

1

The City and the Machine

The network of party clubhouses and the hierarchy of party committees with a citywide leader or “boss” at the apex constituted a “shadow government,” a supplementary structure of power that performed some functions more vital than those of the nominal, legal government.

—William V. Shannon, *The American Irish*

Tammany is corruption with consent . . .

—Lincoln Steffens

THROUGHOUT THE NINETEENTH CENTURY THE FORCES OF INDUSTRIALIZATION, expanding global enterprise, and dizzying demographic increases and mutations made New York City the nation’s most dynamic and influential metropolis. The inexorable rise of the city’s financial, commercial, and manufacturing sectors created a large and aspiring middle class that drove the city’s economic machine. Ranked above them was a smaller but economically and socially dominant upper class secure in the wealth and position that their ownership of the great business combinations had won for them. The rich advertised their status in a number of ways, none more visible than the opulent homes they built for themselves along the then upper reaches of Fifth Avenue in the forties. Through natural growth and incessant immigration from the American hinterlands and Europe, the city’s population pressed against the outer boundaries of established neighborhoods and spread ever northward, swirling around Central Park and engulfing old villages such as Harlem and Spuyten Duyvil. By the 1880s some voices were called for outright annexation of the southern sections of Westchester called the Bronx, as well as Kings County, Staten Island, and those parts of Queens County that lay in the city’s ambit despite lying across the East River.

The wealthy dominated high society and owned the high-end businesses and firms with their continental and global connections. The optimistic and striving middle class contributed the countless small and middling businesses that gave the city much of its energy while providing the personnel that staffed the white-collar professions. But it was the lower class that provided the muscle and the sweat that drove the great metropolitan machine. The major stronghold of the working classes and poor—often one and the same—was the Lower East Side, the area below Fourteen Street, or “south of the line” as the locals phrased it. Here stood the swarming households, pre-Civil War structures, and older tenements and row houses, as well as the myriad of small businesses, recreational, and entertainment places that catered to, and were often owned by, the largely immigrant population that dwelt there.

Two large thoroughfares stretched south to north through lower Manhattan, running directly through the area. The first was Broadway, one of the oldest streets in the city. More than a major artery, Broadway was a commercial street of considerable importance, and the address of many theaters, dance halls, bars, and popular museums. Slightly to the east, but noticeably different in character, ran the Bowery, which took its name from Pieter Stuyvesant’s old *bouwerie*—Dutch for “farm.” Many years had passed since the Bowery could claim anything bucolic, but the avenue, which ran from Canal Street to Fourteenth Street, was home to a wide variety of commerce and recreational enterprises. The area surrounding the avenue, especially to the east, which also bore the name Bowery, had been densely populated since before the Civil War. Between 1880 and World War One, it had the ambiguous distinction of being the most congested residential area in the city. The type of entertainment that was found on Broadway also lined the Bowery. But almost from its very beginnings, Bowery amusements were considered more raffish, rowdy, bawdy—or outright disreputable and dangerous. The Bowery was home to more whorehouses, dives, and flophouses than Broadway—whose legitimate theater was migrating toward midtown as the twentieth century approached—and fielded greater numbers of gang members, gamblers, and pimps. Not to mention politicians.

None of this necessarily hurt the proprietors of the Bowery’s multifaceted enterprises. In addition to the locals who enjoyed

the ruder, proletarian fare, Bowery amusements attracted visitors from uptown and out-of-town, including significant numbers from allegedly respectable classes, who sought the livelier entertainment available in the dance halls and theaters, or perhaps some of the readily available illicit action dispensed at after-hours gin mills, gambling dens, and brothels. The Bowery's expanding notoriety was proclaimed in a popular tune first aired in the comedy *A Trip to Chinatown* in 1892. The chorus, widely known well into the twentieth century, went

The Bowery, the Bowery!
They say such things and they do strange things
On the Bowery, the Bowery!
I'll never go there anymore.

