Municipal Corruption

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MUNICIPAL CORRUPTION.[1]

THIS is a work of a kind that was abundant in England during the eighteenth century but is now extinct there, while it flourishes in this country. Mental growths are no exception to the general laws of growth as regards distribution of species in time and space. Dying out in one region, a species may in another region find favoring conditions and perpetuate the type. In many respects the political ideas of our own times in this country reproduce species which belong to England's past. Mr. Steffens's work belongs to the same class as Burgh's *Political Disquisitions* published in 1774, Browne's *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* published in 1757, and innumerable tracts and essays now sunk into oblivion.

Mr. Steffens says of the articles collected in his book: "They were written for a purpose, they were published serially with a purpose, and they are reprinted now together to further the same purpose, which was — and is — to sound for the civic pride of an apparently shameless citizenship." Burgh said of his work that it was "calculated to draw the timely attention of government and people to a due consideration of the necessity and the means of reforming those errors, defects and abuses; of restoring the constitution and saving the state." Mr. Steffens puts the blame for misgovernment upon the apathy of American character. He says:

> We are responsible, not our leaders, since we follow them. We let them divert our loyalty from the United States to some "party"; we let them boss the party and turn our municipal democracies into autocracies and our republican nation into a plutocracy. We cheat our government and we let our leaders loot it, and we let them bribe and wheedle our sovereignty from us. . . . We break our own laws and rob our own government, the lady at the custom house, the lyncher with his rope, and the captain of industry with his bribe and his rebate. The spirit of graft and of lawlessness is the American spirit.

In the same style Browne argued that virtue was rotting out of the English stock from the development of a sordid commercialism which was corroding all the moral elements which are the true foundations

[1] The Shame of the Cities. By Lincoln Steffens. New York, McClure, Phillips & Co., 1904. 306 pp.

of national greatness. The thought flows in the same channels, the same ideals preside over opinion, and the resemblance extends even to details of suggestion.

All we have to do [says Mr. Steffens] is to establish a steady demand for good government. The bosses have us split up into parties. . . . If we should leave parties to the politicians, and would vote not for the party, not even for men, but for the city and state and the nation, we should rule parties and cities and states and nation.

All this goes back to the time of Addison. In the *Spectator*, Number 125, Tuesday, July 24, 1711, he recommended that honest men should

enter into an association for the support of one another against the endeavors of those whom they ought to look upon as their common enemies, whatsoever side they may belong to. Were there such an honest body of neutral forces, we should never see the worst of men in the great figures of life because they are useful to a party; nor the best unregarded because they are above practising those methods which would be grateful to their factions. We should then single every criminal out of the herd and hunt him down, however formidable and overgrown he might appear.

One difference should be noted. It relates to temperament. American self-confidence and optimism make a distinctive mark lacking in the extinct English literature of this species. Mr. Steffens ends his sermon by saying:

We Americans may have failed. We may be mercenary and selfish. Democracy with us may be impossible and corruption inevitable ; but these articles, if they have proved nothing else, have demonstrated without doubt that we can stand the truth; that there is pride in the character of American citizenship; and that this pride may be a power in the land.

This is a small set-off for such tremendous defects, but the tone of sentiment is hopeful and buoyant as compared with the gloomy forebodings which Burgh expressed in his closing reflections. He said:

I see the once rich and populous cities of England in the same condition as those of Spain; whole streets lying in rubbish, and the grass peeping up between the stones in those which continue still inhabited. I see the harbors empty, the warehouses shut up, and the shopkeepers playing draughts, for want of customers. I see our noble and spacious turnpike roads covered with thistles and other weeds, and scarce to be traced

out. I see the studious men reading the "State of Britain," the magazines, the "Political Disquisitions," and the histories of the eighteenth century, and execrating the stupidity of their fathers, who, in spite of many faithful warnings given them, sat still, and suffered their country to be ruined by a set of wretches whom they could have crushed.

