

coming election, and that demonstration must be an emphatic one.

Should such a challenge fall upon deaf ears, Mayor Dempsey would do right to resign as mayor. But neither he nor his associates could with good civic conscience desert the minority that would have proved their fidelity by their votes. The obligation would be all the heavier upon him to awaken the slumbering majority and rescue his city. To resign as mayor would be one thing; to resign as a faithful citizen would be something wholly different.

DESPOTISM VERSUS DEMOCRACY.*

Burning issues? In the last analysis there is but one issue that burns. Though human controversies be limitless in multitude and variety, the essential issue in every one is the same. It always has been the same and doubtless always will be. Whenever particular controversies burn, it is because they radiate the heat of this essential issue with practical effect. Academic questions never burn. However heated their disputants may become they develop no social heat until they take on practical form. Neither do practical questions burn unless they are vitalized with the heat of this essential issue. And the essential issue, this question of questions, this one burning issue of all the past and as far as we can see of all the future too, what is it but the irrepensible issue of despotism against democracy?

Sometimes we think that in our democratic country we have banished despotism, but we are mistaken. Though some of its more ancient forms have been cast out, the ancient principle of despotism is here and now as active as ever, and the old principle of democracy continually renews its youth among us.

I have no intention of even enumerating the particular burning questions of our generation, nor shall I so much as attempt the discussion of a single one of them. All I ask of you is to consider that those that do burn, those that split society—whether international, national or local society—into hostile camps swarming with vigorous partisans, are only battles in a perennial war between the principles of democracy and the policies of despotism.

Do we observe—either in the present or the past, either here or elsewhere—any burning questions in the churches? Let us examine them minutely and we shall find that in the last analysis they are controversies in behalf of ecclesiastical dominion on the one hand and religious freedom on the other. Are our burning questions political? Then they are struggles for personal liberty against governmental oppression, be the oppression administrative, legislative or judicial. If economic, then our burning questions are essentially conflicts in

behalf of the natural rights of manhood as to property, against the oppressions of privilege as to property. And these three kinds of despotism are allies. Both ecclesiastical despotism and economic privilege fortify themselves with political power, while political dominion draws strength from ecclesiasticism and sustenance from economic privilege. Here is an unholy trinity in unity to appall the stoutest knight errant of democracy.

But democratic knights errant unappalled were never wanting in the past, though the penalties for temporary defeat were rack and thumbscrew, fire and gibbet. Why should there be timidity now, when the severest possible penalties are the irreverent pencil jabs of mercenary cartoonists, and the cheap slurs of smug-souled pharisees? The question is hardly worth the asking. Penalties play a small part in baffling the democratic spirit; whether they are severe or contemptible makes little difference. The democratic knight errant is a reactionary effect of despotism, not an originating cause of democracy; and when the spirit of democracy stirs the hearts of men, it thrusts forward its spokesmen and agents—they cannot help themselves. And the spirit of democracy does stir the hearts of men whenever despotism begins to unmask or its veiled operations begin to sting. Then it is, and only then, that any question offers a burning issue.

The controversy may be religious, political or economic, or a confusion of any two or of all three, and the question in its particular form may be almost anything from "government by injunction" to municipal ownership; but the issue, if the question be a burning one, is always the issue of natural rights. It is the issue (it may be in large or it may be in small) of people's government or superimposed government, of organized selfishness or organized justice, of despotism or democracy.

The despotic impulse may indeed be benevolent, but it is none the less despotic for that. Nor is it less likely to become tyrannous. Haven't most tyrannies originated in despotic benevolence? Yet we must not assume that all who take their stand with despotism are necessarily selfish in their impulses or undemocratic in their aspirations. The benevolent despot is of course as despotic as the tyrant, and more dangerous to the principle of liberty. But I am far from saying that all who support despotic measures are despotic men. I have been comparing not hostile men but hostile principles. The democracy of individuals on either side of any specific controversy cannot be questioned fairly without incriminating proof in each man's case; for particular questions between despotism and democracy are never simple, nor is the issue ever sharply drawn except by historians long after the contests are over and the questions no longer burn.

Were we to attempt a classification of men with reference to their attitude toward particular con-

*A paper read by Louis F. Post at a symposium of the Chicago Literary Club, April 2, 1906, on "Burning Issues."

troversies that burn, we should probably be able to assign them to three general categories. Though we should still be in a maze, for the sub-classifications would be innumerable, the three general categories could be fairly distinguished, I think, as the democratic, the despotic, and (if you will allow the verbal invention) the "grafteric."

