

## ETHICS OF CIVIC GOVERNMENT.

There is no subject to which the inhabitants of a great and growing city should be more willing or anxious to give their most serious thought than the history of their civic government. How can they expect to be well-governed if they persist in remaining ignorant of the principles upon which their government has been developed? It is the indifference of the masses to these things which too frequently prolongs the existence of corrupt officialism in public servants.

Here, for example, is a city of phenomenal growth, having a population of two hundred thousand, and every assurance of rapid enlargement. Little or no confidence is reposed in the municipal regime. Very little indeed in its fiscal operations. Some reform in its constitution is felt to be needed; but as to the nature of the reform, what? Who can answer? And why not? Simply because few, if any, are acquainted with the actual internal workings of the machinery they call government.

Now, supposing the citizens were unanimously and sternly resolved to have their municipal affairs properly managed, so as to redeem the credit of the city, and to utilize to the utmost advantage all its natural resources, how would they proceed? How could they proceed? Remember, it is not the easiest thing imaginable to recover power once it is vested in a corporation subject to the uncertain decisions of the polls.

We witnessed at the last election an attempt to effect a reformation by a liberal infusion of new blood into the Council. That was not a bad idea; but it subsequently became painfully evident that the public as a whole had no faith in the experiment.

Probably, as anticipated by the electorate, the "new blood" by this time has been contaminated, if not corrupted by the old, for as one of the aldermen remarked the other day: "The 'new blood' soon discovers how impotent and insignificant its influence is when it begins to assert itself with the object of converting the Council from the error of its ways. It would require a genius to transform the Corporation into a pure-souled organism."

As a matter of fact, the citizens are all but powerless, so far as effecting radical reform in their municipal executive is concerned. It may seem strange, but upon due consideration it will be seen that they are literally compelled to "put up" with the defective administration at the City Hall. Why?

Let us see. There is no history of Toronto's civic government to throw light upon its evolution. It is a creature of committees and departments, with the composition of which the outside public has nothing whatever to say. As the city has grown, these departments and committees have multiplied, until at the present moment they present a network of bureaus, so to speak, each of which has its special functions.

It is not the writer's intention, in this article, to analyse the aforesaid committees and departments, but merely to note the fact that incompetence on the part of any of them can only be detected by the public in general results. It is utterly impossible to follow the committees in their transactions beyond what they do in session. How far individual interests

govern the actions of the members of the various committees is also something that the public is not in a position to pronounce judgment upon.

So far as its true inwardness is concerned, the City Hall offers closed doors and drawn blinds to all except the city fathers. Perhaps under the most favorable circumstances this could not altogether be avoided. Yet it would seem nothing but right and just that the people who pay toll should know what road they are travelling along; that if their civic government is not fulfilling its duties satisfactorily there should be some way in which the public can interfere, trace the wrong doing to its source, and stop the culprits in time to prevent serious injury being done.

But, as already seen, compulsory dependence upon a visible form of government, with a system based upon invisible principles, places the citizens in the situation of helpless onlookers. They can vote, yes; once a year be assured by those who seek their suffrage that they, the citizens, own the city; then they are permitted for three hundred and sixty-four days to rack their brains endeavoring to find out why it is that although they do vote, do elect their own councillors and mayor, yet they only perpetuate the system and its hidden mysteries without making any appreciable alteration in the behavior of the government.

If they could only change the system! But they cannot. It is invincible; it has grown callous with the years. Like the systems of government on a more pretentious scale, it is almost unconscionable in its moral impregnability. It defies assault, because it possesses the keys of power, which, though rightfully belonging to the people, are held in the firm, unyielding grasp of this corporative embodiment of public will. Hence, the rings and cliques, which shield themselves behind the system, can effectually neutralize the efforts of would-be useful members of the Council to become serviceable reformers. As for outsiders—the voting classes—they perceive the municipal organism which they sustain through the ballot box, i. e., its outward and visible sign. That is all. The rest—the vital principles animating the system, are represented by X, and there is no algebraical formula that will reach the unknown quantity.

Great are the mysteries of government—of civic government especially! Who can fathom them? By all the laws of reason and justice the citizens of Toronto should control their municipal administration; by all the evidence of fact it controls and misrules them.

