

between Republicanism and Democracy have very much to do with a man's fitness to be a president or a congressman, but they also have nothing or next to nothing in the world to do with his fitness to be a mayor or a city comptroller or a president of the city council.

We say these things, not because we are indifferent to politics, but because we see how little, how very little national politics have properly to do with municipal officers. It is related that when General Bourmont was presented to Blücher, the latter, a man of violent prejudices but a thorough soldier, indicated his professional contempt for the deserter so unmistakably as to embarrass his more diplomatic staff. One of them, thinking it might please his commander, pointed out the enormous white cockade which Bourmont ostentatiously wore in proof of devotion to Legitimist principles. "Bah," said the old Field Marshal; "that doesn't matter. A blackguard stays a blackguard, however you label him." When the voters of a great American city clearly understand that "labeling" the tool of a corrupt "ring" the nominee of a great party leaves him just what he was before, and doesn't change in the least their duty as voters, when that time shall come then they will have a good mayor.

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## REFORM VIA DEMOCRACY

THE reformers of a generation past sought good government by way of "checks and balances," seeking to devise a framework of government so ingenious that under it no official could fail to give good government. It was somewhat like tying the steering wheel of an automobile to make sure that the chauffeur would drive straight.

The new generation, working for political reform, no longer tries to get good government on *behalf* of the people, but seeks to put the people in a position where they can easily get *for themselves* whatever kind of government they want, believing that the people will be found to be conservative and at least as wise as that ruling class, the politicians, whose subjects they now are. Modern effort strives to create sensitive forms of government. Every elective official is to be made a shining mark for criticism. His responsibility is to be clearly fixed, and as a necessary requirement in fixing responsibility thus, the officer is to be given all the powers he needs to carry out the people's wish.

<sup>1</sup> This article is a condensation of his address at the Richmond meeting of the National Municipal League, in November, 1911. From 1903 to 1910 Mr. Bonaparte was president of the League. He is now a member of its council, chairman of its advisory committee and the chairman of the council of the National Civil Service Reform League. He was Secretary of the Navy and afterwards attorney general of the United States in President Roosevelt's administration.

The most signal American instance of a government which is so sensitive to public opinion that it dare not disobey the public will is the commission plan. Although it was not designed to be an elective system, it has worked better than those that were. It vests all the powers of the city in a single board. This board has power to raise as much money as it needs to give efficient service. It has power to cut down service as much as may be necessary to give low taxes. It has power to provide improvements or to make economies. If it fails to satisfy the people, the board has no one else to blame. It cannot say "we are helpless." It cannot say "it was the other fellow's fault." It can only say to a complainant "we are sorry we overlooked that but we'll fix it at once." The individual officers are clear targets for public opinion and are correspondingly more sensitive to public opinion than the multitude of obscure officials in the typical old style plan. It is in design and operation a government which is so exposed to popular oversight that it can hardly resist the public wish. This is democracy. A reformer seeking to change conditions has only to explain his ideas to the people and excite their cupidity by making his proposal seem desirable.

The commission plan is not an ideal democracy. Better ones have been found in foreign cities, and the new direction of political reform effort must be toward creating ideal sensitive democracies.

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## A PRACTICE SCHOOL COURSE IN CIVICS

**T**HOUGH boys and girls at the age of entering the grammar grades are not yet ready for the more formal treatment of civics which might be profitable for older persons, they are, nevertheless, *already citizens*, and as such should be trained to think about civic matters. Formal as this may sound, it becomes very simple when we stop to consider what we mean by thinking civically. At almost every turn the child is confronted by something which the community is doing. Whether it is the gas by which he studies, or the car which passes his door, or the policeman who protects him at the crossing, or the postman who brings the family mail, or the school where he spends so much of his time, he is constantly coming into close touch with civic affairs. The impressionable early years are the ones in which to lay the foundation of civic ideals and civic righteousness. If, then, early in the child's school life we can begin to attract his attention to the services which the community is rendering and the return which he personally can make to the community, and get him to *think on these things*, we shall be arousing an interest in public affairs which will make for the efficient adult citizen.

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