



CHAPTER V

THE AMERICAN CITY AT WORK

UP to the present time the boss has been the American city's only apologist. He alone is proud of his city, and stands ready to defend it before the world. To him the city is representative government at its best.

Of critics, on the other hand, we have had a host. The press, the pulpit, the legislature, the reformer have all taken a hand in the condemnation proceedings. The extravagance, the failures, and the waste have all been noted; the absence of business methods has been condemned, but the obstacles overcome, not to speak of the triumphs actually achieved, have been overlooked, while the margin of real efficiency has not been computed. All this is an indication of our intolerance of things that are not good. By all, the burden of taxation is borne grudgingly, and is usually attributed to waste, if not to corruption. In fact, the prevalent descriptions of municipal administration with which we are familiar, and the convictions of the average man as to the city in which he lives, suggest a condition little short of political chaos. Even reform organizations manifest

this feeling of distrust, and their activity ceases on the eve of an election, to be resumed only as the next one approaches.

As a matter of fact, such an attitude is not true. Our cities are bad enough, but they are not all bad. And they are constantly growing better. And the boss and the official are often justified in their pride. The condition of the average American city does not warrant the wholesale condemnation that is so common, any more than it justifies the complacent defiance of the boss. A just estimate of all the cities, as well as of all their performances, leaves a balance to the good. And everywhere are manifest signs of awakening interest, together with a disposition to correct the worst abuses.

A certain perspective is necessary to appreciate this fact. In the first place, it must be remembered that the American city is not only a new problem, it is a new thing. In this it differs from the cities of Europe, which it is our custom to extol. Away from the Atlantic seaboard, most of our great cities have arisen within a generation. They came into existence in response to an industrial demand. The extension of the railways projected settlements. Business and commerce began. Labor was in demand. Here and there industrial ganglia appeared. Shops and factories came into existence. The opportunity to

work brought humanity. Homes were built. Places of worship and amusement arose. Order was established, and officers were elected. Wherever this tangled mass of activities appeared they called it a city. It was in fact an economic happening, an industrial accident.

A lot of cross streets on which houses are built do not constitute a city. Even though paving is laid in these streets, and sewers are made in these streets, they do not constitute a city. Even though people live in the houses, and move through the churches and theatres, they have not made a city. They have made an urban aggregation. A world's fair might as well pass for a city. But when within this human group, out of its common interest and common need, conscience is born and responsibility awakened; when will power and intelligence are civic forces, focussing on a united purpose and a definite ideal; when in addition to self-consciousness and family-consciousness there arises a city-consciousness, that instinct which is willingness to struggle for the common weal, and suffer for the common woe, —then, and not until then does the city spring into life.

In the true sense of the word, the urban aggregations of people in the United States have not yet become cities. Their existence is not unlike that frontier life which has ever been found

in some portion of the United States in advance of political organization. They have existed without living in the sense that the European city lives, and organized public opinion has served as a sort of vigilance committee to prevent the worse sort of excesses.

The citizen is but a reflection of this fact. He came to the city in response to an industrial demand, with no political traditions, and untrained to organized effort. He came from the country and from the Old World. And the official and the city had no experience, no background of tradition, no organized purpose to inspire their movements. We have had no municipal ideals, no base line from which to work. The first expression of the city was the satisfaction of the industrial needs that gathered the people together. The protection of property from fire, and person and property from violence, were the earliest needs. These, with the paving and cleaning of the streets, the protection of health and the affording of means of communication, followed along with the public schools. These were the pressing needs. They were born of industrial necessity. The inspiration of early reform movements was a desire for a business men's government. The city was looked upon as a commercial enterprise, and a solution of its problems was to be found through the election of business men to office.

Of late years this brick and mortar life, representative of industrial ideals, has been assuming a higher order of organization. A city sense is being created. Reform movements have taken on a new character. They are no longer satisfied with a commercial ideal of government. It does not appeal to the imagination. At best it suggests a sordid idea of government. And reform has learned that little was to be expected from a campaign conducted on the issue of mere economy and business interest. Moreover, in recent years, the city has changed its character and slowly enlarged the scope of its activities. New functions have been assumed. They are taken on in response to necessity as well as an enlarged sympathy. The city dweller has become a citizen. His social sense is being organized and his demands upon the government have been rapidly increasing. The city has responded to the change which has come over the citizen. He came to the city as his workshop; a place in which to make a living. The city was this and nothing more. But gradually, as the citizen demanded other things, the community responded to his ideals. Had we a wider historical perspective of this evolution, we should not be so despondent. For an appreciation of what has been done in Chicago, New York, Cleveland, Detroit, Baltimore, Pittsburg, and elsewhere is conclusive of the improvement which

has come about in recent years and a demonstration of the power of democracy to work out its problems.

