



## TOPICS OF THE TIME

### A Call for Home Patriotism.

THE new year ought to be a memorable one in the work of municipal reform throughout the United States. The passing of the Presidential election, with its momentous issue, leaves the field clear everywhere for the undistracted consideration of questions which are rather local than national, and into which partizan politics should not be permitted to enter. New York City will have to decide in November whether it will go ahead with its experiment in non-partizan administration, or will slide back into the slough of Tammany misrule. Its conduct will be watched eagerly by other cities, and if the verdict shall be in favor of progress, a fresh impulse toward good government will be felt in every municipality of the land.

New York can now be looked to with profit by other cities for guidance in the work of good city government. The two years of her reform administration have accomplished one remarkable result, and many others that are valuable. The one success which overshadows all others is that of Colonel Waring in the Street-cleaning Department. For the first time in the history of the country we have a great American city whose streets are as well cleaned as those of any other city in the world. One of the most common and most humiliating charges against municipal government in this country is thus wiped out so far as our chief city is concerned. In securing this advance for us, Colonel Waring has done something even more important than to clean and keep clean the pavements of New York streets. He has shown the whole country that the most efficient kind of public service is that which has no «politics» in it. Every great city in the country had for years a street-cleaning force under the control of politics, but in no city were the streets cleaned. Colonel Waring constructed his force on new principles; he defied politics and politicians; was obliged to face bitter opposition and persistent misrepresentation because of his defiance; but he won in the end, and succeeded in doing what no «practical politician» had ever done. Herein was a victory for the «theoretical reformer» which no man can gainsay. Furthermore, while doing this he organized a force which has become a cause of public pride. Before his advent no public servant was more despicable than a street-sweeper. Now he is a self-respecting member of a uniformed force which marches in annual parade through Fifth Avenue, and is displayed with the Fire Department to distinguished foreign visitors as one of the institutions in which the city takes pride. The men feel that they are their own masters, that they hold their positions because they are fit for them, and that so long as they do their work well no political boss can harm them. In other words, freedom from political interference has made men of them, and they do their work like men, and not like slaves.

The lesson to be drawn from this is twofold. In the first place, the best municipal service is that which is

thoroughly dis severed from politics; in the second place, the best results can be achieved only by a single responsible head in a municipal department. All observers agree, for example, that if Theodore Roosevelt had been the sole head of the Police Department instead of one of four commissioners, and had had as full administrative powers as Colonel Waring possesses, he would have given New York a model police force to accompany its street-cleaning force. He and his reforming associates have accomplished a great deal as it is, but they have been hampered seriously by the defective system under which they have had to work.

Back of all stands the lesson which cannot be too often enforced, that the only way in which to get model city government is to take the government of all our cities permanently out of politics—not for two years or three years, but for all time. New York has accomplished what she has by one step in this direction. If she does not follow it with a second step in November, much of the gain will disappear in a twelvemonth. Her short and fleeting taste of really civilized rule will be largely replaced by the old barbaric reign of incompetence, corruption, and political «pulls.» What must be had is not the service of a man like Colonel Waring for three years, but for life. In other words, we must have here what they have in the best-governed cities of Europe: permanent tenure for all the more important heads of municipal departments, and promotions on merit and fitness alone. In that way we shall always have in training for municipal service men who are competent to fill vacancies at the top, and to carry forward the work of government without a break. In that way, also, we shall shut and bar forever the door against the entrance of partizan politics.

In this struggle to put the government of our cities upon a thoroughgoing business basis, great progress ought to be made during the present year and the others that are to follow it, while we have a lull in national politics. Chicago, under her reform administration, has made great progress already, and is certain to make more, for a genuine public spirit has been aroused there by the Civic Federation, which has secured the thorough application of civil-service reform principles, and is exerting itself constantly to cultivate a militant civic pride throughout the city. Similar organizations ought to be formed, and indeed have been formed, in other cities, and good results are certain to follow their exertions. Let us have all over the country a genuine revival, a national awakening of home patriotism, directed at the abolition of ignorant and dishonest rule from all our cities, and in this way make the year 1897 a memorable one in our annals.

### As Others See Us.

WHY is it that foreign newspapers almost habitually accept as accurate the most unfavorable views which reach them of Americans and American affairs and doings? American readers of foreign newspapers know

this to be the case, and are a good deal puzzled by it. Especially is it true of London journals. Many of these seem to be eager for news which represents this country as the land of extraordinary people and extraordinary occurrences. They revel in accounts of cyclones, of earthquakes, and of appalling railway disasters. Nothing strikes them as too unusual to be credited. The editor of a London daily who received the following cable message from his New York correspondent in August last published it in serene confidence that it was a truthful statement of facts:

Still the heat continues, and the odor of the charnel-house reigns over the city. From hundreds of decomposing human bodies and from the rotting carcasses of horses there exhales a stench that is positively sickening. Added to this horror is an epidemic of rabies. Mad dogs are running about the streets, and already more than a score of children have been bitten. The mortality due to the heat yesterday totals up 85 persons.

