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// NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW.

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MONEY IN ELECTIONS.

IT is encouraging that there is at last an effort to stop the assessment of Government employés for political funds; but it should not be forgotten that behind such assessments is the larger fact that political parties require great sums for election purposes. These shameless levies are in truth rather a result than a cause of political corruption. That appointed officials are assessed for political purposes is secondary to the fact that elective officials (or others for them) must pay roundly for election. The election is the initial point in our political system; and so long as elections are to be gained by the use of money, and cannot be gained without it, no subsequent precautions will prevent corruption. Popular government must be a sham and a fraud unless the popular will alone tells in elections.

It has in many parts of the Union come to this,—that only a rich man, or a man who expects to make money illegitimately out of the position, can afford to run for office. The American principle, that every one who devotes his time to the public service should be fairly compensated, is the correct one, as whoever observes the working of the opposite principle in such governments as that of England may see; and on the whole we pay our officials reasonably well. But in the cases of many elective officers, these salaries, minus the expenses of election, leave an

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inadequate remuneration, or nothing at all. What does the pay of a United States senator amount to as compared with the cost of many senatorial elections? Or take even the Lower House. Some time ago a rich young man of New York spent between eighty and ninety thousand dollars in a congressional canvass. He was beaten, and the newspapers said it was a popular rebuke to the attempt of a rich man to buy place with money. Perhaps it was, after a fashion; for his opponent, who did get elected, spent only some twenty-odd thousand dollars.

In the recent election a gentleman of high character and national reputation, running for Congress in New York, who had virtually no opponent, and whose election was certain, spent, it is said, ten thousand dollars in what are considered legitimate expenses. He is rich, and therefore, although there was in his case really no contest, was expected to contribute liberally to election expenses. In another case, six thousand dollars was spent by a gentleman, also of national reputation, who is not accounted rich, who has frequently gone through the ordeal of elections, who spent no money save for "legitimate" purposes, and is considered a careful manager. After the election, I heard the friends of a defeated candidate for Congress, in Brooklyn, blaming him bitterly for having made no exertion. He only spent two thousand five hundred dollars.

Thus it is in large cities. But it is doubtful if it is in the large cities that our system of government has really become most corrupt. Sparsely settled Nevada is notoriously a rotten borough, and Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and other new States, are little better. And perhaps, for the most flagrant election corruption we must go, not to the large cities with their masses of proletariat voters, nor yet to the new States with their shifting populations, but to the older agricultural communities, where population is most stable, and the voters are in largest proportion of "native American" stock. There is, so "practical politicians" say, more buying of votes among the rural population of Long Island—the descendants of the settlers of the colonial times—than there is in the city of Brooklyn; and in sheer and flagrant corruption there are many agricultural districts of the State of New York that outdo the city.

The Thirteenth Congressional District, composed of Dutchess, Putnam, and Columbia,—long-settled agricultural counties,—has been notorious in this respect. Not long since a candidate for Con-

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gress spent one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in his election, beating a competitor who spent seventy-five thousand dollars. In this district substantial farmers, the owners of even five and six hundred acres of valuable land, men of position in their neighborhoods, are said habitually to sell their votes, and the prevalence of the custom is illustrated by a story of a candidate who, going into a country village, asked, "How many voters have you in this township?" "Four hundred," was the reply. "How many of them are floaters?"—*i. e.*, merchantable voters—continued the candidate. "Four hundred," was again the answer. Thanks to the efforts of the Civil Service Reform Association, a branch of which has recently been started in this district, such a stand was made against this corruption in the recent charter election in Poughkeepsie, that the money spent in buying votes was, it is said, reduced one-half, and four persons (of whom one was a deputy sheriff and two were policemen) were arraigned for bribery. They were tried before a judge who is reputed to have spent twenty thousand dollars in getting his place, prosecuted nominally by a district attorney of the same kind, and counsel for the defense made no scruple of asking how many there were in the court-room and in the jury-box who had not been concerned in like practices. The men were acquitted, though nobody seems to have doubted their guilt.

Illustrations might be given from other parts of the Union, but it is not necessary to accumulate illustrations of a notorious fact. What shows most significantly how deeply the virus of corruption is eating into our political system, is that it is only occasionally that the use of money in elections excites comment, and even then the comment can hardly be called reprobation, at least effective reprobation. The prodigal expenditure first alluded to excited some attention, but that mainly because it was a by-election, when there were no other struggles to distract. And no one dreamed of sending either of the candidates to the penitentiary. On the contrary, as a reward for the spending of a fortune in influencing the voters of his district, the loser was sent to represent the American republic at a European court, just as another New York man, who had himself contributed a moderate fortune to the Republican corruption fund in the last Presidential election, and had induced others to contribute, had been previously rewarded by being made our national representative to the French republic. So the Republican who, in the

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country district to which I have referred, spent seventy-five thousand dollars in a losing struggle with a Democrat who spent one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, was given an opportunity to "recover his usefulness" as Commissioner of the District of Columbia, while his brother got a contract for soldiers' tombstones.

