

# Tammany's Grab-Bag

*Who's Who in Graft, and What He Gets*

by **RALPH E. RENAUD**

**T**AMMANY HALL is just a great, big happy family of overgrown playboys. Ask any Tammany man. But Tammany is something else again.

Tammany Hall is haunted by elderly sachems addicted to Fourth of July celebrations in the robust manner. When Old Glory ripples into the breeze it thrills them more than anything else on earth, except possibly a bit of green now and then. And here is a strange and incredible thing about Tammany Hall which you must accept on my say-so. It has acquired no piles of crisp bills, no hidden hoards, no invisible bank accounts, no concealed safe deposit boxes — not a dime that any honest club shouldn't have.

The Hall calls itself the Columbian Order of the Sons of St. Tammany, "the Affable," a good Indian and, according to all accounts, a good scout. The old building on New York's Fourteenth Street, next to a dump known euphemistically as the Olympia Theater, was encrusted with proletarian grime and had capacious spittoons located at all strategic points. There was also a good deal of oratory spilled there. The site is now appropriately occupied by the Gas Company. The new building, with a bank nestling substantially under the balcony, faces Union Square within a stone's throw (and a good many stones are thrown in Union Square) of Communist headquarters. It is chastely Colonial. I cannot testify whether it consists of anything more than a façade, but it puts up a good front. And if there really is an interior I am sure it contains none of those piratical accumulations which the public imagination so persistently places there.

Tammany is something else again. Tammany may be diagnosed, according to one's mood, as a state of mind, a kind of cult, an



*Drawing by Thomas Benrimo*

organized appetite, or an enormous thrift society. It is only incidentally a political institution. Elections have to be won before they can be exploited. But it is undoubtedly the most profitable business in New York. Rabbi Wise describes the present government of the city as "a Coney Island Mardi Gras managed by cheap and incompetent vulgar-ians." He is mistaken. It is a racket.

For many years now, as a working editor, I have studied Tammany and in my opinion it is the biggest racket in the United States, with the sole exception of the organized liquor traffic. I do not hesitate to set its annual "take" well into the hundreds of millions. This is considerable money, especially in the desolation accompanying Hoover prosperity. Where does Tammany get it? Where does it go? The first question can be answered definitively — from the record. Flashes of testimony in many a court transcript show how luxuriously Tammany keeps afloat. The second question will never be completely answered, though the slow, tidal advance of Judge Samuel Seabury's inquiry rise through the very portals of Sing Sing. Tammany itself doesn't know. It doesn't wish to know.

Tammany, with much the same membership as the Columbian Order, is, of course, predominantly Irish and Catholic. But John Curry, the present leader, his seventy district leaders, and the public officials are not responsible to the Hall itself. McCooey, the smooth and powerful Democratic leader in Brooklyn, isn't even a member. The Tammany Hall General Committee rents the building from the Columbian Order. Curry and his group operate under the authority of the General Committee. They may meet in the Hall and sometimes do,

though really important meetings are held elsewhere. In the famous but elusive Gold Room, for instance.

Outside and beyond this group, which contains a constantly changing inner ring, is a society with no constitution, no password, no insignia, indeed no formally acknowledged existence, which may be called the Friends of Tammany. It consists of the Civil Service employees, 130,000 of them, a large part of the Republican organization, all the protected racketeers, many more or less honest burghers, magistrates, judges, lawyers, experts, big business men, little business men, theatrical big shots and small fry, labor leaders, race track touts and operators, contractors, bootleggers, United States Senators, a flock of Congressmen, state legislators, bankers, Catholic priests and prelates, marketmen, gunmen, brokers, Jewish rabbis, Protestant clergymen, lobbyists, drug peddlers and sniffers, gamblers, grifters, grafters, prostitutes — those, at least, who elude or “conciliate” the vice squad — and Jimmy Walker. They may not constitute a majority of the population of New York City, but they manage to swing the heavy end of the voting list. The bond that holds them in mystical union is profit, privilege, or power — often all three. This loose confraternity has established an absolute, self-perpetuating dictatorship over the political destinies of the city.

