

HUNT OF CINCINNATI

THE MILITANT YOUNG REFORMER WHO TRIUMPHED OVER THE
COX MACHINE AND INAUGURATED A NEW ERA OF
NON-PARTIZAN CITY GOVERNMENT

BY HUGH THOMPSON

IF you should wander around in the long, dark corridors of the Cincinnati city hall, the chances are that you will encounter a compact, athletic young man of medium height, with black, curly hair and keen, piercing, brown eyes, walking with strenuous, determined step, and probably in his shirt-sleeves, if the weather is warm. At first glance, you would doubtless size him up for a rather energetic subordinate in one of the municipal departments. But if you scrutinize him carefully, you will see that from the pugnacious set of his jaw and the grim, firm quality of his mouth, he is no meek, self-sacrificing individual.

As a matter of fact, this compact, strong-jawed young man happens to be the mayor of Cincinnati, who, at thirty-three, stepped to the chief magistracy of one of our great American communities under circumstances so spectacular and unusual as to make him a figure of national interest. Such is the distinction of Henry T. Hunt, a latter-day David who helped to slay—or to suppress, at least—one of the last of the Goliaths of graft.

At an age when most politicians are beginning to graduate from ward limitations, Mr. Hunt finds himself the central figure of an important city government, the symbol and instrument of a municipal regeneration which has a profound significance for every American municipality.

Clearly to understand Mayor Hunt's present eminence, and fully to appreciate his somewhat unusual performance, it is necessary to turn back a few pages of Cincinnati history. It is a rustling of foul leaves, on which is written a story of shame

—the familiar, sordid, seared record of a city debauched.

Scarcely anybody need be told the shocking fact that for nearly twenty years this Queen City of the middle West, hemmed in by verdant hills and washed by the rapid Ohio, was in the grip of George B. Cox, the one-time saloon-keeper who became a mayor-maker, and who, as a political Warwick, wielded a dictatorship not even surpassed by Boss Tweed, Abe Ruef, Israel Durham, or Richard Croker, in the most flourishing days of their authority.

Nearly every office-holder in Cincinnati, from judge to janitor, paid tribute to this silent, gray-eyed czar who sat in a saloon on a side street and ladled out patronage as his neighbor behind the free-lunch counter served soup. His word was law; his rule was absolute; his power for years undisputed. He built up an immense, closely riveted machine, which he kept galvanized into constant submission through favors and through fear. Corrupt government means inefficient government, and whenever the muck-raker went forth on his travels, he had but to go to Cincinnati to find his "horrible example."

New York, San Francisco, St. Louis, Philadelphia, and various other cities have been boss-ridden; but the case of Cincinnati was peculiarly distinct. In none of the other communities mentioned did one man absolutely dominate the situation; but Cox was Cincinnati, and Cincinnati was his, so much so that the rank and file of the citizenship shrugged its shoulders from year to year and said:

"What's the use?"

In Cincinnati, as elsewhere, there were