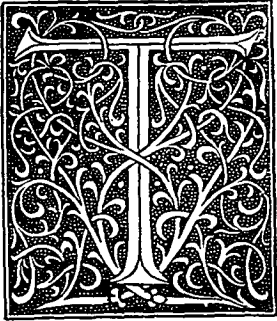


The Higher Life of American Cities

By Theodore Roosevelt

Under this general title *The Outlook* will publish a series of illustrated articles on that part of the life of typical American cities which concerns united Christian and philanthropic work, the development of the Good Government idea and municipal reform of every kind, the efforts for a more wholesome and attractive home life for the people, and the extension of library, musical, and educational facilities. This introductory article by Mr. Roosevelt will be followed by an article on "The Higher Life of Chicago," by Mr. Melville E. Stone, Manager of the Associated Press; one on New York, by Dr. Albert Shaw, of the "Review of Reviews;" on Boston, by the Rev. Edward Everett Hale, D.D.; on New Orleans, by Miss Grace King; on Philadelphia, by Mr. Talcott Williams; and on St. Louis, by the Rev. John Snyder.



THE first lesson to be learned by every citizen who desires to bring about a higher life in our American cities is that he must take an active part in managing the affairs of his own city. He has got to take some little trouble to do this, but if he is worth his salt, and possesses that healthy combativeness which ought to be aroused in every decent man by the insolence of evil, he will soon find municipal politics extremely interesting.

After he has helped inaugurate some philanthropic movement, or helped conduct two or three checked campaigns, whether to carry through a particular measure of civic reform, to beat a particular rascal in public life, or to prevent other rascals from beating some given honest man, he will probably grow to feel that the duty of doing his share of the work of self-government has a pleasant side.

Such a citizen must keep steadily before him the fact that if he is going to accomplish anything of merit he must, on the one hand, keep a high ideal, and, on the other, remember always the words of Abraham Lincoln, and strive, when he cannot obtain the best, to obtain the best possible, instead of, through folly and vanity, choosing the worst.

The man must work, and not merely talk about working, or criticize workers. To sit at home, read one's favorite paper, and scoff at the misdeeds of the men who do things is easy, but is markedly ineffective. It is what evil men count upon the good men's doing; and hitherto there has been this justification for such a belief among bad men—namely, that, as a rule, the corrupt men have been perfectly content to let their opponents monopolize all the virtue, while they themselves have been permitted to monopolize all the efficiency. Rather than sit at home alone and do nothing, it is better that the friend of decent government should go out and meet other men who think as he does, and combine with them; but let him remember here also, that though occasionally good is done when two or three hundred excellent gentlemen of refined tastes meet in a parlor and listen to papers on city government, yet this is not in itself by any means sufficient. We need such work, and real good is accomplished by doing it; but it is ineffective if not supplemented by work of an entirely different kind. The man who in the long run will count for most in bettering municipal life is the man who actually steps down into the hurly-burly, who is not frightened by the sweat and the blood and the blows of friends and foes; who "haunts not the fringed edges of the fight, but the pell-mell of men." He must meet foes as well as friends, and, above all, he must get accustomed to acting with men who may be persuaded to work with him for a common object, but whose ideas are not identical with his own.

There are many different ways in which a man or a woman can work for the higher life of American cities, and it would be worse than folly to expect the one who can do most in a certain line to devote an equal amount of attention to another line. The field opened to intelligent philanthropy is almost boundless, and is continually widened by the antics of the unintelligent philanthropist. A very great field is opened to the man or woman devoted to educational reform. The published studies of Mr. Jacob Riis show what almost infinite labor could be expended with

profit by those willing to devote a portion of their time to bettering the material conditions of life for the bulk of the populations of our large cities. The improvement of tenement-houses; the establishment of many small parks, of free libraries, baths, concerts, and picture shows; the larger development of the noble work now done by the social, college, and university settlements; in short, all movements in the interest of making the life of the day-laborer in our cities less onerous and more wholesome—these are subjects which may well claim the attention of all those who would advance the higher life of American cities.

The special and peculiar work—of constantly growing importance—now played by women, is a department to be treated by itself; so also the part played by clergymen.