Naturally the mere supposition of a system of graft is what Mayor Walker describes as “defaming the fair name of New York City,” though even the Mayor admits a little nickel-snatching. Nevertheless, let us suppose. . . . Suppose I wanted to get into a profitable line in New York. In a modest way, of course. I couldn’t expect a subway contract. I probably couldn’t even chip in with a few friends and buy a magistrate to dismiss favored traffic offenders. But I might open a speakeasy. Having rented a basement and stocked up, I would automatically become a candidate for election to the Friends of Tammany. The initiation would be quiet, simple, and immediate. I would merely kick in when the bulls came around. After their first friendly call I would be a member in good standing. If I knew what was healthy I would continue to come across and before the next election, as a Friend of Tammany, I would be rooting heartily among my customers for the organization ticket.

But I might not be an individual. I might be a corporation, one of the big steamship companies, for example. I might wish to lease certain piers from the city. I might send my representatives before the dock commission and after they had appeared there — frequently, eloquently, but in vain — I might be so dumb that I would quit trying to get the piers and, in fact, quit business altogether. On the other hand I might not be that dumb. I might hunt up a certain judge-elect who had considerable influence with the Dock Commission. I might even slip him a fat retainer to get the lease. Of course the judge might be so simple as to take part of the money after he ascended the bench. He might even be crazy enough to get caught. In that event he would merely cease being a Friend of Tammany. But I, a perfectly solvent corporation, would promptly take his place in that esoteric society — Friend and Victim in one.

But suppositions, of course, prove nothing. Let’s give names and numbers.

#### THE SHAKEDOWN

**W**ELL, THE FIRST case sounds oddly like that absurd pier story I had the effrontery to invent a moment ago. A Brooklyn County Judge, W. Bernard Vause, got into difficulties last year for showing the Columbia Finance Company, a blue-sky concern, how to shake \$400,000 out of innocent but confiding investors. Unfortunately he permitted the Columbia Company to pay him \$125 to \$150 a week for his legal services while he occupied the bench, which is against the law. During the inquiry into these transactions the Federal Attorney discovered that the United American Steamship Lines also paid Judge Vause \$250,000 to obtain the lease on two city piers. Morgan O’Brien, Jr. had already received a \$10,000 fee for a series of not surprisingly unsuccessful appearances before the Dock Commission. But Judge Vause got action at once. The next day he and his wife sailed for Europe as guests of the lines.

Judge Vause had to admit all this. The checks were produced in court. He explained, however, that the later checks, which covered the period he was on the bench, went to a mysterious and unidentified “Frank Baxter.” A typical New York jury believed him. But don’t sprain your sympathies over this injured jurist.

For the little Columbia Finance irregularity he was sentenced to six months in Atlanta. Incidentally, the pier lease graft seemed to pass right through Judge Vause, now ruined but silent, to somebody more important. And the city owns 268 piers. Figure it out yourself.

Dr. William F. Doyle, our next specimen, is more fortunate than Judge Vause. He still continues his practice or, rather, his practices. United States Attorney Charles H. Tuttle disclosed that Dr. Doyle, while appearing as a solicitor before the Board of Standards and Appeals, had banked more than \$2,000,000 in less than three years. He described him as "a veterinary who rose to be a millionaire" and proceeded to investigate his activities.

Dr. Doyle originally had a job in the Fire Department. Mayor Hylan made him head of the Fire Prevention Bureau, but during his incumbency a couple of lives were lost in a Maiden Lane fire. Dr. Doyle was indicted and had to retire on a pension. Since then he has been busy — and how! — before the Board of Standards. This board was organized to hear appeals from decisions of the Fire Department. This is the way it actually functions. George H. Davis, vice president of Saks and Company, prominent merchandisers, testified at Dr. Doyle's trial that the Fire Prevention Bureau ordered partitions built into their Thirty-fourth Street store and their new Fifth Avenue store. They were erected in the Thirty-fourth Street store but resisted on Fifth Avenue. To have installed them there, Davis explained, "would have meant closing the store." But stay! Saks and Company had the acumen to employ Dr. Doyle, and the day was saved — for \$8,600.

