

INVESTIGATING GRAFT AND THE SYSTEM IN NEW YORK

Whitman, Goff, Curran and Buckner Constitute the Big Four.

They Are All Fighters and Are Very Much In Earnest.

By JAMES A. EDGERTON.

WHEN the New York board of aldermen decides that anything is so bad that it needs investigation the public is entitled to its own conclusions. Some will opine that the abuse in question must be very bad indeed, and some others will shut one optic and remark that a good, stiff coat of kalsomine is about to be applied. These two views are not as inconsistent as they would seem, for the worse the conditions the more need of whitewash. In case things are so bad that even whitewash will not cover them something else may be necessary. Two or three scapegoats may be trotted into the wilderness, and there may be reports and doings of various kinds. But the "system" can stand things of that sort, as it has stood them before. The "system" has more lives than a cat, for a cat can be killed, but no one has yet killed the "system." Lexow thought he had done so, and other investigators have harbored similar delusions, but the "system" has only shifted its base and continued doing business.

Publicity is a great corrective, and some people believe it a sovereign remedy for most of the ills that afflict us, including graft, bribery and all the brood springing from the union of crooked politics and crooked business. Investigation is a form of publicity—at least sometimes. At other times it is a method of satisfying the public and holding matters in abeyance until the thing blows over. It all depends on just how much the dear people are aroused.

Publicity may not make people good, but it at least makes them careful. That is the effect it is having in New York. Since the Rosenthal murder there has been one continuous scream of publicity about protected vice and police graft with the result that the underworld is growing somewhat circumspect and cautious. Several well known gun men are hiding out, several policemen and "men higher up" are on the anxious seat, and several politicians are doing heavy turns and dark brown thinking.

Gambling on the Q. T.

As for gambling, it is now more exclusive than the smart set. No society leader scans her list of guests more closely than does the owner of roulette wheels, faro banks and poker tables. The papers even say that these joints are closed altogether, and there are folks verdant enough to accept the statement. Suffice it to say that there is never a time in New York when one wishing to gamble cannot have his desires gratified. Nevertheless there is a panicky feeling around the Tenderloin these days, and citizens of shady occupations walk warily, for publicity is still screaming of vice and graft in Gotham, and the investigating committee is at work in the land.

The big four of the inquiry are District Attorney Charles S. Whitman, Alderman Henry H. Curran, chairman of the investigating committee; Assistant District Attorney Emory R. Buckner, counsel for the committee, and Supreme Court Justice John W. Goff, who is to have charge of a John Doe inquiry and is expected to preside at the trial of the Rosenthal suspects. These men are in earnest and have the confidence of the community.

The Rosenthal case has made District Attorney Whitman one of the really big men of the metropolis. It takes a sizable man to stack up in New York, for Gotham is full of able men, also full of knockers. The popular motto in the big town is that a man must "deliver the goods," and nobody amounts to much who doesn't "put it over." In other words, New York is looking for results and measures a man by what he actually accomplishes. This is but modern slang for judging a tree by its fruits, which has been an honored mode of character reading for 1,900 years.

How Whitman Makes Good.

The talk of the street is that Whitman is making good in the Rosenthal case. He himself says—and nearly everybody agrees with him—that he not only has had little help from the police, but that he has actually been blocked by the police. Mr. Whitman was born in Connecticut and is forty-four years old. He graduated from Amherst and studied law in the New York university. His first office was that of assistant corporation counsel. He then became a city magistrate and later was made president of the board of magistrates. It was in this capacity that he stirred up the animals by a series of raids. In 1907 he was appointed by Governor Hughes a judge of the court of general sessions and in 1910 was elected district attorney.

Personally Mr. Whitman is quiet in speech and manner. He is the sort of man who makes few false moves, but can get a prodigious amount of work done without seeming to hurry. He goes to the heart of a matter in the shortest possible time and digs to the bottom of a case for the facts. His methods have been illustrated by this very Rosenthal case. With little help

from the police and despite assaults on him by the mayor and police commissioner, he has continued delivering the goods. By inducing several men to confess he has woven a chain of evidence around one lieutenant of police and has unearthed enough evidence of graft to set the whole city by the ears. In the expressive language of the day, Whitman is making good.

Goff and the Lexow Inquiry.

