

THE NEXT NATIONAL REFORM.

AS soon and as often as a result of a closely contested election is announced the cry of bribery and corruption is raised throughout the country by the defeated party or candidates. Less often, either in defiance or despair, is heard the question made famous by a "practical politician" of New York in answer to fierce denunciations of his own knavery, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" Yet this should be the paramount issue of the hour.

Men of both parties and all parties without doubt have perverted the spirit of the law even when they have not offended against its letter, and the honest historian will be obliged to record that the machinery of the purest parties, at certain times and places, has been alienated to unlawful and unworthy purposes, at variance with the "true intent and meaning" of the Constitution. How shall political corruption be prevented? I repeat there is but one efficient remedy for the evil—a radical reorganization of our machinery of election—a reconstruction having as its chief purpose to render fraud impossible. For without a strong and non-partisan movement that shall initiate a system of honest voting, making bribery unprofitable and knavery impotent, popular elections in America will become a farce, and Democratic institutions a prey to the same disintegrating forces that encompassed the ruin of earlier free governments.

It is a waste of time to discuss whether this or that party is the greater offender in any given election. What we need is not a victim or a verdict or a palliative, but a preventive. No temporary remedies will suffice. It should be an uncompromising crusade against political knavery—a war to the death—as it was a war to the death against American slavery.

No legislative remedy for the prevention of fraud at elections will prove effective unless it provides for two essential features:

an absolutely secret ballot and the assumption by the national, state, or municipal governments of the essential lawful expenses of candidates. But an act that secured these factors would deal an immediate death-blow to political corruption at the polls.

In first taking up this vital question, in lonely earnestness, some few years ago, and in drafting the first bill for the new Electoral Reform in New York, it seemed to me that a remedy so radical would demand years of agitation. Yet to-day it is the battle cry of the Empire State. To-morrow it bids fair to become a practical issue of reform throughout the Union. Honest men, without distinction of class, creed, or previous condition of servitude to political bosses, unite in demanding this reform, and I cannot refrain from again presenting the more salient features of the great issue.

Under the existing system of balloting in New York State, which is a sad and striking example of some of the worst methods prevailing in the United States, there is and there can be no adequate protection against the most shameless perversion of the popular will. No official verdict can be trustfully accepted as the true popular verdict. Any one who doubts this fact can assure himself of it on any election day in New York City, by an early visit to the polls in the populous districts, especially in the lodging-house centres. There will present itself to the astonished gaze of the uninitiated the strange sight of voters marched to the polls in squads of two, three and four under the direction of a trained party "worker." In order to secure the proper casting of their ballots, those "independent" voters are there required to hold up their right hand exposing the ballot in that position until cast. The "consideration" is generally five dollars, sometimes lower, but often as high as ten dollars. Mr. Henry A. Gumbleton, who has given considerable attention to this matter, estimated the lodging-house population of New York City, on October 1, 1886, at eight per cent. of the entire city electorate. Let it be borne in mind that a really secret ballot would provide for and enforce the secret marking of ballots furnished by the State. No one but the voter would be allowed to enter the compartment provided for marking his ballots, and the arrangement would preclude supervision by the present class of vote buyers or their representatives. In these circumstances no candidate could be induced to pay for votes the casting of

which must be accepted on faith; for, being unable to see the "goods delivered," the machinations of unscrupulous candidates would be relegated to the past. Our political Othello's occupation would be gone.

Having disposed of the question of secrecy, which involves mainly the questions of bribery and of the undue influence of the employer over the employed, the next best safeguard lies in the printing and distribution of ballots at public expense. It is clear that such a provision will at once dispose of many expenses that cannot be claimed as really necessary. The present system furnishes the excuse for innumerable "assessments" under cover of "necessary expenses" demanded for "workers" and ticket peddlers. Under this method the actually necessary expenses are so excessive in metropolitan districts that poor men are practically debarred from election to any high office within the gift of the people without mortgaging their official acts in advance to the persons or organizations that defray their campaign disbursements.

Nothing but a new law, honest in its provisions, and honestly enforced, can guard the people against the inroad on popular government which unscrupulous organization menaces to-day.

It is not too much, I think, to hope that the popular feeling in favor of ballot reform in the great State of New York, and the promise of its early enactment is seconded throughout the Union by a marked tendency to correct the abuses of the ballot, North and South, East and West.

The Southern question can find no better solution than in the rigid enforcement of the law at the ballot-box, and while such rigid enforcement of the laws in the election of all public officers may call for time and be beset with serious difficulties at the outset, there can be no question of the constitutional right of Congress to enact laws for the fair election of Congressmen from every State in the Union. It will be for the Fifty-first Congress to determine whether or not it will assume this grave responsibility.

No one could entertain kindlier feelings toward the South than the present writer, but it seems time to cast aside the fear of encountering the hackneyed reproach of "waving the bloody shirt" that is made whenever the question of Southern election methods is raised. The issue to face is not a sectional one. It is the issue

squarely and honestly made in debate by Senator Eustis, of Louisiana, on the floor of the Senate Chamber. Practically, his words amounted to this declaration: Gentlemen of the North, we admit what you say about Southern elections, and we think well enough of you to believe that you would act as we act under similar circumstances.

Would we act likewise under similar circumstances? If we cannot accept this imputation we cannot continue to tacitly endorse it by failing to protect the rights of every lawful voter.

Let us hope that the time is near at hand when the South will lay aside its prejudices and cease to pervert the powers restored to it by a generous nation. There is no more auspicious omen in American politics to-day than the growing resistance in all parties, North and South, to the theories and practices of Bourbon domination.

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TWO NEW YORK STATES.

THE question is here submitted, rather than discussed, whether the respective interests of New York City, New York State, and the country at large do not imperatively demand that the State of New York be divided into two States ?

If the proposition be first considered in its political aspects, few of those who take an active part in public affairs will dismiss it hastily. Certain facts, that seem to have been the more widely ignored as their meaning was plainer, must, in the light of this special inquiry, become sufficiently glaring to attract general attention. It will then be found that they are peculiarly suggestive, and that further indifference to their teachings may be pregnant with consequences that the City, the State and the Nation would have good cause to deplore.

The first of these facts is the regular oscillation of the Empire State, every four years, from one political pole to the other. In the last twenty years six Presidential elections have been held, and not once did New York cast its vote in favor of the candidate of the party which it had sustained in the previous contest. Republican in 1864 and Democratic in 1868, Republican in 1872 and Democratic in 1876, Republican in 1880 and Democratic in 1884, this State, with the mechanical precision of a pendulum, swung back to the Republican side in 1888.

In all instances but two the majority, or plurality, was an insignificant fraction of the total vote cast in the State. It was less than one per cent. in 1864, a trifle over one per cent. in 1868, 1.90 per cent. in 1880, less than one-tenth of one per cent. in 1884, and about one per cent. in 1888. The first exception was in 1872, when the State of New York, that had given Seymour a majority of ten thousand over Grant in 1868, gave Grant, then far less popular than at the time of his first election, a majority of fifty-two thousand over Greeley.

But this result, as everybody knows, was chiefly brought about by the abstention of many democrats ; for the total vote