In 1878, an elevated line was opened along the Bowery, casting a shadow over the street during the day and threatening to plunge it into darkness after dusk. However, in 1882, electricity was extended along a mile of the thoroughfare, and it was soon ablaze with streetlights and electric signs advertising a wide variety of amusements. Edison banished the gloom, and the Bowery may have been at its peak between 1880 and 1900, when it was described as "the liveliest mile on the face of the earth."¹

The Bowery was home to some of the city's most infamous dives, such as McGurk's Suicide Hall, so-called after a number of prostitutes ended their careers and lives in its halls. Owney Geoghegan, part-time boxer and friend of Tammany politicians, opened his doors at 105 Bowery in the 1870s, and it quickly earned the reputation as one of the toughest "resorts" in town. Raw whiskey went for ten cents a drink, and a "free and easy" amateur boxing bout was held nightly. Complaining customers might be invited to settle their dispute in the same manner. Unwary visitors had to dodge the pickpockets, and off-duty professional beggars could be seen relaxing, their public infirmities vanished as if Geoghegan's was an auxiliary of Lourdes. Less disreputable was Steve Brodie's saloon, a hangout for professional athletes and those who came to gawk at them. The main barroom featured a painting of Brodie's claim to fame, a jump from the Brooklyn Bridge whose authenticity was questionable, but whose celebrity became a career. The tougher saloons and dives could be dangerous, and anyone who flashed big bills might

find himself taken one way or another, but locals, or experienced “slummers” who avoided attracting attention and paid in small change, could usually enjoy the ambience unmolested.²

But the Bowery was more than dives and flophouses where overnight accommodations were sometimes a chalk outline on the floor. “Outside men” acting like carnival barkers enticed passersby into the various “dime museums” where they could gaze at freaks such as albinos and “dog-faced” boys, as well as more conventional acts like sword-swallowers and fire-eaters. The Bowery was home to many theaters, whose performances might be in English, German, or, a little later, Yiddish. Some presented upscale fare such as Shakespeare or Oscar Wilde, but the variety theaters, fast evolving into vaudeville, were more popular. Variety theater offered a panoply of entertainment—comedy, juggling, minstrelsy, singing, short dramatic pieces, amateur nights—for a modest entrance fee. Twenty cents would admit a patron to the National Theater, where the bill often ran over four hours.

Alcohol was served at most theaters, which no doubt encouraged the tradition of razzing and heckling the performers, who were perfectly at liberty to hand it back. To prevent things from getting out of control, Henry Miner, the politically connected owner of the Bowery Theater, stationed security guards—bouncers—on each level of his theater. The guard on the orchestra level stood with back to the stage searching the audience for potential problems. As the curtain opened and a show began, the balcony bouncer shouted “Hats off, youse . . . Hat’s off, all o’ youse.”³ Enthusiastic, even boisterous behavior was acceptable at the Bowery and most East Side theaters. Prohibited acts included tobacco spitting, throwing paper, or annoying women. Violators were summarily ejected.⁴

“Gilded Age” New York had a pronounced Irish accent, and much of downtown sported a Celtic character between 1840 and 1900. In the 1880s, a full 40 percent of the city’s inhabitants were of Irish extraction—either immigrants or first American generation.⁵ Only the Germans, more likely to keep to themselves and less politically active, rivaled the Irish in numbers. Arriving in large numbers only after 1840, the dispossessed Famine Irish had been pitied, despised, and feared. The first non-Protestant group to appear in great numbers, their appearance triggered the anti-Catholic bigotry that had characterized British popular cul-

ture since the sixteenth century. Nor did the old-stock—Anglo-Saxon—citizens of New York forget that their ancestors had conquered and colonized Ireland, beating down several attempts at rebellion between 1641 and 1848. The poverty of most of the Famine refugees, their unfamiliar customs—in many cases unfamiliar language—their concentration in the cheap, dilapidated housing the native born had fled, and the increasing presence of crime and prostitution in their neighborhoods further inflamed anti-Irish feelings. In the decade before the Civil War gangs of Irish and native-born Americans were battling in the streets of the Five Points and other downtown neighborhoods.

