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SYDNEY AND ITS INSTITUTIONS, AS  
THEY ARE, AND MIGHT BE.

FROM AN ENGINEER'S POINT OF VIEW.

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When the "First Fleet" left the shores of old England, a little over a hundred years ago, its destination was not Sydney, for Sydney at that time had no existence. It was, as is well known, owing to the unsatisfactory appearance which the shores of Botany Bay presented, that the intended disembarkment was not made there, and the ships' boats were sent along the coast in search of a better site. From the oft-told story we know that before long our "Heads" were entered, and a most unexpected panorama of bays and headlands was revealed to Phillip and his explorers. What these first white men saw when the harbour was in all its pristine glory has been so oft and well pictured, by poet and artist, that it would only be sacrilege for an engineer (whose chief attribute is supposed to be truthful and inglorious prose) to unburden himself in praise of Port Jackson, its crystal waters, and its milk-white beaches, as they were before civilisation set to work to improve upon them. Truth, however, impels the writer to say (after having visited many capital cities of both the Old and New Worlds) that his eyes have never rested upon a fairer or more promising site, for the metropolis of a great and rising nation, than that which fell to the lot of Sydney.

One of the finest landlocked harbours in the world, has deep water for shipping in fleets. It is indented with sheltered bays, having shores suitable for business or residential occupation. In the close neighbourhood are ocean

beaches and mountain ranges, while both wood and water, by forest and lake, are easily accessible for recreation, when its people are tired of work. A glorious climate, notwithstanding our never-ceasing abuse of it, was not forgotten by Dame Nature when she framed the ideal setting for a great maritime city which was her birthday gift to civilisation in Australia.

Phillip's boats might have found something to recommend either Port Hacking or the Hawkesbury for settlement, but they brought him here; he found the place was good, decided to stay, and named it Port Jackson. To anyone who has an intimate knowledge of the intricacies of Sydney Harbour, it is very apparent that our first Governor showed a rare sagacity (if it was not merely his good fortune) when he selected his landing-place. The neighbourhood of what is now Macquarie Place was probably the very best spot for his purpose, out of the whole 150 miles or thereabouts of water frontage he had to choose from, and there he started to clear the bush, found his infant settlement, and lay the foundation-stones of Sydney.

With the landing of Phillip's charges there was the necessary accompaniment of regulations for the maintenance of law and order; and thus began the foundations of "Our Institutions."

These institutions, from their very nature, were characterised for years by official despotism. Although times have greatly changed since those days, yet many traces of that despotism cling to us, and our people mildly submit to be treated as children or slaves, where the citizens of other countries would assert themselves, and have a more direct say about that which concerned their interests as a community.

It was natural that the first tents and huts which were erected, when the ships' companies were established on shore, should follow the lines of the natural water-courses and the undulations of the ground without any system. It could only be expected that some settlers would improve their homes more than others, and that vested interests would soon be set up, before any accurate survey

would be made, or a settled plan for a town be determined upon.

As buildings of all sorts became necessary immediately, they were erected for the then present purposes. There was a proposal made for erecting the official buildings around a broad open place, but not for many years any idea of the great city that was arising. In the meantime, almost irreparable damage was done through there being no complete pre-arranged plan of main streets. Houses were built to form streets, such as Bent, Bligh, O'Connell, and Spring streets, suitable for the immediate convenience of the residents, and following the natural features of the close neighbourhood; but in such a way as to permanently interfere with the regular continuity of the main thoroughfares which were afterwards laid out to form the town.

The sea-going and labouring population appear to have taken to the hill on the west side of Sydney Cove, which is still known by its old name as the "Rocks," and there to have settled their huts down in much greater disorder than on the east side of the Cove. Among the conglomeration of lanes and alleys misnamed streets, and the pig-stye class of tenements which still characterise that locality, we can find dwellings that are probably a good deal over a hundred years old.

"Tom Cribb's Lane" still perpetuates the memory of one of the first Government butchers. "Jack the Miller" (of whom old residents used to talk when there were still windmills in the city) gave his name to Miller's Point; like Cribb, he was no doubt an important personage in his way and day.

