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*27 Masters of Politics*

*In only one respect does this book follow a sequence of time. It begins with two people whom I should call political teachers. Their creative activities, the educational value of which meant so much to contemporary politics, preceded in time those of the other personalities in the book.*

*This order of appearance I could hardly avoid, since without the lessons I learned from these pioneers I could not have comprehended nor could I have personally known those who appear later. Moreover, these men and others like them cultivated the ground from which many more recent leaders have gathered the harvest.*

*Tom L. Johnson's name is now virtually unknown except in the city in which he wrought a revolution in government forty years ago. But the ideas which he developed, in common with others in the Middle West, have since swept over the nation.*

*Beard was professionally a teacher, historian and publicist, not a practitioner of politics. But the impact of his ideas upon the political thinking of our time has been definitive and immensely important.*

*These two men were in a very real sense political teachers of the living present.*

## Reform without Incompetence

TOM L. JOHNSON

I STOOD in a noisy crowd before a Cleveland newspaper office on a November night in 1907 and saw in the election returns that Tom L. Johnson had soundly beaten that stalwart Republican congressman and candidate for mayor, Theodore Elijah Burton. I was so happy at the news that I almost forgot that on that same day I had been elected to my first public office—that of clerk in a village some miles to the West.

The Republicans had done their utmost that year. President Theodore Roosevelt had prevailed upon Burton to run and had made no bones about supporting him. William H. Taft, Secretary of War and President-to-be, joined in the urging. So did James R. Garfield, Secretary of the Interior and son of an Ohio President. This made the campaign a piece of national news and a test of national Republicanism.

In three successive elections Johnson had already beaten three opponents. Burton was the best the Republicans had. He was a man of eminent respectability, high attainment as a scholarly statesman and great power in the House of Representatives. But he was also stiff, ponderous and pedantic. As he accepted the nomination, he had intoned the aphorism attributed to Julius Cæsar, *lacta alea est*. This, which could have passed in parliamentary oratory, was ill suited to the rough ways of municipal politics. Cartoonists had their fun with it, and Johnson announced a personal translation, "Let 'er go, Gallagher."

Burton was nevertheless a potent speaker, with a masterly grasp of financial and corporative realities. He had the fervid support of every element in the city which represented invested wealth and

finance, large business management, and the more conservative educational and ecclesiastical forces.

That campaign exceeded anything Cleveland had known in bitterness, excitement and general interest. There was wrangling in the clubs, the streets, the schools and the homes. The major issue was the nature of prospective franchises to be given to the street railway companies, the rate of fare and the extent of city control. Deeper than all that, however, the campaign epitomized a line of division between the philosophy of individualism in business, as exemplified in the Hanna-McKinley era, and the so-called "progressive" philosophy of the early years of the century.

After his election Johnson appealed to the more reconcilable people of the business community, and common ground was found with Frederick H. Goff, a distinguished lawyer of eminently conservative connections who later became president of the Cleveland Trust Company. Goff was a man of truly heroic qualities who, no doubt influenced by Johnson, was keenly perceptive of the changing times.

A product of Goff's personal philosophy was the Cleveland Foundation. Unlike the foundations of Rockefeller and others (Goff was once a member of a major Rockefeller law firm), its board of control was not self-perpetuating. A majority of its members were appointed by public officials. It was based on the principle that since wealth was created by the collective energies of all the members of a community, that wealth should in major part return to enrich the common life of that community.

Goff and Johnson established a basis of settlement. In simple terms it recognized the street railways as private property entitled to a fair return on investment. It also recognized a paramount right of the city, through its government, to control a business that used city streets as a monopoly. It recognized, in short, private ownership and paramount government control in the public interest.

The fare charged was to fluctuate automatically in line with a fiscal reserve in the company. This settlement, named after its final draftsman, a Federal Judge, is the Tayler Grant. It ended

the street railway issue in Cleveland politics. It stands as probably the most constructive determination of public and private interest in municipal history.

Back and beyond and above this settlement of what was really an incidental issue, there was an idea which I learned early from Johnson and later saw illustrated in four years' association with Goff while I was director of the Cleveland Foundation. It was the belief, now widely held in all economic levels, that property—all property—is to a greater or smaller degree invested with a public interest. No man or set of men have a right to do as they choose with property which serves the public and which derives its value from public patronage.

Government is the public's agency to determine the public interest in property. It is or should be an arbiter, serving all interests with even-handed justice, never allying itself with one interest against another. For the moment that an official leader allies himself with one group against another group, he descends from the bench of justice, identifies himself as a combatant and opens the judgment seat to the tyranny of contention.

This was the philosophy of Johnson. It was the philosophy of Goff. Perhaps I invite the charge of provincialism by calling it a Cleveland idea.

