

Improvement in City Management

By PRINCIPAL J. O. MILLER

PERHAPS the strongest opposition to the proposed purchase of the Toronto Street Railway that has yet been publicly stated involves a grave want of confidence in the city council. It is said that a strong body of opposition to the purchase of this great public utility might be withdrawn if the public were assured that it would be managed by a Commission of capable men, who were given powers that would render them independent of the city council. In the majority of our Canadian cities there is this distrust of civic administration. St. John has given over its city government to a board of commissioners, though recent reports question the wisdom of this departure. In Montreal there has been the same distrust. Westmount is trying a business manager. Ottawa has a mayor who was elected with the express purpose of making him business manager of the city, and so far the experiment is reported to be highly successful. Some of our western cities are trying these new plans, and think them an improvement upon our present method of civic administration by a mayor and aldermen elected annually.

Where lies the real weakness in our mode of city government? It may be stated in a single word: *Instability*. Good laws do not govern a city well—only good men. If we had a council of none but the most competent citizens, and its *personnel* were constantly changing, there could be no good government. Why is it that the cities of the United States are not well managed? At bottom it is because their city administration lacks coherence, and has in it no element of permanence. The following extract from the *New York Evening Post* of recent date shows what is likely to happen in any great city where there is no stable civic rule:

PART OF THE PRICE NEW YORK PAYS.

"It is in 'The Campaign' (military, of course, not political) that Addison's famous passage occurs about the angel who

"by divine command

"With rising tempests shakes a guilty land.

"Our own city campaign has involved moral rather than physical tempests; yet 'pale Britannia' could not have been left much more aghast at the fierce storms to which Addison referred, than has been the sober citizenship of New York at the general nature of the political contest through which we have been passing. Epithet has supplanted argument. Violent personal attacks have been made; incredible charges thrown about; Bedlam, at times, let loose. Senator Borah scarcely exaggerated when he said that the course of the New York municipal campaign had been such that Mexico might well suggest intervention to save the chief city of the United States from the anarchy with which it is threatened by the liars and scoundrels who are seeking control of its government.

"What the dwellers in no mean city have to deplore is not merely the extraordinary amount of billingsgate that has been flung about in this campaign, but the fact that all the clamour and shrill accusations hurled at and by the candidates have almost prevented any hearing for debate of large and pressing issues of administration.

For it early became marked by so much sound and fury that presently the public seemed to demand only sensations and shouting from campaign orators. If a speaker could not mention by name at least one perjurer, two liars, three grafters and four crooks, he was thought to have made a failure. It was not long before Mr. McCall largely gave up his chatter about economy, and began to foam at the mouth and bellow with the rest of them.

"That all this has been a depressing experience for the city to go through, stands everywhere confessed. But we ought not to turn from it shudderingly without asking what the explanation is. This effect defective comes by cause. And what is the cause of New York's inability to have a campaign conducted on a level of intellectual and moral decency befitting the metropolises of America? Why is it that every four years the city has to go through a sort of convulsion in the election of its officers? We are not without great public policies. Nor do we lack men able to present them to the people intelligently and movingly. Why, then, are we denied, election after election, a calm and rational discussion of constructive city plans, or of methods of municipal taxation? To it we all feel that we are entitled, and have an angry sense that the city is both defrauded and disgraced by not getting it. Why can't we have it? What is the reason that this great city has to lash itself into a frenzy at election time?"

IT is impossible to conceive such a condition of civic affairs as is depicted above in any of the splendidly managed cities of England or Germany.

The vital principle of municipal government in these countries is that it is permanent. In both the actual administration is in the hands of paid officials, who hold office for life on the sole condition of probity and efficiency. In American cities there is a complete change every four years; in Canadian cities there may be a complete change every year. How could any great business, say the Canadian Pacific Railway, stand that method of management?

Why not try to introduce the element of permanency into our municipal system? In our largest cities the machinery is already provided. The Municipal Act provides that all cities of 100,000 inhabitants shall have boards of control. At present their chief function is to lower the calibre of the ordinary councillors. Early in this year the Mayor of Toronto suggested that the controllers should take charge of different departments of civic administration; but they declined the offer, saying they were not elected for any such purpose.

Why not have a board of controllers who would really control?

The *Toronto Daily News* has the following in its issue of Dec. 4th inst.:

"There are weak aldermen in Council, but the Board of Control is the executive body of the administration. It is there that the real weakness lies. What has been the result of the stubborn opposition of certain controllers to the will of Council and the wishes of the Mayor? The result has been that the Board of Control to-day is almost a laughing stock. Were it not for the acknowledged ability of the Mayor and Controller McCarthy and the respect they command from the larger body, its authority would be completely destroyed and its effectiveness absolutely ruined.

