

**MY TOWN; OR,
COMMUNITY
PATRIOTISM**

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My Town; Or, Community Patriotism by George Blackstone Irving

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GEORGE BLACKSTONE IRVING

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By

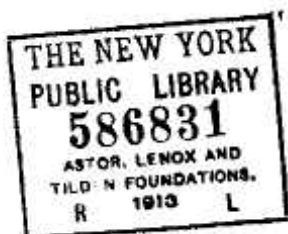
George Blackstone Irving

Better-Town Promoter

Chicago

The Rogers Press, Chicago

1912



Dedicated to
RETAIL MERCHANTS
(One of whom was my father)
AND THEIR CLERKS

All of whom have been great factors
in town building

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Washington, D. C.
also
Great Britain
By GEORGE B. LEVING
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INTRODUCTION.

While the agitation regarding the future of community life has been going on there has been one man, George B. Irving of Chicago, who has been studying conditions and trying to learn by personal investigation what assistance is possible and practicable. Reared in his father's retail store he later was connected with the John V. Farwell Company of Chicago. For several years he has been lecturing, advising and promoting better community life. The writer and his associates in our lecture travels over the United States have heard of Mr. Irving's work a great many times and have the utmost confidence in his ability to analyze local conditions. He is a man not only of education but also of a broad mind as expressed by one merchant who wrote: "He stirred us and said some things which takes a big man to say."

Mr. Irving has had the inspiration to put his experience into manuscript form and this book is the result. He believes in conserving the interests of a community by building up home industries and conserving home capital to the end that maximum manhood may be developed.

The pages of his book show how unworthy are the big city stores of patronage, both in their methods and

merchandise. He describes how the public is deceived and their employees degraded. But this is the negative side only, that is, the conservation of capital and patronage for the home town, for he shows how a town's people should work together, how churches and lodges and schools should exercise their energies, how through a commercial club local citizens should proceed to obtain the best results; in other words, how to develop within ourselves.

If Mr. Irving's writings and lectures cannot inspire a town there is no hope for you.

Springfield (Massachusetts) Board of Trade offered a prize of \$500 in cash for the person who would present the best plan to them for promoting the interests of their city. There were between two hundred and three hundred contestants and Mr. Irving's plan was the one unanimously accepted.

He is a lecturer of national reputation.

Mr. Irving's services are for your town and if you are interested in having him with you, remember you have my word—my pledge—that he will help you.

Des Moines, Iowa.

W. J. PILKINGTON.

PREFACE.

Rome killed its genius, Caesar, and likewise many communities are killing their local genius. While in Muscatine, Iowa, under the auspices of the commercial club, I protested against the officers promoting a public market for the reason that it would antagonize the resident capacity to build social and material welfare.

Whatever embarrasses the home business man is of doubtful merit inasmuch as the local business man is a leader in promoting social as well as other community welfare, those intangible but invaluable desiderata of every town. Business men personify Constructive Genius, therefore the commercial club of Muscatine, which was organized to conserve local life of the community, sought to destroy it by a public market, which was an incident kindred to that of the commercial club of Valley City, North Dakota, raising \$1,500 with which to equip their club rooms and the committee traveling all the way to St. Paul, Minnesota, and purchasing at retail there.

A few cents saved on a bushel of potatoes purchased in a public market cannot compensate for the loss of local Constructive Genius as thus personified in the home business men, for the peddler of potatoes, or any other peddler, including Larkin soap club representatives, are not examples of local Constructive

Genius, while the business man is. The few cents additional paid for the potatoes to the home merchant is the cost in part at least by the local citizen for a respectable community in which to reside. That citizen, therefore, who advocates a public market or who patronizes the peddler or itinerant merchant deliberately seeks to pauperize himself and his family in community wealth, pecuniary and social. He would put a few more potatoes into his stomach and save a few cents in his wallet while robbing his children by community suicide of a civilized society.

Paraphrasing Shakespeare somewhat:

"Who steals my purse, steals trash;

'Tis something, 'tis nothing,

'Twas mine, 'tis his,

And he has made slaves of thousands;

But he who filches from me

MY SOCIAL LIFE

Robs me of that which *both* enriches him,

And leaves me poor indeed."

The wise citizen contributes in every way possible to home Constructive Genius for he understands that it is this genius which promotes local prosperity. He declines to patronize a Chinese laundry, not because he dislikes Chinamen, but because he loves his children, for a Chinese laundryman antagonizes local constructive Genius, yet withal I have found bankers and other leading business men of towns regularly patronizing Chinese laundries.

Community patriotism is selfishness in the sense that it seeks to conserve the local citizens' property and

social interest, and indeed a commercial club is for this reason the very acme of selfishness. Therefore, a citizen who will not join the commercial club has not yet learned the modern way of being selfish, but is an example of the modern grafter, who allows his neighbors and fellow citizens to promote his interest without contributing a share towards the community good.

In a national sense loyalty to the home community is lofty patriotism. The balance of political power is in process of transference from rural to urban hands. However, city politics is of a questionable quality. Hon. James Bryce, British Ambassador in Washington, declares in his *American Commonwealth*: "There is no denying that the government of cities is the conspicuous failure of the United States."

The crowning glory of American Institutions will doubtless be an adequate self government of cities, but during this evolution now being experienced great national problems, economic and industrial, are surely to be before the bar of American Suffrage for adjudication, such great questions as European nations are on the mat with right now. The following decade will no doubt witness unprecedented battles concerning social questions which, let us hope, will be bloodless.

During this transition, political and economic, it is neither wise nor safe to transfer more power into the hands of the city with its great unsolved problems than is absolutely necessary. It is in fact patriotic to conserve population outside of the great cities during this