

## ARE THE BOSSES STRONGER THAN THE PEOPLE?



NOTHING can be clearer than that boss government, as it is administered in several of our States to-day, is destructive of popular government. It concentrates in one man, as soon as it reaches perfection, all the powers of the State, executive, legislative, and judicial, and this man is not chosen by the people for the position. He is an autocrat, or despot, by self-election. He obtains his power by means which are not only not authorized by the people, but have been declared by them in their laws to be criminal. He rules by money corruptly raised and corruptly used. He extorts blackmail from corporations which fear his power, and with it he solidifies and extends that power. He goes with his money into the primaries and nominating conventions, and buys away from the people the selection of candidates for office, thus corrupting popular government at its source. His favor and his money are powerful enough to elect his candidates to office, and powerful enough to prevent the nomination of all whom he dislikes. He thus fills the public service with men whom he has bought to serve him rather than the State; and they seldom or never fail him, for a man who is willing to accept a nomination for office under such conditions is not likely to be squeamish about his official conduct after election.

The system acts, in fact, as a complete bar to men of character for the public service, and as a magnet for those of dull or lax morality. The blackmail revenue of a boss has done for the latter what their own ability and energy would never have accomplished, and they look naturally to him and his resources as the true source of power, and the only one to be feared. This accounts for the extraordinary indifference of a boss-controlled legislature to public opinion. Its members know that they owe their positions entirely to the boss; that the people who are objecting to their conduct would never have chosen them for office; and that their continuance in public life depends upon the continuance of the boss's favor. They know that when the time for a renomination comes round their critics will have little or no voice in the primaries, and that the black-

mail of the boss will be the deciding force. Every aspirant for political honors, be it for a membership of the legislature, or for a governorship or a judgeship, knows that without the favor of the boss he has no hope; and he cannot obtain that favor without giving assurances that, when elected, he will follow the wishes of the boss. Slowly but surely the boss extends his system till he gets possession of all the functions of the government. He gets control of the executive and the legislative first, and later of the judiciary, and then his deadly clutch upon popular sovereignty is complete. We have had instances in more than one State, during the past year, of the fatal advance upon this final stronghold. Not only has the boss been able to make the legislature and the governor do his bidding in the face of all opposition, while committing assaults upon the people in denying them their right to a voice in the conduct of their own affairs, but he has been able to get from the courts, because of new accessions to their benches of men whose nomination has been due to his favor, opinions which have sustained him in some of his most deadly attacks upon constitutional government. If the bench shall really fall into the clutches of the blackmailing boss, popular government will cease to exist in the State over which he rules.

Why are the bosses so much more open and audacious in their doings than they used to be, and why are the people so submissive? The answer to both these questions is the same. There is in most boss-ridden States to-day no longer a desirable alternative for the people. Both parties have bosses, and when the people overthrow one they fall into the clutches of another who is no better, and may be worse. Then, too, the bosses have come to the conclusion that they cannot afford to let reformers get into power, because honest administration of public office is death to the boss system of government, and they now join hands for mutual protection whenever an attack is made upon one of them. The weaker will help the stronger to get into power rather than allow reformers to succeed. This has been the most notable development of the past year. The spoilsmen, or boss followers, of both great political parties have reached the conclusion that



they have been paying too much attention to the demands of reformers, especially in regard to civil-service reform, and they are combining not only for mutual welfare in the future, but to undo, if possible, the harm to their interests which has been caused by concessions in the past. This is, of course, the old «deal,» which has been familiar in all our large cities for many years, but it is now applied on a larger scale than ever before. It was applied several years ago in an election in Philadelphia, when the spoilsmen of both parties united on a select band of rascals among their two sets of candidates, and elected them as a «dose for the high-toners,» or reformers. If the spoilsmen had divided on party lines the reform ticket would have won. Something of the same sort has been done in New York State in more than one Presidential election, and it was done also in the last election in Chicago. Wherever this combination of the opponents of good government is made, it is found of late to be nearly or quite irresistible, and hence its growing popularity with the bosses. If they can show that the reformers can be defied with safety, they will defy them as constantly in future as they have in several States during the past year.

The main purpose of this boss combination is to regain possession of the offices by either repealing or nullifying the civil-service reform laws. All bosses have discovered that without the offices it is difficult to keep their machines in good running order, even with large amounts of blackmail money. They do not enjoy possession of the government unless they can fill its service with their own men. They believe that they made an unnecessary blunder when they allowed the civil-service reform laws to pass. As everybody knows, these laws were, in nearly every instance, passed by one party for the purpose of putting the other party «in a hole.» Then, too, neither party believed at the time of their passage that the laws would ever be rigidly enforced. Neither did they foresee the advent of a man like President Cleveland, who would extend the system to such comprehensive limits. They now see that in trying to injure each other they have lost possession of what both desire most of all, and they are determined to recover the loss if possible. Whatever else they do in future, they are determined not to allow desire to spite each other to lead them into concessions to reformers. We can exist, they say, under a spoils government which either one of us may conduct; but neither of us can

