

MAYOR STRONG AND THE GREATER NEW YORK.

NEW YORK CITY, May 30th, 1897.

I HAVE spent this morning

in the capitol building of the

second city of the world. I

refer to the city hall, which

is to be the center of the

government of the greater

New York. The greater New

York contains twice as many

people as either New Jersey

or Iowa. It has nine times

as many souls as Rhode Island or South

Dakota. All the people in Nevada

would rattle around in some of its

smaller wards like the dry peas in a pod

and its inhabitants are more, with a few

exceptions, than those of the greatest of

our states. New York city is surpassed

by only one place in the world as to its

population, and it is an easy second

among the world's cities in business and

wealth. There is no town but gray-

haired London which will compare with

it, and with lusty strides it is fast tramp-

ing on London's heels. During my visit

to the English metropolis not long ago,

I heard a great fuss made about a sale

of business property there at a price

equal to \$10,000,000 an acre. A lot was

sold within a stone's throw of the city

hall only a year or so ago, for a price

amounting to \$5,000,000 an acre. This

lot was on the corner of Nassau and

Liberty streets. It contained consider-

ably less than a quarter of an acre of

ground, and it brought \$1,250,000.

There is scarcely any property on the

Island of Manhattan which can be

bought cheaply today. There are lots

along lower Broadway which are worth

a carpet of silver dollars over their

entire surface; and there are some, I ven-

ture, which you could not buy by offer-

ing to stand silver dollars on edge, side

by side and end to end, making a two-

inch plaiting over the whole lot. The

tendency of the prices here is ever up-

ward. One-twelfth of the total assessed

value of the United States exists in New

York, the real estate alone amounting to

more than \$2,000,000,000. Still, when

the Dutch bought the Island of Manhat-

tan off the Indians, they paid for it only

\$24 worth of glass beads and buttons.

It was the biggest real estate deal on

record. Twenty-four dollars then—

worth billions now. Think what the In-

dians lost.

It is a big thing to be mayor of a city

like this. The office carries almost as

much responsibility as that of the Pres-

ident of the United States. There are, I

believe, about four thousand policemen

now in this city, and there will be seven

thousand in the new New York. There

will be, all told, an army of city official's

greater by that which Xenophon led on

his retreat to the sea than the army of

the United States, and the salary list will

amount to more than thirty-three mil-

lion dollars a year. The property inter-

ests of such a city are enormous. The

business carried on is of every kind.

There is more manufacturing done here

than in any other town in the United

States. The shipping interests are so

great that three thousand ships come

from foreign countries to these wharves

every year, and two-fifths of all the pro-

ducts we ship to foreign countries are

sent here to be loaded. The banking in-

terests are the greatest on this hemis-

phere. The New York clearing house

does a business of twenty-five billions

annually; while the stocks represented

in Wall street affect every country town

in the United States. There are in the

greater New York one hundred and

sixty thousand dwelling houses and bus-

iness houses, which the mayor must see

are in sanitary condition. The streets

which have to be looked after, would

make a line longer than the distance be-

tween New York and Chicago, and the

mileage of the surface railways, would

make five tracks from New York to

Washington. I don't know the extent

of the sewerage of the greater New

York; but, four years ago, New York

proper had more than four hundred

miles of such works, and the bill signed

by Governor Black, will largely increase

this number. All of these things have

to be looked after. In every part of the

vast city there are men scheming to get

money out of its treasury or to evade

its laws. All sorts of taxes are brought

to the city hall to be ground, and the

mayor has to be a very smart man if he

keeps the wheel turning in the right di-

rection and uses it solely for the good of

the people.

I believe that Mayor Strong does this.

He has no ax of his own to grind, and

he is the mayor of all the citizens. He

has brought civil service rules into what

was one of the most corrupt spoils cities

of the world, and he has really worked

wonders in reforming the government

and the police. I spent this morning in

his office, and I was struck with the free

American way in which he does things.

Whatever there may be about the other

departments of New York, there is no

red tape about the city hall. The may-

or's office is open to all. You walk in

and take your seat, and when your turn

comes you step up to the mayor's desk

and state your case. When I arrived at

the office this morning it was 9:30. Mr.

