

Reduction of Members of County Councils.

A municipal system, to which we are indebted for many of our best ideas is to be found in England and in the newer states of the union, in all of which the county system has been introduced, many improvements have been considered, and tend to do away with the objections that are complained of in the older settled counties. In England the county has gradually sunk from a self-governing community into an administrative district, and in recent times these boundaries have been so crossed and criss-crossed with those of other administrative areas that very little of the old county is left in recognizable shape. For almost every new administrative function, complains one of the recent hand-books on the subject, the legislature has provided a new area, containing a new constituency, who, by a new method of election, choose candidates to satisfy a new qualification, to sit upon a new board during a new term, to levy a new tax, and and to spend a good deal of the new revenues in paying new officers and in erecting new buildings. Among the institutions that have been erected with little or no regard to their fitness with the old counties, or with each other, might be mentioned the poor law parish, the highway parish, the urban and rural sanitary district, school districts, boroughs and Improvements Act districts.

The municipal commission report, referring to these independent bodies, states that by the Local Government Act, the powers of the quarter sessions as to highways, bridges and other works have been transferred to the county councils, whose members are elected, and this change may lead to a complete and simple system. The number of county councillors in the English counties is very large. The members are composed of two classes, councillors and aldermen; the latter always number one-third of the former. The largest council contains 140 members, the smallest 28, with an average of about 75. The councillors are elected by the qualified voters of the county and hold office for a term of three years, and retire in rotation. The aldermen are elected by the councillors, either from their own number or from the qualified voters outside, and hold office for six years, one-half of their number retiring every three years. For the election of councillors the county is divided into electoral districts, corresponding in number to the number of councillors, one councillor being chosen from every district. The boundaries of these districts may be changed by order of the local government board, on the recommendation of the council. The local government board is, in form, a committee of the privy council. It is a separate and independent department, under the control of the president, and may be called the English department of the Interior. It is charged with the supervising of the

administration by the local authorities of the kingdom, of the laws relating to the public health, relieving the poor and of the local government, duties more important to the daily good government of the country than those of any other department. From the English system we can draw but little information that would assist us in proposing a plan for the reduction of the members of councils in Ontario. The division of the counties into electoral districts has been found to be necessary, and more so, as the township system, which has been generally adopted in this continent, has been rendered unnecessary by the many irregular and complicated divisions above referred to. In the United States, the county and township system has been adopted throughout. In Michigan, as in New York and other states, the county board is composed of the supervisors of the several townships, and thus represent the townships. It is held that this is the most approved form of local government, but, on the other hand the objection is made that county boards, thus constituted, are too large. In the states mentioned there are no less than sixteen, and sometimes more than twenty townships in each county, and in a board of sixteen or twenty members, it had been found hard to fasten responsibility upon any body in particular, and that it was possible to have combinations and indulge in that exchange of favors known as "log rolling." The responsibility is more concentrated in the smaller county boards of Massachusetts, Wisconsin and other states, in which three commissioners are elected by the people for a term of three years, one retiring each year. For the purpose of electing, the counties are divided into three districts, and a commissioner elected for each by the voters in the district. Districts are composed of townships, and in dividing the county into districts the population of the townships is considered. Here we find two systems, one in which the number of members of the county council is found to be too large, the other in which the number of members is fixed at three, and for this purpose the county is divided into districts. An American writer states, "It is objected that the supervisors, (reeves, and deputy reeves under the Ontario system) are unable to conduct county affairs as speedily and intelligently as the commissioners. The number, it is asserted, is too large for the transaction of fiscal and other executive business requiring special consideration and special knowledge, and it must be confessed, whatever may be the countervailing advantages of these more democratic organizations, that this objection is sometimes a very serious one, particularly when a county contains within its limits a city or large towns entitled to representatives on the board." It is contended that the work done by large county councils could be done more satisfactorily by a smaller body, and that much

of the county expenditure was practicably uncontrollable and the expenses of the councils quite out of proportion to the amount that they may dispose of at their discretion.

A great deal has been written as to the best means to adopt to effect a reduction of the number of members of county councillors, so that it will be representative. Mr. McEvoy in his essay on the Ontario township, refers to this question as follows: "In order to bring the observation of county business home to the electors, it would be well to elect a county council independent of the township council. Let the electors of each municipality nominate candidates for county councillors at their township nominations, and let the township clerks return these nominations to the county clerk, who shall be ordered to prepare ballots containing the names of all the candidates nominated throughout the county, and send whatever number of these may be needed to each township clerk before election day. When the electors come to vote for their township councillors let them also vote for their candidates for county councillors. Let a statement of this vote in each township be forwarded to the county clerk, and let the fifteen who obtain the greatest number of votes constitute the county council. By this means every member would represent not any particular township, but the whole county and the members would, I submit, be as likely to do justice between the several townships as those chosen on the present plan." In the April number we suggested another plan worthy of consideration, which is to divide each county into districts, composed of polling sub-divisions or local municipalities, so that each district will contain about the same number of votes and to elect district county councillors independent of the local township councils. In this way the number of members of county councils could be easily controlled, and, at the same time, give an equitable representation throughout.

The county council should have the regulation of all matters of detail in connection with the division of the county into districts. The nominations for each district may be made in manner proposed in Mr. Hardy's bill, which was as follows: On or before the first day of December the clerk of the county may receive nomination papers for one or more county councillors, signed by fifty or more rate-payers. The nominees must have the same qualifications as municipal councillors. If only the number to which the county is entitled are nominated—for instance, if the county is entitled to nine councillors and only nine are nominated—they will of course be declared elected by acclamation. If more than the requisite number are nominated, and an election is required, the nominations will be sent to the township and other local municipali-

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