

Our Government as Influenced  
by Some of Our Social Classes

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J. M. Morse,

# Table of Contents,

Page

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Discussion of Relations between a<br>Government and its people - How<br>manifested in different kinds and<br>stages of government, - France as an<br>example - Nation an organic thing -<br>Danger of interfering with action of natural<br>forces. Analogy of river - Constancy of inter-<br>action - Special reasons for this in U.S.                                                                                           | 3<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>4<br><br>5 |
| Study of Social classes with view to remedy<br>Stable classes - Immigration - Foreign<br>elements - In mines & cities,                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 6<br><br>7                                          |
| Foreigners in slums - In Coal Region, Penn.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 8                                                   |
| Bad effect in Industry & Politics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 9                                                   |
| Saving system and associated life as<br>typical result of crowding foreign poor into<br>cities - What it is -                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 9<br>10                                             |
| Conditions brought to light in study of this<br>system illustrative of general state of poor<br>in cities - How the multiply bad conditions<br>and shut out good - Children in Philadelphia<br>slum - Their future - Danger from people<br>raised under such conditions - Extent and<br>effect of them in the West. - Uncertainty as to<br>extent of effect of all this on Govt, - Need of<br>understanding causes and conditions | 12<br><br><br><br>13<br>14<br><br>15<br>16          |

In our country the persons and institution through which the affairs of state are administered stand in close relation to the people.

The expression "a government of the people" is more or less significant depending upon what part of the people are have in mind but however the facts may vary it is certain that a relation, subjective or objective or both, can always be found between a government and its citizens or subjects.

There have been times and governments when this relation was not so apparent where for long periods of time the complexion of the nation was given by a few who stood nearest the hand that held the reins, where only after extended intervals of oppression did this vital relation, this center of pressure, show itself either in wreck or revolt.

France has furnished good illustrations of both cases.

A nation is an organic unity of people and domain and no matter whether it is a republic or a monarchy if the people are hindered in their natural development they will finally break over the barriers and like a

mightily sin breaking o' its dams not only sweep away those who had usurped its channel and used its forces but lay waste the lowland which it might otherwise have enriched.

The limits of a nation's power and the guide to its conduct are found in the nature and development of its people and these have never been overstepped or disregarded but the transgressor has through disaster been obliged to retract.

As the people come in closer and more direct contact and communication with their rulers or administrators their influence of one upon another is more constant and there is less chance for long continued action in one direction followed by the violent reaction which formerly accompanied almost every step in national progress.

Though the values of the ties between the governing and the governed may never again be manifested by such violence as formerly they are becoming more vital rather than less. As in a highly developed industrial system with improved

transportation one man may through his production flourish the whole world of producers so in the more civilized countries with modern means of communication and travel every new element of population is felt almost immediately throughout the entire community.

This is especially the case in the United States where "every man is a politician or a politician's tool."

The liberality or perhaps more properly the looseness of our public sentiment makes it so easy for every man's character to leave its impression upon state affairs that our government has become a sort of composite personality.

In considering what for want of a better name have been called social classes attention is usually given to those of doubtful utility here and also to those with connections such that the cause of humanity and the welfare of the nation demand that attention be given them.

These classes which long ago gave us this nation and which ever since have supported themselves and their hangers on, our "well to do" farmers and business men generally, our authors and educators and professional men, and our home owning wage earners give but little trouble to economists and sociologists. It is enough to say of them that they are Americans that they are the pride and hope and strength of our country, for it is they who do and shall maintain it American. If their development could follow its normal course unhindered by the unnatural conditions and vicious tendencies which surround them we would have little to fear.

The immigration of foreign poor has been pointed to as being at the bottom of all that is not as it should be in our industrial social and political life.

Taking a much more moderate view of the case one still cannot realize the enormousness of this influence easily.

Rome came to an end more from being absorbed into the life of her Barbarian surmises than through the war they waged.

Yet that invasion great as it was, and bringing with it its institutions and people, peaceful as well as warlike, is small when compared with the great stream of immigration which has so long poured into our land.

We in the West realize little of its immensity and less of its evil for the foreign population we know is a superficial and an assimilated one but in our larger cities and in the mining region of the East and to a less extent in the West is an almost pure foreign element.

It is not alone the odd names and accents that we know, but a population that is wholly unconverted. Not only the accents and the names but the entire language, the manners and customs, the dress and food and too often the weapons, remain unchanged by contact

with our people and influence of our laws.

Every slum has its "foreign quarter" if it is not all foreign and the "polly-glot" districts are usually the worst.

In the Coal Region of Pennsylvania is a transplanted section of Southern Europe. Whole districts and towns are settled entirely by miners imported from around the Mediterranean. Almost without exception they are ignorant filthy and dangerous. They never will become Americans in any sense of the word and that was the last thought in their coming here. While they hold the political privileges of American citizens they are nothing socially or industrially but work-animals. They are hired and paid by numbers instead of by measure and are held in some sort of subjection by what is called "Coal and Iron Police" the name of which mildly suggests the nature of its work. To follow the poisonous effect of this foreign matter in the "body politic" would

take us into every department of industry and government and would require volumes to list it.

