

MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENT

APPOINTMENT OF MUNICIPAL ENGINEERS.*

It is believed by many that municipal engineers and surveyors are the best paid in the profession. Thus, when vacancies occur in this department of engineering, there are large numbers of applicants, and the competition is very keen, and canvassing, although confessedly counted a disqualification, is, nevertheless, carried on to a great extent. So much is this the case that the art of applying for municipal appointments, with all the canvassing and procuring and getting-up of the requisite number of testimonials, has become one of the fine arts, a knowledge of which, it is said, is positively essential in these degenerate days to obtain situations. On the other hand, it is well known that when a vacancy occurs in the official municipal staff, in many cases the man has already been chosen for the place, and the place for the man, even before an advertisement has been inserted in the papers. The situation is advertised merely to allow the chosen one an opportunity of applying with the public for a situation already given him. This is done to try and deceive the public into the belief that it is a bona-fide advertisement of an open and free competition to all properly and duly qualified to occupy an important and responsible public appointment. But the public are not so easily deceived, and pretty well know to whom the situation will be given. "Send in your application, apply, and we will secure you the appointment," say the two or three knowing ones of brief authority and influence. The whom they delight to honour hies home, wrestles through the composition of a hypocritical mockery of an application, and gets it printed with the so-called testimonials procured from people who know little or nothing about him or are utterly incapable of judging of his fitness. So he gets the place, and into the power of the knowing ones at the same time. These knowing ones ever after this annex that man's services to themselves, to serve their own little ends—for did not they get him the appointment? Thus he is robbed of his liberty of action, and becomes but a tool in their hands to do their work—dirty and mean enough work at the best—and to further their own little schemes and plans; and this all to the prejudice of the public interests.

There are few public appointments into which more enters the elements of influence and favor than into municipal appointments; and the appointing of a municipal engineer is in this respect not a whit behind even the appointment of a city or town clerk.

* From a paper by Alexander MacLachlan, M.Inst. C.E., in *The Surveyor and Municipal Engineer*, London, Eng.

It is a very difficult thing for even able experts to judge of a man's suitability and fitness for a high public appointment. It is strange and extraordinary that men who commonly compose our town or county councils, corporations, magistracies, &c., should be allowed by the public to decide the appointments of men entrusted with the engineering, building and sanitation of our large cities and towns. One would be apt to think that it would be a safer and wiser plan to give the adjudication of such appointments to judges specially fitted by their recognized high attainments and abilities and great and extensive practice in their particular professions. Such learned institutions or associations as the Institution of Civil Engineers, the Royal Institute of British Architects, or the Incorporated Association of Municipal and County Engineers, the Surveyors' Institution, the Sanitary Institute, &c., contain any number of experts highly qualified in their respective professions for selecting from among applicants the most suitable candidates for the several municipal situations.

The days are gone now when simply masons, joiners or plumbers, with nothing more to recommend them but the goodwill of their magisterial acquaintances, can be allowed to occupy the highly important and responsible positions of municipal or county engineers. But time was when such things were permitted and encouraged, and freely and openly practised, and appointments were given by friend to friend, irrespective of ability, fitness, experience or knowledge. Consequently, in town and county, to put it very mildly, things were in a bad way, a very bad way indeed, for many long years to come. Mistakes were made, money was misspent in useless works, or even in mischievous and dangerous works; and, what is far more important than the mispending of money, neglect, culpable neglect, was shown, especially in regard to drainage and water supply, or the want of them, resulting in disease and death to many of the unsuspecting inhabitants of city, town and village.

The duties of the municipal engineer are exceedingly varied and difficult, and they are becoming more and more so every day. Besides being an expert in a few professions, such as that of a surveyor, architect, civil, mechanical, hydraulic and sanitary engineer, he must now be not unacquainted with that pro-

fession which deals with that subtle, mysterious and wonderful something called electricity, in order to supply the illuminant of the day, or at least to work in harmony with the electrical expert chosen for that purpose.

Therefore, it can hardly be considered out of the way to say that the judging of the proficiency of applicants for filling public appointments, as indicated, should be entrusted to experts in the particular professions required to be known and practised by the successful competitors. It is to be hoped that this will become in the future the general order of the day, and not the exception, so that the public interests may be safeguarded and the most efficient and able men be chosen to fill public appointments.

An English sanitary inspector, discussing the question of sewer ventilation in a paper read at a recent sanitary meeting in London, expressed strong opposition to surface ventilating grates (perforated man holes), as well as to the dangerous practice of connecting from the sewer into manufacturing chimneys. His impression was that wherever a gas ventilating shaft or sewer air destructor might be fixed, the inhabitants residing in close proximity would imagine there were dangers arising from it. The opinion had been clearly expressed by sanitary engineers that the system of taking ventilating shafts outside houses is altogether wrong, as unless they are run up to a great height they practically act as conductors of disease. In short, there was only one way to deal with sewer gas, and that was to destroy it absolutely, which could be done by burning it in sewer gas destructor lamps. It might be urged that this applied only to such sewers as are not disinfected, but this has been shown to be erroneous. The typhoid bacillus, for instance, was infinitely more active, and showed incomparably greater vitality in nitrate sewage than in pure sewage. This practically meant in dealing with the problem of sewers that when we flush them with disinfectants we are laying down food for our deadliest enemy—typhoid. On the other hand, if, in place of putting in disinfectants, destructors were inserted along the line of sewers, and the gas driven off by the decomposition of the sewage drawn out and destroyed, we should, in all probability, have what is at present the great desideratum—that the sewage at the outfall be innocuous.

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