

THE PRIMARY THE PIVOT OF REFORM.

“AN ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is a proverb too true and too old to be neglected by our generation. We hear on all sides complaints of misgovernment. Many people utter them every hour of the day; the newspapers repeat them from sheet to sheet. No sooner does Congress or a State legislature close its sessions, annual or biennial, than a sigh of relief is heard from thousands of lips. The constitutions of most of our States have been changed to escape the infliction of annual legislatures. These things are not encouraging to the admirers of our Government. Whether there be a real foundation for the complaints or whether they be the outcome of heated imaginations, or of thoughtless exaggerations, or even fiction, I do not take it upon me to say. What I wish to do is to help stop the complaints by showing that whether unfounded or well founded, they have their causes in ourselves and are not difficult of remedy.

This is a popular government, that is to say, a government of the people; to which our orators add, by the people and for the people. The latter words are included in the former and their only use is to give emphasis to the first. Let us look a little closely into the matter. If it were possible to get all the people together into one assembly and then take their votes, we might have a real government of the people. That, however, is impossible. Such a practice exists nowhere, except perhaps in some of the small cantons of Switzerland. Therefore whatever act of government is done among us must be done directly or indirectly by delegation. A certain number of voters in specified districts meet and choose their delegates. These delegates may choose petty officers for their own districts, or they may meet other delegates from other districts to choose officers with larger functions or new delegates to larger conventions, until at last there is a national convention, composed of delegates from States, themselves delegated through all the gradations from villages or wards of cities to conventions representing the States respectively.

These primary assemblies are naturally called primaries, and their voices pass, like the echoes of the Taj of Agra, from gallery to gallery

upward until they reach the dome. Even thus the arrangement is not perfect, for it may happen that the nominees selected by the last set of delegates represent not a majority of the whole people, but a minority. Even in the representation of the States in Congress great inequalities exist. Nevada sends two members to the United States Senate and one to the House of Representatives, although in 1880 it had a population of only 62,266, while Ward 19 of the city of New York numbered 158,191. I believe that statistics will show that a majority of the New York Assembly has been sometimes elected by a minority of the voters of the State.

Defective, however, as it may be, the plan of delegation is the one that comes nearest to a government of the people possible in this country so far as our political experience has yet brought us. The primary is the pivot on which the whole machinery is made to turn. If this primary is attended and watched, we shall have what I may call primary delegates representing in reality their respective districts. Should bad men be chosen or nominated, the people would be responsible for the failure. They would have no right to complain, except as they might happen to find after an election that the men whom they had chosen, supposing them to be good men, had turned out to be bad ones.

The primaries in the city of New York are to a certain extent now regulated by law. How it is elsewhere I will not stop to inquire, only observing meanwhile that what has been enacted in New York can be enacted elsewhere if need be. By our statute the arm of the law is extended over "every political primary election held by any political party, organization, or association for the purpose of choosing candidates for office, or the election of delegates to conventions, or for the purpose of electing officers of any political party, organization, or association." The primary is thus protected against the intrusion of outsiders and against violence within. Any voter of any party may at will join the primary association of his party. Besides these provisions for the encouragement and protection of the primaries, our Ballot Reform Act permits the nomination of candidates by the certificate of a certain number of voters designating their favorite. The object of all these provisions is of course to concentrate the choice of a certain number of electors, and whenever that concentration is made known, to provide the means, without expense to the voter, of bringing the candidates thus selected before the electors for their votes.

Now see what attention, or rather what inattention, the voter of our city pays to these beneficent provisions of the law. In the Third Assembly District, which I mention because it is the one in which I happen to live, there were cast at the last election, that of November, 1891, 2,005 votes for Mr. Fassett as governor and 4,184 for Mr. Flower, the former being the Republican candidate and the latter the Democratic. There were, therefore, at least 2,005 voters in the district belonging to the Republican party. How many of these attended the Republican primary, which in its capacity of a nominating body nominated the Republican candidate for assembly? From 100 to 150 as I am informed. The rolls of the association contained about 650 names. So that a little over one-fourth of the Republican voters thought it worth their while to join the primary association, and of these less than one-fourth actually took part in the nomination. I have not the means of giving the like particulars respecting the primary of the Democratic party, but we may assume that it would show about the like proportion. Now bear in mind that out of these two primary bodies, and others like them, came forth not only the members of the second branch of the legislature, but all the other dependent nominations and elections through which the great State of New York has been governed in the year of grace 1892.

Let not those complain of misgovernment who thus neglect their civic duties. If these negligent citizens should say that their civic duties were distasteful to them or interfered with their business, let them reflect that their neglect may cost them more than their fidelity to duty. Neglect may indeed be the most expensive thing that can happen in their business. Take for example the Speedway Act, by which a portion of our Central Park was to be converted into a race-course. It was passed in March and repealed in April. The outburst of indignation against it was unmistakable. More than two hundred thousand persons were said to have made themselves heard at the Capitol clamoring for repeal. The cost of this enforced repeal was great and the annoyance greater. Would it not have been cheaper for the citizens of New York to attend to their nominations beforehand? Would it not have been better to lock the stable door before the steed was stolen than to pay for bringing him back and locking the door afterward?