In yet other respects we have lacked discrimination in our criticisms of the city. All cities have been classed together as hopelessly corrupt. But in any appraisal of conditions, it is necessary to bear in mind: first, that there is a tremendous difference in cities; and, second, that there is an equally big difference in the efficiency with which the city performs its many functions.

For a generation the city of Washington has known no serious scandal. Its departments are intelligently and economically administered. Its official class is dignified and of a high order of talent. True, Washington is governed in an autocratic way, for in the Capital City the citizen is disfranchized. Three commissioners appointed by the President perform the functions usually entrusted to the Mayor and the heads of city departments, while Congress itself is the Board of Aldermen.

Washington is probably as honestly governed as is any European municipality, and it has been for years. Its streets are clean, well lighted, and well protected by police. Its school system is among the best, and its health, fire, and many other departments are beyond serious criticism.

During the two years of Mayor Low's adminis-

tration, New York enjoyed a government which equalled in enterprise and progressiveness any city in the Old World. The executive departments were filled by men above reproach, men who served the city with an indifference to personal sacrifice that no city on the continent can surpass. Outside of the Board of Aldermen, every branch of the government was toned up, while a public spirit was created that has prevented a relapse into the conditions which at times had rendered New York a reproach to the country. This was especially manifest in the police and school administration, the building and tenement-house departments, the cleaning and construction of the streets, the care of the poor and dependent classes, the administration of law and order, the supervision of vice, and in all those departments of city housekeeping that make for orderliness, cleanliness, and comfort. The administration of Mayor McClellan has adopted many of these standards as its own, and its two years of service have demonstrated that even Tammany Hall learns easily when under the spur of an awakened public sentiment.

It is but a few years since Chicago seemed hopeless in its official corruption. Its government had apparently sunk to the bottom. Graft, commercialism, and petty thievery were organized in almost every department of the city. A syndi-

cate of fifty-five "gray wolves" controlled the council and bartered in franchises and vice. But Chicago awoke. Unlike New York, she awoke from below. Her reform was a democratic one, and for this reason permanent. It bore no aristocratic trappings and adopted the rough and ready methods characteristic of the West. Municipal reform in Chicago organized the people, not as a vigilance committee for temporary protection, but as a people's party bent on a permanent and positive programme. Year after year, the contest has been continued, until the "gray wolves" have been driven out, and a Board of Aldermen whose service to the city is characterized by as much honesty as its predecessor's was marked by dishonesty, has finally been placed in control. It must be remembered, too, that Chicago is solving the elemental problems. Her energy is being devoted to the building of sewers, the laying out of streets, the construction of a drainage canal, the development of a splendid park system, the elimination of grade crossings, and the settlement of the traction question. Eastern cities, on the other hand, are more largely engaged in the finishing processes. Their civilization is older. And yet Chicago already has an efficient civil service reform law, its accounting system has been placed upon a scientific business basis, while one after another of the city departments has been reor-

ganized under the spur of an awakened public opinion which is determined that public administration shall conform to the restless energy that has made the city great.

But Chicago has done much more than this. Wearied, as was the city of Glasgow, over a long conflict with the traction interests, the conviction has grown in volume that the city should own its means of transit. Public-spirited organizations, almost unaided by the city administration, have forced the people to listen to their demands. Under a law providing for the initiative and referendum, the demand for public ownership was submitted to the people in the spring of 1904, and was carried by a vote of 120,744 in favor of immediate acquisition to 50,893 against it. It is this democratic flavor of reform in Chicago that makes for its permanence. For reforms which are based on candidates merely, are temporary and uncertain, those based on principle and conviction are abiding. New York City ebbs and flows in its reform movements, because the confidence of the people has not been secured. To many, reform means only a shifting of party and not of control, for New York has not recognized the deep-seated sense of democracy in the people. It is this fact which distinguishes the Empire City from Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, and Toledo. Reforms in these cities have been triumphs of

the people. Reform can come in no other way. In New York reform was a triumph of the Citizens' Union. Relapse always follows any reform that is founded upon an issue that does not command the adherence of the mass of the people. The excise question split New York, as it will always do, because a large portion, possibly a majority of the people, believe in a liberal Sunday. And so long as the state retains its control of the excise question, and denies its solution by the people of the city themselves, reform will carry a heavy load.