Such were the opinions of English reformers on the eve of the wonderful outburst of national energy which created the British empire and brought to England wealth and prosperity beyond the imagination of the wildest dreamer. And yet the forecast was not wholly mistaken, for corruption and mismanagement lost England the American colonies and brought her to deep abasement before the evil generated its cure and the constitution was brought into accord with the needs of the state. But historians of English political development point out that the transformation was accomplished by the politicians themselves, without the adoption of the nostrums prescribed by the reformers and by the very means which the reformers denounced as the essence of corruption. The reformers sought means of administration by the people; the politicians denied them that, but unwittingly provided means of control by the people through the formation of an agency of legislative direction and management possessing plenary authority and hence complete responsibility. This went to the root of the trouble; for in retrospect it is plain enough that the systematic political corruption was the result of political confusion. The doctrine of the separation of the powers of government had obstructed the development of any such agency or organ of sovereignty, clothed with power to provide a proper division of the functions of government and to correlate the exercise of those functions. The actual embodiment of sovereignty which gradually took shape came not by deliberate intention but through the constraint of hard necessity.[1] The formation of the English parliamentary type of government may be described, in the terms of American politics, by saying that boss rule grew up inside the government until it acquired complete authority, thus bringing within reach of public opinion, through the suffrage, competent apparatus of control over the behavior of the government and creating conditions of political activity which gradually substituted the leader for the boss. The forces which sustained constitutional development did not proceed from reform agitation but from the phleg-

[1] Sir Leslie Stephen, in his Hobbes (The Macmillan Co., 1904), makes some acute remarks upon the unforeseen character of English constitutional development. See particularly pp. 180, 181, 199 and 200.

matic common sense of the British people, more interested in results than solicitous about means and not prone to extravagant expectations from the every-day human nature which forms the stuff of politics. To take things as they are and make the best of them, to deal with situations as they arise by the means that are available, to endure what cannot be cured, to look upon the bright side and to cultivate a habit of cheerfulness — these are the traits of which sound politics are compounded and by which constitutional progress is sustained. National hypochondria is a worse evil than national corruption. Happily the American people are free from that at any rate; they are disgusted but not dismayed by the situation, and they have a deep conviction that they will eventually find ways and means of dealing with it.

Meanwhile it must be admitted that Mr. Steffens' book does not exaggerate the facts of the case. What he says about the condition of affairs in our cities is true, and much more might be said to the same purport. In this book he confines himself to municipal graft. The graft system extends to state administration also. The "organization" judge who "takes orders" is another feature of the graft system, the more dangerous since its virus penetrates the very marrow of our institutions. The facts with which Mr. Steffens deals are superficial symptoms. Hardly any disguise of them is attempted in the ordinary talk of local politicians. One of the first things which practical experience teaches is that the political ideals which receive literary expression have a closely limited range. One soon reaches strata of population in which they disappear and the relation of boss and client appears to be proper and natural. The connection between grafting politicians and their adherents is such that ability to levy blackmail inspires the same sort of respect and admiration which Rob Roy's followers felt for him in the times that provided a career for his peculiar talents. And as in Rob Roy's day, intimate knowledge finds in the type some hardy virtues. For one thing, politicians of this type do not indulge in cant. They are no more shamefaced in talking about their grafting exploits to an appreciative audience than a mediæval baron would have been in discussing the produce of his feudal fees and imposts. Mr. Steffens has really done no more than to put together material lying about loose upon the surface of municipal politics and give it effective presentation. The general truth of his statement of the case is indisputable. But the same might have been said of the exhibits of the eighteenth century English reformers; and yet the impression made by them of decay and disease in the body politic has since been shown

to be erroneous. The three stout volumes of Burgh's *Disquisitions* are crammed with accounts of bribery and corruption, making a more startling showing than that made by Mr. Steffens because more inveterate and extensive. Every part of the structure of government was involved, so that there appeared to be no spot of soundness where reform might find a lodgement and a starting point. Probably in every period of political transition, when an old order is giving place to a new, evidence of corruption has confronted the scrutiny of moralists. The formation of modern nationality itself originally wore the appearance of corruption to observers prepossessed by the ideals of the past. History has vindicated feudalism as a reparative process in the organization of society after the collapse of imperial rule. May it not be that the new feudalism which has developed in American politics, despite all its gross exactions of tribute, is also a natural development from constitutional conditions? When the English reform excitement was at its height, Hume acutely remarked that "those who complain of corrupt and wicked ministers, and of the mischiefs they produce, do in fact most severely satirize the constitution of the state, for a good constitution would exclude or defeat the bad effects of a corrupt administration." This is no more than saying that if a business is well organized, employees cannot steal without being found out and dismissed; but propositions which are obvious as applied to ordinary business affairs do not appear to be readily apprehended in relation to the public business, although there is no essential difference. Hume's opinion that the corruption of his times was due to bad conditions rather than to bad men turned out to be correct. It may be worth while to examine our own situation from this point of view.