Yet the Irish persevered. Some—a few—had come to America with money, skill, or professional acumen. Others parlayed work, talent, luck, or connections into a middle-class lifestyle. By 1875 the Irish could boast two major accomplishments in America—mastery, if not virtual creation, of the American Catholic Church and control of the Democratic Party in most northern cities, especially New York. Irish dominance of New York's Democratic Party was exercised through their control of Tammany Hall. Tammany, the leading Democratic organization in the city, was founded as a political-fraternal order in 1789. Originally nativist, it became an important part of Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans, which evolved into the Democratic Party in the 1830s. The organization's name was taken from a mythical Indian chief, Tammany, which led to the society's adoption of a number of pseudo-Indian terms. The Tammany leader was the grand sachem, district leaders sachems, rank-and-file members were braves, and the headquarters was dubbed "the Wigwam."

Seeing the possibilities of the huge numbers fleeing Europe in the 1840s, Tammany welcomed the newcomers—especially the Irish—and baptized them as Democrats. Before the Civil War, Irish loyalty helped Tammany establish itself in the slums of the Fourth and Sixth wards—the so-called "Whiskey Wards." In 1861, William Marcy Tweed assumed the leadership of the Hall, initiating a ten-year reign of municipal looting and bequeathing the organization its soon-to-be famous tiger symbol.⁶

Celebrating Tammany's grip on city politics, in 1867 Tweed erected a new Wigwam on Fourteenth Street. By that time, the Irish were not only "braves" but ward leaders, municipal officials, and Tweed's most trusted lieutenants. Tweed himself would be the last old-stock American to run the Hall. After Tweed's

fall, triggered by a disgruntled organization functionary who revealed the extent of Tammany's looting of city funds—about \$200 million between 1861 and 1871—the organization came under the control of an all-Irish hierarchy.⁷ Until 1932, small breaks excepted, Irish-led Tammany would dominate New York City politics and make it the gold standard of political machines everywhere.

John Kelly, later "Honest John," was the first of a line of powerful Irish grand sachems. Kelly assumed control of the organization at its nadir, drifting and discredited after Tweed tumbled from power in 1872. In the words of later chroniclers of Tammany's fortunes, Kelly "found Tammany a horde and left it an army."⁸ Born in 1822, Kelly was the ambitious son of Irish immigrants who had established a successful grate and soapstone business by the time he was twenty-one. Like many young men in the city, he joined one of the several volunteer fire companies that competed, and sometimes brawled, for the privilege of extinguishing the many blazes that plagued the then largely wooden metropolis. In addition to their basic duties, the volunteer fire companies in the antebellum period functioned as social and political organizations, and membership was a prerequisite for any young man with political ambitions.

Kelly, who had an appetite for self-improvement, acted in amateur theatricals, read Shakespeare, taught himself French, and finished his secondary education at night. He was also devoutly religious and had originally intended to study for the priesthood. The young Irisher was drawn into politics by the rise of the nativist Know-Nothing Party, which grew in strength in the late 1840s and 1850s. Anti-immigrant, especially anti-Irish immigrant, the political leaders of the American Party, as the Know-Nothings were officially named, demanded restrictions on immigration while their underlings fomented anti-Catholic rioting and battled Irish gangs in the streets. Ironically, Kelly began his career with one of Tammany's smaller Democratic rivals, opposing both the Hall and the Know-Nothings. Nativist gangs, supporting Know-Nothing candidates, raided Kelly's electoral district and were probably responsible for his defeat in his first attempts at a seat on the New York City Board of Aldermen. On his third try, Kelly lined up support from Irish gangs and fire companies—often interchangeable—and in a pitched battle at the polls, the

Irish defeated the nativists, breaking Know-Nothing power in the Sixth Ward and handing Kelly his first political victory.⁹

Kelly entered the House of Representatives in 1854. The only Catholic out of 241 representatives, the new legislator was frequently engaged in verbal warfare with Know-Nothing or other anti-Catholic representatives.¹⁰ But in 1858 he returned to local politics, winning the election as New York City sheriff on the Tammany ticket. The position was unpaid, the salary to derive from the collection of fees. The system, which was ancient, allowed certain officials, such as sheriffs, to levy an amount for their services above what the city demanded. The differential was pocketed by the officeholder. Kelly was diligent, efficient, and successful, earning \$800,000 fulfilling his duties and earning the sobriquet "Honest John."¹¹ Though some later claimed he drastically overcharged for his services, others countered that he was restrained compared to other officeholders. At any rate, the nickname stuck.