Some years ago, Hazen S. Pingree was elected as a business mayor in Detroit. His energy led him into conflict with the privileged corporations. He established a municipal electric-lighting plant, secured a competing street-railway system with a cheaper fare, called to the council men of better character, and left Detroit, when he passed into the Governorship, a well-administered city. Here, as in Chicago, Cleveland, and Baltimore, reform was secured through the old-established parties. But it came in through a democratic movement which overthrew the existing machine and made its appeal directly to the people.

Across the lake, in Cleveland, a similar controversy had been going on for years. In Cleveland, as in Detroit, reform came about through the party organization. But here a Republican city

was converted into a Democratic one, and Tom L. Johnson was twice elected mayor by an increasing independent vote. Here also the contest has been waged on democratic lines. The issues have been social and economic. They have centred about an increase in the activities of the city and the comfort and happiness of the people. To-day the city's educational system is one of the best in the country. Its library development has been brought down to the people. Natural gas as a fuel has been introduced from the fields of West Virginia. The price of artificial gas has been reduced to seventy-five cents a thousand cubic feet. The Water Department is in the hands of the city. Its source of supply has been extended, and placed beyond fear of contamination through the construction of a tunnel extending five miles out into the lake. The city has entered upon a policy of metering all consumers, the first large city in the country to adopt this radical reform.

For years the issue of lower street-car fares has been waged in the hope of securing cheaper transportation; while tax equalization and the assessing of public service corporations on their franchise value has been part of the municipal programme. Environing the city is a splendid system of parks, resting upon the lake front, and connected by magnificent boulevards. These

parks have been thrown open to the largest use by the people. Public bathing establishments have been opened along the water front, while an all-the-year-round bath house, with public laundry equipment, has been built. In the crowded quarters over twenty playgrounds have been laid out for the recreation of the poor.

A comprehensive policy for the reform of juvenile delinquents has been inaugurated, which aims at the care and correction of youthful offenders without criminal punishment. A juvenile court, presided over by the Judge of the Insolvency Court, has been established, which removes this class of cases from the Police Court with the demoralizing influences which follow. Truants, orphans, vagrant boys, and petty offenders are cared for through probation officers, and held to an accountability to law and order through kindness and attention rather than through the criminal code. Supplemental to this work, the city has established a Farm School, known as Boyville, and modelled after the George Junior Republic, where youthful offenders are detained for instruction and moral upbuilding. Instead of the brand of crime, a sense of affection has been substituted, and an *esprit de corps* for the school. Cleveland has endeavored to stop crime at its source by preventive measures. Help has been substituted for hurt, and kindness for fear.

The city's police and fire departments have been placed upon a plane of high efficiency. The "white-wing" system has been introduced and the city's streets properly cleaned and lighted. The accounting department is upon a business basis, and the official personnel of the executive departments is above reproach.

Along with these movements the city has entered on a systematic grouping of its public buildings, which will be unsurpassed in America outside of the city of Washington. A distinguished body of non-resident architects has been employed to supervise all public structures, and a comprehensive plan adopted for the grouping of the City Hall, Public Library, County Court House, Federal Building, and Union Station. These buildings surround a spacious mall leading from the business section of the city out upon the lake front.

Such examples as these must be borne in mind in any appraisal of the American city. The ill repute of Minneapolis, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, and others must not be permitted to overshadow the striking examples of efficiency which many cities present.

Moreover, there are certain realms of municipal activity that are above serious criticism. Our fire departments are the most efficient in the world, and are maintained at relatively small cost. The same is true of the administration of

our parks, which is practically free from graft. The American library is the best in the world. A high order of ability is found serving upon its boards, and the maximum of service is attained through the introduction of branch libraries, distributing agencies, and the like. The public-school system, too, is a democratic movement, and even St. Louis, whose corruption has been held up to the scrutiny of the world, has, according to the statement of President Eliot of Harvard, the best school system in America. But good schools are not exceptional. For in most cities public opinion has been jealous of any intrusion of corruption into public education.

