

The Recall in Seattle

By BURTON J. HENDRICK

NOTE.—This article from McClure's magazine tells how the people of Seattle dislodged a Mayor under whose administration the "Vice-Syndicate"—Gamblers, Saloon-keepers, and exploiters of women—ruled the city. Although many United States cities give the power of recall to their people, it has seldom been necessary to use this power. Public servants who are liable to the recall usually render good service to the people, but the Mayor of Seattle was a notable exception to this rule.

The citizens of Seattle have recently dismissed from office an unfaithful public employee—their Mayor. They have turned the Honorable Hiram Gill out of the City Hall as unceremoniously as the average business man discharges a delinquent office-boy. The government agency that has made possible this expeditious action is technically known as the "Recall." It is one of those newfangled devices which, in the opinion of many serious people, are overturning our most sacred institutions and substituting anarchy for the orderly social and political system that now exists. Other essential features of the approaching revolution—the Initiative, the Referendum, the Direct Primary, and the popular election of United States senators—Oregon and other states have extensively experimented with. Los Angeles and Seattle, however, are the only places that have thoroughly tested the Recall. To what extent, therefore, have these enterprising cities suffered from the new expedient?

The experience of both Los Angeles and Seattle is especially valuable because the conditions that existed there are typical of most American cities. Arthur C. Harper and Hiram Gill, the repudiated mayors, have had many predecessors in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and other large American communities. The particular issues that led up to the Recall in both cases are also, unfortunately, commonplaces in municipal administration. Perhaps there is no feature of American civilization quite so amazing as the question upon which our city elections so frequently turn. In the last ten years, at different times, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia—to name only a few—have found themselves engaged in the fiercest contests with the organized outlaws and outcasts of human society. Their history represents a harassing attempt to keep the social sediment at the bottom—to prevent it from rising to the top and submerging the machinery of government. In these cities the people whose natural habitation is the penitentiary or the workhouse have repeatedly been found in control of the municipal organization. Political parties, so called, have existed, not for the purpose of maintaining certain civic ideals, but merely as clearing-houses for commercializing the votes that, to some degree at least, seem inherently a part of city life.

These were the elements that were largely influential in making Hiram C. Gill the Mayor of Seattle. They certainly chose unerringly when they selected Gill as their representative. For many years "Hi" Gill had been one of the familiar and picturesque characters of the town. As a local politician and as president of the Seattle council, he had long had a claim upon the interest, if not the affection and respect, of Seattle. Gill was a lawyer of undoubted cleverness along certain lines. Coming as a young man to Seattle in its early days, he had many of the personal qualities—a freedom of speech, a talent for expressive epithet, a raciness in story-telling, a fondness for conviviality, and a love for poker—that frequently spell success in a frontier community. Personally, Gill is not an impressive figure. He is small and slender, with a pinched, triangular face, a nervous, twitching mouth, and keen but shifting blue eyes. Gill's particular insignia—the things in which he takes a special pride and with which Seattle always identifies him—are a broad-brimmed Stetson hat and a corn-cob pipe. "I'll be just the same as now if I'm elected Mayor," he said in a campaign speech in 1910. "If Bill Taft comes to Seattle, I'll wash my face and put on a dress suit. But I'll smoke a cob pipe, if I want to, as long as I teach no one else the habit." It was quite natural, perhaps, that a lawyer of this easy informality should have attracted many clients from the

dissecta membra of society. "Hi" Gill has made no secret of the fact that his clientele included a fair proportion of gamblers, prostitutes, and professional exploiters of vice. According to the numerous anecdotes told in Seattle concerning him, he has always shown a particular solicitude for gamblers. Once, when presiding over the City Council, he created a scandal by dropping his gavel, leaving the chamber, and hunting up bail for gamblers who had fallen into the hands of the police.

Gill Advocates a "Restricted District"

When Hiram Gill announced his candidacy for Mayor in 1910, these vicious elements unanimously rushed to his support. Whatever personal failings Gill may have had, he was at least outspoken and direct. His political platform frankly advocated a policy which amounted virtually to the official licensing of vice. Among Seattle characters, the man whom Gill admired above all others was Tom Humes, who had been Mayor from 1898 to 1904. It was Humes who, for the first time, showed the Pacific Northwest, not inexperienced in matters of this kind, precisely what an open town was like.



Hay Fork at work on the farm of W. Arthur, Dominion City, Man.

