

*(Continued from Page 78.)*

Although statute labor is at present inefficient, yet, as Mr. Roberts recommends, if properly controlled, if used in the right way and at the right time it would be a mighty engine for roadmaking.

The more important roads, those on which there is, and always will be a continual heavy traffic, should be directly managed by the central office. The best machinery, best materials, best methods of road-making, such as McAdam or Telford, should be employed. Thus we would get thoroughly good main roads, and our local roads would be vastly improved.

\* \* \* \* \*

What led me to make these remarks was this—I saw that in many things our municipalities act not in unison but as separate units. I saw that partly on this account their action was often inefficient. For instance I saw that the isolated co-operative stores overcame the difficulties of separation by means of a central wholesale society, and wondered whether an analogous institution, a central municipal bureau, would not enable the municipalities to gain all those advantages and resources in buying and in working, which individuals acting in union have, but individuals acting in isolation have not.

Any such scheme as this is always confounded with direct governmental action, and owing to this misunderstanding a series of objections are raised; by noticing these we can see what is the nature of any such scheme, what are its limitations and possibilities.

First, it is said that an attempt on the part of a central power to regulate affairs so widely extended, so far reaching as roads and bridges must end not in system but in confusion, not in success, but in miserable failure.

Again, it is said that while such an attempt might be made in England, a country in whose great destiny "a burden well nigh not to be borne" burns a sense of responsibility into the minds of her legislators; but in ordinary democratic countries like Canada or the United States—actual experience—a court from which there is no appeal has shown that the government elected on party lines is unable to control the vast patronage involved in municipal affairs. It is also objected that whereas hitherto the municipal elections have been kept tolerably clear of party politics, any close connection with a government elected on party lines would introduce party politics in all its virulence into municipal affairs.

Last it is said that our municipal institutions are a splendid educative force for teaching the people self-government, they give that wide basis local self-government on which, alone can rest the principal of federation: toward which the history of the future seems tending. that

such a scheme would ruin all this by substituting in its place bureaucracy which is utterly deadening to true self-government, to true national life.

To all these the answer is that it does not involve direct governmental action at all. It is simply a central office by means of which the municipalities could make the most of their own resources, all that the government would do, would be first to institute, to initiate the concern, and second to ensure responsibility on the part of salaried managers. Hence it would not be beyond the scope of an ordinary democratic government. It would not aid in introducing party politics into municipal elections. It would not increase the national debt because the system of municipal taxation would be retained and each municipality would pay for what it got. It would not lessen the value of our municipal system as an educative force, it would not be a tearing up, but simply an attempt to strengthen that system and to increase the powers and resources of the individual municipalities.

But there is an objection so grave that, I confess it could easily be fatal to this or any other scheme for organizing municipal action and furthering municipal powers. To the English artisans their stores were a direct personal gain. Hence they stuck to them and were willing to put up with delay and inconvenience. But to municipal councillors it would be no personal gain, only a public one; and if the thing involved any delay, any inconvenience, any complicated system of accounts, they would have nothing to do with it. In view of this, two things may be said. First, in arranging any such scheme the utmost simplicity must be observed, and the plainest and most accurate business methods employed. Secondly, it is perfectly useless for us to evolve some fine scheme out of our imaginations and expect to introduce it at one swoop. If any thing is done in this line, it must be done step by step, it must be a gradual growth which the experience of the past and the needs of the present will modify into proper shape as it goes on. Only in this way can we get a system which will be practicable throughout.

Hence I have given several hints rather than a definite scheme, in the hope that it may stimulate thought on this matter in the minds of the readers of THE MUNICIPAL WORLD, and that thus better ideas on this subject than those I have given, may be put forth.

One thing is certain, it behoves the people of Ontario to give deep and thoughtful attention to their municipal institutions, to look upon them, not as a thing apart, independent, but rather as an integral portion of the national system and having a relation to those institutions, which should be diligently studied.

WM. BLEWETT.

Yarmouth, June 17th, 1892.

**Country Roads.**

To the Editor of THE MUNICIPAL WORLD:

One of the important questions before the public to-day is the construction and maintenance of our country roads. Every person will admit that the advantages of a well-built roadway, which will carry a heavy load or a light rig with ease and security are very great, that we have very few of these roadways will be also admitted by those who have occasion to travel on them.

The system under which the majority of them were built and are being maintained, is the statute labor system, aided by municipal grants expended by the different councillors. That this system is a very imperfect one for the construction of permanent roads is easily shown by results, and that some other plan must be adopted is evident, if we wish to succeed in our undertakings. The abolition of statute labor and the imposition of a tax in lieu thereof, is being seriously considered by some townships, and, I believe, adopted by others, if those who have adopted some other plan would give it to your readers with the results accomplished, I believe it would assist in solving the question. The plan I propose is abolition of statute labor, and of grants made by the council to be expended by its own members and instead thereof the council to place in its estimates at the beginning of the year, a certain amount to be spent during the year in the construction and repair of the public roads, then to select the most competent man in the township, give him a fair salary to direct and supervise the expenditure of the amount raised over the whole township. By a competent man, I mean one who understands the principles of roadmaking and the nature of the different materials used in their construction, who will not be influenced by fear or favor and who would report from time to time to the council, and, if necessary, have aid of an engineer on any difficult piece of road.

Some of the advantages of this system would be that instead of our roads being built and repaired under the supervision of forty or fifty different men, each perhaps with a different system, or very often with no system at all, they would be under the direction of one, which would give us straight roads, regular grades, the same width, good drainage, and many other qualities of a good road, which would tend to make them of a more permanent and lasting character. Gravel, tile, plank, etc., would be bought in larger quantities, thus ensuring a cheaper rate. Larger contracts would be let at a less rate than is possible now, and more especially would we expect a dollar's worth of work for every dollar expended.

Some objections to this plan are: Another salaried officer and increased taxes. Would it not pay us to give a competent man a fair salary to expend our money as above, than to allow it to be expended by men who are not competent, and where sometimes the money is as good as thrown away? Yours, WEST ZORRA.