

Will You Commute Statute Labor?

Wherever by-laws are to be submitted at the coming municipal elections to commute statute labor, the objection will be raised that commutation is the more difficult means for the poor man, who finds it harder to pay his tax in money than in labor.

This objection is the chief one raised to commutation, but a little consideration will show that it carries no real weight. The money collected from those liable for statute labor, must all be expended in the township. The effect of this is that the poor man has an opportunity to earn back all he has paid in statute labor commutation; and the probability will be, if he is an efficient workman, that he will have an opportunity to earn still more than his own labor tax, for in every township there are farmers and others, who believe it to their advantage to work on their own farms rather than on the roads for wages.

The benefit from a commutation system arises largely from the fact that work of a more durable character can be undertaken, it can be carried on at the most favorable season of the year, every man employed must give a fair day's work, and for proper results, one man the overseer of his division, is responsible to the council and the people. The results of commutation are not all seen in one year; but after a term of years, when the improvements of one season have been dovetailed into those of the next, the full benefit will be realized. It is not the least of the faults of statute labor, that work of all descriptions is carried on in a disjointed, disconnected manner, so that only patchwork can ever be effected.

It is the case, too, that the regular money appropriations are spent with statute labor, on the statute labor basis; so that the money appropriations, like the labor, are scattered and wastefully applied. To comprehend this it is but necessary to sum up the money and labor spent in the average township during the past ten years, and compare this with the present condition of the roads.

Statistics in Boston and Elsewhere.

The statistics department of the city of Boston, during the year ending January 1st, 1900, was maintained by an expenditure of \$10,800. The statistics, as presented are very complete, and the existence of such a department is a credit to the intelligence of the people of Boston. It is one more evidence of the brilliancy of Shakespeare, as quoted by O'Rell: "Some men achieve greatness, some have greatness thrust upon them, and some are born in Boston."

The tables cover ordinary revenue and expenditure under various heads, both in detail, and summarized so as to facilitate comparison in which these figures are necessary. The tables are analyzed in different ways, in such a manner as to con-

vey to people of Boston, a clear conception of the manner in which their municipal socialism is being conducted. Not merely is this result obtained, but a means is afforded the heads of all departments, of judging whether or not their methods are economical and well balanced.

Statistics were prepared in addition to those of Boston, showing the population, assessed valuation, tax-rate, and indebtedness of the thirty-two cities of Massachusetts. From this it appears that the city of Boston, in which municipal functions have been more fully developed than in other cities of the state, is forced to subsist on a tax-rate (\$13.60) lower than that of any other city, and lower than the average tax-rate in the state. The frequency with which cities apply to the legislature for leave to issue bonds outside the debt limit has brought about the curious anomaly that in many cases the debt outside the limit exceeds that within the limit.

A comparison of the cities with the towns of the State, shows that the cities, containing 65 per cent. of the total population, possess 75 per cent. of the total assessed valuation. The average tax rate in the cities is \$17.22; in both cities and towns, \$15.30. The cities bear 87 per cent. of the gross, and 84 per cent. of the net debt. The per cent. of the net debt to valuation is, for the cities 4.91; for both cities and towns 4.39. The net debt per capita for the cities is \$57.28; for both cities and towns \$45.44.

In addition to the more general statistics issued at irregular periods, the department publishes a monthly bulletin. The regular monthly tables thus far included in the bulletin give statistics with regard to meteorological conditions; mortality and causes of death; number of burial permits issued; interments in cemeteries owned by the city; number of cremations; movement of population in city institutions; number of immigrants; number of fires and alarms; number of cattle inspected; number of houses ordered vacated or demolished; number of samples of milk, vinegar, butter and cheese inspected; number of volumes in the public library; number of arrests; number of pupils in the public schools; number of baths taken at the public bath houses; number of transfers of real estate and of mortgages; commercial statistics; flour supply statistics; number of visitors to the Fine Arts Museum, etc.

In addition to the regular tables, there is published in almost every number of the *Bulletin* an appendix, which is in the nature of a short special study on some subject of general interest.

The value of statistics is not, as a rule, sufficiently appreciated. In a large way, they enable us to arrive at general truths upon which to base and rear our social, industrial, commercial and political structures. Descending from subhead to subhead, from detail to detail, they lead to results of the utmost importance, the

very existence of which may not have been suspected.

An instance of insufficiently appreciated statistics are the "Municipal Statistics," issued annually by the Ontario Department of Agriculture. As but one benefit they achieve, which of itself renders them all important, is their function in the sale of municipal debentures. Through these statistics, foreign capitalists learn the financial standing of the various municipalities; and without providing some such source of information there would be much difficulty in offering municipal debentures for sale. Through this sample medium, local improvements are much facilitated, and the lowest rate of interest is obtainable. The Dominion census, to be taken next year, and which is awaited with expectancy throughout Canada, is an impressive lesson in the important functions which statistics assume in weaving the fabric of a nation.

Novel Mode of Complaint.

Some one who is evidently dissatisfied with the existing municipal conditions has given vent to his feelings by a placard on a new townline bridge in county of Oxford. He thinks there are favored contractors who get huge extras on municipal contracts, while others are held to the letter and figure of their bids. He darkly hints at corruption and says it is time for a change. The placard has excited a good deal of curiosity as to the author's identity, and some are of the opinion that it is the distant rumble of an approaching storm in municipal politics.

Donald Guthrie, Esq., Q. C., solicitor for the County of Wellington, has given the following opinion as to the liability of a county to build and maintain bridges on boundary lines between a police village and adjoining municipalities within the county: "My opinion is asked as to whether or not the county is liable to build and maintain bridges on boundary lines between police villages and adjoining municipalities within the county. In answer to this question I have to say that in my opinion the county is not liable to build and maintain the bridges referred to unless, of course, such bridges are on county roads or have been assumed by the county council, or unless the bridge is one heretofore known as a boundary line bridge. In other words, I do not consider a police village is a separate local municipality, nor do I consider that the erection of a village into a police village has the effect of rendering the county liable to build and maintain a bridge which it would not otherwise be liable to build or maintain.

The court has ordered the town of Owen Sound to pay W. Owens \$750 and costs, as damages for injuries received through falling over an obstruction which had been left on a sidewalk.