Electors have shown an unmistakable desire to have an improved state of things in the City Hall. Why is not this desire gratified? Surely the electors should be the masters.

But they are not. They may bully and threaten their "civic government," and try to purify it by electing new men, but there can never be a change while the system inherited from previous Councils remains inviolate. It is the system that is diseased, the principles that are wrong. While these continue unattacked, the body corporate will follow the "old policy" whose effects are creating alarm in the public mind, tending as they do to involve the city in bankruptcy and disgrace.

There are men in the Council who have the ability to get at the root of the evil, and who should have inde-

pendence of character enough to advocate reform of a trenchant nature. If there is to be reform, it must either begin very spiritedly and determinedly inside the City Hall, or by a revolution from without.

Aldermen must sooner or later be taught that they shall not carry the city of Toronto in their inside pockets.

B. SAWDEN.

## THE MUNICIPAL CRISIS.

The municipal situation in Toronto is but a reflex of the tendencies of the times. Everywhere, in the municipalities, in the provinces, and in the Dominion, the governments, small and great, are looked upon as fair game for plunder. The haste to be rich, which characterizes the present day, is responsible for this condition of affairs. The absolute honesty of a man in dealing with another is not impugned, although the same man in transacting business of any kind with a government is on the lookout for any favors going. The consequence is that the man with "the pull" gets there, while honest merit shivers in the cold. Then the circle enlarges. The mediocre man who has "the pull" by his social or moneyed interests is assisted by those who work for the smaller favors to come. This results in saddling on the community more public servants than the service requires; in public enterprises that are in advance of the ability of the people to pay for; and, in cities like Toronto, in the equipment of streets with water, block paving, electric and gas lighting, etc., for the sole benefit of the speculators who own the land and control the aldermen. The burden of high taxes is the inevitable predicament. In this city, within the last five years, the taxes on the land have been trebled. Undoubtedly the system under which these things be possible has assisted the too willing aldermen to this end. It has meant money for them and their friends. Their trade being in danger a stern and stubborn fight has become necessary. They will not easily yield their places to better men. The loaves and the fishes have been many during the past five years, and many have been the feeders. All these will have to be calculated with ere reform will be accomplished or even begun. He who thinks to leave them out of his reckoning will be badly disappointed when the day of trial comes. But, many and powerful though they be through organized self-interest, the great residue of honest men in the city who neither require nor ask favors may cope with them in absolute confidence, if they, casting aside all petty self-interest, prejudice or any other thing that stands in the way, unite for municipal reform for Toronto. It will be well for them to remember at the outset that they too are not entirely blameless. To retrieve the errors of the past they must approach the solution of the difficulties besetting the city with an honest appraisal of all the facts. They must, in blaming others, be content to take their share for lukewarmness. They must be fully seized with the idea that they live not to themselves. Their apathy, their lack of public spiritedness alone make it possible for inferior men to control the affairs of this great city. An honest thought upon the questions of municipal administration will convince them that the effect of mal-administration has at last reached them. The fact that ratepayers are organizing, that men who seldom have taken to heart their

municipal duty are active now, should and doubtless will, persuade them that it is high time they made their voice ring and their votes tell for a more economical conduct of public affairs. Investigation into the affairs of the city should follow. Nor should the facts be taken at second-hand. They are apt to be distorted to suit the convenience of the person stating them. Prejudice, too, should not enter into their determination. Honest men, handicapped it may be by numbers, should be given their due share of praise or blame, and a conviction that a man is honest in his public career, having at heart the interests of the people, should count in his favor even though his judgment has not always been the same as yours. If a public servant is honest, if he has ability, there may have been other causes why the results attained are not all his blame. These causes should be searched for. Found, they should be ruthlessly uprooted. The future welfare of the city demands no less than this. Nay, it demands more; a remedy must be provided. That remedy is the people's honest will. Let no class rule. Let no society hold sway. Let neither race nor religion militate against the plain duty of the moment. Elect a people's council and a people's mayor. And let these be men of honesty first, ability next, and lastly, men who do not think that success in life means riches first, last and all the time. Such a municipal government would soon place Toronto above and beyond all the mistakes of the past, and would be an augury that the promise of the future will be fully realized.

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