

While Toronto annually receives \$125,000 for her Street Railway privileges, the Council of Montreal recently granted similar privileges for thirty years to a company this year paying the city only \$25,000. Although there were three other lower tenders, the contract for electric lighting was renewed with the old company at \$124.10 per arc light annually, and the tenders of the other companies, offering to save the city \$25,000 a year, were not even opened. A paving contract was given to a contractor whose tender was the highest by \$12,000. A public property was purchased by the Health department, with the consent of the council, for eighteen cents, that, in the morning of the day of purchase, had been sold for twelve cents per square foot. The debt of the city had reached \$21,600,000, or  $16\frac{1}{2}\%$  on the taxable real estate, and yet the treasury was depleted and the council clamoring for authorization to negotiate fresh loans of several millions. Despite the protests of the Board of Trade, the *Chambre de Commerce*, and the citizens generally, and despite the fearless attacks of the non-partizan press, the council would not pause in its course of reckless extravagance; each censured alderman confident of finding means to appease a vengeful electorate when the time should again arrive for him to appear before his constituents. "We have been thus attacked before and yet been re-elected: the same power is still at our backs and can elect us again." So argued the condemned aldermen. But election day came and went, and, out of twenty-one who defied public protest in the electric lighting contract, nine only remained. Montreal's civic government is as yet by no means spotless, but few among the citizens are unwilling to admit that the strength of the "ring" is broken, and that an honest minority holds to-day the balance of power, with every reason for believing that another election will see that minority converted into a majority.

To give an account of the way in which this change was brought about is, in the main, to give the history and describe the methods of the Volunteer Electoral League of the city of Montreal.

On a winter evening, three years ago, the members of a social club were informally discussing the influence of money in politics. It was very generally admitted that corruption and a plentiful fund for election expenses were synonymous terms. There were several politicians of experience present, and being among friends, they felt free to reveal what are usually held as state secrets. Many were the tales of successful electoral corruption, and the verdict unhesitatingly rendered by those who know was, in effect, that fraud in the preparation of the voters' lists, and personation (that is, one man voting on the name of another) were responsible for the election of many, if not all, of those who corruptly administered Montreal's public affairs.\* Among the listeners were a few earnest young men, who determined to test the truth of these statements, and make at least one honest effort to find a remedy. An extended inquiry was made. It was found that frequently  $15\%$  of the vote polled was fraudulent, and that where the majority was narrow, this fraudulent vote always elected the more unworthy candidate. There was law enough, but no one seemed willing to undertake its enforcement. The general belief appeared to be that the only way to elect good men was to fight the devil with his own fire. But it was evident to the would-be-reformers that just so long as corruption was necessary to elect candidates, upright men would

\* There is not in Canada, as in the United States, a system of personal registration, excepting the system only to be applied to two cities this year, recently adopted by the Legislature of Ontario. When the assessors make their rounds, they inscribe upon their blotters the names of the tenants or proprietors of the properties assessed. Such parties as, prior to Dec. 1st, pay their taxes are entitled to be entered in the municipal voters' list for the coming year. This list may be examined as soon as completed, and is subject to change at the hands of the Board of Revisors. This word of explanation is necessary in order that what follows may be intelligible.