

Scholastic Straight-Jackets for Democracy.

Nicholas Murray Butler, the president of Columbia University, made a speech at St. Louis last fall against the Initiative, Referendum and Recall; and this speech the reactionaries are now circulating extensively under Congressional frank as a Senate document. It is a delightful speech, highly classical, intensely grave, passingly gay, politely vituperative, elegant in form, school-mastery in spirit, deferential in manner and altogether a model of how to say instructively and interestingly what isn't worth the saying—or worse. We advise our readers to read it.



When the school teachers of the country, who know much of President Butler and his ways and his manners, call him "Nicholas Miraculous" in lady-like derision, it may seem a weak retort in kind to Dr. Butler's rather more witty and more robust banter; but the miraculous ingenuity of this speech, in which Dr. Butler invokes the principles of democracy to prohibit the practice of it, rather indicates that those teachers, however dull they may possibly be in banter, are intensely keen in perception. And yet, in spite of the ingenuity of this polished "devil's advocate," no reader who resists the hypnotic effect of Dr. Butler's entrancing literary passes will find any difficulty in detecting the breaks in his historical parallels and the fallacies of his over-pretentious logic.



Since Dr. Butler makes scarecrows out of the Initiative, Referendum and Recall, but with all his ingenuity is unable quite to give irresponsible "representative" government a clean bill of health, he ventures upon a suggestion of his own and thereby diggeth a ditch for his whole speech. True political progress, as he views it, "leads to a political practice in which a few important officers are chosen for relatively *long terms* of service, given *much power* and responsibility, and then held to strict *accountability* therefor." Now this is precisely the political practice which the Initiative, Referendum and Recall are designed to secure. But Dr. Butler rejects them as undemocratic. By what means, then, would he hold his few elective officials, with their long terms and much power, to strict accountability? He doesn't say. It is a safe guess that he won't try to say. It is perhaps a safer one that with all his miraculous ingenuity as a "democratic" special pleader for aristocracy, he couldn't say if he tried.

Without the protection of the Initiative, Referendum and Recall, the people would soon find Dr. Butler's *few* elective officials, with *long terms* and *much power*, strictly *without accountability* therefor. This is the testimony of all peoples who have either lacked that protection, or possessed it in crude and inefficient forms; it is the increasingly emphatic lesson of American experience. To have but few elective officials, is highly desirable; to make their terms long is also desirable; to give them much power is sound doctrine. But unless they are held to strict accountability *to the people*, these officials will evolve irresponsible despotisms, as such officials always have—despotisms which can be overthrown only by greater despotisms or by tragical revolutions; and no means for holding them to strict accountability to the people is yet proposed other than the Initiative, Referendum and Recall.



"Natural Laws."

In the country-wide discussion of political, economic, and social problems, one frequently hears mysterious appeals to "natural law." As no details are given, we find ourselves in the dark about the meaning of these impressive terms. Captains of industry talk about "the natural laws of business." Bankers refer to "the natural laws of money and banking." Presidents, Governors, and other functionaries, take the cue and fall in line with the same phrases. What does this glib reference to natural law mean? If there be natural laws governing social problems, why not tell the world what they are? We suggest that somebody make a sort of average of all public utterances by captains of industry, bankers, Presidents, Governors, and other safe and sane men, and issue a treatise in book form under some such title as, "The Natural Laws of Society Inductively Deduced from the Speeches of Experts for the Enlightenment of the Benighted." Such a work would undoubtedly fill a "long-felt want," and in this way the aching void, which various expert gentlemen ache to fill, might be filled and soothed.



Lest it be supposed that we are not in serious mood, we hasten to add that we are very much in earnest. The Public believes that there actually are natural laws governing social problems; and we hail with joy any agreement with this fundamental proposition. We neither hint, nor imply, nor suggest, nor even remotely insinuate, that there are no natural laws of society. What we want is to have these laws understood by as many