In all large cities the most vexatious problem is the handling of prostitution and its attendant evils; but in Seattle this problem is especially difficult. The city is brand-new; its population has grown, in fifteen years, from fifty thousand to two hundred and fifty thousand. In many vacant lots the burnt stumps of the original forest are still standing; people, within the last five years, have caught trout in the brooks that flowed across its residential streets. In other words, in spite of the fact that Seattle is a great modern metropolis, with spacious parks, splendid office buildings and hotels, and beautiful residential areas, it is still a city in the wilderness. A frontier town inevitably attracts a wild and undisciplined population, and, in addition, Seattle is the gateway of Alaska. At certain times of the year the city is overrun with sailors, miners, and loggers, all plentifully supplied with money and eagerly on the scent for the crudest forms of dissipation. The Humes administration accepted this situation as a fact, and set aside a particular part of the city as a "restricted district." One of the inevitable results was to stimulate the growth of these particular evils. Under a policy of municipal cultivation, Seattle added to its already numerous industries the production, on a large scale, of gamblers, thieves, prostitutes, and "maques." "Maques," it may be explained, is the word (from the French *maquereau*) applied on the Pacific Coast to the man who makes a business of seducing girls, initiating them into lives of prostitution, and then appropriating their earnings. Thus there arose in Seattle a small coterie of tenderloin capitalists—men who culti-

vated vice intensively and organized it in the way to wring from it the largest profits. The Federal Immigration Commission, in its recent report, said that Seattle was one of the headquarters of the white slave trade.

The voters had periodically protested against this "restricted district" idea; they elected Richard A. Ballinger, ex-Secretary of the Interior in President Taft's Cabinet, as a reform Mayor in 1904, and Mr. Ballinger materially improved conditions. But under Ballinger's successor, William Hickman Moore, things "opened up" once more, only to close again under John F. Miller, who was Mayor from 1908 to 1910. Gill now came forward, more boldly than any of his predecessors, as an advocate of segregation. He repeatedly declared that, if elected Mayor, he would at once establish an open market-place of prostitution. "Somewhere in this city," he said, "occupying about a hundredth of one per cent. of its area, these unfortunates, whose lives are gone, most of them beyond recall, will go. They will go out of the resident districts and the apartment-houses and hotels of this city. They will stay out." His arguments had a certain

professionally vicious classes; and, in their company, the bankers, the large business interests, the public-utility corporations, and frequently individuals of wealth and fashion. Against them usually stand the bourgeoisie—the prosperous middle-class business man, the mechanic, the book-keeper, and the clerk; the churches, the men's clubs, and certain civic organizations. Those who have a direct pecuniary interest in the result, that is, are usually arrayed against those whose only interest arises from a natural inclination toward respectability. Fortunately, the second class outnumbered the first, and, whenever thoroughly aroused, usually comes out victorious. In the case of "Hi" Gill, however, the people were not aroused. Seattle had just passed through an exhausting Exposition, and her civic spirit had evidently reached a condition where it needed a rest. Moral conditions under the Millar administration, in which the segregated district had been nominally closed, were far from satisfactory, and there was a general disposition to let "Hi" Gill try out his ideas. Even one of the best-known clergymen in Seattle, in a Sunday sermon, preached in favor of restriction. The breeziness of Gill's campaign also attracted many light-hearted voters. "I want the bands to play in Seattle," said Gill on the stump. "I want them to play on Sunday. I want the people to sit on the grass in the parks and eat it." "What Seattle needs," he said on another occasion, "is a Mayor who will get a Chief of Police to handle the restricted district, who will back the Chief up when the delegations of citizens call and protest—one who will stand by the Chief of Police; and I'm the bird." The people of Seattle evidently decided that he was. By a small majority, on March 7, 1910, they voted for cakes and ale.

The Great Migration to Seattle

And they certainly got them. Gill gave the only additional assurance needed when he selected Charles W. Wapenstein as his Chief of Police. His appointment was the signal for a sinister migration of undesirables from all over the country. Each arriving train brought its quota of gamblers from El Paso and Kansas City; prostitutes came from New Orleans and Chicago; pink-cuffed procurers, or "maques," crap-shooters, hand-book men, race-track followers—there was a large immigration of the whole miscellaneous assortment of men and women who make their living by commercializing the lowest instincts of human nature. The limits of the restricted district, under the Wapenstein regime, were the limits of Seattle itself.

In twenty-four hours the city seemed to have been transformed almost magically into one great gambling hell. The Northern Club, Seattle's great gambling emporium, ran for fifty-four days, and the earnings are estimated at \$200,000. The Midway, one of the largest brothels in the restricted district, netted its proprietors from \$10,000 to \$12,000 a month.

A Seattle jury has just branded Wapenstein as a grafter and a blackmailer. It was William J. Burns who secured the confessions from Gerald and Tupper that led to Wapenstein's conviction. Part of the evidence collected by Detective Burns was recently presented in the criminal proceedings against Wapenstein. Both Tupper and Gerald (partners) testified that they had paid Wapenstein ten dollars a month for every prostitute in their employ. As they had nearly a hundred, this meant a monthly tribute of a thousand dollars.

A New Form of Municipal Franchise

Naturally, these conditions aroused the anger of Seattle against Gill. But the Mayor seemed entirely proof against public sentiment. He treated with the scantest courtesy delegations of protesting

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Banks and Public-Utility Corporations for Gill

Other influences also supported Gill. In every great municipal contest almost identically the same elements can be found fighting for and against civic order and decency. There are usually ranged upon one side the panders, the gamblers, the race-track touts, and the other pro-