Mr. Steffens gives blunt expression to the opinion that the typical American business man is the great source of municipal corruption. "He is a self-righteous fraud, this big business man. He is the chief source of corruption, and it were a boon if he would neglect politics." In his article upon "Tweed Days in St. Louis," Mr. Steffens says that "when the leading men began to devour their own city, the herd rushed into the trough and fed also." But in the same article, referring to the traffic in franchises, he remarks: "Several companies which refused to pay blackmail had to leave." In other words, conditions existed to which business interests had to submit or perish. The case does not suggest business initiative of corruption, but rather compliance with it upon the universal principle that if you want to do business you must meet the established conditions.

The nature of those conditions is not difficult to understand if one

is able to separate fact from fiction with regard to the suffrage. From the psychological principle of association of ideas it is difficult to separate anything in thought from the use it has served, and such has been the instrumental value of the suffrage that intrinsic qualities are habitually attributed to it of the most absurd character. The increase of literacy and the spread of agencies for diffusing information have imparted to the body politic in modern times a nervous organization unknown before, developing a public consciousness which is the true source of what is known as the democratic movement. The suffrage has played a wonderful part in serving the activities of this public consciousness, but it is merely a vehicle of impulse and its utility is strictly regulated by conditions. Want or desire does not alter in moral quality nor gain in real authority because it happens to be expressed through the suffrage. The right of the majority is a useful fiction as a rule of practical convenience, but if it is manipulated so that it is a pernicious humbug the appearance of corruption may be a healthy manifestation. Instead of being the betrayal of democracy it may be diplomatic treatment of ochlocracy, restraining its dangerous tendencies and minimizing its mischiefs. If any of our large cities should be preserved like Pompeii to remote ages, the archæologists of that period, even without any historic record, would be bound to conclude that the society which evolved such structure was not deficient in great qualities of character; and if some of the lamentations of our reformers should be disinterred, telling how the men of affairs in our times corrupted the government in securing opportunities of enterprise, most assuredly those archæologists would rejoice that they had done so. It is better that government and social activity should go on in any way than that they should not go on at all. Slackness and decay are more dangerous to a nation than corruption.

In order to appreciate the functional office of the suffrage, a clear distinction must be drawn between administration and control. As an instrument of administration the suffrage, from the nature of things, is of very limited value. What can be more absurd than to think that the average citizen, who finds it hard to judge of the qualifications of a clerk or a salesman or to pick out a competent servant for his household, can by any sort of political hocus-pocus be invested with the ability to make a real choice of governors, mayors, judges, clerks of court, district attorneys, sheriffs, constables, tax-collectors, assessors and school commissioners? It is obvious, when one discards cant and exercises common sense, that government by direct administration of the people cannot really be carried on except in small com-

munities, having common and well understood needs quite level with the ordinary capacity of citizenship. Communities in such a situation might just as well choose their officers by lot as by election, as was demonstrated in ancient Greek communities. But in any growing and progressive community diversity of needs and interest is inevitable and specialization of functions becomes necessary. Administration of the government by election then collapses, and the pretence that it is retained is constantly contradicted by actual facts. To assign to the people a power which they are naturally incapable of wielding is in ffect to take it away from them. And this is the concise philosophy of boss rule. Genuine democratic government becomes impossible when the suffrage is applied to uses of which it is not capable; the practical result of the system of filling administrative posts by popular election is ochlocracy; and boss-rule is an expensive antidote for ochlocracy provided by the instinctive good sense of the American people. The system is as firmly based upon social necessities under existing conditions as the old feudalism which it resembles in its essential character. So long as those conditions, now inherent in our constitutional arrangements, continue to exist, so long will the boss system endure; and it will secure its revenues and emoluments, no matter how greatly they may be reprobated under the name of graft.