There are not a few reforms so important that it would be hard to speak of any as pre-eminently necessary; but at least it can be said that there is greater room for reform in our political life than almost anywhere else. There are shortcomings enough and to spare on all sides; but compared to the proper standard we fall further below in politics than in almost any other branch of our life or labor. Moreover, political life is something in which every man, indeed every woman, should take an active and intelligent interest. There is no other reform for which the entire population should work, or indeed could work; but every man, worth being an American citizen at all, is bound, if he does his duty, to try to do his part in politics. The life of the home, the man's relation as husband and father, the woman's as wife and mother—these are all that should come before our political life. In the long run, no amount of material prosperity, no commercial success, can atone for the debasement of public life, for the lowering of political ideals.

Our politics have been in many ways so bad that it is necessary to go back to basic principles and to teach what should be elementary truths. To the first of these truths I have already alluded. Every man must work. In the long run it is the doer of deeds, not the critic, who counts. Again, he must work conscientiously. Not many years ago a then famous politician declared that the Decalogue and the Golden Rule had no place in political life. The flippant cynicism of such a statement commended it to a certain order of cheap intelligence; but, as a matter of fact, the first thing to be learned by any man who proposes to do decent work is that the Decalogue and Golden Rule have precisely the same place in public as in private life, and that until a man believes in applied morality he is certain to be a merely noxious public servant. Whether a man is a party man or an independent, he must, if a good citizen, make honesty the first requisite in a public officer, and must refuse to support any man who is not honest. Moreover, his virtue must not be of the milk-and-water kind, if he is going to do good work politically. If he does not possess the virile virtues, courage, hardiness, resolution; if he is not willing to give good blows and receive them, he cannot expect to accomplish anything of permanent good. In the third place, he must possess common sense. If he allows the friends of bad government to monopolize the intelligence of the community, he is going to get beaten most certainly.

The recent municipal election in New York shows this; for New York has been but a type of American cities in many ways, and, I regret to say, in no way more markedly than in the low tone of its municipal government. It has also been a typical American city in its occasional spasms of virtuous action. It is owing to one of these spasms that it

now has a clean and decent administration of public affairs. But, unless honest men grow to learn that their interest in public affairs must be habitual and not spasmodic, and unless they learn further that when they do take habitual interest in what goes on in the city, they must show ordinary intelligence and common sense, no less than conscientiousness, all we can expect is what has been aptly called an occasional insurrection of virtue.

In 1894, by a combination of good citizens of all parties supporting a ticket which contained representatives of all parties, the corrupt ring government of the city was overthrown. In the following year this same corrupt ring triumphed. Its triumph was partly due to antagonisms aroused by a course of action which will be touched upon toward the end of this article. But it was in part due to the silliness of many excellent people, who could not see that it was worse than foolish to throw back the city into the hands of evil men because they themselves had ideas of civic morality so advanced that the mass of good men had not yet come to understand them. Most students of political life are a unit in their belief that municipal politics should be divorced from National or State politics, and many practical politicians of the better sort are inclined to agree with them. An immense mass of good people have not yet grown to understand this. There are plenty of Democrats and Republicans who will vote for a mixed ticket of honest and decent Democrats and Republicans, against a straight ticket of their own party machine, but who will not vote as yet for a ticket composed of men with whom their own party has nothing to do. It would be a good day for New York if its citizens, in municipal matters, would positively decline to take into account whether a man was a Democrat or a Republican. The way to bring this day about is obviously to get men accustomed to voting indiscriminately for Democrats and Republicans, if they are decent men. Such a ticket was put up in New York in 1895. Against it stood the old ring ticket, the ticket of that organization whose name has become the synonym of political corruption in every civilized town, so much so that when Carlyle, in writing of the Norsemen, wished to speak of a certain stage of unwholesome politics, he naturally turned for purposes of illustrative comparison to Tammany Hall. Every consideration of sound political morality dictated the hearty support of the ticket opposed to Tammany Hall. Nevertheless, a large number of the men who had been leaders in the effort to work the political regeneration of the city either declined to support this ticket in its entirety, or even supported some other of the various small tickets which are always run in every political contest. The effect of that action was to confuse the minds of many good voters. They failed to see clearly what the issue was, and for the most part did not vote at all. Many other men who, if the friends of decency had presented a united front, would have been shamed into supporting them, gladly took advantage of their division to support Tammany Hall. Yet other men announced that they would support certain names, but not all, the natural result being that the friends of the candidates whom these men did not support busied themselves industriously in knifing the candidates whom they did. The result was the defeat of the fusion ticket.