Kelly broke with Tammany as revelations of Tweed's chicanery emerged, and he allied himself with reform Democrat, later governor, Samuel J. Tilden. At about the same time, his personal life unraveled as he watched his wife and three children die in the space of five years between 1866 and 1871. Grief stricken, Kelly again spoke of joining the religious life, but Tilden and Democratic lawyer Charles O'Connor convinced him that his true vocation was that of a political leader, and he agreed to take charge of the faltering Tammany organization. Assuming the office of New York County leader and chairman of the Committee on Organization, "Honest John" purged Tweed's supporters from the Hall. The new leader tightened Tammany's chain of command, according to some observers by using the Catholic Church as his model, and made himself more of a boss than Tweed had ever been. During Kelly's tenure as leader, the Tammany Society and Tammany Hall became separate, though related, organizations. The Hall became a purely political operation, while the Society functioned largely as a social and fraternal entity.

After 1871, the assembly district replaced the old wards as the basic unit in the Tammany hierarchy—although it remained common to refer to neighborhoods by their former ward designation into the twentieth century. New York's thirty-five assembly districts were subdivided into election districts, each with its own

captain who was appointed by the district leader. The district leader commonly held a state or municipal office in addition to his position in the party. But the district leaders' real power was with the organization. Leaders could make or break aldermen, assemblymen, state senators, or even congressmen. Theoretically, the district leaders were elected, but in practice they were usually appointed by the Hall's leader—the ultimate “boss.” Such appointments were usually, though not invariably, bestowed on men who had already built up a significant following in their districts. The district leaders sat on the New York County Executive Committee, which elected the leader of the Manhattan County Democracy—Tammany's boss. Kelly also created the General Committee, which numbered thousands of members elected from the assembly districts. Basically window dressing, the General Committee was Tammany's version of the Supreme Soviet, as it had no real power.

Functioning as the party's eyes and ears, and sometimes enforcers at the neighborhood level, the election district leaders—the captains—made it their business to know everyone in the area, their needs, wants, and how they voted. The captains reported back to the congressional district leaders, who were in turn accountable to the boss. Ultimate power resided with the Hall's leader, whose authority depended on his success in winning elections and distributing spoils to his lieutenants and the party faithful. This system, which Kelly constructed from the wreckage of Tweed's operation, became the model for urban political machines throughout the United States. Kelly's reorganization soon proved its worth, and the Tiger's first Irish Catholic leader oversaw the election of New York's first Irish Catholic mayor, William Grace.

To finance electoral contests, Kelly introduced a campaign funding system that also became standard with virtually all American political machines. Candidates for office were required to contribute a fixed sum to the fund, while party officeholders were assessed a percentage of their salaries. As election day neared, the district leaders, Kelly's bishops to his pope if the Catholic model is accepted, received a share of the war chest as Kelly thought best. After the election, if Tammany was victorious, district leaders, after consulting with their captains—the parish priests—would submit a list of deserving job seekers for Kelly's approval. Kelly would run them by his executive com-

mittee, his curia, and if there were no objections, the appointments were confirmed. Each assembly district was entitled to a quota of the municipal jobs, which the assembly leaders passed on to their captains, who doled them out. Officially, of course, the appointments were made by the mayor, who received the list of worthies from the Tammany leader and who had the honor of conferring the offices.¹²

By the time Honest John was firmly ensconced in the Wigwam, the contractual nature of Tammany's operations were well entrenched. Tammany power depended on the support of the lower and working classes, especially the immigrants and their American offspring. Kelly's success in shaping an effective organization was matched by a diligent campaign to create a reliable electorate. By the time of his death, Honest John had overseen the naturalization of 80 percent of New York's German and Irish immigrants.¹³ These were soon registered as voters with a natural tendency to vote Democratic—a tradition they passed on to their children. While not automatic, the Irish and German electorate gave Tammany a "manageable" vote, one they could count on, barring unforeseen or unusual problems, and one that allowed the Hall to consolidate its hold over the city during the 1890s.

Tammany provided jobs, legal support, social events, and food, fuel, and shelter if necessary. The emerging machine was itself a profession, offering young men opportunities for advancement and power. The Hall also defended and supported the immigrants' religion and culture against the sneers and slurs of old-stock nativists, and protected such popular immigrant pastimes as Sunday drinking from reform-minded politicians who wished to enforce Sunday blue laws. The Hall's political leaders also held patriotic and seasonal celebrations and festivals that provided the working poor with cheap amusements to break up an often dreary existence. For all these services, Tammany leaders wanted three things: votes, spoils, and power.