"The situation is intolerable. It is disgraceful that the senior body of the government should be a laughing stock. It is a matter of grave concern for all truly public-spirited citizens."

Civic government would at once be raised to a higher plane, and made a real and stable administrative power, if the board of control consisted of paid officials, each one placed in charge of a department, and held responsible for its prudent management. The city treasurer would be a controller, placed at the head of the civic finances, and responsible for the annual budget. The city solicitor would be a controller, at the head of the legal department. The city engineer would be a controller, in charge of the streets and public buildings. The medical health officer would be a controller, at the head of the sanitary department. The assessment commissioner would be a controller, in charge of all matters of taxation. That would do to begin with. As time went on and the system

proved its usefulness and economy, there would be added a controller for water supply; a controller for electric light and power; a controller for civic railways; a controller for the harbour board; controllers for all other great public utilities.

This new board of control would have in its hands the whole administration of the city. It would prepare all business for the council. It would be an integral portion of the council. It would carry the resolutions of the council into effect. It would be held responsible for all the details of city management. It would engage and discharge all civic employees. It would bring all the departments into a condition of harmonious working, that would save annually great sums of money now wasted through lack of coherence in planning repairs and new works.

BUT the greatest benefit to the community would be seen in the city council itself. Instead of a noisy, wrangling, discordant body of men, having political, or ward, or private interests to serve, we should, before long, have a city council whose members held a reasonable tenure of office; who had absolutely nothing to do with questions of patronage; who were not troubled by details of administration. The members would meet to discuss questions of general policy; to plan extensions in the ever-growing city; to deliberate as do the directors of any great business enterprise upon what is best to be done, leaving to others the execution of their resolutions. Into such a council it would not be hard to tempt the best brains, the wisest minds, the most enterprising and experienced men in the community.

With a municipal council so constituted, one of two plans might be followed regarding the mayor. He should be either the chief *executive* officer of the city, its inspiration, the presiding genius of the place; or else the social-figure-head. If we desire as mayor a man who can entertain royalty, or at least royally; a man of golden interior and polished exterior; a man who can show the city off to the best advantage; well, in that case the chief executive officer should be the chairman of the board of control. But if we want the mayor to be the real head of the city, the position should be on all fours with that of president of a great railway, or president-manager of a bank or other important commercial enterprise.

No attempt is here made to elaborate these ideas of improved civic management. But one other point may be made in favour of such a departure from our present heterogeneous system, namely, the actual saving in money. The civic officials mentioned above are now, as a rule, fairly well paid. Why not pay them better, give them more clerical assistance, and make them really responsible civic officials. Why not bring them together so that the working of their various departments may be harmonized, and constitute them the corporate executive for all civic administration? Great would be the city's gain.

Men We Meet

A Series of Six Articles by British Writers

1. THE SNOB—By JOHN FOSTER FRASER

IT was an old lady who explained that vulgarity was the conduct of other people. Let it, therefore, be a middle-aged man who declares that the snob is an estimable person.

All unthinking people conceive it their duty to turn up their noses at the snob.

You generally find that the snob is someone who cares nothing for your society, but for the society of another—generally in a better position than you, and who may be a knight and own a motor-car.

When someone runs after you and admires you, and prefers you to those in the lower scale, you know that someone is a pleasant and discerning creature. But let a friend of your own rank show a preference for a lady or gentleman who lives in a house with a rent of \$1,200 a year, whilst you are rated at \$300; then you write that friend down as a snob. Don't you?

I think the snob is to be encouraged and not vilified.

When I come to think of it you, my dear, clear-witted reader, are a snob of the first water. You do not know it. What are you by profession? A pork butcher! There's that fellow the hardware man across the street, who is not so rich as you, you know that, but who thinks himself no end of

a swell, and puts on airs because he is on the committee of the local political club, and has told you a dozen times when he has had a cigar with the local M.P., and in the smoking-room of the House of Commons, too. The fellow is a snob; you know he is. But you are a shining light in the bar parlour of the Bull's Head, where tradesmen foregather. When Smithers, who used to take round the milk, and has become a dairyman on his own account, tries to join your select circle, instead of going to the tap-room, you declare it is just like his impudence. You are sure you are not a snob, but the line must be drawn somewhere. And when you tell of how the vicar once asked you to supper, and when your fellow tradesmen tell you to "chuck it" because you have told them many times, you are well aware it is nothing but their jealousy. The fact is you are a snob; but you will agree with me you are none the worse on that account.

THEN you, patient reader of this column; bless you! but do I not know that snobbish people are the one sort you cannot abide? You are a broad-minded woman. The fussed-up ways of the bank manager's wife fill you with disgust. You do not want to go to her garden parties, not you;