

AN OBJECT-LESSON IN MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT.

SHOWING HOW PUBLIC AFFAIRS ARE CONDUCTED IN THE CITY OF BIRMINGHAM.

WITH PICTURES BY LOUIS LOEB.



IT would be interesting, even to American readers, to develop with some fullness the personal side of a story so interesting as the redemption of a great community from the hands of incompetent men; but space will not permit more than the attempt to develop results, leaving out these most interesting details.

Joseph Chamberlain became mayor of Birmingham, England, November 10, 1873. On January 13, 1874, he proposed that the manufacture, supply, and sale, of gas should be taken under the control of the corporation.

GAS- AND WATER-WORKS.

A bill authorizing the purchase and amalgamation of the gas-works was submitted to the ratepayers, carried through Parliament, and the city obtained possession of the property September 1, 1875, the entire cost amounting to £2,000,931. A Gas Committee was appointed, efficient men were employed as managers, and the manufacture of gas began. Almost the first thing the committee did was to reduce the price 3*d.* per thousand, making the new charge ranging from 2*s.* 9*d.* to 3*s.* 3*d.*

The conditions make the district of supply very large. For lighting purposes, districts more than ten miles from the town hall are dependent upon the corporation, and for many miles beyond the corporate limits the streets of the smallest villages and the main country roads are lighted. The price of gas varies according to quantity consumed, the highest charge being 2*s.* 10*d.* per thousand, and the lowest 2*s.* 6*d.* for consumers of more than 50,000 feet per quarter, the average price being just under 2*s.* 7*d.* Bills are subject to a discount of five per cent. if settled within thirty days. The price charged to the city—the gas committee merely supplying the gas to the Public Works Committee, which erects its own street-lamps, which it lights, extinguishes, and repairs—is slightly less than 1*s.* 3*d.* per thousand. Outlying towns or local authorities have the advantage of

the reduction, while private consumers pay at the same rate, whether in or out of the city.

In order to facilitate lighting in courts, the corporation undertakes to treat such lamps as public, on the principle that a light is almost as valuable as a policeman. In 1880 the number of court-lamps was 4, consuming 60,000 cubic feet of gas, at an annual cost of £10; in 1894 the number of lamps had increased to 1784, burning more than 25,000,000 cubic feet, and the cost to £1,866 per annum. Of the 160,000 houses in the district of supply, only 60,000 have meters, and of these not more than three fourths are dwelling-houses. In England gas-fixtures are individual property, furnished by the tenant, and removable when he goes into another house, the landlord supplying only the connection with the street mains. The department now encourages landlords to connect their houses, to supply tenants with fixtures, and to put in prepayment, or penny-in-the-slot, meters, like those in the artisans' houses belonging to the corporation, all to be covered by the gross cost of the gas furnished at a rate of 3*s.* 4*d.* per thousand.

The success of the consolidated gas scheme has been much greater than was predicted. The total profits appropriated to public purposes during the twenty years ending in 1894 have been £532,298; the reserve fund for maintenance and extension of plant amounts to £100,000; and the sinking fund for the redemption of debt to £415,606; while the large expenditure for betterment does not appear in the capital account, but is found in annual expenditure.

One of the most difficult problems Birmingham had to solve was its water-supply. It occupies the unique position of a great city far from any considerable body of water, salt or fresh. Owing to its situation, there is no river of respectable volume within many miles; lying so near the source of streams, they have no opportunity to acquire volume or force. When the town had grown to such size as to render necessary a public water-supply, it was drawn from the river Tame.

When it was necessary, an enlarged supply was drawn from some small streams, and from a series of deep wells, the water from both being pumped to the heights necessary to secure distribution by gravitation. Even so late as 1872, two fifths of the people were dependent upon shallow wells, which had become so foul as greatly to increase the death-rate.