Ely Maran, a Bronx builder, testified he paid Doyle \$52,000 — \$31,500 of it in cash at Doyle's request. One benighted woman paid him \$5,000 in 1929 to get her a permit for a filling station in Jamaica, a Long Island town. Dr. Doyle and his successful fellow solicitors (there are only about half a dozen who have any success) did a nice little business by easing filling stations and garages into districts zoned against them. Doyle's fee for garages usually ran from \$1,000 to \$3,500, and for filling stations from \$250 to \$1,500. The Board of Standards and Appeals issued about 2,100 permits questionable enough to excite the attention of even District Attorney Crain before he forgot

about them. When the federal courts tried Dr. Doyle on a diagonal charge of concealing his income he was acquitted.

Doyle never rendered a bill and never gave a receipt. He admitted splitting his fees, but wouldn't testify who got the split. He explained that it might incriminate him. Some light may be thrown on this by the testimony of Augustus Misch at the trial of William E. Walsh, chairman of the Board of Standards and Appeals. Misch had been asked to come through with \$2,000 for the privilege of operating two oil burners. He swore that Walsh told him: "I am unable to live on the salary paid me by the city, and in order to enjoy a living income it is necessary for those who need the approval of the Bureau to pay me for the accommodations." Walsh's salary was \$12,500.

Mr. Walsh approved a change in the zoning law which permitted a certain apartment house to obtain a greatly increased rental space, and then himself moved into a \$4,000 apartment at a rental of \$1,500. He was also fortunate enough to negotiate one of those unsecured, non-interest-bearing, flexible flyer notes for \$30,000 with a Bronx builder. The United States indicted him for regarding this as a personal secret. He was acquitted, but it was deemed advisable for him to resign.

William F. Kenny is introduced merely as a typical but particularly ardent Friend of Tammany. What a friend! He gave \$70,000 to Al Smith's Presidential campaign fund and testified before a Senate committee that, had it been necessary, he would have contributed his whole fortune. Yet Mr. Kenny could afford his contribution. A series of suits indicates that for many years he and his brother James enjoyed a monopoly of the tank truck business in moving gasoline through New York City because of the peculiarly devised specifications of the Fire Prevention Bureau which barred all other trucks. It was charged that the Kennys not only made a profit of \$3,000,000 on their trucks but exacted a tax of one-tenth of a cent on every gallon of gasoline delivered. Mr. Kenny vehemently denied this. Al Smith is now in a Tammany eclipse. The authorities have finally certified a Standard Oil truck as satisfactory.

Albert Vitale was the first of the magistrates whose outside financial operations attracted attention. It was revealed that he had borrowed \$19,940 from Arnold Rothstein, that

sinister underworld autocrat who was supposed to collect for the police from the big gambling games in return for protection on his own extensive gambling and narcotic transactions. Indeed, Rothstein's murder on November 4, 1928, was the spark which crept along a slow fuse to set off the present explosion under Tammany. It was too simple a crime for the police to register so spectacular a failure in solving it. At all events, Magistrate Vitale, his beneficiary, confessed to an accumulation of \$165,000 during his sojourn on the bench and demonstrated such a fraternal acquaintance with the criminal classes that the Appellate Division invited him to retire.

There has been a doffing of magistrates' robes ever since. Magistrate George F. Ewald's resignation while charged with having bought his job shocked Governor Roosevelt into appointing Judge Seabury to conduct an inquiry into the minor courts. Thereupon Magistrate F. X. McQuaide resigned. Magistrate George W. Simpson resigned. Magistrate Jean Norris did not resign, but the Appellate Division removed her, and magistrate Jesse Silberman also was ousted by Judge Seabury. Magistrate Louis Brodsky, who just escaped going to Congress, was shown to have maintained eleven different brokerage accounts with transactions of \$3,000,000. The son-in-law of Mr. Brodsky's district leader had power of attorney over one of these accounts, but the Appellate Division endorsed the Magistrate four to one and he is still dispensing, er — justice.