It would be difficult to wish a more excellent object-lesson upon the need of what may be called "team-play" in politics. There must be some loyalty and some organization among good men, or they are at the mercy of the bad. It is impossible that a thousand intelligent men can ever nominate a ticket every name on which will be acceptable to every one of the thousand men. But, if they are going to accomplish anything, they have got to support the ticket solidly. It is very necessary that the managers of the machine should understand that decent men will not tolerate dishonest action on their part, and stand ready to bolt any ticket if such action is rendered necessary by considerations of decency and morality. It is no less necessary, however, that it should be understood that this action of bolting is not normal, but is to be resorted to only when fully justified; and this applies quite as much to bolting a fusion ticket representing the best thought of the decent

men of both parties as to bolting a regular party ticket in State or National affairs. In every case where a man bolts he does a certain amount of damage, if only by weakening his influence for good with the organization which he leaves, and he should always consider this and make up his mind whether the amount of good he does in some given case will or will not be outweighed by the impending evil. As a matter of fact, he will find that circumstances continually arise in which the conflicting elements have different weight, so that it would be right for him to bolt at one time and wrong for him to bolt at another. In the present instance serious harm was done, and, so far as any unprejudiced observer can see, not a particle of good accomplished. Many Republicans and Democrats who were reluctant to enter into any combination with one another found their views strengthened, and it will be a difficult matter to prevent them from running straight tickets in the future. If they do run such straight tickets the fault will rest primarily with those who failed to support the fusion ticket this year.

Above I alluded to one of the elements of weakness in the reform movement this year. By this I meant the alienation of a certain number of voters because of the attitude of the administration in honestly enforcing the laws. This brings me to the final branch of my subject.

Those who have read Dr. Shaw's excellent book on "Municipal Government in England," and who know anything of American municipal life, must have been struck by the extraordinary civic systems which seem to work so well in the English municipalities. Speaking roughly, and translating the English terminology into our own, it may be said that many of these municipalities are ruled by elective Boards of Aldermen which have absolute power of appointing and removing all the officers of the government. Imagine the condition of New York or Chicago if its Board of Aldermen could appoint and remove all the heads of departments and all subordinates! The wildest corruption of the days of Tweed would be surpassed if we introduced this feature of the English municipal system. There are various facts, especially those connected with the suffrage, which tend to produce an entirely different working of the system in England; but the great reason why the system works well there is that the men who administer it are honest and have traditions of good government behind them, and because the laws are enforced as a matter of course. Socially, the English cities make a much worse showing than ours as regards certain kinds of brutality and vice; but in official honesty they are far and away our superiors. In our American municipalities there are certain changes of law which should be made; but no change of the law will go to the root of the matter. We have got to have honest officials to administer the laws, and the laws themselves must be administered honestly and impartially before there can be any permanent betterment in our conditions of municipal life.

As to the first point, the need of honest officials, every one admits it theoretically; the trouble is we have got to insist upon the admission being practical. As a corollary to it we must insist upon all of the minor officials whose duties are merely ministerial being appointed purely for their merits, and being retained exactly as long as they do their duty well. Until we take it as a matter of course that a policeman, or a laborer on the public works, or a clerk in the Dock Department, is appointed purely because of capacity, and is retained without regard to his politics just so long as he does his duty faithfully, we cannot expect to get proper service from the Departments.

But, above all, public officers must enforce the laws. This, again, is one of those basic principles about which it seems hardly possible to argue. It is hard indeed for a man who is both honest and intelligent to tolerate the attitude of those men who deliberately claim the right to violate the laws and who demand that the sworn officials of the Government connive at such violation. Yet such was the attitude of an immense number of voters at the last election in New York City. Such was the attitude of many of the newspapers, even of those that were ostensibly anti-Tammany; and it was on this issue of the dishonest enforce-

ment of the law that Tammany won its victory. The point upon which the battle happened to be waged in New York was the liquor law. Under the statute the sale of liquor in New York City is forbidden on Sundays. This particular law had always been partially and corruptly enforced in New York, immunity being given to the saloon-keepers who paid blackmail. The new Police Board, as in duty bound, enforced the law, and a very large number of voters, notably among the Germans, deliberately announced that they prized the right to drink beer at hours when it was forbidden by law more than honesty or decency, and that they would vote for any party, no matter how corrupt, if it would agree that its officials should violate their sworn oaths of office and connive at lawbreaking. It is hard to speak in temperate language of such a position.