The money—often in huge amounts—flowing into Tammany's coffers depended heavily on corruption and graft. Graft came in two forms. The first, most controversial and a potential source of a backlash, was "dirty" or "police" graft. "Dirty" graft followed from Tammany's control of the police. When in power, the Hall controlled appointments to the police force, and often promotions and specific assignments as well. Gamblers of various stripes and

levels, running from back alley practitioners to owners of upscale gaming rooms, madams, pimps, prostitutes of all classes, and purveyors of illegal alcohol, all paid tribute to Tammany. The payoffs were ordinarily collected by the police, who received a cut depending on rank. Additionally, those who engaged in a legitimate trade were also expected to feed the Tammany kitty if they did not want the local copper looking too hard at a license or inquiring about the hours or days of business operations. Payments to the police meant contributing to Tammany on one level or another. Failure to do so meant raids, arrest, loss of city contracts or licenses, and maybe beatings. Many Tammany politicians maintained contacts with the underworld, and their gangster allies might be dispatched to do a job too controversial for the police to undertake.

The second form of graft used political power or connections to gain lucrative contracts from the city. Alternatively, a Tammany man might use insider knowledge to purchase property he knew the city intended to acquire and resell it to the municipal government at a steep markup. The colorful Tammany district leader, George Washington Plunkitt, whose candid, humorous descriptions of Tammany's philosophy and practices, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, remain in print, dubbed such activities "honest" graft. Some Tammanyites specialized in one form or another. Not a few were involved in both.

Reformers of all stripes railed against Tammany's corruption. Republicans—no novices at chicanery though their power lay outside the city—reform clubs, city leagues, and Good Government clubs (sneered at by Tammanyites as "Goo-Goos) repeatedly endeavored to break Tammany's hold on city government. Occasionally the scandals involving "dirty" graft were sensational and outrageous enough to allow the reformers to oust the Democrats from power. But the Tiger proved hard to kill, and like his smaller cousins had nine lives. Defeat led to reorganization and recalibration, and the Hall kept coming back, reclaiming its status as the most potent and enduring force in New York politics until 1932, when the nature of the game changed, and its methods became obsolete.

The reformers, often college-educated, generally old-stock Protestants, were viewed skeptically by the largely Catholic and later Jewish workers who made Tammany's rule possible. The reformers who tried to entice the immigrant and first-generation

Americans away from the machine, often lacked direct knowledge of the poorer neighborhoods and their inhabitants and were not infrequently insensitive, if not contemptuous, of the culture and mores that held sway “south of the line.” The air of political and moral superiority often displayed by the Goo-Goos grated on the sensibilities of the downtowners and rendered reform gains ephemeral. Above all, the Reformers misunderstood the essential ingredient in Tammany’s hold on its supporters—whatever its sins, the Hall served their interests. In 1900, reporter Harley Davis attempted to educate his readers of this fact in an article published in *Munsey’s Magazine*.

Tammany Hall does more for the daily personal comfort, happiness and well-being of the average tenement dweller than all the charitable and philanthropic institutions in New York. . . . It is not true that Tammany is uplifting the people of the metropolis. It is not true that it is making them better men and women. But it is true that in relieving distress, in providing for daily wants, in furthering ambitions, in helping men out of their troubles, and in assisting them to get on in the world, Tammany does wonderful work. . . .¹⁴

It took a lot to shake the loyalty of people to an organization that provided such practical support.