The general tendency of attacks made upon the system is to confirm it by aggravating the conditions which produce it. There are lower depths of corruption than those so far reached; and the movement for what is known as the direct nomination system is likely to sound those lower depths. That movement proposes to parallel the present system of filling a long list of administrative posts by popular election, by choosing party nominees also by popular election. It is seriously preached as a moral duty that the average citizen shall take the time to inform himself upon the personal qualifications of the various candidates, sometimes numbering fifty or more at a time. How does the obligation arise? If sociologists are not mistaken, the paramount duties of the individual man are grouped about the functions of subsistence and reproduction. Or, in every day speech, the chief duty of every man, as a member of society, is to earn his living and provide for his family. What political obligation can contravene this fundamental obligation? Are institutions made for the people or are the people made for the institutions? The latter appears to be the view of those laboring for direct administration, but no such palpable humbug can be foisted upon the people. The mass of the people will quite properly hold that they have more important things to attend to then

electioneering. They will leave that to those to whom it offers rewards. In practice the system will mean the legal establishment of gang rule. The law may provide equal terms but cannot provide equal conditions. It is obvious that if there were rewards for all comers two miles up in the air, only those able to get balloons would share in the distribution. Any free-for-all terms which election laws may make as regards nomination to office will be just as closely restricted to class opportunity. The crowning touch of absurdity and immorality is put upon the whole scheme by the assertion, sometimes made, that after the selection of candidates has been put in the hands of the people there will be nobody to blame if results are bad, since the people are entitled to bad government if they want it. Here is, indeed, a doctrine such as Burke would have called "a digest and an institute of anarchy." What is government for but the maintenance of justice? No more besotted claim of prerogative was ever advanced than that any body of men, however high they may heap voting papers in ballot boxes, have a right to perpetrate iniquity. A constitution which produces bad government is a bad constitution, and nothing can give it moral sanction. The extent to which such anarchic ideas prevail among reformers is a far more serious symptom of moral degeneracy than grafting. It is an aphorism of practical politics, for which a biologic explanation might be given, that the offices must bear the cost of filling them. The more elective offices the greater the cost of the government. So long as the people tolerate the system they will have to bear the expense, call it graft or what you will.

These views may appear cynical since they antagonize the political mythology now in vogue. The thought of the day is indoctrinated with the idea that, back of the real people one sees in the shop, the factory or the office, there is an ideal citizenship of great purity and intelligence which if brought into political activity would establish the integrity of our institutions. This hallucination energizes the direct nomination movement. The underlying purpose is to open free channels for the activity of that ideal citizenship. It is also traceable in the absurd importance attached to studies in the technique of government. The assumed existence of that ideal citizenship implies the need of educating it in its duties. Hence great effort is being made to spread the study of civics. Even lads whose chief interest in life is centered in their tops and marbles are considered fit subjects for cramming with civics. In this direction, the great superstition that education can create character as well as train faculties goes to its most extravagant length. But if we regard statecraft as an activity analo-

gous to other social activities, we shall not consider it an imputation upon the competency of the people to say that they are unfit to select their administrative officers, any more than it disparages the business capacity of the shareholders in a stock company to say that as a body they are unfit to appoint the clerks, book-keepers, salesmen and other administrative agents of the company. No sensible man will dispute the latter proposition. The essential principle of business control is universally recognized to be the delegation of administrative duties to a responsible management which, having full power, is subject to full responsibility for results. The notion that people should fit themselves for government by the study of civics is as if shareholders should qualify themselves in the practical management of the business of the corporation in order to secure proper administration of their interests. All that is necessary is an intelligent standard of requirement with a proper organization of responsibility, and the conduct of public business involves no different principles. Instead of the people themselves assuming the impossible task of looking after their servants and being continually fooled and bamboozled, they can turn that business over to a head servant and let him hire the rest and be responsible for them. We do this in the federal government but not in state or municipal government, and here the situation beautifully illustrates the Spanish proverb that the more you grasp the less you hold.

