

MUNICIPAL MALADMINISTRATION.

Lord Beaconsfield once described a Royal Commission as "a costly, elaborate, and cumbersome organization formed for the purpose of finding out what everybody knew before." There was a touch of genuine Disraelian wit as well as of Disraelian satire in the definition, and there was, besides, a good deal of truth in it. It would be no exaggeration, any more than it would be disrespectful, to apply this description to a Royal Commission for the appointment of which many estimable citizens of Montreal are about to petition the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council. The proposed object of the commission is, it is stated, to inquire into the allegations which have so frequently been made during recent years to the effect that some of our aldermen and civic officials are guilty of wrong-doing in connection with the administration of the city's affairs.

But does not every citizen who takes an intelligent interest in our municipal affairs already know that irregularities and illegalities, some of them of a very serious character, are by no means of rare occurrence in the City Hall? Charges have been openly made in the newspapers, sometimes supported by statements of facts and figures, but oftener without any tangible corroboration whatever; and records of votes in support of certain contracts and certain schemes have been published over and over again. And what has been the result? Nothing; absolutely nothing. What other result would the report of a Royal Commission, embodied in the regular blue-book form, produce? Our knowledge on some points would be confirmed and, perhaps, amplified, and our suspicions might be justified in respect to others. That would be all.

Obviously, the only remedy for which the present civic situation seems to call is to put the law in motion. It is capable, as it now stands, of being enforced in such a way as to punish with due severity every sort of proved wrong-doing by aldermen or by civic officials. Why is it that those who are making charges against these persons evince no inclination to institute legal proceedings? The answer to this question would furnish the key to the solution of our municipal problem.

It is an elementary truth that the object of legal punishment is three-folded. It is punitive, so that offended justice may be satisfied; it is corrective, so that the culprit may repent of his misdeeds and be influenced to readjust his notions of wrong and right according to the general ethical standard recognized in all civilized communities; and it is deterrent, so that others may be induced to shun the hard way of the transgressor. Justice is the corner-stone of every well-governed community. It operates through written law; and grave moral peril menaces the community where this law is repeatedly broken with impunity.

A MARINE LOSS AND ITS LESSONS.

"There is Safety in the Offing."

Fog, that appearance at sea, in hazy weather, sometimes resembling land at a distance, but which vanishes as it is approached, is given as the primary reason for the loss on her maiden voyage of the magnificent new Allan Line steamship, "Castilian." But, if the majority of landmen who are not familiar with the Nova Scotia coast will take a map and study the lay of the land in the vicinity of the dreaded Tusket Ledges, they will join us in seeking elsewhere for the cause of this latest maritime disaster. The "Castilian" left Portland, we are informed, at mid-day on Saturday last. During the night, the weather was hazy, and the steamer "proceeded slowly and cautiously, carefully looking out for buoys, and other signs of land." Suddenly, breakers were seen; and, between three and four on Sunday morning, the "Castilian" found land at a point known to every Yarmouth skipper and Halifax yachtsman, near the dangerous ledges off Tusket, and in the neighbourhood of Gannet Rock. Of course, the crew affirm they heard no sound, and made out no light to indicate land ahead. It was only when

"the breakers were right beneath her bows"

that the captain discovered the course he was following was not one likely to carry the "Castilian" well to the southward of Seal Island and dreaded Cape Sable. With what followed there is cause for gratification. The splendid Allan liner was manned by a British crew, and Captain Barrett and his officers and men by their admirable conduct prevented any panic, landed their passengers in safety, and have apparently nothing to regret except the loss of one of the finest steamships sailing out of the port of Liverpool. But it might well have been otherwise. Many miles to the southward and eastward of Tusket is sombre and threatening Cape Sable, near that island known as "the graveyard of the Atlantic." If, failing to hear any friendly whistle or bell, warning mariners in foggy weather to avoid the coast and shoals, and to seek an offing, the "Castilian" had, instead of running on a shelving ledge, struck a rock, and foundered, we would in all probability be recording something more appalling than the loss of a costly ship and cargo.

However, the frequency of fog as the stated cause of marine losses must attract the attention of underwriters and incidentally arouse the anxiety of landmen who have occasion to travel by water. With the much discussed and disputed question (frequently the subject of warm debates in the smoking rooms of Atlantic liners) of the safety or danger of steaming ahead in thick or foggy weather, we have but little patience. It is perhaps useless to dream of such immunity from danger in a dense damp haze on the banks of Newfoundland, or off the mouth of the Bay of Fundy, as would be ensured by a rule compelling steamers to "lay to" until the fog lifts. But surely there can be no question as to the wisdom