Despite his dedication and organizational skill, Kelly’s effectiveness as a political boss was undercut by a deep contrarian streak. An early ally of Tilden, he later broke with New York’s governor, though he grudgingly supported his losing run for the presidency in 1876. Three years later he bolted the state Democratic convention when it renominated Governor Lucius Robinson, whom Kelly despised for reneging on a pledge to pardon Tweed. Already suspect in many Democratic circles, Kelly’s tepid support for the party’s 1880 presidential candidate, Winfield Scott Hancock—which may have cost Hancock New York and the White House—led to his ostracism from state and national party functions. Despite his isolated position, none of the other “Democracies”—rival Democratic clubs—could turn him out of his power base in New York, and Kelly worked his way back into the party’s good graces through his early support of Grover Cleveland’s political career. But once safely in possession of the governor’s chair, Cleveland declined to give Tammany the patronage it expected, infuriating Kelly, who then tried to block Cleveland’s nomination as Democratic presidential candidate in 1884. In-

creasingly beset by health problems, and depressed at Cleveland's victory that year, Kelly relied more and more on his chief aide, Richard Croker, in running Tammany's operations.

Born in Cork in 1841, Richard Croker and his family arrived in New York three years later. The Crokers' first American address was the Irish shantytown on the western fringes of what became Central Park. Young Croker's connection with Tammany came early when the Hall got him a job as a veterinarian's assistant on the horse-drawn Hudson Railroad, which allowed him to move to better quarters on East Twenty-eighth Street. Croker left school at thirteen to work as a locomotive machinist, but most of his time was spent with the Fourth Avenue Tunnel Gang. Though a Protestant, Croker was no Orangeman, and, at least in his case, Celtic background trumped sectarian divisions, and he was running the gang by nineteen.

Aspiring political leaders—like their criminal counterparts—were expected to demonstrate physical prowess as well as organizational acumen. Tweed had proven his mettle as a battling fireman. Kelly was a fireman, amateur boxer, and opponent, both physically and verbally, of the nativists. Croker's forte was boxing, and he announced his arrival as an up-and-comer by knocking out his instructor. He added to his reputation by taking on and defeating several professional pugilists.¹⁵ In addition to their criminal activities—robbery, shakedowns, burglary—New York gangs functioned as farm teams for political clubs, and the young immigrant soon attracted the attention of Tammany leaders.

Jimmy "the Famous" O'Brien, Tammany alderman and district leader, befriended Croker and persuaded him to operate the Fourth Avenue Tunnel Gang in Tammany's interests. In addition to applying necessary street muscle, Croker and his crew became adept repeaters—men who voted several times on election day. O'Brien brought Croker into the inner circles of Tammany power, introducing him to Tweed and launching his political career. When O'Brien moved up to become sheriff, Croker moved into his alderman's seat. A shrewd judge of people and situations, Croker stayed with O'Brien and Honest John Kelly as Tweed began to topple, and remained with Kelly after "the Famous" defected from the Hall and attempted to set up a rival Democratic organization.

The falling-out between former friends led to an election day melee in 1873 when O'Brien, running for Congress against Tammany's candidate, Abram S. Hewitt, crossed into the Lower East Side with a gang of West Side repeaters. Croker and his Tammany posse were patrolling the area and confronted the group. O'Brien, smarting from what he viewed as Croker's disloyalty, called him "a damned loafer."¹⁶ Croker rejoined that he was no such thing, and O'Brien shouted, "You damned cur. I picked you out of the gutter and now you're supporting a rich man like Hewitt against me for Congress."¹⁷ Verbal exchanges quickly degenerated into a brawl, during which someone pulled a gun, leaving one of O'Brien's men dead in the street. Croker was charged with the murder, most likely committed by his friend, Joe Hickey.¹⁸ He stood trial, but the jury deadlocked and the case was never heard again.

Despite the odor emitting from the trial, Croker retained Kelly's loyalty. As Honest John's health declined, he became increasingly dependent on the younger man, who had shown toughness, loyalty, and an ability to keep his mouth shut under pressure. After Kelly's death in 1886, Tammany's district leaders were unsure of what course the Hall should take—should Tammany adopt committee rule or keep a boss at the helm? The day after Kelly's funeral, as the leaders convened at the Wigwam to debate the issue, Croker arrived on the scene. He strode past the district leaders, walked into Kelly's office, and sat down in the chair behind his desk. There would be no committee running Tammany.¹⁹

Croker had his work cut out for him. Kelly's intransigence and grudges had left Tammany weakened both in and out of Democratic circles. But Croker proved he had the right combination of talents to resuscitate the Tiger. In addition to an iron will and perceptive intellect, Croker was more flexible than Honest John. He was ready to compromise when necessary and worked to avoid schisms and self-defeating maneuvers. The new boss set about to reestablish Tammany's power in the city, combating Republicans and Henry George's popular Independent Labor Party. His first task, however, was to reassert Tammany's unchallenged control of New York's Democrats by defeating the rival County Democracy, which had gained prominence during Kelly's last contentious year.