While the suffrage is incapable of serving as an organ of administration, it is capable of serving as an agency of control; but to be an efficient instrument of control, it must act upon some organ of government possessing administrative authority so complete that it may be held to full accountability for results. It is just because such an authority exists in Switzerland that that country is able to maintain such an advanced type of democratic government. Executive authority is so concentrated, and the connection between the executive and legislative departments is so simple, direct and immediate, that not even the mediation of party organization is needful to secure popular control over the conduct of the government. It is the principle of concentrated responsibility with which we are familiar as the basic principle of all business organization. In our governmental arrangements we have deviated from that principle by using the suffrage for administration. We have split up executive authority among a number of independent and coördinate administrative servants, who are practically irresponsible during their term of office if they are shrewd enough to keep out of the clutches of the criminal law. Thus they are put in a position to control the people instead of being controlled by the people. And

in employing the suffrage in its proper use for representation, we make it ineffective by disconnecting legislation from administration. We elect a mayor to represent the community as a whole, but we do not give him the right nor do we make it his duty to present the public business to the legislative branch or to bring it to decision. That is left to the good-will and favor of the representatives of localities. Why should we wonder if they turn such irresponsible power to lucrative advantage?

The growth of an extra-legal system of connecting the disconnected functions of government for administrative purposes certainly entails corruption, but it does not follow that under such circumstances it is disadvantageous although founded upon venality. Our ordinary system of municipal government is so opposed to all sound principles of business organization that it is highly creditable to our practical capacity for government that we are able to work it at all. The graft system is bad, but it is better than the constitutional system as established by law. Mr. Steffens himself supplies evidence upon this point. In Chicago, after a reform movement had triumphed, he says:

> I found there was something the matter with the political machinery. There was the normal plan of government for a city, rings with bosses, and grafting interests behind. Philadelphia, Pittsburg, St. Louis, are all governed on such a plan. But in Chicago it didn't work. "Business" was at a stand-still and business was suffering. What was the matter?

Mr. Steffens goes on to say:

> I spent one whole forenoon calling on the presidents of banks, great business men, and financiers interested in public utility companies. . . . Those financial leaders of Chicago were "mad." All but one of them became so enraged as they talked that they could not behave decently. They rose up, purple in the face, and cursed reform. They said it hurt business; it had hurt the town. "Anarchy" they called it; "socialism." They named corporations that had left the city; they named others that had planned to come there and had gone elsewhere. They offered me facts and figures to prove that the city was damaged.

It is possible that these business and financial magnates knew what they were talking about, and that it is better for a city government to lend itself to the operation of the forces of progress even through corrupt inducements than to toss the management of affairs out upon the goose-common of ignorance and incompetency, however honest. Reform which arrests the progress of the community will not be tolerated

long by an American city. On the other hand, it is quite possible that public men who have done great things by methods which have brought obloquy upon them may be esteemed when the results of their activity are appreciated. The people of Washington city now regard as a public benefactor a boss of this type and have recently erected a statue to his memory. Historians speak respectfully of one Julius Cæsar, who rose to eminence not upon the recognized lines of the constitution but as a popular boss. He is now credited with having done a great deal for his city and its dependent territories.

If these considerations are sound it may be fairly argued that they raise a greater mystery than they explain away. How is it possible to reconcile with the good sense and business capacity of the American people the growth of governmental arrangements so antagonistic to rational principles of organization? I confess that this phase of the problem has often puzzled me. Ordinary political theory is certainly oblivious of political fact to an astonishing degree. For instance, popular election of public treasurers is ordinarily justified upon the ground that it is necessary for the safety of the public funds to put them in the custody of an independent official not subject to removal by any other authority save the people themselves. The facts are all the other way. The public is not exposed to loss by the appointed treasurers of the United States, but it has lost millions through the elected treasurers of state and municipal governments. Although the growth of suretyship as a systematic branch of business enterprise is reducing risks of loss through absolute defalcation, yet those on the inside of affairs know that the manipulation of public funds in connection with elective fiduciary offices is an extensive department of the graft system, while this particular development of graft is unknown under the federal government. And yet these notorious facts do not perceptibly affect public adherence to the theory. At this very time the appointment of federal postmasters by popular election is receiving organized and influential support as a reform measure, despite every day experience of the fact that in practice this would mean irresponsible appointment by local bosses. A satirist might extract from American politics many fresh instances in confirmation of Robert South's opinion expressed nearly three centuries ago: "The generality of mankind is wholly and absolutely governed by words and names, without — nay, for the most part, even against — the knowledge men have of things. The multitude or common rout, like a drove of sheep or an herd of oxen, may be managed by any noise or cry which their drivers shall accustom them to."

