LETTERS AND SPEECHES

OF THE

HONORABLE JOHN F. FITZGERALD

MAYOR OF BOSTON, 1906-07, 1910-13

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INTRODUCTION.

JOHN F. FITZGERALD, entering upon his first term as Mayor of Boston on January 1, 1906, brought to this honorable office an intelligent love and devotion to the city of his birth and education, and a definite, far-reaching program for the development of all her interests. A little past his fortieth year, he already had experience of city affairs through a term in the Common Council; of state affairs, through service in the Massachusetts Legislature, and of national matters through three successive terms in Congress. During these, it is pertinent to note, he began the work for the improvement of Boston Harbor and the development of Boston's commerce, which culminated during his second administration in the establishment of the Board of Port Directors, and marked the beginning of the restoration of Boston to her old-time commercial importance.

Mayor Fitzgerald condensed his plan into the famous watchword, "Bigger, Better and Busier Boston," and proceeded forthwith to work it out. He made a brief exposition of it at his first official appearance at the Franklin exercises on January 17, 1906. From the beginning, public office has been to Mayor Fitzgerald not only a public trust but a whole-hearted personal dedication, having no work-day limit, and superseding all private claims, even those of home and family. His official responsibility, as he saw it, included the extension of the city's trade by land and sea, the development of new industries by the investment of local capital, and therefore the creation of new opportunities for employment; the preparation, mental, industrial and moral, of the future citizens to make the most of these opportunities; and, as far as possible, the safeguarding of the citizens of all ages and conditions from illness and accident.

He deplored the scattering of Boston capital among enterprises in the far West and South, and the scattering of that still more precious asset, Boston's young manhood, all over the land in quest of work which should be attainable at home. Again and again he proclaimed that success and advancement were more certainly to be found on the high seas beyond Boston Light than in western mining enterprises. The lack of civic spirit among the small but powerful moneyed class in Boston (the class to which he refers so vividly in his article on "Mortmain"), as manifested by their remote investments and their evasion of taxes, drew out an early and strong protest from the Mayor, and made for him from the start persistent opponents to his every scheme of civic betterment.

Mayor Fitzgerald's first inaugural proposed and outlined the scope of the now flourishing High School of Commerce. He knew our public schools experimentally, as a graduate of the Eliot and of the Boston Latin School, and he knew the greatest of our private schools through some years at Boston College and nearly a year at the Harvard Medical School. He realized the need of a system of schools to follow the grammar school, offering alternatives to the cultural course of the high school, for he knew the danger of leaving our youth to enter life unprovided with any practical occupation. This educational phase of the Fitzgerald mayoralty was more fully developed during his second term.

Mrs. Julia Ward Howe was the poet of his "Old Home Week" of 1907, in which the older and the newer elements of the population were well represented. It was doubtless one of the forces making Boston the favorite convention city that it has since become; not national alone but cosmopolitan, as when in October, 1913, with the Cardinal Archbishop of Boston, the Mayor welcomed hither the greatest Missionary Congress of modern days.

The achievement of his first administration on which Mayor Fitzgerald looks back with most satisfaction is

the creation of the Finance Commission in the summer of 1907. He might have allowed the work assigned to this commission to have been performed by a State Committee, and any criticism it might have made would have been promptly discounted on partisan political grounds. He chose an alternative which to any but a man sure of his record had been fraught with danger, in creating instead a representative Boston committee, over which it was clearly understood he should have no control. Despite his unpleasant personal experience when the commission was packed with bitter personal enemies, the Mayor steadfastly maintains the value of the institution itself. Doubtless, as time goes by, and the membership becomes more varied and broadminded, Mayor Fitzgerald's successors will get the aid to which they are entitled from the Finance Commission.

During his first administration Mayor Fitzgerald was handicapped by an antiquated charter, under which a reorganization of the municipal departments was impossible. Through his institution of the Finance Commission he began the work which finally resulted in the new charter with its provision for greater efficiency.

After a mayoralty contest, the bitterest ever waged in Boston, and having for cities throughout the land well nigh the interest of a Presidential election, he was re-elected to office January 10, 1910, victor on a non-partisan ticket, and under a revised charter, which, though yet imperfect, as the latest municipal contest has demonstrated, is yet a great improvement on the old. He was inaugurated in Faneuil Hall, February 7, following.

During his interval of private life his ideas of Boston's internal development were taken over bodily by various individuals and associations, the "Bigger, Better and Busier Boston" reappearing as "The Boston 1915 Movement." For lack of the vivifying hand of its maker, the plan withered up and died of inanition. It sprang up again, however, in its primal and practical form when Mayor Fitzgerald came back.

He was but eight months in office when the nomination for Governor was tendered him on the Democratic ticket. This he declined, feeling that Boston came first, and now demanded of him a consecration more complete, if that were possible, than he had ever given it before. From February 7, 1910, to February 2, 1914, Mayor Fitzgerald has worked for Boston, spoken and written for Boston, traveled for Boston, and "remade Boston," as has well been said, into something like the city of his dearest vision.

