

"NATURAL MONOPOLIES."

The Convention of Mayors and Councilmen, which has just been held at Columbus, Ohio, has brought out very clearly the fruit of opinion toward the control by municipalities of what are called "Natural Monopolies." In respect to the water supply the necessity of such control is universally admitted, but when it comes to be a question of furnishing gas and electric light, or running street car lines and operating ferries by direct municipal agency, there is opened up a large field for debate. The formation of the League of American Municipalities, which has been the first visible result of the convention, is calculated to give an impulse to the extension of the sphere of municipal activity. The tendency of the movement, of which this is the first stage of development, is unquestionably to support the idea that a city may, in its corporate capacity, do all it can in the performance of any service which can be properly called public. The keynote of the movement is obviously the restriction of the area of private enterprise in the operation of public franchises. This is sharply in opposition to the idea that municipal government should be confined within the narrowest limits compatible with the public convenience or welfare. The position thus defined is one of serious importance, because the prevailing sentiment of the newly formed League is evidence of a sentiment already well established and generally diffused among its members. The League will do its part in translating this sentiment into action, just in proportion as united effort is a more powerful force than isolated or independent initiative.

In matters of State and national concern, there is a widely entertained conviction that the country is too much governed. There are too many laws, too much money spent in departments of public activity that could be better conducted by private agency, and too much interference with the natural play of forces which give vitality to free government. If a totally different attitude is to be taken in regard to the government of cities, some very good reasons must be given to sustain it. Certainly some better reasons must be forthcoming than that the new theory of municipal action has secured a great deal of support both at home and abroad, and that it is no longer a question of confining a city government to what it must do, but of discovering how many things it can do as well as, or better than, a private corporation. It is not so much the immediate results of this new theory that are to be considered, as whether it is likely to lead us, and how it may affect the future of our political system. Were the argument in favor of cheaper light or transportation being supplied by the city than through the agency of a private corporation much stronger than it is, there would remain the very grave consideration, what is to be the effect on the conduct of local and general politics and on the forces that are controlled by politicians of an indefinite multiplication of city employees? There may be a danger, when the number of men drawing pay from the city treasury becomes large enough to make or unmake political parties, that our servants should become our masters. There certainly would be such a danger unless the conduct of city affairs can be absolutely divorced from partizanship, and unless the holding of a place under a city government becomes as free from political influence or pressure as the holding of a place under a private corporation. That consummation may be at hand here and elsewhere, or it may be very distant; in any case it is something which will cost a struggle to obtain, and probably no less arduous struggle to preserve intact. It is at least an open question whether the struggle will not rather be hindered than helped by a further enlargement of the sphere of municipal action.

In his speech at Columbus the other day, Mayor Quincy, of Boston, made the

following observation: "The question whether city life has not already proved too powerful a magnet in attracting people from the country to the town—whether large numbers of those who to-day earn a scanty, sometimes a precarious, livelihood in cities would not be materially better off in the country—whether municipalities will not yet be forced in self defence, to open up some regular channels through which those who become dependent upon the public may be returned, so to speak, to the soil, to earn their own support from its cultivation—raise problems for the future which can only be suggested at the present time." Yet, with the apparent approval of its chief magistrate, Boston has been making steady encroachments of late on what may be called the field of private enterprise. It has established a municipal printing office, it has a department of electricity designed to provide isolated plants for the lighting of public buildings, and it keeps 3,000 laborers steadily employed on street and other improvements which are elsewhere given out by contract. To light its own public buildings is obviously a step on the part of Boston toward lighting its own streets and public places, and so installing plants large enough to supply the wants of stores and private residences. But a city can hardly treat the electric lighting business as a legitimate sphere for municipal operation and disregard the much stronger argument in favor of running the street cars by means of a city department. If the one is a "Natural Monopoly," so is the other; if corporations have too much power to tax the consumer in the one case, they are still more advantageously placed for making profit out of a public service in the other.—*N. Y. Journal of Commerce and Commercial Bulletin.*

CURIOSITIES OF TAXATION.

From the annual parliamentary return for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, of taxes and imposts for the year ending March 31, last, it is gathered that the number of dogs licensed in Great Britain was 1,370,482, the number of licensed male servants was 199,744, the number of hackney carriages, 116,442, and of private carriages 431,931. Over 200,000 persons paid ten shillings for a license to carry a gun, and 56,584 persons paid one or two guineas each for armorial bearings. There were nearly 2,000,000 packs of playing cards made for sale or use in the United Kingdom, which are all dutiable, and bills of exchange numbered 7,576,491, these, too, bearing a tax.

