

## MUNICIPAL CORRUPTION.

It is barely possible that there may be men living who have never heard of boodling and boodlers, but if there are they must have passed their lives in the jungles and recesses of primeval forests, and away from the busy haunts of city life. To those who live in cities and take intelligent interest in municipal affairs, it is no surprise at any time to learn that some of those who are dressed in a little brief authority, and deputed to look after the welfare of the community, have been dishonestly lining their own pockets at the expense of the taxpayers. When Boss Tweed, the prince of boodlers, was detected in stealing millions from the people of the city of New York, he very naively enquired, "What are you going to do about it?" And that is just the question all good citizens are asking each other when they discern Boss Tweeds in their midst.

In a recent number of the Forum this matter is discussed at considerable length. The article relates some characteristic experiences where contracts could not be effected with city officials where only straightforward and honorable methods were observed, and where they were obtained by corruption. In speaking of the methods by which officials are bought—of the science of municipal corruption, the writer says:—

As to the scientific perfection of the system and its safeguards, let me suppose that a typical city council is about to undertake some important public improvement—water-works, for example. Suppose, further, that all the piping, excavation, brick-laying, and other work for which specifications can be prepared, and for which the general public can compete, have been eliminated and advertised to be let to the lowest bidder. There still remains the pumping machinery, which may be controlled by patents or built according to special designs prepared and owned by the contractors, or in some other way so managed that the rival contractors bid not on the same detail in general competition, but each on a different detail claimed by the proposer to be the best and so controlled by himself that no one can bid against him. Such a case involves all the necessary elements for a corrupt deal, which are, first, an amount involved of sufficient magnitude to conceal a profit large enough to afford a corruption fund and still leave a profitable margin to the contractors; secondly, absolute ignorance on the part of the general public as to the actual necessary cost of the proposed work or of the comparative working economy and efficiency of rival systems; thirdly, the certainty that whichever system be adopted, the desired work will be accomplished; fourthly, the fact that the lowest first cost may not indicate the most desirable plan since that may be more than offset by the greater durability or greater working economy of some other plan; and, fifthly, the fact that since there would be only one system established in the community, no subsequent comparison with others could ever enable the public to judge whether it had been imposed on.

All these elements invite corruption, and when they exist together the public may know positively in advance that corruption will be attempted, and in all likelihood successfully attempted. If the council of twelve men contain no mechanical engineer or skilled mechanic whose opinion carries special weight, and the contest be confined to two rival systems, the simple problem presented to the rival agents—for principals seldom personally engage in these contests—is how to get seven votes. These must be secured before the bids are submitted, because the nature of the bid will be largely determined by the number of votes secured. If the agent knows that eight or ten men are prepared to stand by him, he may raise his bid with impunity; but if he have only the bare seven, he must be more circumspect. If he have not the seven definitely pledged—and every experienced agent counts

as against him every man who is not pledged for him—he puts his bid at the lowest price possible in the hope that public opinion, when the bids are opened, will bring the more respectable men to his side and enable him to get in one or two of the other sort.

In approaching such a council the agent takes a few days to look over the ground, calling on each member at his place of business and if possible at his home, in the meantime learning all he can learn of the circumstances, associations, business, and personal history of every man. At the end of his round he will have them correctly classified, and will know much more of the strength of character and of the influences likely to affect every one than they know of themselves or of each other. He is then ready to begin operations. His first care will be for the four directly purchasable votes, and he must decide whether he will engage them directly or through the boss. If he intends to "knock down" he will prefer to deal directly with the men, since he may be able to bargain with them for, say, one thousand dollars each, and to double this sum in his accounts with his firm. On the other hand, if he does not engage the boss his rival will engage him, and there will be a struggle between himself and the boss to hold them. The boss will readily ascertain what he has offered and will offer more, whereupon his men will promptly become dissatisfied and will demand a higher price. Or they may pretend that more has been offered, a contingency so common in the trade that the dishonest agent who has been compelled really to pay out all he has charged, sometimes recoups himself by telegraphing home for "more mud" at the last moment, on the ground that his men are deserting him and must be held, when in fact they are as steadfast as mountains. The "honest" man in this business is the man who will stay bought. If the agent, instead of himself approaching the men, decides to deal through the boss, he will, unless he is very reckless, charge his company with only the exact sum paid, since the boss, of course, would make no secret of the matter with the principals should any question arise. The boss has his own reputation to maintain. The agreement is with the boss for so many votes for a given sum, a certain amount paid down and the remainder contingent on success. Of course arrangements are sometimes made that are wholly contingent; but an aggressive agent, accustomed to win, will usually prefer to make an advanced payment, since that gives him a better hold on the men. This arrangement is preferred by the members also, and it possesses the additional advantage of dividing the payments and so averting suspicion.

Having secured the four purchasable votes, the agent directs his attention to the doubtful men. Of these the boss, if the agent deal through him, will tell him frankly whom, in his own opinion, he can "handle" and whom he cannot. The latter group the agent undertakes to handle himself. If they are timid or inexperienced he may try to reach them through intimate friends. This method is sometimes necessary, but it is always dangerous. A man hanging on the verge of dishonesty and looking over the precipice will generally prefer to fall into the arms of a stranger whom he never expects to see again than to expose his weakness to those with whom he will continue to associate. And here appears the craft of the agent. To him the comings and goings of his intended victim are known. They meet frequently in apparently casual ways, and a friendly acquaintance is established. Perhaps the member of the board takes a business trip to a neighboring city. The agent happens to be on the same train; they stay at the same hotel; they dine together—and the agent is a noble entertainer; they visit the theatre, and after the theatre a wine supper does the business. The victim grows confidential and lays bare all his trouble; he is in debt and his creditors are pressing; he is trying to borrow money and he has not succeeded. The agent sympathizes with him; tells him that money is cheap and abundant and that he should have no trouble. He inquires into the security offered, says it is ample, and that he knows plenty of men who would jump at it. The next day he inquires and finds such a man; if neces-