The voters are vehemently solicited at every general election to rush to the polls and save the people from ruin. But if the nominations are bad, how little is the use of votes. The truth is that the voting

plays a secondary part in a New York City election. It is the nomination which turns the scale for good or evil, and the primary makes the nomination. If both parties should nominate good candidates, good men would hold office, whichever party won the election. There may indeed be elections in which great principles are at stake; but the occasions are rare in which the voter is obliged to choose between a good policy with a bad candidate and a bad policy with a good candidate.

The practical politicians jeer at us for our simple folly. This is what one of them said the other day: "*It's great sport to see people go to the polls in hordes and vote like cattle for the ticket we prepare. Reformers don't begin at the right point. They should begin at the point where nominations are made. The people think they make the nominations, but we do that business for them.*" What a boast of profligacy and shame! "*Sport,*" is it, to see one's fellow-citizens led like cattle to slaughter, thinking all the while that they are going to pasture? How long shall we endure this profligacy and hear this boast? *Civis Romanus* was a boast; has *Civis Americanus* become a burden?

There is little new in what is here written. My aim is to reiterate, and by reiteration enforce, if I may be so fortunate, what has been written many times before. For myself, I must say that I would indeed go further, and require a nomination to be made by every voter when he registers his name preparatory to his exercise of the suffrage. Details could easily be arranged to secure the secrecy of such a nomination. It would be useless, however, now to enter upon the discussion of such a scheme. The public is not ready for it. Meanwhile a full attendance of the voters at the primaries as well as the polls would insure, as it seems to me, a real government of the people by the people and for the people. Reform clubs are good in their way. They bring together citizens of like opinions, beget discussion, and conduce to concert of action. But, after all, I venture to affirm that the true reform club is the primary. There is the place to begin the purification of our electoral streams and make the waters clear at the source and the fountain.

They greatly err who think that a state can long prosper in defiance of moral laws. These laws encompass with their commands and their revenges all creatures of the human race, whether they dwell within the gates of cities or in the solitudes of wildernesses. No man can live in defiance of these laws without a worm gnawing at his vitals, and no state can escape decay which acts in contempt of their authority.

What objects can be set before the eyes of American citizens more worthy of pursuit than the good name and the good deeds of their country? To the younger citizens of the nation especially do these objects commend themselves. No glory can come to them like the glory of true statesmanship. They may heap up riches, but cannot tell who shall gather them. They may neglect their civic duties and give up their lives to business or pleasure; they may build palaces upon great estates or on fashionable thoroughfares; they may scour the seas in yachts or ride through the land in their own chariots upon roads of steel; but it is a nobler thing to build or sustain a state. The palaces and the yachts and the chariots will crumble, and the estates may pass into the hands of strangers and aliens. The citizen who helps to build a solid state upon the foundations of public virtue is creating a happy and invincible home for himself and his children and children's children.

DAVID DUDLEY FIELD.

SUNDAY AND THE COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION.¹

THE action of the Congress of the United States in the matter of the opening of the Exposition at Chicago was probably expressive of the sentiment of the majority of those whom Congress represents. People who live in cities, and especially those who live in cities of which the population is largely or considerably foreign, are disposed to believe that of late years a decided change of sentiment has taken place as to the mode of the observance of Sunday and in favor of the relaxation of those legal restrictions by means of which it is supposed to be protected. In cities this is undoubtedly true. Two causes have co-operated, whether in New York, Boston, Chicago, or in other communities of which these are more or less typical, to bring about such a change. One of these has been the large immigration of those from other lands to whom the American idea of Sunday is at once unintelligible and distasteful. The other cause has been the usage and example of people claiming social precedence, who, whether from personal preference or the influence of foreign customs, have chosen to disregard the traditions in which they were nurtured.

But these, after all, are not nearly so representative of the American sentiment concerning Sunday as is commonly supposed. There are, indeed, parts of the country where, as in New Orleans, Sunday usages have always been more nearly European than American; and there are probably no large towns where the stricter laws of earlier

¹PRESENT-DAY PAPERS

CONTRIBUTED BY THE SOCIOLOGICAL GROUP.

CHARLES W. SHIELDS.	SETH LOW.	FRANCIS G. PEABODY.
HENRY C. POTTER.	RICHARD T. ELY.	WILLIAM F. SLOCUM, JR.
THEODORE T. MUNGER.	HUGH MILLER THOMPSON.	EDWARD J. PHELPS.
WM. CHAUNCY LANGDON.	CHARLES A. BRIGGS.	WILLIAM M. SLOANE.
SAMUEL W. DIKE.	WASHINGTON GLADDEN.	CHARLES DUDLEY WARNER.

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