

Suggestions for the Improvement of Municipal Government in Ontario.

Some years ago (1895) we directed attention to a few reforms, that then appeared to be necessary, among which were :

The abolition of ward elections.

The election of councillors for a term of years.

The reduction of members of county councils and election by districts.

The appointment of an experienced county auditor to audit the accounts of the county treasurer and of every local municipality.

Since then, ward elections have, by legislation, been abolished in all townships and villages and by vote of the people in many cities and towns. The members of county councils have been reduced in number and are now elected in districts. A provincial auditor has been appointed and the election of councillors for a term of years has been introduced in the legislature, by some of its most progressive members. We expect this change will be made before many more sessions of the local house have passed. County councillors and others have considered the question of county auditors and approved of the same, by petition to legislature and otherwise. The provincial auditor could, in a short time, confer with all county auditors and a uniform system of municipal accounting would be an almost immediate result.

In addition to the suggestions for changes in the Municipal Law, attention was directed to the expenditure, in connection with roads. This question has, since that time, received special attention from an able provincial instructor in roadmaking, with the result that statute labor where not abolished is performed in a better manner than formerly, and, although the system of construction and repairing roads has improved, the expenditure, for this purpose in the township municipalities, has not increased.

Another reform now appears to be necessary and, before referring to it, we will direct attention to the system of central supervision of local authorities, which, although in opposition to the usual idea of municipalism has proved beneficial in Ontario. *The Provincial Board of Health*, established in 1881, is a central administrative authority, composed of experts, having power :

1. To supervise the health boards of the province.
2. To appoint health officers.
3. To issue regulations subject to approval of the Lieutenant Governor in council, for the prevention of disease, which, after publication in the Gazette, have the same effect as if enacted by the Legislature.
4. To institute proceedings for the abatement of a nuisance when the local board refuses or neglects to act.
5. To approve of all plans for the establishment of water supply or sewage systems

before they can be lawfully adopted by the councils of cities, towns or villages.

The Provincial Municipal Auditor is an administrative officer, having the general supervision of books and accounts of the municipal and school corporations of the province, with power to frame rules respecting the manner in which the accounts of municipalities shall be kept and audited, and the number and forms of books of account to be used. After publication in the *Ontario Gazette* these rules have the same force as law.

The Provincial Instructor in Road Making is an official whose duties are largely educational and advisory.

Similar systems of control and supervision are to be found in connection with the school system, post-office, banks, insurance companies, etc., and wherever efficient service is a necessity.

ENGLAND.

In the older countries central control has been found to be a necessity.

The Local Government of England is the best example of a system of central supervision. Albert Shaw, in his work on "Municipal Government," refers to it as follows :

"The relationship that now exists between the municipal administration and the central government at many points is advantageous rather than hampering to the local corporation. It is no hardship to make annual or semiannual reports to the local government board, or the treasury, or the Home office, touching all matters of corporate income and outgo, and the results of the administration of sanitary and other public statutes. Through the medium of the local government board, its regular publications, its permanent staff in the London offices and its expert visiting inspectors, the officials of one town are supplied with knowledge of the doings and experiences of other towns, are deterred from harmful experiments, and are instructed in the best methods. At times it appears a needless interference with local affairs that compels a well governed city to submit to the central authorities for inspection and approval every scheme whatsoever that necessitates the borrowing of money. If there were any lack of system in the methods by which local projects are passed upon by Westminster, or if there were any serious taint of partisanship, favoritism, or arbitrary judgment upon the processes employed, the mechanism would break down speedily, and a more complete local autonomy in matters involving municipal outlay and indebtedness would have to be accorded. But the system works in the interests of justice, and its costliness in money, and in time, is counterbalanced by the benefits which accrue from the more thorough preliminary sifting that every scheme receives in preparation for the searching ordeal at Westminster, and from the valuable emendations which so often result from the advice that expert central officials can give.

This is also referred to in Goodnows "Municipal Problems," in a chapter by M. R. Maltbie, who says :

"The central administrative control which was introduced into English local government by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, but has been elaborated by subsequent legislation has not had the effect of centralizing local government in the sense of providing for the central appointment of local officers. It has consisted merely in giving to the central authorities established for its exercise, powers of supervision over local officials. Such powers are to be exercised, in

the first place, to prevent unwise action on the part of local authorities in the second place to overcome negligence on their part, and in the third place to secure obedience to the law. The central powers are not, however, altogether concentrated in one authority, but are, on the contrary, entrusted to several authorities, the most important of which is the local government board. Further, both because of the different needs of different branches of administration, and because the system is the result of long and not altogether symmetrical development, the control over one branch of administration is somewhat different from what it is over another."

In the concluding chapters on administrative control in England, the author states :

"This brief consideration of the effects of the establishment of the central administrative control in England cannot fail to force the conclusion that the frank recognition in the recent English legislation that the state as a whole, has a vital interest in the performance, by the local authorities, of many of the functions of government entrusted to them, and the subjection of such functions of government to central administrative supervision, have been among the causes which have transformed English social and political conditions during the past century. The marked improvement in English local government, the great increase of its efficiency, have been secured also without an undue centralization, without diminishing local public spirit, which, as seen in the actions of the English municipalities, was at no time in English history greater than it is at present. While in America we have been extending the powers of the legislature over our cities, largely as a result of the previous decentralization of our administrative system, until municipal administration has, from the point of view of legislative interference therein, come to be regarded almost as a part of general state administration, England has turned aside from her historic administrative decentralization, her local self government, and after continental examples, has absolutely entered upon the pathway of administrative centralization wherever the needs of administrative uniformity have made such a step seem necessary. The result has been to reduce legislative interference in local government to a minimum, to increase enormously the efficiency of local government, and by clearly differentiating the state agency of cities from their sphere of action as local organizations, to open the way for a great expansion of municipal activity to be seen in the vigorous way with which the English cities have grappled with distinctively municipal problems, such as housing of the poor, and the better care generally of the local interests of their inhabitants.

It is confidently believed that the adoption of a similar policy in the United States cannot fail to be followed by the same results."

UNITED STATES.

In many of the United States, officers, with administrative powers similar to that of the Provincial Municipal Auditor, have been appointed. The government of each state is supported by direct taxation, levied and collected by the municipal authorities and, to avoid injustice, such as would arise if assessments were unequal, State Boards of Equalization adjust the assessments of the different counties and in all of the states, in which the matter has been considered, it is a duty of the State Board of to assess the tangible property situated on the highways and the franchises of transportation or transmission companies, operating within the state, and apportion the values obtained amongst