

MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENT

THE USE OF STREETS BY PRIVATE CORPORATIONS.

The order recently granted by the Board of Aldermen of Boston, says Engineering Record, to the Bay State Pneumatic Delivery Company for the use of the streets of that city for the purposes of the company without compensation, has again raised an old question which affects the interests of all municipalities. The order granted by the Boston Aldermen was vetoed by the Mayor on statutory grounds, so that it was not necessary for him to discuss any question of public expediency or of the manifest equities of the matter. This order was also granted in the face of a recommendation of a special commission on the finances of Boston to the effect that the holders of similar franchises should pay for the privileges granted to them. The argument was urged by the pneumatic company that the increased facilities for mail delivery and the transmission of packages would be of so much public benefit that a free use of the streets would only be reasonable. It was also urged that the system of pneumatic transmission which the company proposed to use was so largely of an experimental character that the enterprise should not be handicapped by payments for the use of streets in which to lay its tubes.

It cannot be denied that there may be conditions under which these arguments possess considerable force. In the case of small municipalities whose growth would be stimulated or whose prosperity would be enhanced by enterprises really serving public ends, it obviously would be public policy to encourage them by relief from compensation for the use of streets or for other public favors until the development of sufficient business should create the obligation to make financial return for the privileges they enjoy.

Very few citizens of any city would probably deny the validity of this general principle, and yet there are many cities at the present time where either grants are pending in violation of it or where it is practically impossible to secure its application; and there is at least one city where a nearly or quite successful attempt is being made to rescind an application of several years' standing. In many of these cases it must be admitted that corrupt influences aid materially towards such ends, but in the majority of instances a lack of intelligence on the part of the granting bodies is probably the main evil.

In large cities like Boston and the other great municipalities of the country franchises involving the use of streets or other grants of a similar nature are of great value, and no valid reason can be assigned for relief from payment of reasonable compensation or from the performance of reasonable duties of a compensatory char-

acter. It frequently may be difficult to fix either a perfectly just compensation or perfectly just duties, but there can be no doubt that there should be some return for the benefits received, and experience has invariably shown that where compensations and duties (either fixed or graded) are prescribed they are placed too high. Indeed it is wise so to adjudicate matters of this kind that private enterprise will be encouraged rather than obstructed, but that wisdom should not be turned into public loss, or worse, by relieving the benefitted corporations of the obligations which properly belong to them. This is no theoretical view of the matter, as is attested by the experience of cities like New York and Philadelphia, as well as many others, where the municipal revenues have enjoyed the advantages both of compensations paid by corporations using streets and of the performance of such duties as paving within prescribed limits. The results are satisfactory for the reason that they involve simple equity and justice to the parties concerned, and the city of Boston will make a serious mistake if it does not attain the same ends.

A GOOD ROADS PARLIAMENT.

Secretary Morton, of the Department of Agriculture, at Washington, has issued a call for a good roads parliament to be held at Atlanta, Ga., in October, under the auspices of the Cotton States and International Exposition. The Secretary has made his invitation broad enough to include every person interested in the subject of improved highways, for it is addressed to "all legally authorized organizations of officials and of private individuals who have given special attention to this subject." The dates fixed are October 17, 18 and 19, and the hall of the House of Representatives at Atlanta will be the meeting place. The Secretary states that real progress in road improvement is observed by the Department of Agriculture since the organization of the office of road enquiry. The invitation to the parliament is urged upon all State highway commissions, State and local road improvement associations, and upon commercial bodies and boards of trade and transportation, agricultural societies and farmers' organizations, universities, agricultural colleges and engineering schools, societies of civil engineers, humane societies, the League of American Wheelmen, carriage and bicycle builders' associations, and all other organizations or individuals especially concerned in the improvement of highways.

The by-law which was to have been submitted to the taxpayers of Nanaimo on the 31st ultimo, authorizing the City Council to purchase the property of the Water Works Company and to raise a loan of \$65,000 for that purpose, has been withdrawn, a legal opinion having been given that the by-law was not drawn in accordance with the statute. It is probable that another by-law will shortly be submitted.

The disadvantages of compressed asphalt pavements are ascribed by the Semaine du Batiment to the use of the powdered asphalt at different temperatures, and to the insufficient pressure—about 80 kilos. per square centimetre, equal to 1,136 lb. per sq. inch—which can be applied to it *in situ*. To avoid these troubles there have recently been used in France paving blocks made from asphalt powder heated to 120 deg. and then moulded, at a pressure of 900 kilos. per square centimetre—12,780 lb. per square inch—into blocks 8 in. by 4 in. by 1 1/8 in., which are set in 0.6 in. of cement mortar, and are said to give satisfactory results.

The terrible destruction of life and property which followed the failure of the reservoir at Bouzey, by which a large area was made desolate, has caused M. Loewy to consider the construction of reservoirs. A paper by him on the subject was read at the last meeting of the French Académie des Sciences. M. Loewy ascribes all failures to fissures in the masonry of the embankments. Water enters, and not only is mortar washed away, but there is a sort of leverage exerted against the sides of the fissure which the bank cannot resist. M. Loewy proposes that a second bank or wall should be always formed in front of the main wall and bound to it by cross walls. In case of a leakage the water would run into intervening spaces or wells, and the pressure would be taken off the main wall. For a time, at least, a catastrophe would be avoided. Moreover, the people having charge of the reservoir could perceive the danger, and a remedy could be provided. The principal obstacle to the proposal is one of cost. The construction of reservoirs is costly, and shareholders of water companies would not care to have it increased. At present very few accidents happen, and the introduction of a continuous outer wall might lead to carelessness in superintendence. — Builders' Reporter.

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