

# THE WEEK.

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## THE WEEK :

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All articles, contributions, and letters on matters pertaining to the editorial department should be addressed to the Editor, and not to any other person who may be supposed to be connected with the paper.

OVER one hundred MSS. have been received by THE WEEK for its Short Story Prize Competition. These are now in the hands of the judges; but some time must necessarily elapse before their labours can be completed. The awards will be announced in these columns at the earliest possible moment.

TORONTO, in common no doubt with many other cities on this continent, is just now anxiously enquiring for an improved municipal system. The genius for self-government, which has served the Anglo-Saxon peoples so well in national affairs, seems for some reason to fail in the restricted sphere of civic politics. The repeated refusals of the taxpayers of this city to vote their councillors the money asked for specific and necessary uses has directed special attention to the fact that something is seriously wrong with the municipal machinery. To elect men by popular vote to the control of civic affairs, and then to refuse them by popular vote the means which they declare necessary in order to enable them to do the duties of their office is, to say the least, somewhat illogical. The impression is becoming general that a better system must be found or devised. An important contribution to the discussion appeared in the *Mail* of Monday, in the shape of a letter from Mr. Goldwin Smith, written at the request of that paper. Mr. Smith points out that it is the aldermanic part of the city government which is weak. The standing regiments of officials, such as police, firemen, and so forth, do their work well. Nor does he find it difficult to put his finger on the chief cause of the aldermanic weakness. It is the annual election. "Any Government must be weak and wanting in system and in foresight that is re-elected every year, and is half its time thinking, not of what is best for the city, but of its own re-election." This is so obviously the chief source of difficulty that there can hardly be, we think, two opinions in regard to it. The first step in the direction of reform is therefore clear. The civic rulers, by whatever system chosen, must have a longer term of office. In the second place, Mr. Goldwin Smith thinks these servants of the city should be paid for their services, as much as members of the Provincial Legislature. This proposal may not command so universal assent, though it is not easy to see how any valid objection can be found to a proposition so apparently fair and reasonable. The *Mail*, it is true, alleges that as a fact an increase of pay to civic representatives results in a deteri-

oration of quality. If this be so, it can be accounted for only on the ground that the mercenary inducement brings into the competition a lower class of candidates than the inducements supplied by the honour, or importance, or influence, of the position. But in ordinary commercial and professional life the rule is that the quality of service one is able to secure is improved in the ratio in which the salary is increased. If it be otherwise in municipal affairs, the fact must be due to the manner in which the choice is made, since, other things being equal, the conscientious alderman, who is paid for his time, will certainly be not less attentive to duty than if required to perform it at his own expense.

THIS opens the question of electoral methods. Mr. Goldwin Smith refers, with evident approval, to a proposal which has been made to put the city into the hands of a Board of Commissioners appointed by some impartial authority, such as the judges, but thinks it would be difficult to get the people to part with so much of their power. With due deference to so high an authority we should be sorry if it were otherwise with the citizens. The people who would voluntarily divest themselves of the power of self-rule would prove themselves by the act unfit to use it, by reason of want of intelligence, sloth, or corruption. In either case the confession of inability and the policy of despair would but confirm their unworthiness, instead of helping them to rise above it. It would be very likely, too, to result in ultimate loss of the despised birth-right, for, as Mr. Smith indeed hints, it would be very difficult to secure due responsibility in the use of the transferred authority. A regime of family compactism, or of oligarchism, would be pretty sure to ensue sooner or later, and the last state of the civic administration would be worse than the first. In any case Mr. Goldwin Smith's suggestions that those who do the work should be paid for it, and that their number should be largely reduced, may, we think, be set down as the second and third steps in the direction of reform. Mr. Smith would give the Mayor a veto, to be overridden only by a two-thirds vote of the Council, but does not think it would do to sever the Executive entirely from the legislative by taking the Mayor out of the Council. Certainly not, if the Mayor alone were to constitute the Executive. But why not empower and require the Council to select some four or six of their number to constitute with the Mayor the sole, paid, Executive? The choice of these Executive officers should be in some way sanctioned, not simply by their respective wards, but by the whole body of citizens, and they should hold office so long as they retained the public confidence. In this way the principle of responsibility would be more effectually secured than in the case of members of the Provincial or Dominion Governments, whose acceptance of office requires endorsement only by their own small body of constituents. Possibly all the members of the Executive should be elected directly, as the Mayor now is, by the whole city. This suggests an answer to the difficulty pointed out by Mr. Goldwin Smith, in doing away with the ward system. "Suppose the elections were for the whole city, how and by whom would the candidate be nominated?" There has not usually been much difficulty in securing good nominees for the mayoralty. If nominations are really necessary, which is not quite clear, and the large number of councillors required would cause embarrassment or confusion, the nominations might be made by a meeting of delegates chosen for the purpose by the rate-payers of the various wards. But much would be gained could the electorate decide on even the three changes we have already named as recommended by Mr. Goldwin Smith, viz., a longer term of office, payment of aldermen, and reduction of their number.

