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EDITORIAL

The Chicago Traction Steal.

Nothing now remains to protect the streets of Chicago from J. Pierpont Morgan's raid, but the referendum vote. Mayor Dunne has exhausted his official power by vetoing the Morgan ordinances, and the corrupted City Council has nullified his veto by the requisite two-thirds. Only twelve aldermen stood firm against the temptations and influences that Morgan's band of buccaneers threw in their way.

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It is a motley crew, that which has lined up

behind Morgan in this last desperate assault upon the city's rights. There are the "gray wolves" of both parties, aldermen who are known to be always "out for the stuff" and whose votes could never have been got for a proposition like this of Morgan's without "a roll," and a "fat roll" at that. Side by side with these are Victor Lawson's milk-and-water reformers, backed by Lawson's papers—the News and the Record-Herald—together with the Municipal Voters' League, all aforetime vigorous denouncers of their present "gray wolf" comrades. Cheek by jowl with the others is the Republican machine, which is to Cook County what Tammany Hall is to New York—an office brokerage concern that collects from the corporations and makes good by distributing party spoils and giving orders to its henchmen. Last of all, but hungry as any, are the Harrison Democrats, part of the stock in trade of the Victor Lawson outfit. In different ways this entire aggregation has been brought into line under the Pierpont Morgan banner; some by raw boodle, some by political promises, some by coercive pressure, some by business relationships and expectations, and all by influences that none would like to confess to with candor and for publication.

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But the referendum looms up before Mr. Morgan and his motley cohorts. Unless the Morgan ordinances are voted for by the people, the corporations will find their plunder again just out of their reach. They may, of course,—and in spite of legal opinions to the contrary, as well as their own promises, they doubtless will,—claim that an adverse referendum vote cannot affect the ordinances; that their rights were complete when the ordinances passed the Council over the Mayor's veto. But on this contention they will almost certainly lose in the courts in the end. It will serve them only to postpone the final decision of the traction question until they can possibly jam through a franchise ordinance without a referendum. Their ability to do this will depend upon the result of the election for Mayor.

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The Mayoralty Election in Chicago.

The defeat of the traction ordinances on referendum is almost a certainty. Huge sums of money will no doubt be spent to carry them, but the whole Morgan combine are conscious of the gigantic difficulties in their way even with "oodles" of money.

They are planning, therefore, to secure the election of a city government from which, when these ordinances are defeated, they can obtain what they want without the obstacle of a referendum. The one thing that would baffle their plans in this respect is the re-election of Mayor Dunne. Every agency at their command, therefore—physical, political, goo-goo and financial,—is now in requisition to assure Dunne's defeat. But it is evident that Dunne cannot be defeated at the polls. The only possibility of defeating him at all is to corrupt the Democratic primaries and prevent his nomination.

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The man chosen to lead the Pierpont Morgan interests at the Democratic primaries is ex-Mayor Harrison. As the primaries are practically under the control of susceptible politicians, and are so held as to make popular voting at them a farce, the Morgan manipulators expect to count Dunne out and Harrison in. Should they accomplish that purpose, the election contest would be between Harrison as the machine Democrat and Busse as the machine Republican, and Morgan wouldn't care which side won.

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Upon the Democratic nomination for Mayor depends the settlement of the traction problem. If Dunne is nominated, his inevitable election and the equally inevitable defeat of the pending Morgan ordinances, will put a quietus upon the Morgan schemes and leave the city in control of its streets; should Harrison be nominated, the Pierpont Morgan financiers, whether under Harrison or Busse makes no other difference than possibly to some confidential expense account, would own Chicago. Though they failed on the referendum they could then fall back upon Harrison or Busse, as the case might be, for a franchise without a referendum. The immediate demand upon the Democrats of Chicago, if they would protect their traction rights from the Morgan raid, is that they make Dunne's nomination sure by voting for him overwhelmingly at the primaries.

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Indecent Newspapers.

President Roosevelt is credited in Washington dispatches with an intention of prosecuting daily newspapers for publishing through the mails the indecent details of the Thaw trial. Since there is a law prohibiting the use of the mails for such purposes, it is to be hoped that the Federal authorities will enforce it impartially against the great dailies, as they have done with much less reason against defenseless weeklies. But postal

laws can do little to eradicate the evil. No law can force newspapers to rise above the level of the general decency. Of this the instance under consideration furnishes proof, for it is not "yellow journals" alone that are offending in connection with the Thaw trial. The offenders include papers of highly reputable tints. But who is there among their readers, their advertisers, or the patrons of their advertisers, that thinks of thrusting them and their vile reports out of his house? These papers do not come into homes by stealth. They are invited in—filth and all. So long as public sentiment is no more sensitive than that, the postal laws, though they continue to be operative against weak periodicals, will be impotent against great newspapers. Later dispatches indicate that this is also President Roosevelt's opinion. His intention to prosecute the great dailies is reported as having been abandoned.

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Capital Punishment.

An agreeable surprise came last week from the judiciary committee of the lower house of the Illinois legislature. One progressive member, Mr. Ton, had timidly proposed the abolition of the death penalty in cases of conviction on circumstantial evidence. To his astonishment, no doubt, the committee voted, 13 to 12, to abolish capital punishment altogether. One of the members, Mr. McGoorty, fortified the position of the majority by asserting that "every man who ever has seen an execution has been made an advocate of the abolition of the death penalty." This is probably too extreme a statement. While doubtless true of human men, it is probably erroneous as to brute men. To the instincts of the latter the capital penalty appeals, and the closer he gets to its infliction (until it reaches himself) the more he enjoys the horrible sensation. He revels in newspaper details of executions, he yearns to be an onlooker at the grewsome spectacle, and when he sees a hanging he wants to adjust the rope. Capital penalties are bad enough, in that they blot out the physical life of the victims; they are infinitely worse, in that they foster brutish instincts in the populace. The man who coldly demands the taking of another's life by law, is fit, and upon provocation is likely to be willing, to take another's life without law. Where lawful homicide flourishes lawless homicide is cultivated, and of the two the former is morally the worse. Driven by righteous wrath temporarily beyond control, men may lynch murderers caught in the act, without breaking down their own moral