Making our history as brief as possible, we find that when the first quarter of the present century was completed the town of Sydney had emerged from its swaddling clothes. Men like the energetic Dr. Lang were among its citizens, leavening the community for spiritual and material good—and plenty of the latter, too, for he introduced a number of skilled masons from Scotland. Sydney had then made a wonderful advance considering its distance from the parent country, and that in those

days a six months' voyage was not unusual. In ten years more, that is in 1835, it had become of such importance that it was able to produce a directory with an itinerary of the principal roads of the colony and a well-executed map of the town.

It is well known, not only to the members of this Association, but to many citizens, that the author has been for many years the earnest advocate of certain proposals for improving the city of Sydney, by opening up new streets in the constricted neighbourhood of the Devonshire-street Cemetery and the Benevolent Asylum, and by the extension of George-street from Bridge-street northward, through the "Rocks" site to Dawes Point. These improvements being concomitants of a scheme for extending the railway lines into the city. It is an old saying, "There is nothing new under the sun"; he was, therefore, not particularly surprised, on recently becoming the possessor of one of these old maps of Sydney, to find that in this idea of a new George-street extension which he had vigorously advocated for over ten years as his own, he had been anticipated by half a century. This old map actually shows by dotted lines that over sixty years ago proposals had been already made to extend George-street southward from the Benevolent Asylum in a straight line through to Redfern, and also in a straight line northward from Bridge-street to Dawes Point. It may be mentioned here that the same map also shows Government House just upon the site where the foundation-plate was recently unearthed in Bridge-street, and so it may be considered as fairly correct. Although no broad and general scheme for improving our main thoroughfare has ever been carried out, and there are no records to show that a private person has brought such forward and has received a careful hearing from the Municipal Council, yet a number of confined and dirty alleys, lanes, and closes have since been created.

A strange apathy with regard to the advancement of the city seems to have developed, and, in fact, with regard to all important matters affecting the appearance of our city and the health of the citizens, a general in-

difference to what is going on appears to have become a distinguishing characteristic of the people themselves, and inability to look ahead of those who have undertaken to govern them. The municipal motto, "I take but I surrender" would be a very good one if rightly interpreted, but "how not to do it" would appear to be more appropriate to conditions as we find them.

There have been other institutions outside municipal ones which have had a great influence in bringing about the condition in which we find our surroundings. Looking back at these it will be noted that the naval and military influence under which the city was born continued dominant for many years, and showed itself in our civil affairs, while its traces remain in our midst after the lapse of a century.

There were giants of our early days; some were explorers, while others were workers nearer home who have left enduring monuments, like Major Mitchell in his great road over Mount Victoria, and his wonderful three-sheet feature map of the colony, or like Busby, who gave us the tunnel and water supply at Hyde Park, from what is now the Centennial Park. To these pioneers we owe more than can easily be comprehended by the youth of the present generation. All honour to the memory of such large-minded men in a small community. When the settlement became more important later on, however, the supply of competent men does not appear to have been kept up, and it was quite a different matter entrusting great works of the colony to younger men often without any professional experience, and appointing novices to important positions simply because they held honoured names, were upheld by influence, or backed by wealth. Such, however, seems to have been very largely the case, and the colony and city are now reaping the consequences and paying interest upon millions of absolutely wasted money. With the discovery of gold in the middle of the century all old boundaries were altered; wealth became more assertive, and, when suddenly acquired, more dazzling. The "nouveau riche" was everywhere, culture was at a discount, and property and

wealth at a premium as a title to distinction. Municipal as well as other laws seem to have been made in the interests of property. Men sought public positions for the sake of the honour and patronage attached to them, without any regard to their qualifications; and they were elected often because more suitable people were either too busy or were making too much money to trouble about their material surroundings. The fact that only property had a vote in their election has probably been the principal factor in the City Council failing to understand its responsibilities.

