. He has given further sums at various times to the support of the institution. He and his wife contributed \$12,000 in 1888 toward the erection of the south wing of the university and he gave \$17,000 for the purchase of scientific apparatus for the institution. He helped the Jesuit fathers in building St. John's collegiate church with a contribution of \$10,000. He established the convent of the Poor Clares on Hamilton street at a cost of \$35,000. He erected the John A. Creighton Medical college in 1898 at a cost of \$75,000. He has lately contributed \$75,000 for improvements and additions to the Creighton university.

Honors Came to Him

When Mrs. John A. Creighton died in 1888 she bequeathed \$50,000 for the establishment of a hospital for the use and occupation of the Sisters of St. Francis. John A. Creighton donated the site of this institution and added \$150,000 to the sum left by his wife. The result was the handsome St. Joseph's hospital located at Tenth and Castellar streets. In recognition of the benefactions of Mr. Creighton he was honored by Pope Leo XIII in 1895 with the title of "Count of the Papal Court." He had previously been recognized by the Holy See and made a Knight of St. Gregory. A third great honor was bestowed on him in 1900, when he was selected as the recipient of the Lactare Medal, which is given by the University of Notre Dame only to those who have rendered conspicuous services in the cause of religion.

As the count has grown in years his benefactions have increased. Two years ago he presented Creighton college with \$200,000 worth of property located in Omaha, and on the occasion of his 75th birthday, October 15, 1906, he gave to Creighton university property valued at nearly half a million dollars. Two years ago he founded the Edward Creighton Institute in memory of his brother. It cost more than \$100,000. Aside from these munificent gifts, which must of necessity be public, the count's private charities are great. He is, by nature, unassuming and prefers not to let his gifts be known. It is distasteful to him to talk about them. It is said that he has never been inside of some of the buildings which were built with the money given by him. He puts no "strings" on his gifts. There are no conditions attached to his benefactions.

Arrived as he has at a ripe age full of honors ecclesiastic and secular, Count John A. Creighton is today the same simple, broad-minded, far-sighted, humble individual that he was when he stood, a poor young man, on the bluff of the Missouri river and looked upon the land of promise. His home life is admirable in its simplicity. The handsome residence at Twentieth and Chicago streets in which he has lived for twenty-five years is a model of simple elegance. The household includes only the count, his brother-in-law, Mr. Schenk; the housekeeper, Miss Cotter, and the servants. Miss Cotter has managed the house for nineteen years. In spite of the richness of the home its air of homeliness is the most marked. The rooms are finished in oak, the walls are thick, the carpets are velvety. There is plenty of light and color. There are books and instruments of music, cigars and wines and pictures. Count Creighton has no acquired or assumed tastes. He delights in being a common man. His tastes in the matter of food are what they were fifty years ago. He likes bacon fried with a gravy made of flour and water, such as he had in the early pioneer days while he was "roughing it" across the plains and through the wilderness. He is also fond of corn bread and oat meal and mush. This simple life has brought him to the age of nearly four score years with a physical system that is still strong and nerves that allow him eight hours of sound sleep every night.

Fond of His Fellow Man

A companionable, sociable and very approachable man is Count Creighton. Scarcely a day passes that he does not have a friend or acquaintance to take dinner with him. A standing order in his household is to always prepare dinner for six. There are only three in the regular personnel of the house, but any evening there may be three guests and every evening there is likely to be at least one. A unique feature of the home is the count's "den." It is located on the south side of the house in a bow window and is a marvel of coziness and comfort. The walls and ceiling are handsomely frescoed and the woodwork is oak. On the ceiling, in the midst of cherubs and wreaths and surrounding a portrait of the count, are mottoes and typical sayings of the master of the house. "Here's where I meet my friends and forget my enemies" is one of these legends. Another is, "It's wonderful how business keeps up." This is a frequent remark of the count's and was suggested to the artist along with the others by friends who planned the decorations. A third sentence is: "This is the only new farm house within the city limits," a remark made by the count after the fire of a short time ago which destroyed the old "den." At that time he remarked that he would build a new farm house. He had always referred to his home as the farm house. Little pictures adorn the walls of the "den." One of these is of a puppy wearing a muzzle. Under the picture is the legend, "Mum's the word." On a table under the picture and on the wall near it stand flasks and bottles of the choicest wines with which the count treats his guests. In the matter of his liquors he is a connoisseur. He keeps them in bond for years before using them.

Count Creighton considers himself only a steward of the wealth which he possesses. He often looks out of the window of his handsome home at some poor man passing and reflects, "Why has the Lord given me so much and that man so little? If I knew him I'd call him in and treat him." This kindness of heart is so natural and spontaneous that it is almost unconscious. It is his nature to love people and to be sympathetic. An example of this trait is his weekly visit to the patients of St. Joseph's hospital. Every Sunday for years he has made this visit. He always takes several pounds of the best candy along and passes from bed to bed speaking kind words and distributing his "chocolate pills" as he calls them. He still takes an active part in business, being at his office nearly every day and taking his lunch at a downtown restaurant. Wherever there is a crowd he is sure to be the center of it. His ready wit, his active mind and his penchant for telling a good story make him a favorite among his business associates and all who know him.

