

to all intents and purposes a system of government by commission. Their selectmen, who are chosen by the people at large, represent in their jurisdiction a complete fusion of local power and responsibility. In every state of the Union, moreover (with the exception of Louisiana and Rhode Island), county administration has been vested almost wholly in the hands of an elective commission. The use of the term "commission" has misled many into overlooking a system with which they have been long familiar under a different designation. American cities have had occasion, no doubt, to become familiar with "commissions," but with commissions of a very different sort.

No aspect of the general problem of municipal reform has received more attention in the press and on the platform during

**The Merits and
Defects of the
Commission
Plan**

the last year than the merits and defects of the commission plan. In the main, however, these discussions have dwelt largely upon the advantages of the system, many of which are almost too obvious to require emphasis. The defects, on the other hand, do not appear on the surface so plainly, though a closer examination will disclose that the system of government by commission, if generally applied to American cities under present conditions, would in all probability encounter important objections which no real friend of permanent municipal reform ought to treat lightly. Some of these relative merits and defects may be briefly noticed, so far as it may be accounted safe to generalize in the light of American municipal experience.

The cardinal advantage of the system is that it affords definite hope of putting an end to the intolerable decentralization of responsibility which now characterizes American civic administration. By concentrating powers and focusing public attention upon a narrow area it will render more effective the scrutiny which the voters may apply to the conduct of men in public office. If the system does not guarantee efficient administration, it at least promises to disclose where the blame for inefficiency should be made to fall. It will undoubtedly facilitate the election of a higher type of men, for American municipal experience has plainly demonstrated that small bodies

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