COMMERCIAL BLACK SHEEP.

The board of administration of the National Association of Credit Men of the United States has taken a very advanced position in reference to dealing with the great commercial curse of dishonest or fraudulent failures. It is proposed to attack this evil, root and branch, upon a plan that is national and far-reaching in its scope. The organization is in excellent shape to enter upon this important work. Its organized membership is now 1,746, a gain since June of 333, and its individual membership is 243, making a total enrollment of 1,989. The resolutions adopted by the board of administration at its meeting in New York Sept. 20, are as follows:

Whereas: Fraudulent failures constitute a serious menace to the mercantile community; and

Whereas: Such failures are as dishonest and reprehensible as any form of robbery, and the safety of the business public demands that all persons involved therein be brought to justice; therefore, be it

Resolved: By the board of administration of the National Association of Credit Men that the plan of dealing with suspicious failures presented be, and the same is hereby approved, and the board recommends that the proposition contained therein, to select legal correspondents throughout the United States,

to act in conjunction with some well-known detective agency in investigating such failures be especially emphasized in carrying out such plan; and be it further

Resolved: That the officers of the association, together with the Committee on Investigation, be authorized to make such changes and modifications in the plan presented as they may deem expedient.

There is a flavor of sincerity and business about these resolutions that augurs well for the success of the undertaking and badly for the commercial black sheep who thrive by means of fraudulent failures.—*Shipping List.*

MONTREAL BOARD OF TRADE.

It would seem that the Council of the Montreal Board of Trade is losing patience with the replies of the Department of Public Works at Ottawa about the ship channel between that city and Quebec. At the last weekly meeting the following resolution was passed, and ordered to be communicated to Hon. Mr. Tarte: "That in view of recent disasters between Montreal and Quebec; that in view of the fact that some of the Quebec-Montreal pilots have complained that the depth of water at certain points in the ship channel has been less than that indicated by the Government gauge at Montreal; that in view of the fact that this Council, at the request of the Marine Underwriters Association, did, under date of February 22nd, 1896, call the attention of the Minister of Public Works to the possibility of stones and debris being deposited in the channel during spring freshets, thus reducing the depth of water supposed to be available; and suggesting as a proper precaution that an official sounding of the channel be made at least three times a year, and further, having reference to the reply of the Hon. Minister of Public Works, stating that these matters would be duly attended to, the Council of the Board of Trade now asks to be officially informed what steps have been taken in conformity with this promise contained in the Minister's letter of 27th February, 1896."

Mr. John McKergow presided at the meeting. The others present were Messrs. James Crathern, Charles F. Smith, Henry Miles, E. L. Bond, Charles McLean, James W. Pyke, Chas. Chaput, A. W. Stevenson, F. W. Evans, Harry Stikeman, Robt. Mackay, David G. Thomson, W. B. Matthewson and David Wattson.

THE TERM HORSE-POWER MISLEADING.

It is important to observe that, as pointed out the other day in *Power*, the term "horsepower" is misleading. That journal says: "The term horse-power when applied to a boiler, is always misleading, besides being a misnomer to start with. A hundred horse-power boiler will supply steam for a modern engine to develop 200 horse-power. The term should be avoided when speaking of boilers whenever it can be gracefully done, and we notice with gratification that an English writer says of water tube boilers that 'the approximate cost erected is £96 per 1,000 pounds evaporation.' That is to say, you can buy and erect for £96 enough boiler to evaporate 1,000 lbs. of steam per hour. You can use the steam of a pump at an expense of 200 lbs. per hour per horse-power, making the boiler supply five horse-power; or in a compound engine at an expense of 13 or 14 lbs., making the boiler supply 70 horse-power; or you can use it for boiling glue and generating no horse-power at all."

—France has bought the late M. W. Waddington's collection of Greek coins for 421,000 francs. It contains 73 gold, 1,300 silver, and 5,635 bronze pieces. Among them are coins of 398 towns of Asia Minor.

—The advertisements which appear in public journals take rank among the most significant indications of the state of society of that time and place.—*Dickens.*