

# **THE BOSTON SOCIAL SURVEY**

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The Boston Social Survey by Grover J. Shoholm

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**GROVER J. SHOHOLM**

**THE BOSTON  
SOCIAL SURVEY**



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## PREFACE

"Of course!" snorted a certain pompous old gentleman upon my venturing to touch on the influence of wealth in public life. "Looka that!" and he sought out a list of Boston's largest taxpayers.

"When interests as important as those are subject to every flurry of politics, must we not look after our investments?"

"And"—I suggested—"the best method of defense is an aggressive offensive?"

"Exactly!"

"But isn't it rather—(I knew the old gentleman)—rather, well—disagreeable?"

"Lemme tell you, young man, there are, in certain offices down there, **wolves** who would, if they could, destroy every cent of values in every one of my enterprises!"

"And," he added cuttingly, "they would be no more re- gular of the means they employed than —"

"Than your group?"

"Than the Devil!" he exploded.

The social control exercised by property in Boston and New England has as many filaments as a cancer.

To trace it out in all its elaborate intricacies would seem like presenting a complex problem in geometry.

"True, perhaps," would remark the reader, "but too deep—too abstruse—too complicated!"

Besides, in daily affairs the power does not show itself as a whole. But now and then we can see one or two sinuous tentacles reaching out—sucking in gold! And reaching into what have been considered the most sacred places of Democracy.

Part by part then it is possible to trace the operations of secret financial diplomacy—so silent in its important workings, and often unnoticed under the very eyes of those who are taking part.

More opportunities have been afforded the writer than ordinarily fall to the lot of the enquirer in these fields.

The cause of social change has seemed of more importance than any personal considerations; this is all there is to say to persons who may feel an indignation at the open manner in which I have treated certain matters that were discussed in confidence.

The elementary nature of some chapters is to be accounted for by the purpose of the work,—to make clear what are the real social forces to those who now enjoy the stimulating, vibrant thrill of ideals and illusions.





*FINANCIAL CONTROL.*

The elements that enter into the formation of Boston's social order are not a few. Industrial control, political control, educational control,—all contribute their parts. Then, too, the forces of necessity and of idealism intermingle gradually into a fabric of most complex design.

But of design, nevertheless. Not chance has arranged the structure which many surmise, but which is here to be considered somewhat in detail.

A list of directors to most persons is merely a list of names, and nothing more. As a matter of fact, each name is a centre of power,—not solely financial but political and social as well.

In determining the control of a banking house not every name is of equal weight. The fact usually transpires that factions are contending for strategic positions with all the intensity of professional chess players.

The intricacy of interlocking directorates makes the situation puzzling at first, but by eliminating the "nobodies" the complication of affairs becomes a little clearer. Often an examination of the executive committee gives the key to the situation.

"Nobodies" are of several varieties. There is the type of director who accepts a position at the request of some personal friend, indifferent as to issues involved, voting as that friend may request, and glad to strengthen his social and business standing by associating with a "good crowd."

Then there is another type aptly described by Mr. W. F. Fitzgerald, of the banking house of Fitzgerald, Hubbard & Company.

"The financial world possesses a large number of men of big means who are willing to loan the use of their names for \$10 or \$12 a month, and whose only interest in the corporation is the gasoline money which they collect."

A common species of director is the active business man whose presence on the board attracts to the bank deposits and other business from the trade group of which he is a leading member. Thus, advertisements often appear like the following:

"The shoe and leather trade is ably represented in the directorate of the Boylston National Bank."

Such men are rarely active in the control politics of the bank, being too occupied with pressing problems in their own special business.

Young scions of wealth sometimes deign to divert a little of their attention from golf and tennis to business. As a rule they do not; but there are a few of these "nobodies" in the bank directorates. They may be safely depended upon to follow the leadership of their family banker. And, also, the force of tradition keeps them in a predetermined course.

We may also eliminate in considering the larger financial strategy men who are intimately connected with the actual management of an industry—operating men. At times, it is true, an operating man speaks the decisive word in regard to a policy; but after all he is a mere salaried official, and is on a directorate, *ex officio*, to aid in whatever way he can the controlling majority.

The position of the operating man is similar to that of the general counsel, to suggest and serve,—not to direct, except in so far as special authority may be delegated to him.

Such a man is Mr. P. F. Sullivan of the Bay State Street Railway Co. He has acquired a reputation as a railway operator. And yet, if it serves the purposes of the group who control this road to enter into a scheme detrimental to the road's best interests, but profitable in other directions, the operating man would have no voice in such a matter.

Similarly, the President of a bank may be not at all the controlling spirit, but be concerned chiefly with the bank's mechanism and its daily routine of business.

Some banks are subordinate to others, although the exact knowledge of this relationship is confined to a very small group. To inquire about this matter would be considered a gross breach of propriety—an impertinent prying into private affairs.

However, tracing out the larger financial strategy of Boston, two main groups are disclosed in a contention of the most bitter and uncompromising character.

That political events are a reflex of issues that arise in the course of their struggles is a theory which is more than suggested by some of the tendencies of Boston and Massachusetts politics.

An understanding of this one fact furnishes the key to the politics of the city and the State, and robs the secret councils of the two parties of much mystery.

The two groups centre—one at the Kidder-Peabody banking house, the other at the banking house of Lee, Higginson & Company.

That political control gives opportunities for strengthening and extending the power of the dominant financial group is apparent after only a slight knowledge of inside political activities.