

## TOWN REPRESENTATION IN CONNECTICUT.

BY CHARLES HOPKINS CLARK,

EDITOR "HARTFORD COURANT."

Town representation is the unique feature of our Connecticut scheme of self-government—the first ever established by written constitution, the pattern after which our national Constitution was modeled and by means of which the Union was made possible. Historians from De Tocqueville to Fiske have expressed their ample admiration for it. The two legislative houses—one representing people, the other representing certain definite areas of local self-government, presented what Dr. Fiske calls the “germs of federalism,” which enabled Connecticut in the great crisis to play the part of “Savior of the American nation.” The first three towns, the “creators” of the State, each had four deputies at the General Court and their fundamental orders provided that future towns should send as many deputies as the court should judge meet, observing “a reasonable proportion to the number of freemen that are in said towns.” Those persons who in these days are attacking our system so bitterly for putting “acres before men” cite this “reasonable proportion” clause as evidence that the original design was to grade the number of deputies according to population. They neglect two very important facts when they set up this proposition: First, that Article 11 of the Orders expressly provides that in the apportioning of the general tax upon the towns the “comitee bee made up of an equal number out of each town;” and, second, that from the earliest times down to 1901 representation in the House of Representatives never has been apportioned to population. The principle of town equality was fully recognized and asserted in the provision that, in exercising the sovereign power of taxation, each town should have equal representation on the committee. The late Dr. James Hammond Trumbull, the best authority on Connecticut history, declared that this was a conclusive demonstration, though often overlooked by those who read Article 8

and go no further. Any one who studies the late Dr. Charles J. Hoadley's brief but very comprehensive paper on Town Representation, appended to the State Register for 1892, will find a most interesting statement of the variations of representation from time to time, with explanations of the many apparent vagaries. In 1780 the House of Representatives had 154 members, being two each from seventy-seven towns—all of them standing alike. Barkhamsted, Colebrook and Winchester were towns, but, being exempt from state tax, went for that time unrepresented.

The Constitution of 1818 stipulated that each town should have the representation it already had, but gave to each new town only one representative. In the convention of 1818 there was active discussion of a change in representation to make it follow population, but this was voted down. There were no such differences then as now, but even then one town had ten times as many people as another. The Constitution of 1818 provided for twelve senators, elected by the people at large. An amendment, adopted in 1829, changed this so that thereafter senators were chosen by districts (not less than eight nor more than twenty-four) "regard being had to population," but at least two must be in each county. This opened the way for the gerrymandering which has given us today a Senate that is nondescript and indefensible, and that though alleged to be popular, is altogether without "regard to population." The Eighth district, by the census of 1900 has 108,027 people, and the Twenty-fourth has 11,895. Yet this is the body whose members are supposed to represent the people! The House, too, is no longer consistent in its composition. If every town had two members, equal representation would justify that; and, if the larger towns had each two and the smaller each one, that would be easily defended. But, for example, we have today twelve towns with a population exceeding 3,000 in each that have but one representative apiece, while fifteen towns each under 1,300 have two each, as follows:

Towns with One Representative.			Towns with Two Representatives.		
		Pop. 1900			Pop. 1900
Watertown	1780	3,100	Union	1734	428
Darien	1820	3,116	Hartland	1761	592
West Hartford	1854	3,186	Killingworth	1667	651
Thomaston	1875	3,300	Colebrook	1779	684
Bethel	1855	3,327	Ashford	1710	757
Berlin	1785	3,448	Goshen	1739	835

Towns with One Representative.			Towns with Two Representatives.		
		Pop. 1900.			Pop. 1900
Griswold	1815	3,490	Barkhamsted	1779	864
Seymour	1850	3,541	Canterbury	1703	876
Stratford	1639	3,657	Willington	1727	885
Portland	1841	3,857	Hebron	1708	1,016
Westport	1835	4,017	Tolland	1715	1,036
<u>Hamden</u>	1786	<u>4,626</u>	Cornwall	1740	1,175
12 towns		42,665	Harwinton	1737	1,213
			No. Stonington	1807	1,240
			<u>Granby</u>	1786	<u>1,299</u>
			15 towns		13,551

The date is that of the naming, founding, or incorporation of the town.

There is no justification of such a contradictory situation as these tables illustrate. But there has been no gerrymander in these cases in the House. The towns have been created one at a time. The changes of population have come gradually. In most cases young towns have run away from old ones.

No one who studies representation as it is in either Senate or House can defend it. But that does not mean that the principle on which the two bodies were established should be abandoned. Rather it shows that the time has come for returning to first principles and re-establishing the government upon its historic foundations. The two legislative houses, one popular, one representative, are fundamental to the State and each should be given its original character. The Senate should be made over so that each senator should represent practically the same number of constituents, and in the House the town as such—the “creator” of the State—should have full recognition; but no small town should have more representatives than a larger one. We have now eighty-seven towns with each two members and eighty-one towns with each one member. No town should be deprived of representation. The town is the political unit in our commonwealth. But, if each town is guaranteed one representative and others are added in the larger places “in reasonable proportion” to population we may still the clamor about inequality and maintain our towns in the dignity and influence to which they are entitled by all the traditions of our proud and peculiar history.

The outcry against the checks and counter-checks of representative government, which is now so often heard, is one of the signs of the times, and not a welcome sign. There is a

growing talk against the electoral college and in favor of choosing Presidents by the popular vote. The same demand is made regarding the election of senators. A school of half-baked political agitators prate about "artificial barriers" set up against the "will of the people" and ask if ours isn't a popular government—National or State. In fact neither is, and neither was designed to be, a pure democracy. The wisdom of second thought was recognized by the wise founders and was given its opportunity. The call now for government by mass meeting is based on impatience and is the but slightly disguised voice of opposition to all government.

The similarity of the United States government and our Connecticut government is too marked to be accidental and history proves there was no accident about it. Nation and State have both flourished wonderfully. It would be a sad day for the country, if state distinctions were blotted out, and a sad one for the State, if the towns were denied the rights that have been recognized as theirs ever since the wise men met at Hartford in 1639. Governments are judged largely by results; and surely no State in the Union has greater reason for pride in its own history than Connecticut has. No other people have led more peaceful and prosperous lives, adopted better laws for their self-government, shown greater inventive genius (the sign of active minds), developed a wider variety of industries, built up nobler educational and charitable institutions, or taken a more influential part in leading the Christian civilization of the times. All this has come about under our form of government and certainly not in spite of it. The town as a political and social factor has been of chief importance. The attempt to deprive it of recognition in the General Assembly is a blow at that feature of our government which we should most sturdily defend and in which we have the greatest reason for pride.