Justice John W. Goff, who is to be the trial judge, was the attorney of the famous Lexow investigation eighteen years ago. New York has never forgotten the thorough manner in which he carried on that inquiry, and it has created universal satisfaction that he is to be so prominently identified with this probe, which promises to go even deeper than did that of 1894. Goff has been a terror to the underworld ever since that day. He was born in Ireland and came to America in boyhood. He was educated in Cooper Union, read law and was admitted to the bar in 1870. In 1888 he was made assistant district attorney and later was the

He will have as great an opportunity to distinguish himself as did John W. Goff in the Lexow inquiry or Charles E. Hughes in the Insurance investigation. Buckner is thirty-five years old and has had a brilliant career. He has been in New York only five years and has been admitted to the bar but four, and yet he has made an enviable name as clean, honest, capable and a hard hitter. He was born in Iowa and is the son of a Methodist minister. The boy's early life was spent in Nebraska, where he was graduated from high school and next taught school to earn money to put him through college. It was then that he met the present Mrs. Buckner, and both resolved to make enough money for a college education before they married. This took pluck, but they won, young Buckner not only teaching school, but acting as a court reporter. They entered the University of Nebraska in 1900 and a year later were married. In 1904 Mr. Buckner graduated, after which he entered the Harvard Law school.

The same year he was admitted to the bar, 1908, Mr. Buckner distinguished himself in a counterfeiting case and was appointed an assistant in the office of the United States district attorney. In the following two years he participated in the prosecution of the celebrated sugar trust cases. In 1910 he became an assistant to District Attorney Whitman of the county of New York and since then has had charge of the prosecutions in the criminal branch of the supreme court, one of the most responsible positions before the New York bar.

A Responsible Post.

In this capacity he has conducted such famous cases as that against Daniel O'Reilly, the counsel in the Thaw case, the "Biff" Ellison trial and



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NEW YORK'S GRAFT PROBERS.

1, EMORY R. BUCKNER, ATTORNEY OF THE INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE; 2, ALDERMAN HENRY H. CURRAN, CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE; 3, CHARLES S. WHITMAN, DISTRICT ATTORNEY; 4, SUPREME COURT JUSTICE JOHN W. GOFF.

counsel of the law association in the investigation and prosecution of election frauds. For twelve years he was recorder of the city of New York and in 1906 was elected a justice of the supreme court.

Alderman Curran has had several bouts with Mayor Gaynor through the public prints and has not minced words. It was he that demanded an investigation when Gaynor was asserting that there was little or no police corruption. Curran rejoined hotly through the papers and then got enough signatures of aldermen to compel the mayor to call together the board. The aldermen themselves did the rest. The investigation was ordered, and Curran was placed at the head of it. His next move was to demand enough money to carry on the inquiry, and when the mayor refused to call together the board of estimate to make the necessary appropriation the alderman accused him of trying to block the inquiry.

A Career and an Opportunity.

The same charge was renewed when there was an attempt to foist on the committee an appointee of the corporation counsel as the attorney for the investigation. The committee itself called on District Attorney Whitman to appoint its counsel. Whitman named one of his own assistants, Emory R. Buckner, and it is safe to say that Mr. Buckner will be the official attorney of the inquiry. He will at least if Chairman Curran has anything to say about it.

Mr. Buckner is to have a free hand.

the case of "the shooting showgirls," Lillian Graham and Ethel Conrad. For a man who was admitted only four years ago this career is nothing short of phenomenal. Today he has an opportunity such as falls to the lot of few lawyers, young or old. His previous brilliant work holds out the promise that he will make good.

One of the most hopeful things about the "big four" in the police graft investigation is that they are all fighters. They will need to be if they buck up against the "system" in New York city. It will not be child's play. Every effort will be made to turn the inquiry into a farce, to withhold testimony, to block its progress and to cover up and whitewash the whole affair.

Have these men the moral stamina and the intellectual ability to thwart these attempts and to unearth the truth? If so they will start a new era not only in the government of New York, but in that of other American municipalities, for there is no question that if they go to the bottom a mass of corruption will be turned up that will cause a revolution in city government. Already Philadelphia has started a parallel investigation into her own police system, Detroit is having an overhauling of a slightly different kind, and other cities will follow.

It is high time. Municipal conditions in America have become a disgrace and a menace. It is charged openly on every hand that there exists a working alliance between criminals and the police. While the charge is unquestionably too sweeping, there is enough truth in it to occasion grave concern.

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