This projection of district leaders into the affairs of the magistrates is significant because the appointment of magistrates and any loose change that goes with it is believed to be the prerogative of these leaders. The career of Ewald, unimpressive otherwise, though he did manage to get hold of what the federal authorities insist was a paying mail fraud, illuminates the activities of Martin J. Healy, leader of the nineteenth district. When Ewald, a butcher's helper who climbed into an Assistant District Attorneyship, wanted to mount the bench, Mrs. Ewald quietly loaned Mr. Healy \$10,000. The money was conveyed to Healy by a faithful retainer named — of all things! — Thomas J. Tommaney. They all have these men Fridays. Healy, who was being pressed for payments on a little Long Island bungalow, though he had about \$70,000 in various banks

at the time, gave a note for the money — another of those flexible flyers. But Mrs. Ewald, an absent-minded woman about such trifles, lost it.

About the same time Healy was receiving, it was testified, a votive offering of \$2,000 for the appointment of Jacob Cash — again the incredible name! — as a City Marshal. Tommaney managed that negotiation, too. Healy, who likewise pried a diamond brooch for Mrs. Healy out of Cash, generously bestowed \$1200 on the faithful Tommaney. This sum, oddly enough, represented exactly ten per cent of the Ewald and Cash payments to Healy. But Ewald paid a total of \$12,000 on the occasion of his appointment, including \$2,000 to a member of the Steuben Society which "recommended" to him. This was his full salary for a year. Ten per cent on an individual sum, one hundred per cent of a year's salary for an appointment seems to run like a pecuniary theme through the sweet song of Tammany politics.

#### SPEAKEASY GRAFT

SO FAR we have merely selected a few shining illustrations from the thickening book of municipal scandal to show the diversity and ingenuity of Tammany's golden touch. But how about the big money?

Let's take a look at the speakeasies. New York is a thirsty town, and the official figure of the oases is now about 36,000. A police stool pigeon, Harry Levey, testifying before Judge Seabury, declared: "During 1927 and 1928 I helped Patrolman James J. Quinlivan and William M. O'Connor collect at least \$7,500 a month from 125 or more speakeasies. The larger ones paid a hundred dollars and the smaller ones came across with fifty dollars." This makes an average of seventy-five dollars a month, or perhaps a little less, assuming there were more smaller places. On the other hand, they were all uptown resorts, for O'Connor and Quinlivan never reached the good hunting grounds around Times Square or lower Manhattan. Seventy-five dollars a month from 36,000 speakeasies figures out to about \$32,000,000 a year.

The question arises as to whether these plain clothes men represented merely the precinct or the "higher-ups," or both. Their tax certainly did not include that levied by the cop on the beat. Major Maurice Campbell, former

Federal Prohibition Administrator for the Southern District of New York, thinks any such figure as \$32,000,000 is ridiculously low. Some of the larger speakeasies take in as much as \$3,000 a day and pay in proportion. I know of one rather prosperous speakeasy café which pays \$500 a week, but this may include a cut to federal agents and perhaps to muscle men. Moreover, all speakeasies buy only protected liquor, which means a terrific graft for police connivance in delivery.

Mighty few gallons of any sort of liquor would reach their destinations unless the police had been reached first. Leaving the "alky racket" entirely alone, let us consider beer deliveries. There are about twenty breweries in the Southern District, and at least four of them have been flagrant law violators. A truck of beer is worth not less than \$1,500. From a cheating brewery ten or twelve trucks a night, each under police escort or protection, will start radiating their cheer as often as three times a week. Ten per cent is regarded as the "cops' cut."

Whatever the figures, liquor graft in New York is tremendous. I don't want to give the impression that Friends of Tammany get it all. Plenty of itching Republicans are being scratched. And upstate — well, up there it is just too bad. But skimming the surface of illegal liquor has now become an old and honored pastime. Racketeering is a newer manifestation of organized crime; it is only about seven years old. A racket is essentially an alliance between business or labor and the underworld to fix or raise prices, operating usually under police or political protection. The New York State Crime Commission, reporting to the Legislature last spring, declared that rackets cost the people of the nation between twelve and eighteen billions a year.