In the year 1843, a Municipal Council with a Mayor at its head was established for Sydney, but it did so badly that after working for eleven years the Government of the day found it imperative to supersede it. Three Commissioners were then appointed to look after the interests of the citizens, who held office for three years, and it was at this period that the city waterworks were established at Botany to supersede Busby's bore, and a system of underground sewerage commenced. In the year 1857 (noted as the year of the wreck of the "Dunbar"), municipal government was re-established, the Hon. George Thornton being the first Mayor. At this time the Town Hall was held in what is now the Oxford Hotel. The author well remembers the drawing offices on the top floor, and the preparation of plans for works in connection with the system of sewerage then being carried out, with a large gun-metal outlet valve at Fort Macquarie. The great ventilator to the sewers on Hyde Park—still known to many citizens as "Thornton's smelling bottle" at the top of Bathurst-street—was designed at this time. This upcast shaft was fitted with a furnace for establishing a draught, but it is very questionable if a fire was ever lighted in it after it was handed over to the Municipal Council. About this period the Imperial troops were being withdrawn, military influence was on the wane, and then a trinity of autocracy became established by the appointment of three officers on the formation of a Department of Public Works. This was the foundation of the great civil bureaucracy of engineering

which now practically holds the whole of the public works of the colony in its octopus grasp. So much is this the case that Ministers of the Crown now sometimes appear to the uninitiated to be more the creatures than the masters of their offices, while at other times officers of high attainments seem to be made the sport of political opportunists. The public and a section of the press often confuse position and responsibility with attainments and qualifications, in both Ministers and officers, and no matter how often failures may occur, or how serious may be their results, never admit that the system under which our public works are carried on is inherently bad until they are obliged. It is not the fault of the talented and conscientious professional servants of the country who constitute the focus of our great system of centralisation that their works extend over an area many times as large as the United Kingdom, and are so manifold that it would be impossible for them to be acquainted with their details; but it is the fault of our political system which allows it to continue, and the love of patronage which has time after time killed bills brought up for the establishment of local government.

A great deal might be said here about the direful results which have ensued from this system of centralisation in our community, of the many millions of public money wasted, which would have been saved had a good system of local government been established years ago to create a spirit of rivalry and emulation between shire or district engineers to secure efficiency with economy. Now there are immense bills to be paid by a people who are deeply in debt and who have comparatively little to show for their money—money often spent in ridiculous extravagances, which would not be found in the wealthy country we borrow from. Absolute essentials for a commonsense, civilised people have been entirely overlooked, while Government has carried out extensive and costly works, often under the direction of comparative amateurs and sometimes of a useless character. Thousands of pounds have been paid as salaries to gentlemen with influence, who have sometimes been one on the top of

another in looking after or inspecting such works. No doubt many of the anomalies of the past have disappeared with the institution of the Public Service Board, and qualifications are necessary for all appointments made by this Board. is an institution we shall not have time to discuss this evening. It would appear to be inequitable that certain local centres, which have been supplied with public works that they have not ordered and did not want, should pay for the mistakes incidental to central authorities working at a great distance from their base. If such works are sanctioned by Parliament, as representing the whole country, then the whole country should pay. At present in New South Wales the people of a country locality have very little voice in the election of those who rule over the more important local works as they have in more advanced parts of the civilised world. Under the Sydney Municipalities Act the aldermen of Sydney (as the writer has time after time pointed out) are not the representatives of the citizens, but only the representatives of a minority, and are elected by a series of cliques or factions, in which corporation servants themselves may be great factors. As things are now, a citizen may pay £500 a year for a set of chambers in George-street without having a vote, while a bottle-washer may pay five shillings per week for a shed in Woolloomooloo and be entitled to elect the alderman of his ward.

If the people of Getupancumalong have to pay £20,000 for public works carried out under central authority for their benefit, when an expenditure of six or seven thousand pounds discreetly laid out would have served them just as well, then it is largely their own fault for looking to the Government for everything, particularly so if they could find examples in other places where from 30 to 50 per cent. has been saved under similar circumstances by the people looking out for themselves. But in the city of Sydney it is otherwise—the people as a body have no option under the laws as they exist, because they are not enfranchised.

