

which demand prompt, united and uncompromising attention. In local administration promptness and efficiency are imperative; and it may be properly urged that, in order to secure these essential qualities, a municipality is justified in weakening its organs of deliberation and in assuming a reasonable amount of risk that concentrated power will be abused.

There are, no doubt, many incidental advantages which cities may reasonably hope to secure from the introduction of the commission system, and to these the experience of Galveston bears abundant testimony. Most of these, however, are relative to the existing conditions in particular cities, and may not, therefore, be dealt with in general terms.

To the casual student the defects of the commission system are, perhaps, not so apparent as the merits. They exist, nevertheless, and are of sufficient importance to demand careful and judicious consideration; for the cause of municipal reform may receive permanent injury through the open advocacy by its friends of any plan of administration which has not been adequately studied in the light of conditions which now exist or are likely to exist in American cities.

The Defects of the Commission System

The most common objection urged in the public press and by the rank and file of municipal politicians is that the plan is un-American and undemocratic; that it involves a radical departure from American traditions of local self-government and proposes a step in the direction of municipal dictatorships. This objection is as easy to raise as it is difficult to support. The present framework of municipal administration, with its division of powers, is not a whit more traditionally "American" than is the New England town system of government by a board of selectmen with no division of powers whatever. That the system of administration by a small body of men tends to remove control "away from the people" is an assertion which the whole history of local government in the United States absolutely refutes. Indeed, it has been proven time and again that a single elective officer may, in his official actions, more faithfully reflect public opinion than a large body of elected

The Commission System Claimed to be un-Ameri- can and un- democratic