

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

Our New Order of Nobility

“What are you looking for? What have you lost?” inquired a friend one evening, as I passed and reappsed a certain establishment on Vine Street, illuminated with electric lights and colored glass, and flanked outside by a row of beer-kegs.

“I'm looking for a school trustee, one of the principal members of the board of Education.” “Well,” was the reply, “why don't you walk in? What's the matter with you? This is the spot.” “That is a very elegant looking bar, but I am looking for the committee that hires school-masters. I am not after beer just now, but after the dispensers of culture, my friend,” I replied. “Well,” was the answer, “and ain't this the place? I know what you want; you are looking for the committee on salaries. That's Jeff, that is. Come in. I'll introduce you to him. He's awfully jolly. He can give you anything from pousse Café to a Manhattan cock-tail.”

“But what has cock-tail to do with education; the selection of proper teachers for boys and girls?” I replied indignantly. “Come here,” said my friend and pulling me in front of the electric light, he surveyed me critically. “Do you know that you are talking like Rip van Winkle? That thing might do in Boston, but not here old fellow. Now listen. You have been to Europe, and have seen those old castles on the banks of the rivers which frown at you like old, broken cannon. Well, there is where the Barons used to live; and whenever a boat passed, with a flock of sheep or a case of Mumm's Extra Dry, or a cargo of sauer kraut, the Baron and his noble band would drop on it, like a policeman on the wrong man, and take away as much as they could carry. And then the merchant would treble the price of what he had left, and recoup from the purchaser; and sometimes you know, these barons would combine, and they would go to a city, and they would clean it out as thoroughly as a fire or a troop of cow-boys. Then the king and the bishop would fall upon the barons, and while the former killed them in this world, the latter would damn them in next; and then they would divide the spoils, sing a Te Deum, and wait for another batch of barons.

“Now all this is changed, and here is the very nub of our progress. The baron is here, he still makes his levy, and the merchant still charges to his customer

the loss, but how intelligent, how delightful, is the whole process. The baron has his castles, his band, and his fighting followers; but they are no longer on the hill-tops; they are right in the middle of the city. The baron's castle looks like the warehouse of a merchant and that is perfectly proper; for the goods of the merchant find a resting place in it. There is no swearing and tearing and bloodshed, but just a calm, serene, quiet, and gentlemanly steal from daylight to dawn. And this very man you are looking for is a baron, and don't you forget it. What is that? Where do they come from? You might as well ask where poverty and the cholera comes from. You know the origin of the mushroom a tree, a patch of grass, cow guano, a warm night, and up comes your mushroom blushing, with the exertion of life. So with the barons. Before you are out of bed, the city is in the possession of that delightful old band, the lineal descendents of that arabian chief Ali Baba and his friends the Forty Thieves. Yes indeed; and Jeff is a baron, and this is his castle. That is its coat of arms: c & c, – cut and come again. Just peep in. There is a delightful altar for you. A pyramid of bottles, glasses, lemons, mirrors, corkscrews, cold ham, and Havana cigars. It's astonishing how many sixes you can turn up on that nice marble counter, (except when you play with Jeff) and the pictures are awfully select. You never see them anywhere else.

“But what has such a fellow to do with education?” I indignantly repeated. “Now, see here” said my valuable friend, “don't speak that way of Jeff. I am trying to enlighten you. Now, Jeff is a power. Yes sir, a live power. You may not meet the mayor once in a year, nor become acquainted with the terror of the Police Court; but here is the universal pilot and friend! Clever! He's as clever as Signor Blitz! The brewer puts into a keg only 100 glasses of beer, but Jeff can draw out 210. Out of the quart bottle of cologne spirits he can pour three pints of old rye and a headache, big enough to fit Bob Ingersoll. And then Jeff is as witty as the last new farce, and tells one of those funny stories which make you snort when you get home, but when your wife asks you what you are talking about, you blush and say, ‘Oh, nothing, nothing.’”

“But,” still I objected, “suppose that it be true that the descendants of the old barons still plunder the cities, and that Jeff is a baron. Why put him on the Board of Education? Why not make him chief of police, market-master, or city missionary, but education! What is the possible link between stealing and culture?”

“Hold on, now was the reply, “you are now just where I was twenty years

ago. That problem troubled me very much. I wrote to the Commercial Gazette about it, S.R.R. told me to wait until he had taken the underpinning out of the Bible and Shakespeare, and then he would settle it. As for Mr. H., his head was full of silver. He said only a pig-headed Democrat would say that there was only 85 cents worth of silver in a dollar, when it said on its face 'This is a dollar.' And to deny it was to fly in the face of the Almighty, _____ Dollar. Then I wrestled with the problem myself and all at once, it burst in upon me like the colic or a run round; and the thing is a joy forever. The distinguished statesman who said that thieving was a lost art, was a liar; excuse me, I mean a journalist. Do you suppose that while Science, mechanics, and knowledge have been improving, that stealing has stood still? No sir. Today it is an institution with as perfect a piece of machinery as a political caucus or a Jesuit Seminary. Why, in this city we have a pipe that taps every till; and at one end of that pipe is a Baron, a modern B. B. a Boodle Baron!

'The Dems may come, the Reps. may go,
But in the grand old steal flows on forever!'

"What has that to do with me," I exclaimed, "I am looking for the Board of Education, for the intellectual center of the city. Let them steal. What I want is the Board of Brains."

"And ain't I coming to it?" was the reply. "Isn't knowledge power, and am I not baling power into you? Now listen. There's the board of Police Commissioners. There is the Board of Public Worst. And on top of all, is the Board of Education; and a grand old mahogany board it is, too, and Jeff is the principal knot-hole in that Board. Are you poor? Get on the Board and be rich. Are you rich? Let the Board get on you, and you will be poor. And the beauty of the thing is its simplicity and perfection. You can not build a gasometer, or a sewer, or fill up a hole, or tunnel the fill, or pave a street with granite blocks, without the permission of the Board of Public Worst, or the Board of Education. On top of Each Board is a Boodle Baron, and behind each Baron is a bar, and behind the bar is _____."

"Oh, well," I cried, overcome with impatience, "you make me sick with your barons and bars. What is a Boodle Baron to me? What I want are the guardians of the youthful intellects; those to whom are entrusted the brains and hearts of the young. This Jeff of yours may be very well as the chairman of the Bar Association, but as educator! the thing, you know, is impossible."

My friend grew emphatic. "For two pins I would call the patrol-wagon, and dump you where you belong. I'm explaining the history to you and you don't catch on. I'll tell you that Bulwer's 'Last Baron' is here, in the beer business, that the city is in possession of the Boards, and that the boards are run by the Barons, and that the bulliest Baron of them all is on the Board of Education and that ____ ____"

Thank heaven! At that instant two policemen had a fight and while my friend ran behind the lamp post to avoid the bullets, I escaped. Nevertheless I have since wondered if it be really true that we have the lineal descendants of the old plundering Barons among us, and if so whether it would not be a good thing for our President, who is fond of articles of virtu, to invite one or more up to the club, that we may all become familiar with this instance of the evolution theory, and the survival of the meanest.

Henry Hooper

Budget
Hinman editor
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