

THROUGH A MONOCLE

THE TURMOIL IN MONTREAL

MONTREAL is in the throes of a plebiscite election which is to decide whether it will keep its present government by aldermanic committees or try a Board of Control, a good deal on the Toronto model. The Montreal aldermen appear to have been a bit careless of their reputation. A number of years ago they piled up something imposing in the way of a debt with the result that the Legislature had to interfere and put a limit to the city's borrowing powers. Then for a time Montreal was economical. It took an interest in municipal reform. It had precious little money to spend; and so the forces which usually surround a City Council were willing to let such men as ex-Mayor Laporte and ex-Alderman Ames worry through the best they could on the lean incomes. But lately the increasing value of real estate has enabled the aldermen to borrow more money; and permission to borrow is not a privilege which these gentlemen ever neglect.

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JUST now, however, two things have happened—both at the bidding of the interfering Legislature. A Royal Commission has been set at work enquiring into the methods and results of civic government; and the people have been asked to vote on three proposals looking toward the reform of the existing municipal system. The Royal Commission has been at it for some time now, and the citizens of Montreal have been supplied with much entertaining reading. They know more to-day about the reasons why they get such poor results for all the money which the aldermen have a right to borrow. It seems that the City Council and its departments can buy little direct. They usually deal with "middlemen." Now this does not make their purchases any cheaper. Then such matters as street paving are settled by a "tug-of-war" between the different aldermen with the result that the most important wards in the centre of the city are starved in order that combinations of the outlying wards may be stuffed. Montreal has a City Surveyor who is supposed to give expert advice as to the best varieties of paving and such like. He gives the advice all right, too, but that doesn't interfere to any alarming extent with the plans of the contractors and their very good friends—the aldermen.

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THE vote is to come in September. Then the citizens will have three propositions before them. They may cut the present City Council—forty-two in number—in half; they may decide to try

a Board of Control, which will consist of four members and the Mayor; or they may try instead a civic commission of public works, which will consist of five members appointed by the aldermen but only removable "for cause" by a two-thirds majority. In each case the "Board" is supposed to suggest projects and expenditures to the City Council, upon which it will vote, and then to carry out such proposals as are adopted. The Board of Control will not have seats in the Council—as they have in Toronto—though they may be present and speak. The Council, moreover, will be able to set aside any of the Board's dealings with the civic service by a simple majority of the entire body. The Act, in fact, is badly drawn, and if the scheme carries, we may expect to see the citizens of Montreal approaching the Legislature for amendments.

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THE aldermen are not saying much, but it is notorious that they are preparing to fight the Board of Control proposal tooth and nail. On the other hand, the citizens are organising to bring out the vote in favour of almost any change from the present muddle. The Board of Trade, the Chambre de Commerce and business organisations of that sort are leading in the campaign, and French and English municipal reformers are giving their time and money to the battle in generous fashion. There can be little doubt that the vast majority of the citizens believe that "it is time for a change," but will they come out and vote? That is the question.

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A BOARD of Control will not save Montreal unless her citizens will not only come out and vote for its inauguration but will afterward organise, and campaign, and vote for the right sort of Commissioners. The ability to vote as a whole city and not within the restrictions of ward boundaries, will be a great help. The ward system is in many ways the chief incubus of all municipal government. But even an entire city can fail to elect good men. For one thing, some of the aldermen will go into such a fight with a splendid "pull" in their old wards which will give them an immense majority there over any outside candidate. If, then, the sinister influences in the other wards can agree upon which of the "old gang" to support throughout the city, these "favourite sons" will make hard candidates to beat. There is, after all, no salvation for municipal government on this Continent short of an awakening among the voters. We will only get Glasgow success when we attain to Glasgow public spirit. As a Briton said to me one day when I was enquiring why they had such good city government over there, while we could not approach it here—"They have a different breed o' cats over there."

THE MONOCLE MAN.

THE CURIOUS FEATS WHICH MEN ATTEMPT



The other day, Mr. Jules Gautier, a Frenchman, for a wager of \$500, undertook to swim a certain distance on the Thames, (from Putney to Mortlake) manacled and fettered, and towing a boat licensed to carry eight persons. This picture shows him almost ready to begin his successful feat.

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