Strong had already been there a half-

hour and he was still engaged in answer-

ing his mail. He had received, at this

delivery, one hundred letters, and more

than half of these were already disposed

of. He went over the letters rapidly,

directing his secretary how they should

be answered, and later on the secretary

took the mail and dictated the proper

answers to a stenographer. After this,

delegations began to come in. The

mayor heard the spokesman of each

party, and in many cases decided the

disputes without leaving his seat.

It was between two such delegations

that I was introduced by Mr. John

Sleicher, formerly the editor of Frank

Leslie, and now one of the city officials.

Said Mr. Sleicher: "Mr. Mayor, here is

a newspaper man who wants to look you

in the eye."

"That is an easy thing to do," replies

the mayor as he turns his face to me,

and a pair of shrewd, honest blue eyes

look into mine. I study his face as we

chat, and am more and more surprised

at his vigor and strength as he goes on.

The mayor of New York is by no means

an old man, and still he is more than

three-score years and ten. His eyes are

bright and full of life. His complexion

is rosy and his face almost free from

wrinkles. The thick thatch upon his

head and chin contains but few gray

strands, and his voice is as strong as that

of a man of forty. As he chats, I think

of the enormous amount of work he

does, and resolve to get at the secret of

his vitality. I ask him as to his habits.

He replies that he has no habits to

speak of; that he lives simply, works

hard, and thrives upon it. In reply to

my questions he answers that he does

not drink much, although his friends

tell me that he is not averse to a finger

of good old whisky now and then. He

tells me that one of the secrets of his

vitality lies in the fact that he never wor-

ries, and his assistants say that he sheds

trouble as a duck's back sheds water.

He says that he always does what seems

right to him at the time, and then forgets

about the matter until it again comes up.

He puts his full force upon the thing

before him. Nothing seems to ruffle

him. A man may come into the office

and denounce the city government. He

may storm at the mayor and say things

which might be considered unpleasant.

The mayor passes upon his case then

and there. After he has decided it he

dismisses it from his mind, and the face

which is turned to the next caller is as

clear as a May morning.

I am told that Mayor Strong is very

fond of humor. He has a homely way

which reminds you of President Lin-

coln. He can see a joke as quickly as

could Lincoln, and he enjoys a funny

story amid the most solemn circum-

stances. People who come before him

are surprised to hear him burst into a

laugh and tell a funny story in the midst

of a most serious consultation. Some

of them cannot understand how it is in

this love of humor that he rests his

mind. The laugh breaks the strain

which his position necessarily entails.

The mayor is a good story teller, and

his best stories are the reminiscences of

his own life, which has been a typically

American one.

Mayor Strong's life-story is that of a

country boy, who came to New York

and succeeded. He was, you know,

born in Ohio. His early years were

spent upon a farm, and one of his first

business ventures was in a small store at

Mansfield, Ohio. Mansfield is now a

town of twenty thousand people. When

Mayor Strong was young, I doubt

whether it had three thousand; but

among its young men it included some

of the brightest minds of the United

States. One of Mr. Strong's associates

and friends was John Sherman, who had

come to Mansfield from a school at

Mount Vernon to study law with his

brother Charley. It must have been

during Mr. Strong's mercantile experi-

ence there that Sherman became a can-

didate for Congress and canvassed the

district, going about with an old white

horse, and stopping at the country cross-

roads to make speeches. Another young

man was Amos Townsend, who after-

ward went to Cleveland and made a big

fortune there. He was sent from Cleve-

land to Congress, and was for years one

of the soundest advisers of the republi-

can party. I think that Townsend and

Strong were partners at Mansfield. An-

other man who has done much since he

left that part of Ohio, is General Tom

Eckert, who is now the president of the

Western Union Telegraph company.

During my chat with the mayor, I asked

him how he happened to leave Mans-

field. He told me that he was ambi-

tious, wanted to see something of the

world, and concluded to try New York.

He began his work here as a clerk, re-

ceiving at first a hundred dollars a

month. Then he was sent out West to

collect bills for his firm, and he succeed-