During his term in office Joab Banton, Tammany District Attorney, made it a set policy to initiate no crusades and to act only on specific complaints. Ferdinand Pecora, his chief assistant, declared he knew of no rackets in New York. The question arises as to whether such an attitude isn't tantamount to issuing letters of marque to the racketeers. Judge Crain, who followed Banton, assumed a different attitude. He started by declaring war, with the aid of a citizens' committee of fifty, on all rackets, ended with a few feeble indictments in

the leather pocketbook manufacturing racket, and is now under investigation by Judge Seabury because, among other things, he hasn't succeeded in demonstrating the difference between a racket and a tennis court.

For any effective or complete action it is necessary to turn to the Federal Attorney's office. There at least one healthy racket was put under the microscope and thoroughly mangled, if not utterly destroyed. This was the Chicken Trust, or, as is it called itself, the Greater New York Live Poultry Chamber of Commerce. Competitors were blown out of their beds with bombs, beaten, gassed in their places of business, had their property destroyed by poison or, if other means failed, were threatened with "the apple," that persuasive leaden pellet which killed Barnet Baff, once a big pullet-and-hen man himself. There was sworn evidence that independents were intimidated by city detectives and motorcycle police. This single racket, not one of the biggest, cost New York \$10,000,000 annually and yielded its organizers several millions a year.

There is no census of rackets in New York. I have just listed fifty which received some sort of official attention in the past two years, from Larry Fay's milk racket to the window cleaners' racket. If anyone imagines the Friends of Tammany are overlooking the possibilities of all these good things, he ought to have his head examined.

#### WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS

**B**UT IT IS possible to come even closer to Tammany and remain among the astronomical figures. William H. Allen, Director of the Institute for Public Service, says the New York City budget contains a hundred million dollars more than the city ought to cost. It goes to the maintenance of waste, slackage, surplusage of employees, and malingering. Governor Roosevelt says Allen is a person of no importance and Mayor Walker implies he is crazy. He sounds quite sane to me. Besides, Jimmy disagrees with a great many people. When the City Affairs Committee figured the recent cost to taxpayers of condemnation proceedings at \$33,000,000 the Mayor was shocked at the absurdity of such a total.

Nevertheless, Charles Berry, Tammany Comptroller (but of the Al Smith wing), discussing the school site scandal, said on May 6:

"I make the open charge in this public hearing that the procedure adopted by the Board of Education regarding school sites is costing the taxpayers of this city millions of dollars unnecessarily." This referred merely to school sites, a minor aspect of condemnation, and did not even cover the gobbling up of adjoining lots by favored insiders. The Mayor declared a few days later that anyone criticizing the schools was un-American and an enemy of civilization.

The bail bond business, thriving to a degree, might have been regarded as legitimate if the nauseating details of how it is conducted had not been exposed before the Seabury inquiry. It is inextricably intertwined with the levy on prostitution imposed by the amazingly prosperous members of the Vice Squad. This dirty traffic is scorned by the regular police, and the cops, like the Greeks, have a word for it. Judge Seabury's bright young men traced bank deposits of \$83,000 to the name of plain clothes man Charles A. Wundt. Patrolman Robert E. Morris had bank accounts, too, but kept \$50,000 kicking around in an old tin box. Policeman Andrew G. McLaughlin banked \$35,800 in two years on a salary of \$3,000.

In March, 1931, Charles Brady, Superintendent of Buildings, resigned under fire, with the City Administration aiming the gun in his particular case, and his chief building inspector, Rollin C. Bastress, was arrested for accepting a bribe. It seems only fair to consider the subject of construction, especially since the figures are large. In 1930, an off year, new buildings and alterations in Manhattan cost \$198,662,098. Residential construction in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens ran to \$64,019,000. Tammany has approximately ten city departments, each with more or less of a finger in this vast pie. And the organization has never been accused of not developing plenty of Jack Horners.

The gambling industry in New York fully equals the building industry. Betting on the races is entirely illegal in the state. Yet New York City supports 5,000 pool rooms, 1,000 touts in the Times Square district alone, and pays its full share of the annual billion dollars which flow to the American race tracks. At least, those are the figures given by Charles H. Claraham, Post Office Inspector, assigned to fraudulent tipping. Crap games thrive every-

where, from the little ones anyone can watch late at night in quiet subway stations to the big ones in protected flats. George McLaughlin, a good Police Commissioner, had to retire when he interfered with gambling in the Tammany District Clubs.