The fact that they live so miserably that ten or fifteen cents per day supported them at home and but little more suffices here gives some suggestion of the harm they do our workers in the same line while their effect as directed by "bosses" in politics is quite as hurtful.

In New York every year thousands of them are "naturalized". Sworn in by professional forgers and used as tools in the perpetration of the political and municipal frauds which continually threaten wider and wider destruction to all just government and trade.

Our institutions which if not a direct result of, has been made easily possible by the hungry mass of foreigners in our cities, is what is known as the sweating system.

It and its effects may well be given as typical of the work and lives of some of our cities poor whose conditions are

too miserable to be even suggested by the word poverty.

The people working under this system are probably little worse off than those who find work outside for are they much better situated than those with no work at all who live by crime and begging.

The Sweating System is merely a special phase which has been more widely studied and is better understood than it can be taken as a reliable illustration.

It is a use of contract labor mostly in the clothing business, that being the one in which women and children can be most employed.

The goods ready cut is got from wholesale clothiers and tailors and is returned made into garments, by contractors who sublet to others who in turn may sublet again until the clothing reaches the cheapest labor to be had.

The contractors are usually brutal foreign tailors of the lowest type who

pass the margin of profits from one to another until there is scarcely a living left for the poor wretches who must work almost incessantly, ten twelve or fifteen hours a day in the most unhealthy, crowded and uncomfortable rooms imaginable.

The workers driven by the piers and the employers and owners masters compel effort to the limit of endurance and are only less terrible than the starvation or crime which stand as the only alternatives.

Comparatively few men are employed making the conditions all the worse for the work which is most exhausting and at the same time most brutalizing falls upon women and children where it can do the greatest harm.

In the Chicago shops 20 000 women and children are employed.

In New York there are 62 000 sewing girls working at wages which will not support life. The greed of employers and under bidding of foreigners have done

this and these girls must either fall  
an additional load upon already over-  
burdened parents or face starvation as  
best they may.

Particular phases and cases have  
been cited but the conditions attached to  
them are general and any econom-  
ic significance which they have is  
true ~~in~~ of a large population in  
every city.

In each of these there are thousands  
of more whose degradation and ignorance  
make them utterly unfit to exercise  
the power they have in their hands or to  
be anything better than obstacles to the  
work which as citizens they should aid.

The bitter unrelenting struggle for life  
which is the rule with so many of them  
so dwarfs the moral and intellectual part  
of a man that by the time he becomes a  
voter he is easily used as a tool to strengthen  
the barriers which already shut him out  
from the part of life most worth the  
living.

These people have through their degrada-  
tion not only become powerless to better them-

seliers but careless as to the betterment;

In these densely settled districts where the English language is as foreign as any Education and Religion can get no permanent hold.

Hunger nakedness and filth are no conditions on which to build intellect.

Many of them know no condition other than their own and if they did it would seem almost fatalism to hope for our improvement through their own efforts.

Think of 25000 children in our "slum" in Philadelphia, half clothed half fed and every day exposed to the influence of vice and crime, perhaps born in it, toiling at the hardest kind of drudgery when work can be found and running at large on the street when it cannot, wholly ignorant of schools and churches and the world outside and so blunted in their higher sensibilities by hardship and the rough scenes around them that ideas of comfort and beauty sometimes go right and wrong and even family ties are

almost beyond their comprehension.  
This is the foundation for a good  
percent of our next generation of  
voters. How near do they come up to  
the ideal?

That they are absolutely without value  
for good & any government is patent,  
that they are already a power for  
the bad, is shown in every defeat and  
check of reform and a ~~disaster~~ <sup>disaster</sup>,  
while the fact that they may become  
extremely dangerous is proven by the  
rioting and plundering which have  
accompanied so many of our indus-  
trial disturbances, especially the  
"Pullman" strike in '94.

Here in the West we can hardly real-  
ize what we may read from reliable  
writers every day but the army of tramps  
is becoming a more and more com-  
mon reminder of the masses of  
poverty and ignorance farther east,  
and in many of our western cities  
may now be found miniature  
"slums" with perhaps more than  
a proportional accompaniment of law-

lessness.

The real roots are here as in the east and the secret annals of many of our municipalities show the evidence of the power given to irresponsible persons by those multitudes who know no patriotism, feel no responsibility and who have little to live for and nothing to lose.

How greatly or in what direction the nature and course of government may finally be changed by these social forces and others which might be named, can be little more than guessed at by even the best of thinkers.

Calculations based on the nature of man are too uncertain to allow a definite statement of results. but whatever the uncertainty of conclusions an understanding of the conditions is none the less necessary.

The stability and prosperity of a nation is based directly upon the learning, health, happiness, ability, industry and opportunity of its people but under these lies a factor which though in-

direct is essential and powerful.

A nation can realize its strength only through unity and parallelism of ~~interest~~ and actions. This means unity of feeling, sympathy and we swat over that a thorough understanding and appreciation of the needs and interests and conditions of every class is essential.