long maintain power if the principle of honest administration, or the principle of the merit system, becomes firmly and thoroughly established. It is true also that the swift alternations of political power from one party to another during recent years has created among the spoilsmen of both parties a disposition «to make hay while the sun shines,» to look only to present advantage, without regard to future consequences. We are in power now, they say; let us get as much as possible out of it, and trust to luck about the future. No boss really cares for the perpetuation of his party, or for its continued triumph. What absorbs him is his personal advantage, and that of his family and favorites. If he can get rich himself, or enable his sons and relatives to get rich, with a few years of power, he cares very little about what becomes of his party. The lack of an alternative for reformers in the opposite party sustains him in this policy. He knows that if he is put out of power the bad conduct of his rival boss will bring him back again to power within a few years. The only really vital point to him is to keep the spoils system of government from destruction.

Will the American people consent to allow this condition of things to become permanent? Will they permit government by blackmail and corruption to be substituted for government by the people? «There is one thing which is worse than corruption,» says Lecky, in his «Democracy and Liberty,» «and that is acquiescence in corruption. No feature of American life strikes a stranger so powerfully as the extraordinary indifference, partly cynicism and partly good nature, with which notorious frauds and notorious corruption in the sphere of politics are viewed by American public opinion.» So long as this indifference of public opinion continues, just so long will the bosses rule. The cause of all the trouble is neglect of the duties of citizenship. It is this which enables the bosses to gain possession of the government, and it is this which enables them to continue in possession after the corrupt source of their power has been revealed. There is only one remedy, and that is resumption of the duties of citizenship. If we desire to have our public affairs managed in an honest and intelligent manner, we must take the trouble to bear our part in their management. The bosses will not conduct them as we wish them to, save on compulsion, and we have been too indifferent or too indolent to exert that compulsion. Occasionally we pass a law designed to put



an end to some of the worst forms of corruption, and then sit back and wait for it to enforce itself. When it does not do this we despair of popular government, and doubt whether it is really worth while to attempt to do anything to save it.

When the Australian ballot system was adopted, its advocates had great hopes of the usefulness of the privilege of making nominations by petition which was embodied in all the new laws. It was thought that as a menace over the regular party primaries this would have an excellent effect upon the character of nominations. So it would have had, had it been made use of; but public opinion has been so indolent that very little use has been made of it. When the corrupt-practice laws were passed in fifteen or more of our States, it was thought that they would have great influence in restraining and exposing corruption in elections. So they would, had they been enforced; but public opinion has allowed them in nearly all cases to remain virtually inoperative upon the statute-books. It is useless to hope for better things until we can get a more vigilant and alert public opinion in operation than we have had in recent years. The bosses show us the way. They combine and work unceasingly for bad government. The friends, not merely of good government, but of free government, in all political parties must combine and work with equal zeal and persistence for what they desire.

The large cities afford the best field for work of this kind, and in them beginnings of

the right kind have been made. The most effective method is the enrolment of all voters who favor good city government without regard to party considerations. This should secure in every voting district a compact body of men who should be of great service in many ways. They should hold themselves in readiness to make nominations by petition of men who will regard city interests above national party interests. They should make it their duty to enforce all corrupt-practice laws, and to get those laws strengthened wherever they are defective. They would thus become an engine for good government which would awaken and educate public opinion, and make it a growing power before which the boss system would steadily and surely crumble away.

This is a commonplace and laborious remedy, but it is the only one. There is only one way by which we can get good government, and that is to work for it, not only one year, but every year, and to work for it harder than the bosses and their followers do. All remedies which have been devised for the cure of the ills which flow from neglect of the duties of citizenship have failed, and all those which may be devised hereafter will fail also. If our patriotism, our faith in popular government, and our desire for its success be not sufficient to induce us to bear our part in the work of carrying it forward properly, then it will fail, and the blame for its failure will rest no more upon the blackmailing bosses than upon ourselves.

*Joseph B. Bishop.*

## THE SUNRISE OF THE POOR.

A DARKENED hut, outlined against the sky,  
 A forward-sloping field, some cedar trees,  
 Gaunt grasses, stirred by the awaking breeze,  
 And nearer, where the grayer shadows lie,  
 Within a small, paled square, one may descry  
 The beds wherein the poor first taste of ease,  
 Where dewy rose-vines shed their spicy lees  
 Above the dreamless ashes, silently.

A lonely woman leans there, bent and gray,  
 Outlined in part against the shadowed hill,  
 In part against the sky, in which the day  
 Begins to blaze—O earth, so sweet, so still!  
 The woman sighs, and draws a long, deep breath:  
 It is the call to labor, not to death.

*Robert Burns Wilson.*