

to-day?" will elicit either a pleasant negative, or the more pleasant "have you got so and so?" or "you may show me so and so."

THE GOVERNMENT OF CITIES.

A great point is gained when the public is aroused to the necessity of increased vigilance being exercised in the government of cities. In Toronto, there has been a great awakening on the subject, and if the public enthusiasm in favor of improved methods be sustained, good must come of it. Nothing is so injurious to the good government of the city as apathy: when the mass of the citizens act as if they were unconcerned for the city's welfare, the government of the municipality is abandoned to whomsoever may have the enterprise to seize upon it.

The local improvement system is responsible for a large portion of the increase of the debt which has taken place in the last five years. In its inception, this journal frequently expressed opposition to it on the ground taken by the Mayor on nomination day, of its injustice. Some of its advocates saw in the local improvement plan a means of shifting a part of the burthen of taxes, which they ought in equity to bear, to other shoulders. Some few properties under its operation escaped taxation altogether for street improvements, under the pretence of paying for them. Obviously, if the property abutting on some streets was to pay for their own improvements, property on other streets which had been improved at the expense of the city treasury, ought to have been charged with the value of the unexhausted improvements. But the proposal to do so was rejected by the City Council. At this time it was not foreseen that local improvements would make a large addition to the debt of the city, a debt secured by what is in fact a first mortgage on the property abutting on streets in which the improvements are made. The debt is incurred in the name of the city, which stands towards the local improvement expenditure practically in the light of mortgagee. The city can be called upon to pay this debt or any portion of it, out of other sources, only in the event of the property assessed for it not being sufficient to answer the demand. As far as can be seen at present, there is no probability that the city will lose anything by having to provide for this debt. A sinking fund is collected every year to furnish the means of paying off the debt; and any back taxes are easily collected by a sale of the lands. Care was not always taken that the whole amount should be collected before the improvement would be exhausted. But even when this has happened, the land which was to answer for the improvement could be made to realize the amount. But, though there is no danger of loss to the city from this source, the expenditure for local improvements has been unduly great. The mistake has been in going far in advance of actual needs, with the result that the expenditure beyond what necessity required is for the present dead capital. The land in respect to which these improvements were made is

loaded with interest on its cost and on works which are far in advance of the demands. For this unnecessary debt the city is primarily, and the land secondarily responsible. The tendency of contracting a debt beyond requirements, in respect to property which yields no revenue, and which cannot yield any for many years to come, is to put a weight on the credit of the city which it ought not to have been called upon to bear. This is a clear disadvantage; but this debt, endorsed by the city will all be discharged by assessments against property which is secondarily liable for it. Everybody agrees this form of expenditure must henceforth be made only when public necessity calls for it. But it should be remembered that the property taxed for local improvements is not only bearing its own burthen, it is also bearing a part of the burthen that belongs to property which had its roads made at the cost of the general revenue of the city. For the Water Works debt the city has a valuable asset ample to meet all demands it may make.

The question whether the city corporation ought to sell the real estate which it owns, has been raised during the mayoralty contest. One of the candidates says, and says truly, that private ownership of land is a great spur to improvement. But this is not a reason why the city should sell its lands. Ground rents increase as leases fall in, and that is a good reason why this form of property should be held as a source of revenue for the city. An instance occurred, the other day, where a piece of land owned by the city had the rent increased from \$25 to \$400. There is land in the Market block where a similar rise must soon take place. The C. P. R. made a bargain with the city this year on the principle of progressive ground rent. It would be a misfortune, no doubt, if a great extension of leased lands, the property of private individuals, were to take place; but when Mr. Osler extends this objection to site land owned by the city, we cannot agree with him. Mr. Beaty makes the same mistake. All site land which, when built upon, yields in rent more than average interest on the buildings upon it, over and above a rebuilding fund, brings ground rent; it is confused with the building rent when the proprietor of the land is also proprietor of the buildings. To sell the land belonging to the city for the purpose of applying the proceeds towards a reduction of the debt, would involve a certain loss in the sacrifice of future increase in value, while there would be no advantage in the payment of a portion of the debt at all equivalent, by way of compensation.

Mr. Osler, we do not doubt, would be found to possess some of the qualifications of a good mayor; but we cannot help thinking that he places himself in a false position when he attempts to unite in his own person the Mayor of Toronto and a director of a great corporation, which has interests in contention with the city. He says the interests of the city and those of the railway corporation are the same. Up to a certain point, this is true; but it is only one half of the whole truth. They are interested in their co-existence, and their amicable relations; but when it comes to a question

of bargain-making between them, how much one shall pay and the other get, in what proportions they shall contribute to works in which they are mutually interested, their interests are not identical, but diverse and opposite. There are actually pending questions between them involving large amounts of money. At such a time, the city would surely be unwise to put into the mayor's chair the director of a company holding such a relation to the city. Mr. Osler thinks "it would be a strange thing if the city thought it an evil to be connected with a railway," such as the C.P.R., and we agree with him. No one assuredly thinks the worse of him for being the director of a great railway; most people think the connection is one that confers honor; but surely that is no reason for going to a company which has interests in contention with the city, for the gift of a mayor. There is no objection to the railway director; to make him mayor, at the same time, when conflicting interests would draw him in different directions, there are strong objections. There are many who, with ourselves, would gladly see Mr. Osler either mayor or railway director, but not both at a time when the interests are diverse and incompatible. Only a judicial mind and a judicial position can ensure the holding of the even balance between them. We have witnessed, during the year, much cheap and unmerited abuse of the C.P.R., discreditable only to those who indulged in it; are we now to rush to the other extreme and call upon one of the directors of that company to assist, as mayor, in the settlement of disputes between it and the city? In the making of bargains, there is a certain amount of higgling to be done; in contests in which the just claims of the city have to be sustained, a firm assertion of its rights is necessary. To fill the dual position it would be necessary for the advocate to take briefs from both sides in the case; in law this is declared unprofessional and is not permitted; in business and municipal matters it ought to be avoided. If Mr. Osler did not occupy this dual position, he ought, in our opinion, to be considered the most acceptable of all the candidates.

"PROGRESSIVE BENEFIT" HUMBUGS

It appears by a despatch of last week from St. Louis to the *New York Times* that the victims in that city of the Progressive Benefit order are in a state of hopeless and helpless confusion. They held a meeting which lasted until after midnight, but about all that was done was to make a great noise. Several telegrams were read. One was from Supreme President Davey, of Boston, ousting Chief Deputy Organizer Parker, of St. Louis. Another from New Orleans enquired the address of the St. Louis investigating committee in Boston. Another was from one of the supreme officers to a local lodge treasurer, who had informed the supreme body that the contents of the treasury had been garnisheed. The letter indignantly stated that "the assessments did not belong to the Supreme lodge until they reached Boston."

A telegram from the investigating committee informed the audience that the committee had asked seventeen questions of President