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Civic Government Something More Than Mere Business

In this issue we give opinions on Municipal Government from three different sources, which are interesting and instructive as showing how complicated civic government has become on this continent. In the United States the reasons are not far to seek. One reason is expressed in an article taken from the "Public" which begins:—"A slavish desire on the part of the Fathers of the Republic to be consistent led them to embody principles of government in forms poorly calculated to express them; and an inordinate regard for the memory of the founders has led their descendants to cling to those forms long after their uselessness had been demonstrated. The "check and balance" theory, as expressed in the National government, has not worked so well as to necessarily warrant its continuance in the several States, and certainly not in municipal governments." But the second and principal reason is not that given later in the same article, that "the unsatisfactory condition of municipal government in the United States is due to our practice of putting complicated business interests into inexperienced hands; for municipal government in its last analysis is nothing but business," but rather because the prevalent idea in the United States is that civic government, to be successful, must be made a business only (too many men make a good business out of it) with the consequence that the true civic spirit has been largely eliminated, or at least delegated to the few. Whether or no the commission or manager form of government works out

in the long run successfully or not, it is certainly not based on the fundamental principle of American citizenship—democracy or popular government. To reason out the system of commission government logically we are bound to say that it is the consequence of the failure of American democracy. It is true the referendum and recall have been introduced to counteract the evil influences of the system (which again is an admission of the failure of popular government as understood in the United States), and the reports so far have shown success, but largely because of the ability and integrity of the personnel.

From the report of a convention of city managers that was recently held in Springfield, Ohio, the ideals of citizenship were totally lacking in the addresses and papers, one of the speakers maintaining that any man with executive ability could manage a city. No wonder Bryce in his American Commonwealth, said that municipal government in the United States was a complete failure, when the public spirit was so wanting that municipalities had to come down to purely business methods to make any success at all. We venture to say that the municipal life of Canada is on a decidedly higher plane. Her civic government, in spite of many drawbacks, and possibly one or two exceptions, is run honestly and intelligently. Her citizens take a keener interest to-day in the doings of the local councils than ever they did, and if the public interest can be still further inspired there is not much danger of the civic government of this country getting down to the dead level of the business world.