This is natural. So long as money is necessary for the carrying of elections, the spending of money will be deemed laudable, and those who furnish money may claim what successful parties have to give. As to where the money comes from, that will not much matter. "Beggars cannot be choosers." When Mr. Garfield wrote the "My dear Hubbell" letter, he of course knew that he was asking a ring engaged in swindling the Government to contribute to his election; when Mr. Arthur went down-town to gather in an hour the last five hundred thousand dollars needed to carry Indiana, he of course applied to those who were pecuniarily interested in the retention of power by his party. If Garfield and Arthur had been too "squeamish" to take such money, they would never have reached the Presidential chair. Washington and Jefferson once sat there, it is true. But that was some time ago. Even Lincoln had to trade off Cabinet places to get there, and to wink at the robbery of the nation when mothers were sending their sons to die for her.

The most suggestive assessment during the last presidential election was that levied upon the New York police. These policemen are appointed by a commission intended to be non-partisan, after an examination as to competency, and, once appointed, cannot be removed except upon trial and conviction of misconduct. The commission at the time of the last presidential election, was composed of both Republicans and Democrats. Here, at least, it would be thought political assessments were impossible. Yet the New York policemen were assessed for political purposes, and the money thus raised seems to have been divided between the two parties. Each party wanted money so badly, that it was willing to join its opponent in plundering and dividing. What hope for preventing political assessments by prohibition, when under such conditions political assessments can be levied?

Nor can we hope to cure corruption by mere improvement in administrative machinery. The disease is deeper seated. Growing inequality in the distribution of wealth begets a tendency to

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political corruption that can be cured by nothing that does not go to the causes of inequality. And beyond this, we have induced corruption by extending the functions of government too much in one direction, and too little in another.

Our absurd attempt to "protect American industry" by a tariff brings enormous moneyed interests into politics, and, from the blackmailing tide-waiter to the wood-pulp senator, debauches the public service. The Federal internal revenue system, and in large part the revenue systems of our State and local governments, also powerfully foster corruption, while minor misuses of governmental power tend in the same direction. On the other hand, we have in large part abandoned to corporations the true governmental function of coining money, and thus raised up a power of corruption whenever their interests are at stake; and we have in most important part left to other private corporations the true governmental function of opening and maintaining highways. The truth of the axiom that "the Government must own the railroads, or the railroads will own the Government," is seen in every American State, as it is in the halls of Congress or on the bench of the Supreme Court.

Nevertheless, any reform that can be made in administration or political machinery is not only good in itself, but clears the way for more radical reforms. Money *is* power,—power of all kinds; and in normal times it will exert its power in politics just as it exerts its power in the press, and even in the Church. But while the "money power" will always exert an influence upon elections in which it is interested, that power becomes the greater just as money is necessary for elections. When it requires a large expenditure for any candidate to be elected, or even to try the chances of election, it is only such as have money of their own, and are willing to thus spend it, or such as will make engagements with those who have money to spend, that can hope for election or really become candidates, and the popular choice is restricted to the rich or unscrupulous. And when a political party must raise large sums of money, it must turn to those who have money-interests in politics, and become to that extent their servant.

We have laws enough against bribery in elections; but laws against bribery are of the nature of the Pope's bull against the comet. Where some want to buy and others to sell, the bribery goes on all the same. Some of our States have endeav-

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ored to prevent the illegitimate use of money in elections by other means. The Constitution of Pennsylvania, for instance, requires the officer-elect to swear that he has spent no money in his election, save for certain prescribed purposes; but the first instance of this requirement having any effect occurred in the last Legislature, when a senator from one of the interior counties confessed inability to take the oath, and his seat being declared vacant, he was reëlected by his constituents without any illegitimate use of money. Perhaps this, and the fact that proceedings have been commenced against an officer who did, as is averred, falsely take the oath, indicate a rising sentiment that may make this clause something more than a dead letter. But the prospect is hardly hopeful.

The fact is, that the illegitimate expenses of elections grow naturally out of the legitimate expenses. The habit of raising and using money for improper purposes begins in the raising and using of money for proper purposes. To prevent the one, it is necessary to do away with the other. There should be no necessary election expenses, either to the candidate or to those who support him. This is required by the theory of our government. In that theory office is not a prize to be struggled for, but a public service to which the citizens freely elect one of their number, and for which any citizen is free to propose another citizen, or to offer himself. Yet, in making it a costly thing to run for office, we not only effect a discrimination between rich and poor opposed to the genius of our institutions; we do worse—we discriminate against the scrupulous in favor of the unscrupulous. Here is the root of the spoils system: In our elections, which are the foundation of our whole governmental structure, we treat offices as things to be paid for.