AS the season of the year approaches in which there is usually more or less of destitution and suffering from want of employment, various modes of meeting the difficulty are being proposed. It is unnecessary to say that simple charity, the giving of food and clothing without an equivalent, is, as a rule, the worst of all methods of relief. Gratuitous support is, of course, necessary in many cases, in which, in consequence of old age, sickness, physical deformities, accidental injuries, etc., labour is an

impossibility. In all such cases all that is needed for health and comfort should be promptly and amply supplied, and will be so wherever there is any efficient system by which the wants of the sufferers can be reliably ascertained and some guarantee given that the gifts of the charitable will be properly used. But it cannot be too often or emphatically repeated, until the lesson is fully learned, that gratuitous relief to those able to work is a degradation and a serious moral injury. The establishment of some kind of public labour exchange, such as we are glad to see is being advocated in the daily papers, should be made one of the first cares of every city and town in the Dominion, in which there is danger of men and women and their children suffering for want of employment. It matters little whether the employment bureaus proposed can be made to pay expenses or not, though there should be no great difficulty in enabling them to do so under good management. There are thousands of citizens who would most gladly contribute to make up any deficiency, could they but be put in a position to know what is right to say and do when able-bodied men and women come to them for help. How often one would a thousand times rather give than withhold the aid asked, but for the conviction or the fear that to do so would be to do a moral injury to the individual, and a wrong to society. It is quite possible that there is more danger of actual suffering from destitution in the smaller towns and villages than in the cities, simply because of the more frequent absence of systematic modes of enquiry and relief. A correspondent of the *Globe* suggests that the municipal governments all over the land should provide public farms in every county and public workshops in every city and town for interim employment, so that no one able to work could say, "I cannot get work." It is not easy to see why some such plan should not be everywhere adopted. But whatever the mode it surely is both right and feasible that in this land of plenty and of industry no one who is able to work should suffer for want of an opportunity to earn at least the necessaries of life. The simple, inflexible rule should be in every such case: food and clothing for all who are able and willing to work for them, but no fostering of able-bodied pauperism.

AT the last monthly meeting of the Toronto Presbytery a resolution was passed deprecating the selection of persons of hardened and debased character, "as has sometimes been done," as the instruments of justice in carrying out the sentence in cases of capital punishment. The Presbytery strongly pronounces "against the dishonour done to public justice in connecting any but reputable, recognized public officials with an act which is the supreme vindication of the majesty and authority of the law." The point is well taken. It is hard to conceive of anything better adapted to weaken or destroy the supposed moral effect, which is the highest if not the only justification of the death penalty, than the fact that no sooner is the verdict pronounced with all due solemnity by the Court than a shocking competition is begun by some of the most degraded and unfeeling wretches in the country, each vaunting his skill and naming the terms on which he is willing to undertake "the job," as they term it correctly enough, for that is evidently all it means to these applicants. The thing is not only revolting, it is distinctly demoralizing. But what is to be done? Dr. Caven, in introducing the resolution, said that he did not propose that this act should be done by the sheriff, but by a public official appointed for the purpose. But as Dr. McLaren pointed out, no reputable, respectable man, no man of character and position, would accept such an office. It is better to look the question fairly in the face and to speak frankly. The feeling may be weak and wrong; it may, perhaps, show that modern society has degenerated from the severe sense of justice which nerved men of an earlier time to become executors of its sternest decrees without misgiving or remorse, but where is the man of ordinary sensibility who can imagine himself as returning complacently to the society of wife and family and friends after having performed the function of such an office? What conceivable consideration would prevail upon any reader to consent that any member of his family should accept the office of public hangman? How long would such an officer, we care not what his previous character or