But satire loses in comprehension what it gains in point. The persistence of ideas is an essential feature of the principle of social continuity which gives stability to political conditions. The ideas which have shaped our governmental arrangements are of the same class as those which were at the bottom of the past corruption of English politics. The derivation is distinctly traceable in our political origins. The check and balance theory of government which still controls our political thought was a colonial importation. Some perception of the true principles upon which democratic authority may be founded is shown in the Federalist;[1] but at that stage of constitutional development exact appreciation of those principles was impossible. Popular government was still undeveloped, and the principle of the separation of powers was not construed in its true significance as relating to the functions of government, but as an apportionment of power among classes and interests so as to confine prerogative upon the one hand and popular influence upon the other. The chief concern of the framers of the constitution was to erect barriers against democratic tendencies, and they used the check and balance theory for that purpose. As democratic tendencies gathered strength, they also settled upon the check and balance theory by natural momentum of thought, applying it to their own advantage. The class control which the gentry enjoyed under the closely restricted suffrage of the first period of the Republic was broken down by the extension of the suffrage and by the conversion of appointive posts into elective offices. The precautions taken by the framers of the constitution to secure executive unity proved so effectual that the latter movement was frustrated so far as the national government is concerned, but it has swept through state and municipal constitutions with increasing vigor until all the functions of government have been both disconnected and disintegrated in a way which leaves public opinion with no embodiment of authority capable of giving it complete representation or of assuming full responsibility for results. The stages of the process were not wholly disadvantageous so long as they were steps in the acquisition of power by the exponents of democratic tendencies, through partition of authority originally aristocratic in its tenure. But with the triumph of democratic principles of government, the partitions of power now useless as shelters from the class oppression against which they were reared,

[1] See particularly No. 70, a masterly argument on the thesis that "the executive power is more easily confined when it is one"; also, Nos. 47 and 48, wherein it is argued that separation of the powers of government does not mean their disconnection.

became obstructions which defeat democratic control by preventing its efficient exercise. No one now disputes popular sovereignty, but the people are in the position of the Grand Turk, who can cut off the head of an offender but whose affairs are so out of control that he is robbed right and left by his servants. What makes the situation more exasperating is that it is becoming a matter of common knowledge that democratic control is more complete and effective in some other countries than in our own; but the usual inference that we have somehow lost what our institutions were intended to secure is a fallacy. Our institutions have not lapsed from democracy into plutocracy; they never were democratic, and their present plutocratic character arises from the substitution of money power for the original aristocratic control. In other countries where democracy has arrived, it has not had to devise its constitutional apparatus but has had the far simpler and easier task of attaining control over that already in existence, whereas American democracy has never had a competent organ of authority. In developing such an organ we shall have to work out a constitutional application of the principle that division of the functions of government must be associated with administrative efficiency. The final result may be the formation of a new type of government. The exact form which it will assume it is now impossible to anticipate, but we can at least be certain from the very nature of sovereignty that there will be an organic connection of the executive and legislative functions. So long as the legal frame of government does not provide for that connection, it will take place outside of the legal frame; in which case we are in the habit of calling it the "machine" or the "ring" and of regarding it as a malignant excrescence upon constitutional government, whereas it is in fact the really constituted government, and the formal constitution is but a pretence and a sham.

The municipal situation is not really so desperate as one might think from a perusal of works like that of Mr. Steffens. Genuine improvement is going on through the undermining of our traditional constitutional principles under stress of practical necessity. In such charters as those of New York and Baltimore, the disconnection of the executive and legislative functions which is the root of ring rule is being practically overcome by the creation of boards of estimates and apportionment, which really unite executive and legislative powers in the same organ of government. Such appliances of government will gradually spread to other cities from the effect of example. In most cities, however, matters are likely to be worse before they are better; but even at the worst there are mitigating circumstances. Just as mediæval feu-

dalism was a powerful agency in binding together the masses of the people into the organic union from which the modern state was evolved, so too our party feudalism performs a valuable office by the way it establishes connections of interest among the masses of the people. To view the case as a whole, we should contrast the marked European tendency towards disintegration of government through strife of classes and nationalities with the strong tendency shown in this country towards national integration of all elements of the population. Our despised politicians are probably to be credited with what we call the wonderful assimilating capacity of American institutions. They are perhaps managing our affairs better than we are able to judge. We certainly do not know how to manage the politicians, but that is a branch of knowledge which no people acquires save as the result of a long course of education in the school of experience. There is no royal road to learning even for the sovereign people of the United States.

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