

**THE FALL OF BOSSISM. A
HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE OF
ONE HUNDRED AND THE REFORM
MOVEMENT IN PHILADELPHIA
AND PENNSYLVANIA, VOL. I**

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VOL. I.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE possession of political power, the abuses to which it leads, and the corrupt or crafty means resorted to for its preservation have in all ages furnished themes for the historian, the statesman, and the moralist. A melancholy perversion of great talents, treachery, artifice, and fraud have been the familiar and ready instruments adopted by those who have sacrificed patriotism to ambition, and trampled under foot the good of the State in pursuit of personal ends. The rage of party and of faction has frequently endangered the cause of good government. The importance of party supremacy has been unduly magnified, and men have been too easily persuaded that opposition to the powers that be is deserving of condemnation and reproach. The fears of men, their cowardice, their reluctance to face the odium of rebellion, their dread of being stigmatized as traitors have been skillfully seized upon by autocrats as the means of suppressing all murmurs of discontent. The foul dishonor of the word rebellion has often stained the holiest

cause ever won or lost by tongue or sword, and many an ardent reformer has sunk into the grave disheartened or disgraced by the charge, however undeserved, of lack of loyalty. Harrington, the profoundest political philosopher of the time of Cromwell, shrewdly observed that corrupt ministers styled themselves the State, in order that good men might not oppose them, for fear of having their loyalty suspected. This sagacious remark, based upon a close study of political phenomena, is a happy statement of one of the commonest means by which unprincipled men have endeavored to preserve their possession of ill-gotten power. A few illustrious victims, sacrificed without pity or scruple, were found sufficient by way of example to awe the crowd. Indifference to the egregious assumption of a minister that he is the State, or bold defiance of such arrogance has shut up many a man, like Raleigh, in the Tower, or sent many a proud head to the block. In our own day, men, some of whom have never heard of Harrington or read a line of his works, ignorant even of the misdeeds of former days, but keenly alive to the weaknesses of human nature, have maintained for years despotic sway by simple denunciation of all patriotic efforts at reform as treason and re-

bellion. "I am the Party." Such is the imperial edict of the party boss. "It follows, therefore, that nothing that is distasteful or dangerous to me can be tolerated. Disorganizing doctrines must have no place in party platforms, political free thought must be stifled; the people are not entitled to representation upon party tickets, and can have no hand in shaping policies. The man who prates of lofty principles is a lunatic: he who dreams of freedom is an enthusiast: he who refuses to be a slave is an outlaw: he who hates corruption and denounces it is a sore-head. He who strikes at me is an enemy of the people, because I am the people. The man who has a conscience is an idiot—politics must be practical; while he who considers the science of government as one of the noblest subjects of human speculation, or who agrees with Arnold that the highest earthly desire of the ripened mind is the wish to take part in the great work of government is a dangerous aristocrat, as his studies must lead him to distrust me." This is the political creed of a modern politician. His sphere may be large or small, it may boldly embrace the nation or a state, or it may be confined to the limits of a ward precinct in a town; it

matters not, within these bounds he aims to be supreme.

Our view must be limited, however, to the narrow field of municipal politics.

At the close of our great civil war, when a grateful people rewarded with their confidence the party that had saved the Union and made free the slave, the unscrupulous speculators who dealt in local politics as a trade and who grew fat upon the spoils of office, saw and seized their opportunity. While great men were debating high questions of statesmanship, they slowly but surely were forging the fetters of "The Machine." With infinite tact they allied themselves to popular doctrines, and while careful to preserve the forms were industriously destroying the substance of public liberty. They cunningly bound local issues to national interests, and thus having confused the duties that a citizen owes to the Nation, to his State and to his City were able to turn to their own advantage his mental bewilderment. So inseparable did the union of national and municipal interests become that the latter were often wholly sacrificed, and good men stolidly voted for the most odious and unworthy candidates upon the local ticket, rather than endanger

the supremacy of the party in national affairs. This popular devotion to the Union was made a shield of protection to public robbers. The assassins of Liberty, disguised in her own mantle, crept close to her heart and there sheathed their daggers. The patience and incredulity of the people knew no bounds. It could not be true that the party of high moral purposes, of rectitude and progress, the chosen guardian of human destiny, could ever prove false to its high trust. Thus while the people slept an enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat. The harvest soon came—a harvest of shame and dishonor. Virtue, ability, integrity were rarely seen in public life; rapacity, cunning, trickery, fraud, ignorance and violence supplanted them; men of character were driven away, self-respecting voters remained at home, men who busied themselves with public affairs fell under the ban of suspicion; debts, state and municipal, were piled mountain high, necessary public works were neglected, public money was squandered or stolen, offices were sold and the spoils divided, new, useless, and expensive offices were created, salaries were enormously increased, fees became extortionate; even the courts of justice were invaded, the jury fixer plied his nefarious trade, while crime stalked in the streets

defiant and unrebuked. Councilmanic appropriations attracted clouds of vultures which fed on the offals of contracts; conspiracies and plots were organized to plunder the State Treasury, and in a moment of reckless daring the bribery of the Legislature was attempted. Neither sex, age, nor condition provoked the pity or stayed the hand of the despoilers; pauperism was stripped of its rags to clothe the shivering dependents of the Ring, and the copper of public alms was transmuted by the alchemy of politics into gold for political lazars. Taxes grew into grievous burdens, and though vast sums of money were annually collected the treasury was always empty.

Means were devised to perpetuate this system, the results of which were so profitable to the leaders, under the pretence of maintaining the boasted party supremacy. The cry was raised that to defeat the party in the city was to defeat the party in the nation. Party organization was carried to such a pitch of refinement that, while it rendered hopeless all efforts at reform within the party, it could not fail to excite astonishment at the ingenuity and skill of the architects. In short, the party rules consolidated all power in the hands of a City Committee, an arbitrary and irresponsible body clothed with un-