Johnson won astonishing successes in business before he entered politics. He lived in an Horatio Alger era, and there was something of that "brave and bold" citizen in this young man who rose from poverty to eminence and economic power in his middle thirties. Whatever he touched seemed to prosper and to yield rich profits. He promoted and developed street railways in Louisville, Indianapolis, Detroit and Cleveland. He developed steel manufacturing in Pennsylvania and Ohio. He was a successful inventor in his own right. He had amazing judgment in picking business associates and subordinates. Had he followed business as a life-long career, he might have left one of the country's major fortunes.

Johnson was not a man who blandly accepted success as a tribute solely to his own personal capacity. As his fortune grew

from every enterprise touched by his restless energy, he began to wonder just why he should succeed while others failed. He knew that he had been guiding his attention to business situations in which a minimum of competition prevailed. Later, he pointed out that at the age of eleven he became a monopolist when a railroad conductor gave him the exclusive privilege of selling papers on his train.

He asked himself about the system which permitted monopoly. He noted that monopoly grew from the joining of politics and business. And he perceived the moral failure of a government that allied itself with a single interest. He was ripe for a great awakening.

A sudden conversion arrested his interest and almost ended his concern with money-making when, in 1883, chance in the form of a railroad news-butcher tossed in his lap a copy of Henry George's *Social Problems*. Johnson's education in economics had been in the market and workshop. He never had considered causes. He was interested in results. George appealed to him because his diagnosis was devastatingly clear and his remedy simple and all-inclusive. Johnson's next step was characteristic of a man of action. He apparently didn't bother to consult background reading. He took his Henry George books to lawyers and businessmen and talked and listened. Your true politician learns through his ears, not through his eyes.

Johnson soon sought out Henry George in Brooklyn and established a lasting friendship. No disciple ever gave himself more utterly to a master. Thereafter Johnson's life purpose was to cure inequities in society and, following the advice of George, he sought his end through politics. He would undoubtedly have written as his epitaph that he was a life-long advocate of the ideas of Henry George. He was first and last a single taxer.

He served two terms in Congress, where it would seem that he gave major attention to converting his colleagues to single tax and to the doctrines of free trade. Later, he participated in George's campaign for the mayoralty of New York and stood at

the deathbed of the great reformer a week before the election in 1897.

In the perspective of time, I wonder if in his case, as in that of many others, it was not the Henry George remedy but the diagnosis that was important. I leave it to economists to debate the soundness of the single tax. But the tremendous fact which George so diligently promoted was that of social value. To point out that a piece of land in itself is valueless unless there are people who find it useful is to shake the very foundations of all ancient concepts of private property. Moreover, land exploitation is the easiest form of exploitation to understand. Johnson pursued this point in his entire attack upon monopoly and privilege in many fields other than taxation.

Johnson, intent upon giving practical meaning to the philosophy of his dead master, first sought and won the office of Mayor of Cleveland in 1901. He held this office until 1910.

The extraordinary thing about Johnson was that, while his soul burned with the zeal of reform, his practical knowledge of administration gave his city honest and efficient government. He handled the business of government with such skill that his public was induced to take good government as a matter of course. Unlike many others whose names are associated with reform government, he denied that efficient and honest government was an end in itself. It was just a detail, like shiny shoes and pressed clothes.

In his autobiography, *My Story*, written in the final year of his life, he impatiently brushes aside the truly memorable administrative achievements of his years of service as mayor. "To give 'good government,'" he wrote, "wasn't the thing I was in public life for." It was "a side issue, merely. While we tried to give the people clean and well lighted streets, pure water, free access to the parks, public baths and comfort stations, a good police department, careful market inspection, a rigid system of weights and measures, and to make charitable and correctional institutions aid the unfortunate and correct the wrong-doers, and to do the hundred and one things that a municipality ought to do for its inhabitants—while

we tried to do all these things, and even to outstrip other cities in the doing of them, we never lost sight of the fact that they were not fundamental."<sup>1</sup>

Even his great crusade for a three-cent fare was to him an incidental matter. He believed with all his heart that the roots of evil were in land and land taxation. He said many times that if cheap transportation were gained, the public's saving would merely be paid in higher rents.

Nor did he make a fetish of non-partisanship in city government. He did not fight the Democratic machine. He took it over, controlled, directed it and measurably kept it clean. In this respect he revealed a deep wisdom, for the winning of elections was not entirely dependent upon his personal popularity. His organization won them, and even after his death the party he built won two more elections, with Newton D. Baker as a candidate.

