

The City Manager in Canada

One of the proposals for a revised city charter that will be referred to the ratepayers of Montreal calls for a city manager with full administrative powers, such as he has in some of the smaller cities in the United States. To bring home to its readers the benefits of the city manager system of government the Montreal Star is publishing daily an interesting series of articles by H. S. Gilbertson on the subject. Mr. Gilbertson is a prominent member of the American National Municipal League and specially qualified to write on the city manager plan, but Mr. Gilbertson in his eagerness to present the best side of his case is inclined to run riot in his interpretation of the workings of the manager system as against any and every other form of municipal government. In his fourth article he cites Dayton (Ohio)—the second municipality and the first city to adopt the system—as a kind of earthly paradise after seven years of administration by a city manager. While not questioning for one moment the excellent government of Dayton, we attribute it more to the fortunate choice by the city commission of a rare genius in H. M. Waite as manager, than to the system itself, which in practice is bureaucratic to the last degree and in consequence is absolutely opposed to the spirit of British democracy—which in principle is continuous personal responsibility on the part of the citizens.

We venture to say that within the British Empire there are many cities of the same size that are as well governed as the American city, and which are administered under the old fashioned system of mayor and aldermen. In Canada we have Toronto, Winnipeg, Hamilton, Vancouver and Ottawa, all cities with equal or larger populations than Dayton—and many lesser communities, including all the capital cities with the exception of St. John N.B.—governing themselves through the mayor and council in a way that is a credit to the citizens. None of these municipalities could be better administered by a manager.

Of course, a number of smaller municipalities in Canada are ably administered by managers, but when it comes to large communities it is questionable if in Canada managerial administration would prove a better system than our present systems. It must be remembered that municipal government in the United States has never been quite the same as in Canada. In the first place, across the line, there has never been the real checks in expenditure such as we have in the different provinces,—the control of the State authorities being but nominal. In spite of the many excellent municipal associations there has never been that civic sense of responsibility in American cities such as we have, with few exceptions, in Canada. Their civic politics have not only been along party lines, but their systems of elections—which in some of the states make every official down to the constable an elected official—are so complicated as to give special opportunities to ward bosses and grafters, as is illustrated in the notorious Tammany Hall of New York, and its imitators in most large American cities. Such societies or gangs would be impossible under our Canadian system of civic government, particularly since municipal departments, and local government boards have come into force.

It was an attempt to change this complicated system with the hope of eliminating the "bosses" and their baneful influence on civic affairs that the commission and the manager form of government were introduced in the United States and in comparing the success of either system it would be well for Canadians to remember that the comparison is between the municipalities that have adopted them and those that are still under the old form of complicated civic government as practiced in the United States—not in Canada.

In other words municipal government had got so bad in the United States that some reform had to be made to save its good name and undoubtedly the manager form, because of its simplicity and directness in the 185 municipalities that have adopted it, has so far proved a successful means of administrations. But in Canada municipal government has always been simple and direct, both in regard to election and administration, and on the whole honest and economical, so that the introduction of the manager form of administration in any of our municipalities is in reality bringing in an American experiment to eliminate evils that were never ours. Municipal government in Canada is not all perfect by any means, but the United States is hardly the place to go to get tips from, rather we would say that our friends to the south have much to learn from our Canadian systems of municipal government.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT.

The announcement of the Governor-General, when replying to an address of welcome from the Winnipeg civic authorities, that he intended re-entering municipal life when he returned to England, was illustrative of the zeal of the best men in the Old Country to serve their fellows, and also illustrates that deep sense of public duty which is only measured by the capacity and opportunity to give that service. To the Duke of Devonshire the only difference between the Governor-Generalship of Canada and the Chairmanship of the Maidstone District Council (Kent) is one of degree only—in either position he gives of his best. How many of our public men, having occupied the highest offices in the gift of their fellows would, assuming they had the opportunity, take up a municipal office. The point we wish to make is that when the Governor-General of this Dominion on retirement does not consider it any lowering to his dignity as a public man to serve in the capacity of a municipal councillor, there is surely great dignity in municipal service, whether it be in the Old Country or Canada.

Ceremony is the invention of wise men to keep fools at a distance.—Steele.