It has, therefore, been impossible for thousands of reputable citizens to exert a positive influence for the better government of the city, however much they might express their opinion, and the recent strong action of the Chamber of Commerce has not led the City Council to frame a new City Corporation Act.

It is far from the scope and intentions of this paper to make charges or even cast reflections that will admit of personal application, yet in view of the awful seriousness of what has happened recently by the outbreak of a dreadful disease, largely due to the filthy condition of the city, one should not hesitate to lay bare unpleasant truths that have a special bearing now, even though they have been oft repeated before. While no false delicacy should hold one's hand when plain outspokenness makes for the good of the whole community, it would be no good raking up old grievances if the source of them was done away with. In the present case the source is still turning out grievances, and it is only in the belief that a full exposure of such abuses, and that a comprehension of the difficulties surrounding their cure, is a necessary precedent to steps being taken to prevent their repetition, that the matter is now brought before this Association as a public body.

For 43 years, from the time that the Hon. George Thornton was Mayor, when the author was often engaged in business at the Town Hall in connection with works carried out by P. N. Russell and Co., he has watched the operations of the City Council, known most of the Worshipful Mayors, and been acquainted with a large proportion of the aldermen. It must be acknowledged that he is acquainted with many good works which the City Council has carried out during that time, and he is prepared to admit that most of its members have been, and still are, very estimable citizens. This, however, he is assured of, and the opinion is backed by results, that as the units of a concrete body they have mostly been material in the wrong place. United as a Council, the city aldermen have certainly failed to do anything like justice to the fair city they were elected to govern. No

doubt, in a number of cases, the city has been improved by purchasing property which projected into the streets. The Council has kerbed and guttered by the mile, blocked and paved, pulled down and rebuilt, but in what sort of a way? Ask the roll of contractors who have received city money, and look at what has been achieved.

When you see an enquiry like that held by the Council about two years ago degenerates into a farce, and find that there was no examination under oath, and then note that the anchor was dropped directly it got into sultry weather, what can you think of such a public body?

No doubt the City Council has been shamefully treated by the General Government by shearing them of their undoubted rights, taking away their streets for tramways, and appointing boards whose authority clashed or overlapped their own. But did they ever make a dignified stand in the interests of the city?

You may point out in their favour that thousands of pounds have been spent in an unsystematic improvement of the mass of lanes and alleys which lie between Prince-street and George-street (perhaps because there are a lot of votes up there), but it is not on record that a bill ever emanated from the Town Hall asking Parliament to give the city power to resume the whole area of that district, and to lay out a new quarter of the city as was proposed sixty years ago. For years and years the Council ran the water supply of the city, and the great pumping works at Botany, and in doing so it is said they paid for thousands upon thousands of tons of coal more than would have been necessary under business management. The Council has done many other unbusinesslike things besides. As before stated, it would be no good unearthing details of scandals which attached to the public competition when designs were invited from architects some years ago for the Town Hall, when the objections of the competitors were not based on imaginary grievances. Neither need we say why a subsequent City Architect was so little pleased with his masters, that he promptly discharged himself from their service, when he learnt

more of their ways. Coming, however, to more recent times, many of us remember the rumours about the discovery of contractors who made the mistake of putting the hundred-weights for their goods supplied into the tons columns of their bills, or something to that effect, and the mistakes of the City Council in paying them. The memory of the wonderful Town Hall foundations (utterly eclipsing, so it is said, anything "Tammany" has yet attempted in America), and which were built from large unwrought stones dumped into a trench right under the eyes of the Mayor and aldermen sitting in Council, lives still; and the fact that the works were all passed, and something like thirteen thousand pounds was paid for them before they were unearthed, is yet in the memories of citizens. Besides this, many direct defalcations from Town Hall funds by its officers are not forgotten. We may be asked to believe that these things were accidents, to which any great organisation is liable; but supposing such is granted, where, we would ask, are the mighty works actually accomplished to serve as a set-off against them? Municipal Councils in other countries have established great records during recent years. Have we in Sydney municipal baths and washhouses, or even a few decent conveniences with public lavatories? Have we city gasworks to secure the profits to the consumers? Where are our great city esplanades and fountains, our bandstands with municipal music in the parks? We must give our aldermen credit for providing a first-class city organ, but although Sydney is an ideal city for "al fresco" entertainment during a great part of the year, they have never given us a peal of carillons in the Town Hall, so that such delightful music might float over the city at stated intervals. Yet our accomplished city organist is a professional carillonneur, and a set of forty or fifty bells up to three tons weight, such as afford outdoor pleasure to the citizens of many European cities, would cost much less than the market verandah came to. Did the Council ever consider the possibilities of Elizabeth-street, or take steps towards making it an avenue of 100 feet wide, from the Circular Quay to Mount Carmel?