Baker was destined to become Johnson's most celebrated lieutenant. But the annals of Cleveland's politics are full of the names of able administrators who were chosen by Johnson and taught by him to serve the public. The innovations he conceived in city government spread their influence everywhere. Home rule, municipal control of utilities, smart police administration, enlightened welfare activities conceived in Johnson's Cleveland became standard practices in many other cities.

Notable among the city departments that attained national administration and emulation under the Johnson regime were Charities and Correction, under Harris R. Cooley, and Police, under Chief Fred Kohler.

Cooley, who had been the pastor of the Disciple Church attended by Johnson, was a humanitarian and a bold administrative innovator. Under his leadership the various correctional and charitable institutions were moved out from rookeries in the city to a great farm purchased by the city. There he developed decent, humane plants—one for minor offenders, another for the indigent, another for old people, another for juvenile delinquents, and an-

<sup>1</sup> *My Story*—New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1915; p. 125.

other for tuberculous patients. Modern welfare administration everywhere owes a heavy debt to this pioneer effort.

Chief Kohler, a martinet in handling his police, was a far-sighted humanitarian in handling offenders. When Theodore Roosevelt visited Cleveland in 1910 he designated Kohler as the "best police chief in the United States." Years later, Kohler himself was elected mayor.

But it is as a teacher that Johnson deserves to be remembered. He believed that a political leader can go only by measured steps in reform and that the limit of his progress is the capacity of the public to understand, accept and learn to live with reform. Therefore, he conceived the educational function of his job to be paramount. Some years after Johnson's death, his most widely-known lieutenant and successor, Newton D. Baker, when leaving the office of mayor said, "I believed during my tenure of this office that preaching was my most important job."

Johnson's power as a public educator was so great that almost every person in Cleveland's streets was able to talk with good intelligence about franchises, property rights, taxation and a variety of other complicated issues. A visitor from abroad once asked Mayor Johnson to tell him about the street-railway problem. Johnson pointed to the street below his window and said, "Just go out and ask the first man you meet." That was hardly an exaggeration.

I hope it is not the pride of a native that induces me to believe that Cleveland is politically the most remarkable city in the nation. The ups and downs of other American cities in which massive victories for reform are followed by swift falls from grace are marks of political immaturity. In the past forty years Cleveland has had its scandals and its upsets. But a certain sophistication prevails which tempers the curves of civic morality. Behind Cleveland government is an educated public whose basic training goes back to the still revered golden age of Johnson.

When, in 1933, the nation hailed a national administration which established in rapid succession a number of long overdue reforms, an elderly man came to my office in the State Depart-

ment. It was Frederick C. Howe, whom I had not seen since, as a youngster, I had attended Tom Johnson's tent meetings in Cleveland. Fred Howe was of the Johnson inner circle. He was the most academic of the lot, an orator and the author of many books on reform. In the years since Johnson he had drifted here and there, looking for the light he had seen in the Johnson years. He was infused with the idea that under Roosevelt the nation might see something of the same renaissance. Misty-eyed he talked of the old days, and I told him, as I had told many others, that whatever of permanence and worth some of us had given to the New Deal was the fulfilment of simple lessons learned long ago from Johnson in Cleveland. In so far as the New Deal conformed to that pattern, it was hardly controverted. But it never learned that reform without able and efficient public service is a song without words. The nation still waits for national leadership in the pattern of Johnson—reform without incompetence.

## Challenge to Orthodoxy

CHARLES A. BEARD

TWENTY-TWO YEARS passed between the death of Tom L. Johnson and the inauguration of the New Deal in Washington. They were years of extraordinary national diversions—war, normalcy, depression. But the seed planted by Johnson and other pioneer reformers in the early years of the century had been alive and growing in the minds of a new generation of Americans. There was a revolution in the texts and teaching in the schools and colleges, in literature, in the everyday discourse of the young, in newspaper and magazine comment, in the legislatures of the states, in judicial decisions, and in the policies of many business enterprises. A new order of priority in social values was appearing. In short, there was, by 1932, an educated audience for the political preaching of social progress through government.

No man was more potent in creating this receptivity than Charles Austin Beard. He appeared on the academic stage as a challenge to orthodox concepts of history, political science and economics, just as had been some of his elders, like John Dewey and Thorstein Veblen. But unlike those pioneers, Beard immensely amplified his influence by creating, often in collaboration with others, popular textbooks which reached all grades and classes of schools. Other writers of textbooks, such as James Harvey Robinson and Carlton J. H. Hayes at Columbia, were infected by his intellectual and emotional interests. Graduate students inspired by Beard moved into vastly important educational forums everywhere. When the children who had studied his texts in school reached maturity, Beard offered them the *Rise of American Civilization*, a great distillation of his historical research in popular form. Finally, his great dialogue, *The Republic*, reached millions