

Suggestions for the Next City Charter

Next year or the year after, we will want a new charter; the last one in was in fact a very pretty and tasteful lid, but it did not cover the pot. It was evidently modeled to suit some imaginary turrine, but, Lord Bless us! It did not fit the vessel which holds our political soup. Hence this sketch. You see every now and then there is a panic in the city at the discovery that we have selected as chief magistrate, a Constitutional bummer, and for treasurer a man, whose sole merit is that he has large feet and a very small head.

The usual remedy is to empty the “Ins” on the sidewalk and put the “Outs” in their places. And what is the result? The political offices are like that row of houses on the riverbank, which is commonly known as “Rat row.” Every high flood drives out the tenants, it drowns the bugs and other vermin; then the waters retire, and another set of insects and rodents go back. It is like a marionette theater, or a puppet show, on which the little figures are changed, but the voices the hands and the wires are the same! One good suggestion always suggests another, and here is one before passing to my main theme. The legislatures ought to be attached to the public schools, so that the scholars, for a last course, might be shoveled into the House of Representatives, without further expense to the public. Now for the general theme. Legislators and politicians are requested to commit the following definitions to memory.

A city of the first class, is one where the politicians outnumber the inhabitants; and where the handsomest buildings are the political offices, and the largest thing in the office is the salary and the meanest article therein and is the work.

A political club is a reservoir where the young tadpoles become official frogs; and you will notice that in the tank the tads are all eyes and mouth, but in office they become all stomach and voice!

A citizen is a man who votes! Any man can vote, whether he be native or foreign born. In the latter case, the would be citizen procures a friend and goes before the Clerk of some Court. All three hold up their hands together all three chew tobacco at the same time; the clerk gurgles something in his throat and the would-be-citizen glares in silence. This costs 35 cts and is called being naturalized. It is a relic of the old compurgators oath, in which the defendant brought twelve of his friends to court to swear that the plaintiff was a liar. The Constitution is a thing which young lawyers exercise their milk teeth in biting and sucking, so as to harden their gums and from which very old lawyers break off a knob here and there and carry about with them, like bits of the true cross.

A statute is like an omnibus, which can be loaded until the bottom falls out; or rather like the skin of a sausage which can be stuffed until it bursts, whether the meat be good or bad.

The charter of the city contains the written law, but the unwritten law grows at night like fungi in the heads of the politicians; and it is as much more abundant than the former, as the water out-measures the land, and the wind is greater than either land or sea.

Beer Saloons are the premises of office hunters; just as sand is the breeding ground for ants and decayed wood for flies, and stagnant water the home of the operatic mosquito. This is the real but never spoken platform, and on this platform stands the mayor. And as there seems to be some confusion of thought as to what are the duties of a mayor under the charter, and as I have paid some attention to the matter, I give you the results of my inquiries. On the first day of April each year, or every other year, the two reigning political factions, that is to say, the semi-monde and the demi-semi-monde shall elect a thorough bred partisan to serve as mayor; no half breeds need apply.

His official life shall be divided into theory and practice. In theory, he shall make declaration as follows: that he will close up all saloons on Sunday; kill all the dogs found in the streets in July; arrest the base-ball umpire who decides against the home team; and discharge every policeman who clubs on man on the head after he says that he has had enough.

He shall find all the lost children, protect the hayseeds from the bank-Sheerer and, put out all the fires, keep the streets clean if he has to sweep them himself, and be ready at all times to receive strangers to our city, and tell yarns about our musical and art tastes, until his tongue hangs out. So much for the theory but in practice he shall fulfill nobler political duties.

Perpetual committees shall sit in the mayor's office, devising ways and means by which a demi-monde can be put into office and a semi-demi-monde can be kicked into the street, or clapped into jail. A list of all the offices filled by his opponents, the demi-or, the semi-demi-monde shall be handed to him, and the one perpetual aim of his official life, shall be to chop off the official heads of his opponents and to reward his partisans out of the public treasury.

And whenever he appears in public he shall be preceded by the presidents of the two leading political clubs, each one carrying in a [], and followed by Box, and Cop, each one with a bag, for the reception of political assessments. One month before each Election, the mayor shall write a letter to every office holder, demanding two percent of his salary on pain of being bounced.

I received three of these letters, on the same day, one of my office, one at my residence, and one was handed to me while dining on the counter of the Delicatessen on vine street. But with these labors he shall have his hours of recreation. For instance, when the clergy make their usual monthly call, demanding the instant suppression of vice, and that he stop all bicycle riding on Sunday, as the wheel is a sinful thing; he shall receive them in a black silk gown, and new Hymn book in his hands, and he shall show the whites of his eyes at half minute intervals, and until they, I mean the clergy, are all out in the street.

But when a deputation of brewers call, to tell him if he monkeys with the back doors of the Saloons on Sundays, they will wipe him out at the next election; he shall be dressed like King Gambrinus – his chief clerk shall open a fresh keg of beer – and he shall drink and cry “prosit” until the thirsty bummers and the voluble Hummers in the corridors shall tremble with delight. And one of his principal rewards shall be that in all the stoker sings of the comic operas, and in all the one sent farces like “The Brass Monkey” and the

“Hole in the Ground,” he shall furnish the hits and the gags, and all the newspapers shall call him Our Bob, or Loney Jim, or [Lullaby] Bill, or other pet names!

Lastly the most important office in the city Government shall be the political stok, whose whole duty, shall be to shovel the people in the bottom, and plank them on the top, and shovel the people on top into the bottom. This is such an important office that I must leave a full description of it to another time.

One more remark and I finish. A late Persian minister to this country, when explaining to the King of Kings, the topsy-turvey method of our political selections, illustrated it by saying that a venerable maxim of antiquity, had got a tail attached which pulled it down into the bowels of Mother earth. The vitiated maxim was “the voice of the people is the voice of god-damn!”

Henry Hooper

Cin Literary Club’s

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Theo Kemper Editor