

# IN THE EDITOR'S CHAIR.

## REFORM IN CIVIC GOVERNMENT.

Civic Reform is in the air. Judging from the interviews which have appeared in the Times and from the public utterances of those who have spoken at the public gatherings at which civic affairs were discussed there is widespread dissatisfaction with the present city government. It is also evident that the people do not know just what they are dissatisfied with, but they are anxious for some change. The recent jump in taxation is the probably cause of most of the present disquietude. For years the taxes have been increasing without having much effect on the public mind but the aldermen went the limit when they raised the taxes 17 cents on each \$100 of assessable value in a single year. This at once aroused public curiosity and everybody is now asking, why, the increase? So far, if we are to judge from the opinions expressed, no one has as yet been able to answer the question satisfactorily to himself, but there is an indefinite opinion that the present Council is responsible for it. These fail to realize that for 15 years the lid has been off the public treasury of St. John and the pot has been continually at the boiling point. A new scheme has been suggested every year and the expenditures have been made in junks that would have paralyzed the civic financiers of a quarter of a century ago.

Strange to relate—and yet it is not strange—the initiative of nearly every expenditure has been suggested by the tax payers, or some of them. The Council in a large majority of instances has only carried out the wishes of the people. Whether all of these expenditures has been carried out with prudence and economy is not necessary to discuss just now. Many of them were made under the direction of aldermen who are no longer members of the Council and the blunders of the past, however expensive

they may have been, are only useful as experiences that should not be repeated.

One great difficulty with the civic rulers of St. John—not the present aldermen, any more than their predecessors, has been that they do not learn by experience, but keep on doing things, just as they have always been done,—the care of the streets for example. Many people were honestly convinced that a change in the mode of electing the members of the Council would result in changes in the method of doing city business. This has been tried, but the only financial benefit that followed was the reduction of the cost of the Common Council by reducing the number of members—and this benefit has now been nullified by the aldermen doubling their allowance.

It must not be presumed for a minute that it is contended that a good alderman is not worth \$200 annually to the city, but the sum of nothing is too much to pay a poor alderman. But the funnest thing about it all is that the reason some aldermen of St. John advance for favoring the increase is, that since they have to appeal to the citizens at large for election the gratuity they receive does not pay their election bills. If this is so civic elections are becoming much more expensive than under the old ward system. The truth is that the root of the evil is deeper than generally supposed and will not be reached by any change in the method of electing aldermen alone.

The whole system of civic government requires to be entirely uprooted and carefully examined before any reduction of taxation can take place. The drifting policy of the aldermen and the lack of public interest has produced a state of things in St. John that is calculated to startle the most optimistic of her citizens. There is not a single department, wherein the expenditure has not been in.