This was almost pure invention. If a New York editor had received from London a message ascribing such a condition of affairs to that city, he would not have accepted it as truthful. Why should a London editor be less skeptical about the probability of such things existing in New York? We are known to be a civilized community, and it is reasonable to suppose that a civilized city of a million and a half of inhabitants would have a government capable of removing dead bodies and checking the running of mad dogs through its streets. Why should not a London editor consider this when confronted with «news» like the above?

Similar credulity is shown by English journals in American political matters. The tendency almost invariably is to believe that the worst side has the best chance of winning. There must be reasons for this state of mind in regard to us as a people. Nations, like individuals, make their own reputations, and we must have a hand in making ours. Undoubtedly the long-standing view of us as an enormous country with an enormous mixed population is responsible for much of the foreign misunderstanding of us, but it does not account for all of it. For many years all the books which visitors to this country wrote about us were given up mainly to more or less exaggerated, and often largely imaginary, accounts of our peculiarities; but this is no longer the case. Most of the information which reaches the Old World in this manner nowadays is intelligent, and is calculated to depict us in our true character.

Can we be said to serve ourselves as fairly as others serve us? The two chief sources to which foreign observers look for manifestations of our civilization and progress are our press and our public men. This must be the case with every nation. Are these two reflections of our national life such always as to command high respect for our general culture, our self-restraint, our high-minded sense of justice, our broad conception of international obligations? It has been said that every nation has the kind of press that it deserves, that its newspapers reflect the tastes and mirror the intellectual standards of its people. We cannot expect to be made an exception in the general judgment of the world; and if many of our great journals place trivialities, scandal, and crime in most conspicuous position in their columns, thus assuming that American readers like that kind of news best of all, how can we complain when foreign ob-

servers accept the assumption as accurate? If some of our statesmen and politicians assume habitually a bullying tone of contempt for foreign opinion, if they habitually make light of expert knowledge, express contempt for trained intelligence, treat such grave matters as the public credit and national honor with indifference, how can we complain if foreign observers say that as a people we care little for all those things?

It is worth while to consider these matters seriously. The English editor who published the telegram about the condition of affairs in New York City had been in the habit of seeing American newspapers arrive in every mail with their columns filled with accounts of crime of one kind and another, and with groups of criminal events headed «Carnivals of Crime.» Such prominence and profusion of this kind of news in an English or other European newspaper would have meant a virtually lawless condition of society in the city in which the crime was placed. What more natural than for an editor who had been accustomed to this kind of news about New York to accept the rumors about mad dogs and dead bodies as not a bit improbable?

There is one trait of our national character which foreigners can never comprehend, and that is our unshakable faith in our ability to «come out all right in the end.» We stand idly and more or less indifferently by, and allow the country to be pushed to the verge of a financial or political precipice under the impulse of some kind of popular craze or another, entirely confident that just before it slips over we can take hold of it and pull it back. We have done this again and again, and nothing seems to shake our faith in our ability to repeat the operation whenever occasion arises. It costs us enormously, not only in reputation, but also in money, and retards our growth and progress in a thousand ways; but nothing seems likely to cure us of the habit, unless it be a great national calamity due to our failing in some crisis to take alarm quickly enough.

We must not say this much without adding that English periodicals are beginning to see the necessity of better reports both of current events in America and of the great movements of reform of various kinds that are continually being carried to successful conclusions in this country. The grotesque and sensational will doubtless not fail to have an undue share of attention on the part of the foreign, as it has with the native, press; but the deeper life of the people, the quiet, home-making, conservative, self-respecting, uplifting forces in American civilization, will not be forgotten or underrated.

#### A «Law-Regarding Race.»

We have heard it said of a great English poet that he was always disappointing his admirers. It may be remarked of the great American republic that it is always disappointing its enemies. A campaign such as that through which we have recently passed, marked by such intense mental excitement and harshness of language, ought in all reason to have been accompanied by physical violence. There were, it is true, rumors of eggs thrown—that seemed to hit no one; occasionally speakers were interrupted. There was some horse-play, doubtless; but where were the shootings and riots that ought to have been reported from all parts of a country