The universal esteem in which he is held is largely due to his broad-mindedness. The institutions which he has endowed are all under the control of Catholics, but the scope of their work is not limited to members of that faith. It is expressly stipulated in the terms of his donations that the institution endowed shall be free to all regardless of color or creed. In St. Joseph's hospital more charity patients of non-Catholic faith are cared for than of the Catholic faith. Many of the students in the colleges and universities endowed by John A. Creighton are non-Catholics. Count Creighton has been a democrat all his life. He has never been an aspirant for office, but has been a delegate to five national conventions. Count Creighton has made a name by living. He is a man like the one eulogized by Martial when he said:

I do not like the man who squanders life for fame,
Give me the man who, living, makes a name.
Count Creighton lives his life doing only the things which duty, aided by a gift of sight into the future and appreciation of possibilities, pointed out to him. He has reached a ripe age surrounded with those things which reward a man who has lived his life rightly.

Education in Public Ownership

MANY of those who deprecate public ownership acknowledge that very real evils have led to the demand for it. Thus, even if the present agitation for this doctrine does not lead to the general acquisition of public utilities, it will not be without its good results. It is sure at least to check and to control the grosser abuses of individual and corporate monopoly.

There are, however, many indications that the movement for public ownership is likely to be more than a salutary stimulus to reform along the general lines of present-day economics. The offences of corporate wealth have been grave and deliberate. Unless there is swift retelling or unless some effectual help is speedily found in the law, the mass of our people will not consent to wait for the results of investigations into the results of municipal ownership in other countries. Instead, popular impatience may demand immediate and drastic relief and, in such a case, it may be well to consider whether many of the dreaded consequences of state or municipal ownership are not baseless terrors or even real benefits in disguise.

In the first place, is it true, as the opponents of public ownership assert, that great pecuniary rewards are an indispensable incentive to the service of humanity? The golden harvest sometimes reaped by invention and research, but too often siphoned from the discoverer and the investigator by the "promoter," has not been the real stimulus of the man of science.

The great things have been done and are being done today from simple love of mankind, of science and the truth, in thousands of laboratories and workshops all over

the world. The foreboding that it will be otherwise is as baseless as it is unworthy. It is scarcely fitting to name here the one great example or the innumerable army of his followers of whom the "world was not worthy," but are we not assured that Galileo, Newton, Galvani, Franklin, Harvey, Rumford, Nasmyth, Wedgwood, Darwin, Watt, Arkwright, Ericsson, the Stephenson, Pasteur, Graham-Bell and their fellows made their contributions to humanity without hope of fee or reward and would have made them in any case, even though the only compensation for their risk and labor might have been an approving conscience.

As the exceptionally gifted man may be trusted to do his best because of an impelling inner motive, so the mass of men may be trusted to do the wise and the right thing when issues are placed squarely before them. Our people are often betrayed by their chosen representatives for the very reason that those representatives are selected as merely political leaders without reference to business qualifications or business integrity. If the effects of bad government were directly and clearly manifest in bad service and higher taxes, the average citizen would soon learn wisdom through experience; wisdom of general political application, of infinitely more value than some immediate material benefits derived from the administration of his affairs by a coterie of irresponsible industrial chieftains. The belief of those who retain their faith in democracy is that the truth must ultimately be grasped by the slow-growing general apprehension that public ownership is a private ownership, in which every citizen is a stockholder who can influence his dividend by his own vote (as he cannot do in many private corpora-

tions). By such a conviction he will be aroused to the fulfillment of his duty in regard to all the other responsibilities of the suffrage.

Patriotism may be sluggish, but it is no cynical asperation, and only the recognition of a wholesome truth, to assert that the pocket nerve of the masses of the people is highly sensitive and quickly responsive. The selfishness of the capitalist may and often does operate against the public good, but the selfishness of the poor is the righteousness of the nation; the wage-earner's or the salaried man's demand for the due proportion between wages and the expenses of livelihood, is the voice of its conscience. The mass of the people may be blinded by the effects of indirect taxation and many forms of public theft, but it could not be deceived or made indifferent in the exercise of its power if that exercise affected directly the daily needs of life; if it had an obvious part in controlling the administration of the business, and consequently, in affecting the cost of heat and light, transportation and food and housing, day in and day out.

Let the voter be aware that his vote does not merely help some boss or some party or some platform, or procure for him vague and untrustworthy promises of political reward, but that it helps to guide the affairs of the nation, to save him money in his daily expenses (as Mayor Johnson of Cleveland has proposed to do by giving his fellow citizens cheap car fares), and the voter is likely to break away from platform and boss and party, and cast his vote for honest men and honest measures which mean so much to him and to his family.—Moody's Magazine for December.