

MAYOR JOHNSON AS INTERVIEWED BY CREELMAN.

An interview with Hon. Tom L. Johnson, of Cleveland, as reported under date of Cleveland, O., April 15, by Jas. Creelman for the New York Journal of April 16.

With the second desperate struggle for the control of Greater New York impending, New Yorkers have seen Tom Johnson take possession of the mayor's office in Cleveland with such moral rage and such reckless disregard of political theories that this seventh city of the nation has suddenly been turned into a laboratory for the working out of great municipal problems.

The new mayor has arrested the attention of the whole country by the sudden stroke through which he seized his office, just in time to prevent his predecessor from signing away a large part of the lake front to a railway company.

He has ordered dangerous buildings torn down, has set policemen at the doors of immoral dens and has begun to organize a department of the city government for the equalization of taxes—a system that will make the franchise owners bear their just share of the burdens of taxation.

He has gone at the public problems of this great and rich city as Grover Cleveland attacked the political corruption of Buffalo, but he goes deeper than Mr. Cleveland ever went.

I saw Mayor Johnson when he arrived at his office this morning—a burly, rosy-cheeked, curly-haired, hazel-eyed man, who forced his way through the picturesque crowd that was massed in the shadowy corridors and ante-room, nodding, shaking hands, smiling, but moving straight on to his desk like a man who had work to do and would not be delayed.

Words can hardly express the sense of energy conveyed by the personality of this extraordinary man, yet nature has given him the plump, laughing, unwrinkled aspect of an ease lover. For all that his good-natured, round figure and jolly face show, he might be an amiable, lazy, mediaeval abbot spending most of his time sprawled out at the table.

But when he dropped into his swinging chair before his desk and whirled this way and that to make decisions or give directions his countenance took on an expression of power, alertness and determination which is not easy to describe.

Those who have seen Tom Johnson in evening dress in the Waldorf-Astoria lolling about among the cushions have wondered how a man appar-

ently consecrated by nature to caressing indolence could have risen in a few years from poverty to great wealth. But if they had seen Mr. Johnson as I saw him this morning in the mayor's office in Cleveland they would have recognized the terrific industry and dominating personality which has made the world a level road for him. He has the mind of an idealist, in the body of an ox.

"What would I do if I were mayor of New York? But I am not mayor of New York. I am mayor of Cleveland. My work is here."

Mr. Johnson smiled and showed two rows of sound white teeth. His strong fingers played with a red cornelian seal hanging on his watch chain.

"I am not a reformer," he said. "I dislike that word. It suggests a crablike motion to me. It is identified with backward movement. I don't want to be known as a reformer. I want to see progress made in our cities—real progress, not sham reform."

"What is true of Cleveland is generally true of New York. The two great steps which are necessary now lead to the public ownership of municipal monopolies and the equalization of taxes. Vice in our great cities is largely the result of injustice, of involuntary poverty, the product of unequal conditions."

"The worst evils of municipal government and municipal politics are due to the struggle for valuable public franchises. That is the main source of corruption. When we have put the street railway companies and other private owners of municipal monopolies out of politics we have solved one of the most tremendous problems of city government."

"So long as you continue to grant these valuable franchises to private companies the companies will remain in politics, and will, as a rule, control politics for their own ends. That is the trouble in New York and Cleveland to-day. If I were mayor of New York instead of Cleveland I would urge the passage of a law providing for a three-cent fare on all street and elevated railways, just as I am determined to secure that system here."

"But that is only a step toward the real thing—the public ownership of street railways."

Mayor Johnson stood up, walked to the window and pointed to the steel rails of the trolley railway shining down the gray sweep of granite pavement.

"Why should not the city of Cleveland own these streaks of steel as it

owns that pavement or the water pipes under it? Why should Cleveland or New York vote away monopolies based on the right to use the streets?"

"You say that the army of street railway employes would be used in politics, would work to keep some party in power."

Mr. Johnson laughed and slapped his knee.

"And you think the street railway systems are not in politics now? It is extraordinary to see how little penetration the public has. Now I have built, owned and managed street railways on a pretty big scale. That is a subject I can fairly claim acquaintance with. I know the inside of it and the outside of it."

"And I can tell the people of New York, as I tell the people of Cleveland, that the street railways keep their power simply by being in politics."

"They are at the bottom of municipal politics. If they are willing to spend vast sums every year to keep their monopolies, they are bound to stimulate a struggle for office for the sake of the rich spoils they offer. The worst element in politics will fight harder than the best element to get positions which will give them a chance to share in the plunder."

"I don't lay the blame on the poor, corrupt aldermen or on the street railways. They are simply the victims of custom and habit. I blame the system which offers monopolies as prizes for corrupt politics."

"This system invites corruption and paralyzes progress. Let any citizen of New York or Cleveland look at the matter thoughtfully and he must see that the great cities will never free their elections and their governments from the prime source of corruption until they own their own street railways, and all other monopolies founded on public grants."

"It is a waste of time to talk about corruption in the police force, or corruption in the board of aldermen, while we ignore the all-moving power which dominates and demoralizes municipal politics."

"Of course you will have corruption, of course you will have official incompetency and official cowardice, until you remove from politics altogether the struggle for private ownership of public franchises. That is the overwhelming issue in municipal politics to-day."

"If I were mayor of New York I would work to have the street rail-

ways and all other owners of city monopolies pay taxes on the full value of their property. That is what I want done here in Cleveland. Tax the possessions of the street railway companies on the basis of the selling value of their stock.