The question at issue was really of infinitely more importance than whether beer shall or shall not be sold on Sundays—it was the question upon the final answer to which depends the continuance of the Republic. If public officers are to execute the laws at their caprice, or at the caprice of a section of their constituents, then we may not only expect to see corruption flourish in our great cities, to see the growth of a blackmailed and lawbreaking body of liquor-sellers, and the growth of venality among public officials and of indifference to law among citizens, but we may expect to see in other communities the white-capper and the lyncher flourish, and crimes of every kind go unpunished unless punished by the exercise of the right of private vengeance. The one all-important foundation of our system of orderly liberty is obedience to law.



Theodore Roosevelt: A Sketch

So distinct a personal impression of Mr. Roosevelt is conveyed by the member of *The Outlook* staff who secured the preceding article that we publish his informal report without further explanation:

This afternoon I called on Mr. Roosevelt with a stenographer. Although we had arranged the meeting by appointment, I found that a great many other people expected to see him at that time. A few moments after my card was taken to his inner office, the door opened and Mr. Roosevelt shot out, stopped short, and said, "Will you excuse me a moment?" Whereupon of course we said we would. In five or ten minutes he was back again with "Will you excuse me for another moment?" and again we said we would. This went on for three-quarters of an hour, but at last our opportunity came. We were no sooner seated in the private office, however, than Chief Conlin came in on some important matter. A policeman belonging to a distant precinct had been drunk, and drunk in his uniform, too. The idea of his reeling around the streets and disgracing the service was too much for Mr. Roosevelt, and this matter was dispatched very quickly and summarily. It was an interesting juxtaposition of two faces—those of Conlin and Roosevelt as they sat facing each other. The one had many marks of physical wear and

tear, and yet was a face good to look upon. The face of the younger man spoke of splendid health, vigor, virility, everything that goes to make up the physical man; but it spoke far more clearly of that which does not always accompany physical well-being, namely, mental equipoise and will-power, decision quick and sharp and resolutely enforced.

One instinctively thought of Mr. Roosevelt's books on sport in the Rocky Mountains, and remembered how much such big-game hunting must have contributed to the development of a physique which would have been remarkable enough without any development. Who shall say that some of the rare personal force of this strong executive does not come from attention to athletics and outdoor life? This impression was further emphasized by the explosive way which the President of the Board of Police Commissioners has of talking. No sooner had Mr. Conlin put his face in the door than it was "Hello—Chief!" the syllables being projected like steam from the piston of a locomotive. This directness characterizes Mr. Roosevelt's every word and act. There is no trifling with a man who believes in such explosive syllables, monosyllables for the most part—the shorter the words the better for him.

When he began to dictate his article, he stopped for a moment, looked at us, and said, "Yes," and then shouted, "I think I can—I will!"—with boyish glee, but certainly with a man's decision. It is sometimes alarming to see a man thus think aloud, but we learn to love a person

for it. Mr. Roosevelt then began an interminable walk about his apartment, up and down, from side to side, and round and round. He would make several circuits of the room without saying a word, and then suddenly break out in a torrent of eloquence. At other times he would measure his words carefully.

Then the officer on guard came in with a bundle of letters, and Mr. Roosevelt would run through them for a moment. Once he looked up, and, with a contemptuous gesture, dashed the letter on the floor, and said, "There's another! Three-quarters of my mail to-day has consisted of anonymous letters."

"You see, my time is not my own," Mr. Roosevelt would always say at the frequent interruptions. Perhaps Commissioner Parker needed his counsel on some point that must be decided at once. Perhaps the telephone bell would ring and some bit of news would be communicated from a distant station. Then Mr. Roosevelt would put his mouth to the receiver standing on his desk, and we would hear one side of such a conversation: "Yes. Who is this? Tell me your name. Oh, yes! What do you want? What? Yes. All right. You send that roundsman here to-morrow morning at half-past nine and I'll fix him."

Mr. Roosevelt's own words elsewhere abundantly define his character, and show the value of the physical, mental, and moral integrity, force, and independence of the present President of the Board of Police Commissioners of New York City.

New York is a type of American cities, all of which are more or less misgoverned. The entire country is receiving an object-lesson from the strong sense of duty which Mr. Roosevelt shows in enforcing the laws at any cost.



THEODORE ROOSEVELT