To make poor and rich alike eligible to office, to prevent public plunderers having an advantage over honest men, to give voters freedom of choice, it is necessary to so order our elections that any citizen may run for office without expense.

Let me dwell for a moment on the point that elections must be inexpensive to give freedom of choice. What we call machine politics springs from the cost of elections. Parties are necessary and useful in popular government; but in political organizations, as in all other organizations, power tends to concentrate in the hands of those who make a business of their management,

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and that in proportion as the details and machinery of organization become relatively important. Evils which thus arise can be held in check only by the independence of mere organization on the part of voters,—by the ease with which new organizations can be formed, and candidates can be run outside of regular organizations. Under present conditions, the expenses of election are so great, and organization so costly and important, that it is a very difficult thing to start a new party, and, except in very rare cases, a hopeless, as well as a very expensive, thing for an independent candidate to run. The two great existing party organizations may be compared to two railroad lines. Those who do not like the terms of the one must close with the terms of the other, or else accept an alternative as hopeless as building a railroad for themselves, or trying to walk. And as the competition between railroads only operates at terminal points, so, practically, does the competition between parties only operate as to the heads of tickets. It is only as to a few of their nominees that party managers need take public opinion into account; the fortunes of the rest, save in very rare instances, depend upon the fate of the head of the ticket. As the same general causes operate in both parties to put their practical control into the hands of the men who make of politics a business, the voter is, in most cases, confined to a choice between the nominee of a Republican machine and the nominee of a Democratic ring. And, too, the axiom that railroads will not long compete when they can combine, is as true of our political machines. Nothing is more common than to find the same combination running both political parties, and playing with the people a game of "heads, I win; tails, you lose." Thus freedom of choice is destroyed, and, under the forms of popular sovereignty, we are ruled as completely as though our institutions recognized a governing class.

To get rid of machine rule, we must adopt such measures as will lessen the importance of the political machines in elections by lessening the cost of elections. This must be sought in various ways, adapted to the necessities of the case or the abuses that have grown up. In addition to pointing out this as a direction which effort for the purification of our politics should take, I only wish to offer some general suggestions.

The legitimate election expenses of political parties, which make it necessary first to assess the candidates and then to

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assess office-holders, and to levy or solicit contributions, are mainly the expenses of presenting the ticket to voters, and the printing and distribution of ballots. Under the first head fall the expenses of advertising, distributing documents, holding meetings; and in presidential elections, or strongly contested State elections, of banners, transparencies, uniformed clubs, and torch-light processions. Under the second come not merely the expense of printing very many more tickets than can by any possibility be used, and of mailing or sending them to voters, but of employing "workers" to stand at the polls to offer ballots and solicit voters. In some sections, where the payment of a poll-tax is a requisite to voting, it has become customary for the parties to pay poll-taxes; in others, it has become customary to send carriages, not only for sick voters, but for those at work.

To begin with what I conceive would be the greatest single reform. By adopting the Australian plan of voting, now for some years in successful operation in England, we could abolish at one stroke all the expenses of printing and distributing tickets, and all the expense and demoralization consequent on the employment of "workers," and very much lessen the importance of party nominations and party machinery. Under that plan the ballots are printed at public expense, and contain the names of all persons duly registered as candidates. When the voter approaches the poll he is handed one of these ballots. He enters a compartment, where a pencil or pen and ink are provided, and, concealed from observation, strikes off the names of those he does not wish to vote for, or, as in England, indicates by a mark those he prefers, and then folding up the ballot, presents it. Some objections may doubtless be urged against this plan, but they seem to me trivial as compared with the gains. The final date for the registration of candidates should be fixed at such a length of time before election as to secure opportunity for scrutiny, and the lists then advertised at public expense, as election proclamations are now advertised. To prevent the swelling of the lists by trivial nominations, either the number of indorsing voters required to secure registration might be made large, or a fee might be exacted; or, what would probably be still better, a deposit might be required, which, in case the candidate did not receive a certain number of votes, or reach a certain rank in the voting, should be retained for the public treasury, in other cases being

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returned after the election.* Thousands of ballots would thus suffice, where now hundreds of thousands are printed. The power of nominating conventions would be reduced to the moral effort of their indorsement, since any candidate indorsed by the required number of citizens would be as well presented to each voter as the nominee of the strongest party convention. Thus the corruptions of primary politics, and the practice of selling votes in nominating conventions, would be destroyed, and the practice of blackmailing candidates by the so-called indorsements of political clubs whose only object is to make money, would also be destroyed. And not only would a large amount of money now required from political committees and from individual candidates be saved, but the practice of buying votes, and that of coercing voters by terror of discharge from employment, would be in large part, if not altogether, broken up by the difficulty of telling how a man voted. There could be no putting a ticket in a man's hand and keeping an eye on it until deposited. And thus, too, the paying of poll-taxes, where that unjust and undemocratic tax is retained, and the sending of carriages for voters, would become risky investments.

