

# EDITORIAL

## CHICAGO AND GALVESTON

### A VITAL QUESTION OF CIVILIZATION

HOW DESTRUCTIVE FORCES GAIN CONTROL OF A CONVENTIONAL CITY ORGANIZATION —  
PRESIDENT ELIOT OF HARVARD ON THE "PURE BUSINESS" OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT.

THE first article in this magazine is a study of the trade of dissipation in Chicago—its amazing revenues, its power, and the simple and unavoidable steps through which it moves to atrophy government and break down our civilization. Conditions similar in principle—though not, of course, identical in every detail of arrangement—exist in all great American cities. Generally the forces concerned work in the dark. Occasionally—as in Minneapolis and San Francisco—they appear at the surface in some violent and scandalous outbreak which startles the continent. Then they are forgotten. But they never cease their operation.

It must never be forgotten, in the discussion of bad politics, that its motives and impulses are purely financial. It is a matter of business; and this fact furnishes the one clear clue which leads throughout its many and complicated transactions. Now, there are obviously just two ways of making illegitimate money out of a city: by robbery—either direct, or indirect, through criminal conspiracy in the sale of franchises; or by trading in the profitable right to break the law.

Mr. Turner makes no attempt whatever in his article on Chicago to treat either the robbery of the city by corrupt officials, or the operations of the evil financial interests engaged in stealing franchises. He turns his entire attention to the older, greater, and more dangerous interests which lie at the foundation of the ugly structure of bad politics. These interests of dissipation keep alive continually the working organization—a matter which no other interest could afford to undertake. The organization furnishes exactly the kind of officials who rob cities; it furnishes exactly the kind of accomplices that the franchise stealer must have inside of the city government, to carry out his plans of robbery.

Together, all these interests form one great association of the exploiters of communities. There are bankers and lawyers and great corporation managers in this, as well as gamblers and brothel keepers and thieves. Many of the members of the more respectable class probably never admit to themselves the position in which they really are. But the impelling motive of all is the same,—the desire to make an illegitimate profit at the expense of the people. And the alliances and methods necessary to secure their aim bind all together in one body of people, who may be called the sellers of civilization.

Why has this great business of confederation been continuously successful in American cities? Because it has been able to organize in their political machinery a perfectly businesslike and direct way of obtaining its ends. It has reached straight through ward and city politics to its object. The people, in the meanwhile, working indirectly through a complex and irresponsible governmental machine, have been unable to make their will effective. They have had a less immediate control of their own government than their exploiters.

In the October number of McClure's, Mr. Turner told the story of Galveston, Texas, a city which had framed a form of government, through which the will of the people could be directly expressed. This month, in his story of Chicago, he gives a picture of the old form of government,—the organization by wards,—grown to an evil maturity. The contrast points out graphically the greatest political question before the country to-day: Shall city government be simplified, clarified, made at once intelligible and responsible to the people; or shall it be left in a form which gives the exploiters of the public a more direct hold upon its functions than the public themselves? This question—as Mr. Turner's article shows—strikes deeper than the mere administration

of a city's financial affairs. It concerns the very existence of our civilization.

Any portrayal of the individual tragedies resulting from the conditions in Chicago would obviously be impossible within the limits of a magazine's space. That they exist by tens of thousands will be recognized at once by every reader of Mr. Turner's story. The huge machine for the consumption of young flesh — for the conversion of boys into vagrants and thieves, and girls into prostitutes — grinds on continually; and each person fed into it has an individual story of horror and disgust. But the entire effort in this article has been to produce a clear and simple statement of fact and to let this statement make its own arraignment.

It is interesting in this connection to chronicle the further growth in favor of the Galveston idea throughout the United States. The Texas cities — at the time of the writing of this — are pushing their bills for commission government through their legislature. In the Kansas and Wisconsin legislatures measures have been introduced providing for the government of cities of a certain size by commissions like that of Galveston; and a large number of individual cities throughout the country are considering charters for themselves along the line of the Galveston idea. Memphis, which for twenty-five years prospered under a form of commission government, but which lost it two years ago through political influence, has a bill in the Tennessee legislature to adopt the Galveston plan, with every chance of passing. The people of Memphis expressed their preference for a return to commission government last fall by a majority of three to one.

Public discussions of this form of government are going on through the entire country — especial interest being shown in the cities of New England. No more illuminating treatment of the subject of city government has been given in this country than that of President Charles Eliot of Harvard University, when he spoke in approval of the Galveston idea, before a meeting of the Economic Club of Boston, held to discuss that subject last January. Sections of this remarkable speech follow:

I am sure that if you have not read it you will be interested in reading in *McCLURE'S MAGAZINE* an article by Mr. Turner on "City Government by Commission in Galveston." He suggested the

preparation of that article himself and wrote it. I feel personally indebted to him and to the magazine for giving me an excellent picture of that very remarkable experiment in municipal government.

"We have an advantage in New England. We have seen and known for centuries an almost perfect form of municipal government, — the town government. Cannot we get back to that with modifications? I should prefer to call what we seek "government by selectmen." That is exactly what we want. How many selectmen are there in a good Massachusetts town to-day? Three. Now, the city is larger than the town; we might ask for seven selectmen to govern, if you please, the City of Boston.

Municipal government is pure business and nothing else — absolutely nothing else. To the performance of business functions in an intelligent and honest manner, the notion of representation by districts of population has no application, no sensible application. Therefore, the whole structure of our municipal governments in two representative chambers, the Senate and the House of Representatives, is entirely false in theory. It always has been, and its dead failure is the result of the fact that it had no sound theoretical basis. There is no representation of that sort needed, and the ward basis or the basis of the geographical lines of these thirty municipalities within ten miles of our State House, such bases as those have no intelligent foundation, even from the point of view of representation. We imagine a citizen of a Boston ward having some particular interest in the condition of the street in front of his house, and he needs to have a representative to urge those interests; but, gentlemen, the interest of that citizen in the condition of the street in front of his house is as nothing compared to his interest in all the highways of the entire Metropolitan district, his means of getting about, himself, and his means of getting his freight about the entire body of roads or area of roads, highways, bridges, etc., in that district swept by the ten-mile radius from the State House. Even if his interest is to be represented, it is really an interest in the whole thing, not in a little bit of it.

Now, how are we going to get business men of capacity and honesty to transact this pure business of a city? We have got to have but few of them, to begin with, so that they can be held responsible, just as we have got now a school commission of five in the City of Boston, and we know what kind of work they are doing, and we know who is responsible for it. We have got to have men who know enough to put all the business of the city in the hands of experts. That is the very first sign of intelligence in a business man, nowadays, that he puts all his executive work into the hands of experts, and we shall never get good results in our cities until that principle absolutely prevails in the conduct of all city business.

I think we see a brighter day dawning. We have got down very low in regard to our municipal governments, and we have got dark days here now, but we can see a light breaking, and one of the lights broke in Galveston. . . . What it needs, that the light may grow and get to full noon, is that the people, the great body of the people, should be convinced that municipal government means nothing but good, intelligent conduct of business.