Attempts to obtain authority to buy the undertaking were futile, but public sentiment was irresponsive until, in December, 1874, Mr. Chamberlain moved a resolution for the purchase of the water company's property and rights. This was carried without opposition, as it was also at the resulting town-hall meeting of the ratepayers. Mr. Chamberlain, while the bill authorizing the purchase was passing through Parliament, laid down the proposition, since accepted as a principle by most of the municipalities of England, that "all regulated monopolies sustained by the state, in the interest of the inhabitants generally, should be controlled by the representatives of the people, and not left in the hands of private speculators." Progress was rapid, and the bill received the royal assent within eight months after its introduction, and January 1, 1876, the city had possession of the water-supply.

The health authorities then began the wholesome policy, since followed, of condemning the wells which had done so much to increase the death-rate from its then normal 22 in the thousand to 28 or 29. So effective has this been that the rents, the supply, and the number of consumers, have all nearly doubled since 1876, while the price has been three times reduced and only once increased. The works have been extended, and the old plant has been replaced by new, so that the property would bring in the market far more than its original cost, about £1,350,000, since swelled to £2,443,903 by extensions and by the new water scheme. The use of private baths and water-closets is slight compared with cities in the United States.

In spite of the increased demand and constant efforts to meet it, the water committee reached the conclusion some years ago that it was dangerous to trust existing resources. As early as 1871 it was proposed that the supply should be drawn from the valleys of the Elan and the Claerwen, in mid-Wales, eighty miles due west. The elevation of the lowest proposed reservoir is about 800 feet above the sea, some 200 feet greater than the highest point in Birmingham, so that

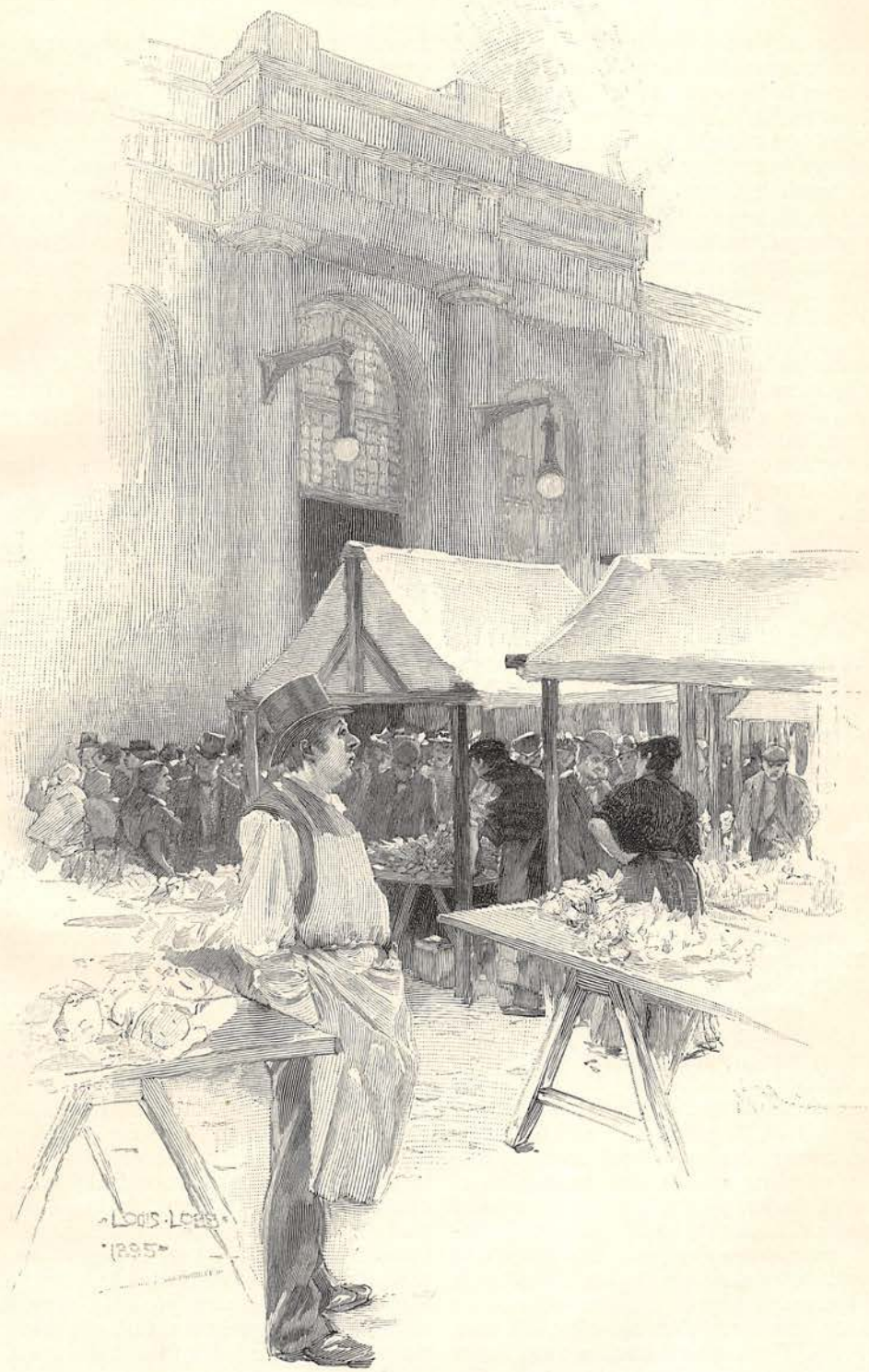
water may be brought by gravitation over mountains and hills, under or over rivers, and deposited in reservoirs without pumping—now one of the most expensive processes. The corporation now distributes water to an area of 83,192 acres, and for its future supply has already acquired in the Welsh mountains areas amounting to over 45,000 acres.