As for the banners, the torch-lights, and the marchings of uniformed clubs, which have become such a feature in our presidential elections, there would, I think, be little objection to their prohibition save on the part of manufacturers of "election goods." Each party resorts to them, mainly because the opposing party resorts to them; and a prohibition which would put all parties on the same level and save large expenditures would meet little opposition, and would be, I think, generally approved by public opinion. Pennsylvania has already prohibited torch-light processions within a certain time preceding election, and there is more to be said for absolute prohibition than the mere saving of cost. When a man puts on a uniform, or carries a torch in procession, his self-pride is enlisted in the success of the party, and all appeals to his reason are vain; and these glittering displays of partisanship are not merely disgraceful to a people whose government can only find stable foundations in the reason of the masses, but they are positively injurious.

It seems to me, moreover, that it would be good public policy, and a wise and fruitful expenditure of public money,

* One of the faults of our system that most need reform is the election of many officials who properly should be appointed.

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to lessen the expenses of election campaigns by the provision of public halls for political meetings. Every town and city ought to have its public hall or halls, which, like Faneuil Hall in Boston, could be had, under proper restrictions, for any public meeting on the payment of the cost of lighting and cleaning. In the country districts the school-houses are frequently used for such purposes, and in the cities every grammar school might be provided with such a hall, which would have other good uses than for political meetings.

The practice of "treating" by candidates has, in many parts of the country, grown into an evil of formidable magnitude. The old custom of a personal house-to-house canvass has, in our cities, degenerated into a visiting of liquor saloons and "corner groceries." The candidate is expected to visit each groggery in his district, to present his card, and leave on the bar a ten or twenty-dollar bill, for which no change is given, while all the loungers about the place are called on to take a drink. In some places the custom is for him to pay for a keg of beer. So large in the aggregate are the amounts of money thus disbursed by candidates, that in many towns it is said that one-half of the saloons could not be kept open but for the elections. So strong is this custom that even avowed temperance men, when running for office, frequently feel themselves obliged to conciliate the bar-room influence. A very prominent member of a great temperance society was a while ago a candidate for office in Brooklyn. He, too, went the regular rounds. He did not enter the saloons, however. At each one he gave "the boys" who accompanied him a bill, and went around the corner while they left his card and "set up the drinks." At another election, in New York, the president of a national temperance society ran for Congress. He did not go around the corner while the drinks were set up for him by proxy. He ascertained about what each saloon-keeper in his district expected to make out of him, and sent him the money.

It might be worth while to consider how far prohibitory legislation would be useful in preventing this and similar customs by which candidates are bled. As a great deal of the money spent in elections is extorted from candidates rather than voluntarily spent by them, it might to some extent be useful as furnishing an excuse for refusing. But I am inclined to think that a change in the manner of voting, which would dispense with

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the "worker" and the "ticket-peddler," and render it impossible to see how any man voted, would so destroy the influence of the groggery in politics as to do away with this species of blackmail, and as well with the many other forms of extortion practiced upon candidates.

No mere improvement of political machinery will suffice of itself to give us pure government; but it ought to be possible to so improve our methods that a citizen can run for office, and be elected to office, without spending a large sum or mortgaging his official acts. It ought to be possible to break up that system which tends to bar all but the unscrupulous rich, or the still more unscrupulous poor, and which demoralizes the people while it corrupts the government.

We need in public service the very highest character and the very best ability, and this need increases with social development. We can command them, if we make character and ability free to come forward and offer their services without derogation to manhood, and the people free to select them: for there is in the public service that which is attractive to the proper ambition strong in every unspoiled man. What most astonishes one who realizes how corrupt and corrupting is the mire of our practical politics, is the virtue and patriotism there yet is, despite it, in our public service.

That democratic government is with us becoming a failure, is clear; that we are driving toward oligarchy and Cæsarism in a new form, may be seen by whoever will look. But they are weak and foolish who say that democracy is therefore condemned, or that universal suffrage must be abandoned. Let us fairly try democracy before we condemn it; let us give universal suffrage opportunity before we vainly talk of curtailing it. Not only is it impossible to go back; but the dangers which menace us come merely from bad adjustments. When there is danger that his sails may be taken aback, the good seaman shifts his helm and trims his yards. He does not chop away his masts. Nor does the good surveyor condemn a stanch ship because she has been suffered to foul with barnacles.

HENRY GEORGE.

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