In the activities just enumerated the American city is in advance of the cities of Great Britain and Germany. There is much to be learned by us from the honesty, efficiency and economy, as well as from the public spirit of their officials. But while foreign cities are working out the problems of municipal ownership, of Civil Service Reform, of adornment, the American city has better schools and kindergartens; our libraries are the models of the world, as are our fire departments. More is being done by us for the poor in playgrounds and parks than by any other country, while philanthropy is relieving the severity of the law in the treatment of poverty, vice, and crime. Further than this, all over America the city is be-

coming an object of enthusiastic interest in the matter of artistic improvement. We are working for a beautiful as well as a clean city.

In the matter of public work it is likewise necessary to discriminate. The city of Boston, through its Metropolitan Commissions, has developed one of the finest park, water, and sewage systems in the world. The water supply of New York, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, and Milwaukee, not to speak of many less important cities, has been developed to a high standard of service. The city of New York is gradually acquiring all the dockage upon the North and East Rivers, and derives from this source an annual net revenue of \$875,000. The same city has constructed recreation piers upon the North and East Rivers for the relief of the slums, while Chicago has carried through an immense sewage-canal project, connecting Lake Michigan with the Mississippi River.

Such exhibits as these must not be overlooked in an appraisal of our cities. Moreover, when comparison is made with Paris, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, and other continental cities, it is to be remembered that the American city is essentially an industrial centre, while the European city in a large sense is not. This accounts for the skyscraper, the smoke, the dirt, the lack of coördinated beauty. It also explains the heavy cost of it all,

for the standard of living in America affects the rate of wages paid in municipal as well as in private work.

But with all the faults of our city administrations the services rendered are secured at a relatively small cost. The per capita burden of Boston's government, probably the heaviest in the world, is but \$34.39. The total expenditures of New York for all purposes are but \$31.62, while the average of Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Baltimore, Cleveland, Buffalo, and San Francisco is but \$15.54 per capita. When we consider that our schools, libraries, police, fire, and health protection, the care and lighting of our streets, and all the manifold services which the city renders, do not equal the cost of a suit of clothes, or even the cost to the individual of transit on the streets, it is apparent that the real cost of the city is inconsiderable and its services of incalculable value.¹

Some years ago Mr. Joseph Chamberlain made a statement of the comparative expenditures of Boston and Birmingham, England. His conclusion was that the American people "pay for less efficient service in their large cities nearly five times as much as is paid in the case of a well-man-

¹ From the reports of the Department of Labor, Bulletin of September, 1901, we are offered some data on this subject. From the tables of per capita expenditure the following statement shows the disbursements of eight cities, the first four being those whose

aged English municipality." This is probably true in so far as Boston is concerned. In all probability the total as well as the per capita cost is greater in America than in England. But the functions performed and the conditions prevailing render any exact comparison difficult. Moreover, the difference in expenditure of two American cities is often as marked as is the divergence between England and America.

A study of the activities of the American city seems to demonstrate that in those departments where the franchise corporations have not entered, a relatively higher order of talent and service has been secured. In the administration of the parks, libraries, and schools, the departments of fire, accounting, etc., corruption has been largely eliminated, and the public has shown a willingness to enter the service of the city.

On the other hand, graft is most prevalent where franchise interests are active. It makes its appearance in the city councils and among ex-administration is not of the best; the last four being cities which are well governed.

	Police Dept., including courts, jails, workhouse, reformatory, etc.	Fire Dept.	School	Lighting	Streets	Other	Total
Philadelphia . . .	\$2.65	\$.78	\$2.67	\$.90	\$.82	\$ 7.82	\$15.64
St. Louis . . .	2.98	1.35	2.63	.90	1.07	6.81	15.63
Cincinnati . . .	2.18	1.51	2.22	1.04	.98	9.74	18.63
Pittsburg . . .	1.60	1.55	2.67	.95	1.34	11.74	19.86
Chicago . . .	2.39	.95	2.65	.25	.59	2.73	11.49
Boston . . .	2.28	2.15	5.31	1.30	2.43	16.92	24.29
Cleveland . . .	1.28	1.19	2.67	.63	.30	5.78	12.14
Detroit . . .	1.91	1.71	2.81		1.90	3.40	11.73

ecutive officials charged with the regulation of these industries. Most councils are incompetent. Disclosures have been made in city after city showing them to be corrupt. By most people the trouble is laid at the door of democracy. It is attributed to the inability of a free city to manage the intricate and difficult matters involved in municipal administration.

To what extent this explanation is true, it will be the purpose of the succeeding chapters to consider.