Have they even discussed the advantages or possibilities of building a viaduct from Bathurst-street to the railway station like the Holborn Viaduct in London, that would be a city improvement which would put a stop to the "Duke of York" proceedings by which ten thousand man power daily, besides that of horses and motors, is wasted by marches to the bottom of the hill in order to march up again like the celebrated Duke of York's men? Did it (the Council) look well to the interests of the city when the slaughter-houses were removed from the bottom of Drutt-street and see the site was properly levelled and laid out?

These, and all such matters, await the coming of a greater Sydney Council. We must, however, credit the City Council that it has accomplished a more ambitious work, one "greater than trifles which shed no radiance of immediate glory" on all concerned. It has given us the "Queen Victoria Markets." A mighty structure! A great speculation, and one that will repay us for looking into a little deeper for a few moments.

According to the official speech of Sir Matthew Harris on its grand opening day, this speculation of our city fathers is valued at about £700,000 sterling, and from the Mayor's recent statements we learn that it entails a loss to the citizens of £10,000 a year. One wonders if the Council ever had a responsible estimate made of its cost, and of the probable income to be derived from it, before they started on this huge expenditure. If such was ever done, it has been carefully kept from the public eye, and will never reach it now. It is a singular thing the public can apply to a member of Parliament to ask questions of public interest, or to move for "papers" to be laid on the table of the "House," but the "papers" of the City Council are private, and not for the information of the "vulgar." This a simple member of this Association once found to his sorrow, when he sought to prevent a mistake being made which seemed almost to involve a fraud. Instead of being thanked by the alderman, to whom he believed he was giving important information, he was rebuked in good round terms because he was in

possession of a copy of a printed report upon a public work, which report was only intended for the eye of certain privileged persons.

Let us return to a consideration of this municipal institution, which has been most irreverently dubbed a monument of monstrosity by unsympathetic persons. It is called a "market building" we note, although every feature which would indicate such a use or adapt it for market purposes is conspicuous by its absence. Whether it is suitable for a market or not, it is one of the most costly and utterly inconsistent buildings in the world. Let us begin with the site; here the Council had a piece of ground all "frontage" and with comparatively no "depth"—because George and York streets at the spot are only about 100ft. apart. With practically no depth to begin with, it was decided first of all to throw away one-half the little area there was, and to create what is practically another street through the centre of the already narrow block, and thus leave ground estimated at an average value of £250 a foot frontage, with about 28ft. average depth. The cost of the useful portion of the structure seems to run out—on the Mayor's figures—at about 1s. 9d. per cubic foot, or, say, from four to six times the cost of other city markets; but then it must be remembered "our market" has about twenty small domes over it, and one big dome in the centre to show that it is a market. It has also between five and six dozen enormous corbels at its upper angles, probably intended to carry lofty sky signs when the market business begins. For the present they only carry little tin temples, the use of which is not apparent.

The great and lofty dome overhead, which dominates the whole conception and emphasises everything else, cannot possibly, however, be merely for the present. Such a conspicuous and prominent feature must be a permanency, and in it must abide the spirit of the whole great creation. Let us for one minute, as part owners of this mighty structure, try to bring ourselves into touch with it, and let us attempt to ascertain what that spirit is. Michael Angelo's great dome at Rome, although