Unselfish men of the democratic and the despotic classes are in honest conflict over a principle of social life, one class believing in the benevolence of despotism and the other in the beneficence of democracy. Although these classes vary in their constituents, from unqualified individualists at the extreme of democracy to unrestrained centralizationists at the farther extreme of despotism, and although there is a middle space between the two where the constituents of both remind one of the little boy whose trousers were so curiously cut that his own mother couldn't tell at a distance whether he was going to school or coming home, yet on the whole I think there are clearly distinguishable among unselfish men the two tendencies I have indicated, one of which makes for despotism and the other for democracy.

But these tendencies are more or less diverted by the "grafteric" tendency. This also has its maze of sub-classifications. They extend from the disreputable gray wolf with his raw carrion, through many grades downward to the two-dollar voter, and many more upward to millionaire beneficiaries of the two-dollar vote. They extend even to the supernal plane, where "grafteric" clergymen tithe those beneficiaries for the cure of their souls and the moral policing of their tainted treasures.

Both sides of burning questions are affected by the influence of graft. The democratic side has its little graft, and men of undemocratic or indifferent impulses are doubtless often drawn to that side for the graft rather than by the principle. The despotic side has richer graft. Not only is the graft richer, but usually its successful appropriation operates also as a general certificate of good character. Business interests of the "grafteric" kind usually flourish better under despotic than under democratic influences. So do professional ambitions of the "grafteric" kind. Every large form of selfishness, from the benevolent type that would magnificently regulate the lives of the poor to the type that would commit any predatory crime of magnitude if assured immunity—springs as naturally to the despotic side of every burning question as iron filings to a magnet.

But what is the moral difference between large and little forms of selfishness? We differentiate respectable graft from the disreputable. We send some little grafters to prison, while we send some bigger ones to the council, the legislature, the senate or the bench, and depend upon other bigger ones to lend their respectability to missionary enterprises and anti-crime committees. But in all

candor, what is the moral difference, for instance, between an impoverished citizen who votes any way you want him to for \$2, and a "penniless plute" who votes as business men tell him to, or the business men themselves who vote for what they are pleased to call "business interests"? What moral difference does it make whether the "business interest" is an interest in a law creating a privilege worth millions in the course of a few years, or an interest in a two-dollar bill on election day? And let me also ask how much superior morally to election grafters who begin a graft job by selling their votes for \$2 apiece, are distinguished lawyers who for a larger fee perfect the job, or successful business men who seek profit by investing in it, or distinguished editors who earn salaries by writing editorial defenses or apologies for it?

A politician of the "grafteric" type once confided to me his three rules for political success. He was a man of compact speech, whose verbal embellishments were few. They were usually phrased in spiritual terms, though seldom in terms of heavenly significance. "In the first place," said he, "you must keep your family in good standing in church; in the second place you must be true to your friends, true to your ring; in the third place you must keep out of the penitentiary; and after that you can do anything you damn please. But," he added reflectively, "you *must* keep out of the penitentiary."

With the advance of our era of fierce commercialism (now happily passing away), when gross idolatry of commercial success grew more and more obtrusive and repugnant, I often wondered if those rules for ignoble political success might not be the rules also for pretty much all ignoble successes—for all those ignoble successes at the bar, in the counting room, in the pulpit, in the editorial chair, in society, as well as in politics, before which we were strenuously admonished to fall down in ignoble worship. They seem indeed to be rules of universal application in the wide domain of successful graft, and the one important consideration seems always to be the keeping out of the penitentiary.

Into every burning question this element of graft enters, and not one of us knows how much he himself may be affected by it until he is tempted. Even if we withstand temptation, how can we know we have been offered *our* price? Mayhap we are unconsciously only holding out for a higher price or a different kind of price—for a safe fortune instead of a dangerous bribe; for a professional or business career instead of ready money; for political advancement or social recognition, rather than anything else. Let none of us be *too* ready to cast the first stone at a grafter, whether that grafter belong to the upper four hundred or to the submerged mob.