Anyone familiar with city affairs will recognize the gaps in my assemblage of green pastures for the Friends of Tammany. I have not attempted to discuss Tammany banks, such as the City Trust and the Bank of United States, with their costly and scandalous failures, the widespread narcotic traffic, inequality of assessments in the Tax Department, destruction of property values by zoning changes, the markets and peddlers' graft, the Queens sewer and highway graft, insurance graft, subway contracts, water system development, refereeships, local bankruptcies, organized perjury, the sale of appointments, designations, and nominations much more important than those of magistrates, and a dozen other prolific subjects. But I believe I have said enough to indicate that Boss Tweed, with his \$80,000,000 swag, was a piker.

Where does it all go? I don't know. I suspect that a large part of it is dumped at the races and in the stock market. Some of it clings to buttered fingers along the way up. I can't conceive of more than five or ten per cent of it reaching the upper levels.

It can't last. For years I despaired of the conscience of the city, callous even to bartered judgeships and soiled ermine. But suddenly it flashed out at the spectacle of chartered brutes in the police department beating, torturing, and blackmailing fallen women and some wholly innocent women as well. Tammany itself was shocked, though it kept a stiff upper lip. And, strange as it may seem under present conditions, there are honest police aplenty and honest officials striving in a bewildered manner to check the appalling manifestations of a vicious system which has got out of hand.

Finally the relentless pressure of economic law will crush the graft back to a minimum. People in prosperity forget how they are robbed. In adversity they remember it — and resent it. New York is still rich. But it feels poor. And an increasing number of its citizens are sick of that political lycanthropy which changes too many of its sworn guardians into wolves. Stand by for a change, Mr. Walker.

# The Dressing Case

by BRUNO FRANK

HE WATCHED her as she walked away with firm, reliable steps along the station platform, a still young, if homely rather than elegant figure. She looked back just once to wave a friendly hand. Then, after a short wait at the ticket barrier, she vanished into the crowd.

He settled into his seat before the train started, and spread his papers out on the little folding table.

He remained alone. Whenever he looked up from his papers he saw through the window a dull landscape wrapped in gray November haze. Behind the line of hills was a dim, red glow. At a level crossing, through which they passed more slowly, stood a shabby little automobile, a frightfully battered piece of old iron that might have come straight out of an American film farce. He thought of his own car at home. It really was high time he exchanged it. At least he might have a good look round in the city for something more up-to-date. But his sensible wife, always so thrifty, thought there was time enough. He turned to his papers again.

When the train got in, it was dark. There were far too few porters about. He kept his brief case under his arm, and saw his trunk and little brown dressing case piled on a heavily laden luggage-trolley that went rumbling along to the station exit.

It was quite a long way to the hotel. The theater rush was on. Millions of pleasure seekers were flocking gayly toward the lights that beckoned, leaping, whirling, colorful. Every car in the city seemed to be out. Progress was at a snail's pace. One caught glimpses of festively clad women, all of them beautiful,

in the dimly lighted interiors of luxurious automobiles.

The same old drive, repeated every two months, from the station through the evening streets. How well he knew the attacks of questioning to which this drive always laid him open. Was it right, he asked himself every time, as he did to-day, for him to be spending his years out there in the province, beyond the dark miles, while life sparkled here in such alluring colors? To follow the prescribed road calmly, successfully, but without any particular interest — was he not too young for this at forty-five? Evasive thoughts, he knew it, and he knew what it was they were evading.

He arrived. They knew him here. His

room was ready, quiet, spacious, really meant for two persons. A curtain could be drawn across the room before the two beds, so that it could then be used as a reception and work room.

His luggage was brought up, and he was left alone. The first thing next morning his work would begin, so it would be best, he decided, to have an early night.

He opened the dressing case. Dark green silk puffed up. He started. This was not his property.

Changed by mistake. How annoying! One is attached to little things in daily use, particularly when one is no longer young. To be sure, nothing seriously regrettable had occurred. He could get over the loss of a sum of money inside the lid pocket of his dressing case. All his documents were here in the brief case. But he would almost have preferred the loss



Drawings by Weldon Bailey