His first act was thoroughly and effectively to reorganize the municipal departments. The city became a great business corporation, though not a corporation without a soul. The Mayor came back, not breathing threatenings and slaughter against his erstwhile opponents and their friends, but in a merciful and magnanimous spirit. He sought near and far, without regard to personal ties or ancestral, religious or political affiliations, for the right men for the places created by the new charter.

Again he returned to the projects which had preoccupied his young years in Congress, and which he had never ceased to hammer into the consciousness of Boston from his return hither in 1902, the development of its splendid waterfront and unsurpassed harbor facilities. He went abroad with the Chamber of Commerce in the summer of 1911, studied the port of Hamburg and other great European ports, and incidentally the German system of continuation schools, and gave publicity to the discoveries of this period of study in his subsequent speeches. It was the only publicity they received, for the much heralded report of the Chamber of Commerce failed to materialize. Thenceforth, in season and out of season he prodded the business men of Boston and of Massachusetts, as well as the law makers, until the Massachusetts Legislature in 1912 appropriated $9,000,000 for harbor improvements, and organized the Board of Directors of the port. Within a year new

lines were plying between the port of Boston and German, English and Italian ports, with a line projected to Buenos Aires, Argentina. He forced the attention of Boston to her opportunities in the South American republics, so greatly increased by the construction of the Panama Canal, and inspired the trip of the Chamber of Commerce to the Southern Continent.

Meantime, he urged the extremely practical study of the Spanish language, so necessary to our future merchants, in public and private schools, but more especially in the Boston High Schools. He gave the School Committee no peace till the continuation and vocational schools were well started in Boston. As factors in the physical, mental and moral training of the future citizens came the Mayor's provision of playgrounds, the Zoo, the Aquarium, the Mothers' Day, the municipal picnic, the prohibition of immoral dances, the regulation of the hours at which children and adolescents might be out of their homes unaccompanied by their elders, and his firm stand against plays dangerously outspoken.

Nor was he lacking in interest in the teachers, molders of our future citizens. He interested himself publicly, practically and successfully in the increase of the salaries of the grade teachers early in his second administration.

Administering a city the whole character of whose population has changed from that of the small and almost homogeneous city of the Lymans and Elliots, Mayor Fitzgerald sought political assimilation and recognition of the special and general good qualities of every element. In his civic appointments he tried to represent all racial lines. In his public appearances he went as willingly to the Greek Union as to the Irish Home Rule meeting. The great sons of the Puritans, like Dr. Edward Everett Hale, drew forth his generous appreciation as the framers of the ribs and keel of our Ship of State, equally with the Jews, "the People of the Book," the depositaries of the first divine revelation. This breadth of sympathy is very evident

in his speeches. It is, after all, a part of his literal acceptance of fundamental Americanism: the equal right of all our citizens to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Further to facilitate the exercise of this right, Mayor Fitzgerald worked for the alleviation of physical ills, as in the creation of the Consumptives' Hospital; for the prevention of sickness, as in the playgrounds; for the protection of the dwellers in tenements and in the congested districts generally from fire hazards. Unhappily, through a short-sightedness well nigh criminal, the Massachusetts Legislature defeated the Mayor's Fire Hazard bill in May, 1911, and the chairman of the Finance Commission, a few months later, declined to serve on a commission to be appointed by the Mayor to investigate the needs of the Fire Department. Some there were who remembered his three successive appeals for better fire protection within less than six months of the year 1911, to say nothing of a later appeal to the Legislature for a law compelling the equipment of a certain class of buildings with hand fire extinguishers, when, on December 4, Mayor Fitzgerald nearly gave his life as the forfeit in a personal examination of badly equipped buildings. His illness obliged the Mayor to withdraw from the latest municipal contest, with his re-election assured.

He has never feared vested interests, social position nor political "pull," nor any other thing which would stand between him and his duty in office.

At least, it remains to his everlasting honor that from a single estate he wrung the substantial amount of $500,000, hitherto evaded taxes, for the city's revenues. How much more he might have accomplished had the Finance Commission strengthened his hands by co-operation, instead of wasting its time and the people's money in investigating trivialities!

Doubtless one of the greatest difficulties of the civil authorities in combating the forces of anarchy arises from the powerful "Dead Hand," and the ease with

which the unreachable multi-millionaires evade their citizen obligations. But as wrong is not remedied by other wrong, Mayor Fitzgerald withstood anarchists and socialists, and before a law against the Red Flag, with its "No God! No Master!" had been added to the statutes of Massachusetts, he had refused permits to any parades carrying this banner of destruction.

On patriotism and fundamental righteousness he has united the vast majority of the people. In his Memorial Day address at Sandwich, he who had helped to save the common citizen soldier of the Spanish-American War at Montauk, paid his grateful tribute to the common citizen soldier of the Civil War, and explained what is so hard for many Europeans to understand — why we Americans refer to our native land as "God's country."

One of the Mayor's last achievements for Boston was the municipal Christmas tree on Boston Common, which he instituted in 1912, and which was taken up this year by other great American cities, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington and many more. Here, where Christmas was once unnoted in the calendar, men of all ancestries and beliefs gather about the great symbolic Tree "whose leaves are for the healing of the nations." Here enmities become flat, stale and unprofitable; rancor and malice are forgotten; and brotherhood, which is the ultimate expression of good citizenship, rules.

KATHERINE E. CONWAY.