Apart, however, from the sin of judging others,

it is a fact we cannot blink, that the element of graft tends to distort the issue of despotism or democracy in every burning question. Have we not met men who are academically democratic, yet never on the democratic side of any concrete question which has begun to burn? Why is this so? Some no doubt are influenced by genuine alterations of opinion, induced by the heat of the conflict, which brings their academic speculations to the test of a stimulated judgment. Many, however, are influenced—unconsciously, it may be, for the most part, yet influenced nevertheless, by considerations of personal gain or loss. And do not these considerations constitute the essential principle of graft?

But when all the diverting influences to which individual minds are subject have been given full weight, there remains the truth which it has been my chief object here to point out, that the essence of every burning question, the principle that makes it what we understand by burning question, is the clash of the despotic and the democratic forces in human society—the irrepressible conflict of despotism against democracy.

In greater or lesser degree, every man yields himself to one or the other of those forces. The degree to which he yields may be affected by his selfishness, his ignorance, his thoughtlessness. But he does yield. And whatever the motive that determines him, he does turn his face, when the heat of social controversy arises, in one or the other of those directions—either in the direction of which the logical goal is perfect equality of legal rights, of political power, and of economic opportunity, or else in the opposite direction, of which the logical goal is oligarchy if not absolute monarchy. The ultimatum of democratic principle is government of the people by and for the people; the ultimatum of the opposite principle, whether we call this principle despotism or by some smoother name, is government of the people by and for a few or may be only one of the people.

When these two principles clash, as they do clash whenever and wherever common rights and private interests conflict, they generate burning questions. These questions vary in form with time, place and circumstances, and are numerous accordingly. But they are burning questions only because and to the extent that they are battle gauges in the perennial war of despotism upon democracy. In this sense, therefore, there is but one burning issue.

And the war of despotism upon democracy, let me close by saying, is at its heart the same war on a larger scale that is fought out to the end of his life in every man's breast, between his own selfish instincts of lust and pride, and his own sense of brotherly justice. His selfish lust and pride are the germs in him of that despotic spirit which in the wider field of human society is manifested in the struggle for political conquest, for ecclesiastical

dominion, for economic privilege. His sense of justice, on the other hand, is the germ in him of that spirit of democracy which is set forth as the vital principle of our patriotism in the Declaration of Independence and of our religion in the Golden Rule. Though the despotic spirit might possibly conquer the whole world, it is the democratic spirit alone that can make the whole world kin.

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

Ohio.

Cleveland, April 16.—Only two things of genuine importance were actually accomplished by the Ohio legislature which recently and with significant precipitancy closed its session. These were the enactment of the 2-cent fare bill for passenger travel on the railroads of the State, and the repeal of the law prohibiting the printing of the same name in more than one column of candidates on the official ballot at elections. Substantial progress was made, however, in some other respects, the value of which will doubtless become more apparent in next Fall's campaign.

The 2-cent fare bill was passed early in the session, before the corporations were able to pull the strings of partisanship, local interests and personal corruption, whereby a little later they threw this reform legislature into a state of demoralization. This bill reduced fares from 3 cents a mile to 2, and the roads are obedient to it as to local travel. But they evade it with reference to through travel. The Lake Shore, for instance, charges the same fare as heretofore between Chicago and Cleveland. Astute travelers circumvent them somewhat by buying tickets from Chicago to Toledo going east, and from Cleveland to Toledo going west, and pay for the rest of their journey on the train. One good effect of the reduction of fares has been the abolition by the roads of clergymen's half-fare rates; a rather short-sighted policy for the roads, however, for it has dampened a friendly feeling among a large and influential class, upon which, with notable individual exceptions, these corporations have been accustomed to rely for more or less indirect support in times of need.

The change in the ballot law is a severe blow at party regularity. When the Australian ballot law came into vogue, the professional politicians bestirred themselves to make it as ineffective as possible. Among their tricks was one to provide for party columns, so that voters could vote a "straight" ticket by merely making a single mark in a circle at the top of the party column instead of marking each name. One object of this trick was to favor indiscriminate voting. Another was to facilitate intimidation by enabling the "straight" voter to come out of his booth almost instantly. If he remained there longer than the instant required to make one mark he could be "spotted" as probably disloyal. But fusions of two minority parties were still possible, and this possibility caused so much consternation among the professionals of the plurality party, that a bold stand was taken against it. The trick adopted by several States, including Ohio, was