The County Democracy was the most successful—however briefly—of the anti-Tammany Democratic organizations that appeared after the Civil War. The rival Democracy drew its support from recently arrived German and Irish immigrants, and wielded considerable power over construction and employment patronage in several municipal departments. Moreover, it fielded effective district leaders, many of whom took advantage of the competition between the two Democratic organizations to enhance their local power.²⁰ Among the County Democracy's weaknesses was internal dissension, an Achilles' heel that Croker exploited after it allied with Tammany in the face of the mutual threat posed by Henry George's surging Independent Labor Party in 1886.

George's third party movement drew on widespread labor unrest, fed by the dislocations and often misery of workers in the industrializing city. Popular among both Irish and German workers, especially those of a socialist bent, George's campaign heralded the arrival of labor issues as a potent force in municipal politics. George's popularity and potential victory frightened Democrats, Republicans, and businessmen, who feared his pro-union, pro-labor agenda. The Catholic Church, whose leaders smelled socialism in George's policies, also denounced him, providing additional support to the Independent Labor Party's enemies. Nevertheless, Tammany ballot stuffing and ballot theft were necessary to prevent George's capture of city hall.²¹

Croker took the initiative in forming a joint front against George by co-opting the County Democracy's leader, Abram S. Hewitt, as his candidate for mayor. Hewitt ran on both lines and won, providing Croker access to some crucial city patronage.²² Already playing the role of a junior partner, the rival Democracy began to unravel due to internal disputes and weaker organization, with most of its district leaders joining Tammany or forced from office.

The Tammany boss's alliance with the old-stock mayor lasted just long enough for Croker to rebuild his organization. Hewitt, pressured by Protestant reformers and bitter over perceived slights to his overtures for higher office, advanced Croker's program to regain Tammany's dominance through self-defeating actions. He forced peddlers off the streets, enforced Sunday closing laws for saloons, called the Knights of Labor "highwaymen," and derided the Grand Army of the Republic, the largest Union army

veteran's organization, as nothing but office seekers. Unsatisfied, the mayor alienated the city's largest voting bloc by refusing to review the St. Patrick's Day parade and went on to assert that the percentage of Irish in city jails and almshouses was double their percentage of the city's population.²³ In the next mayoral race, Croker nominated his close friend Hugh Grant. Grant and most of the Tammany ticket won in a blowout, defeating Hewitt, who had only the hollowed-out County Democracy line, along with the Republicans.

Croker and Tammany were back in the saddle, free to dispense municipal jobs and contracts to friends and supporters while they entered lucrative alliances with businessmen. Croker was unapologetic about his spoils-system approach to city government. "Now since there must be [city] officials, and since these officials must be paid, and well paid, in order to insure able and constant service, why should they not be selected from the membership of the society that organizes the victories of the dominant party? In my opinion, to ask this question is to answer it."²⁴

Croker's personal wealth increased in parallel measure with Tammany's grip over city government. The boss became an inactive partner in Meyer & Croker, the most prosperous real estate auction house in New York. During Grant's term as mayor, the Tammany leader held the post of city chamberlain, which paid \$25,000, along with ample opportunities for financial enhancements. The money raked in from his take of kickbacks, bribery, and protection was likely much higher yet. After 1890, Croker moved into an \$80,000 brownstone in the East Seventies, which he refurbished for another \$100,000. He then purchased a \$500,000 stock farm near Utica to indulge in his passion for horses. The Tammany boss also owned a Palm Beach estate, "the Wigwam," and took to traveling to Democratic National Conventions in a private Pullman car.²⁵

Between them, Kelly and Croker had not only revived Tammany Hall, they had made it the central fact of life in New York politics. Tammany provided the ladder a sharp, young man might climb if he had a mind and the drive to make his name and fortune in the empire city. Many a lad from the dirty, impoverished byways below Fourteenth Street would do so. None would do it as flamboyantly and as successfully as Timothy Daniel Sullivan.