"That is a fair and businesslike proposition. The street railway companies of Cleveland refused a value of \$29,000,000. They pay taxes only on a valuation of \$2,000,000. The other street railways pay taxes on about three per cent. of their value.

"But small property owners have to pay taxes on 50, 60, 80 and 90 per cent. of the value of their property."

"I tell you that, if I were mayor of New York, I would use my power and influence to change the system of assessing taxes. I would have a public court to equalize taxes. I would have the tax assessors present their figures in court, in the presence of the public.

"I would have large wall maps in each case showing the location of the property assessed, and giving the value of the surrounding property in bold, plain figures, so that the members of the court and the public could see at a glance whether there was any apparent discrepancy in the assessed values. I would not allow assessments to be fixed in secret.

"I would make the process as public as possible, so that favoritism would be detected instantly. And I would have the system of valuing property for taxation a continuous one, raising or lowering values, according to the changes of circumstances and conditions. I would abolish the present plan of fixing values at certain periods, or in certain years, and keeping them without change.

"If the owners of great estates and the street railway companies were to be compelled by such a system to pay their fair share of taxes as poorer owners of small dwellings and owners of tenement houses are forced to pay, the tax rate of New York would be reduced one-half.

"This is a practical matter, not a mere doctrine. It squares with business principles. It is just and reasonable. The taxpayers and the rent payers of New York have a tremendous stake in this question, for it lies at the very root of municipal evils. When New York owns her own street railways and other city monopolies, and when the publicity attending the equalization of taxes makes the big property owner pay at the same rate imposed on the small property own-

er, not only will taxes be lower and rents lower, but local politics will be freed from the principal incentive to corruption—corruption that eats into parties and primaries as well as into sworn officials."

The mayor walked up and down the room with his hands locked behind him. The "high rollers" of the Waldorf-Astoria would not have recognized Tom Johnson, the rosy sybarite, in this serious, stern-mouthed man.

"All this can be accomplished in a year, if the people of New York are in earnest about it," he said. "This question of cities is the greatest practical question of the time. It is pressing for a remedy and the remedy is plain.

"Take the Brooklyn Bridge company. It has been owned and operated, not by one, but by two cities. Yet, notwithstanding the admittedly rotten element in New York and Brooklyn municipal affairs, that railway, under Superintendent Martin's management, has been the best and cheapest railway in the world.

"No one has ever accused the employes of the Brooklyn Bridge railway of using their positions for political purposes. There, right in the heart of the Greater New York, you have a perfect and practical illustration of the great principle for which New Yorkers should fight night and day.

"In my opinion the people of New York will be fools if they let the state legislature take away from them the right to manage their own affairs. They should resist all charters and all legislation which interferes with home rule, and they should fight for three-cent railway fares and public and continuous equalization of taxes as the first step toward the public ownership of monopolies. That is progress. That is common sense."

As the mayor ceased speaking the door of his office was opened and a river of office seekers rolled in. But the mayor turned his back on them and went to work at his desk.

"We must take up this question of clear sidewalks to-day," he said to his secretary. "Things must move."

The widow is gathering nettles for her children's dinner; a perfumed seigneur, delicately lounging in the *Oeil-de-Boeuf*, has an alchemy whereby he will extract from her the third nettle, and name it Rent and Law; such an arrangement must end. Ought it not?—Thomas Carlyle, *French Revolution* (Book 6, Chapter 3).

ONE CODE OF MORALITY.

THE LAW WHICH BINDS THE INDIVIDUAL ALSO BINDS THE NATION.

A speech delivered by Rev. Herbert S. Bigelow, of the Vine Street Congregational church of Cincinnati, at the Manhattan Single Tax club's dinner in honor of Thomas Jefferson, held in New York on the evening of April 13.

In a letter to James Madison, Thomas Jefferson used these words:

I know of but one code of morality for men, whether acting singly or collectively. He who says I will be a rogue when I act in company with a hundred others, but an honest man when I act alone, will be believed in the former assertion, but not in the latter.

If Thomas Jefferson could know the drift of our national life to-day, and if he could return to give us a word of counsel, I believe he would improve the opportunity by solemnly reminding us that there is not one code of morality for individuals and another for nations.

If this is a Christian civilization, if we are not a nation of atheists, we must hold that there can be no enduring progress or prosperity which is not founded on righteousness, and that righteousness alone exalteth a nation. And national righteousness is nothing at all but an empty phrase if it is not what Thomas Jefferson said it was. National righteousness is the recognition, in the conduct of public affairs, of the same code of morality which men universally agree to be binding on them in their private life.

We hear much about the nation's duty. If a nation has duties, it must also have a conscience, a moral code, and must distinguish between right and wrong.

But, while the word duty is a good one for the politician to conjure with, we submit that it is often used to-day as a blind by which to win the support of well-meaning people to policies which are immoral, and which it is their duty to shun. In order to do this, another doctrine of national duty is taught, quite the reverse of the teaching of Jefferson. It is taught that the nation is under no moral obligation to respect that code of morality which is binding upon the individual. This doctrine, stated or implied, lies at the foundation of the gospel of imperialism. A prominent preacher in the west was more honest than politic when he boldly stated and defended this double standard of morality.

"The individualist," says this preacher, "has no category of national conduct except his own individual conscience. * * * Because