The cost of the first section, to be in operation in 1902, will be about £4,000,000, and it is estimated that this will meet all demands for twenty-five years, after which, when needed, pipes will be added, the whole sum authorized to be expended by the act of Parliament being £6,600,000. The water is said to be the best in the kingdom, pure and soft, a curious incidental feature being the claim that the substitution of soft water for the hard now in use will result in a saving of from £35,000 to £60,000 a year in the cost of soap.

No opportunity is afforded for jobbery or corruption, because the work is done under the immediate personal supervision of the Water Committee, composed of eight of the best business men in the Council, serving without a penny of remuneration. During the last four years the chairman of the committee, Alderman Lawley Parker, has devoted an average of three days a week to the work in hand, and during the next six years will give nearly the whole of his time to its completion. It is not surprising that few mistakes are made, or that no intimation of jobbery or waste is heard.

DWELLING-HOUSES AND HEALTH SCHEMES.

ONE of the first things the reform element did, when it obtained control, was to get accurate knowledge of the districts containing slums or insanitary areas. Immediately after his first election as mayor, Mr. Chamberlain suggested a special inspection of every part of the town. In order to do this, each member of the Health Committee—busy men engaged in their own affairs—undertook the work in two wards. During the following two years each member gave such time as he could to this work, going into every part of the district assigned him, including dark, noisome courts and narrow passages, and among a population to which he was unaccustomed. The slums were found to be almost as bad as could be, considering the conditions. It was an overcrowded population in small houses, not in tenements. Houses were then built in courts, many of them back to back. In the most congested



LOUIS LOEB
1895

DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

ENGRAVED BY M. HAIDER.

THE OLD MARKET.

districts they were very small. The English workingman wants to have his home as nearly next door to his work as possible, one of the difficult problems being to get this class distributed into suburbs; so workshops had held their own in the heart of the town, and the work-people had remained with them. The worst district was within a stone's throw of the principal business street, its center no more than 300 yards from the town hall, and almost midway between the two great railway stations.

In 1875, during the second year of Mr. Chamberlain's mayoralty, Parliament passed the Artisans' Dwellings Act, providing that in any town of more than 25,000 population the medical officer of health, either on his own motion or upon complaint, should make an official representation that an unhealthy area existed. It also provided that the local authorities should remedy the condition of the area thus reported; that the local government board, after inquiry, could approve the scheme devised, and make a provisional order embodying it; and when confirmed by Parliament, the condemned property might be purchased by agreement or arbitration, without paying an extra price for compulsory sale. After making the necessary improvements, the surplus land might be sold, but the city could not, without special authority from the local government board, enter upon the building of houses.

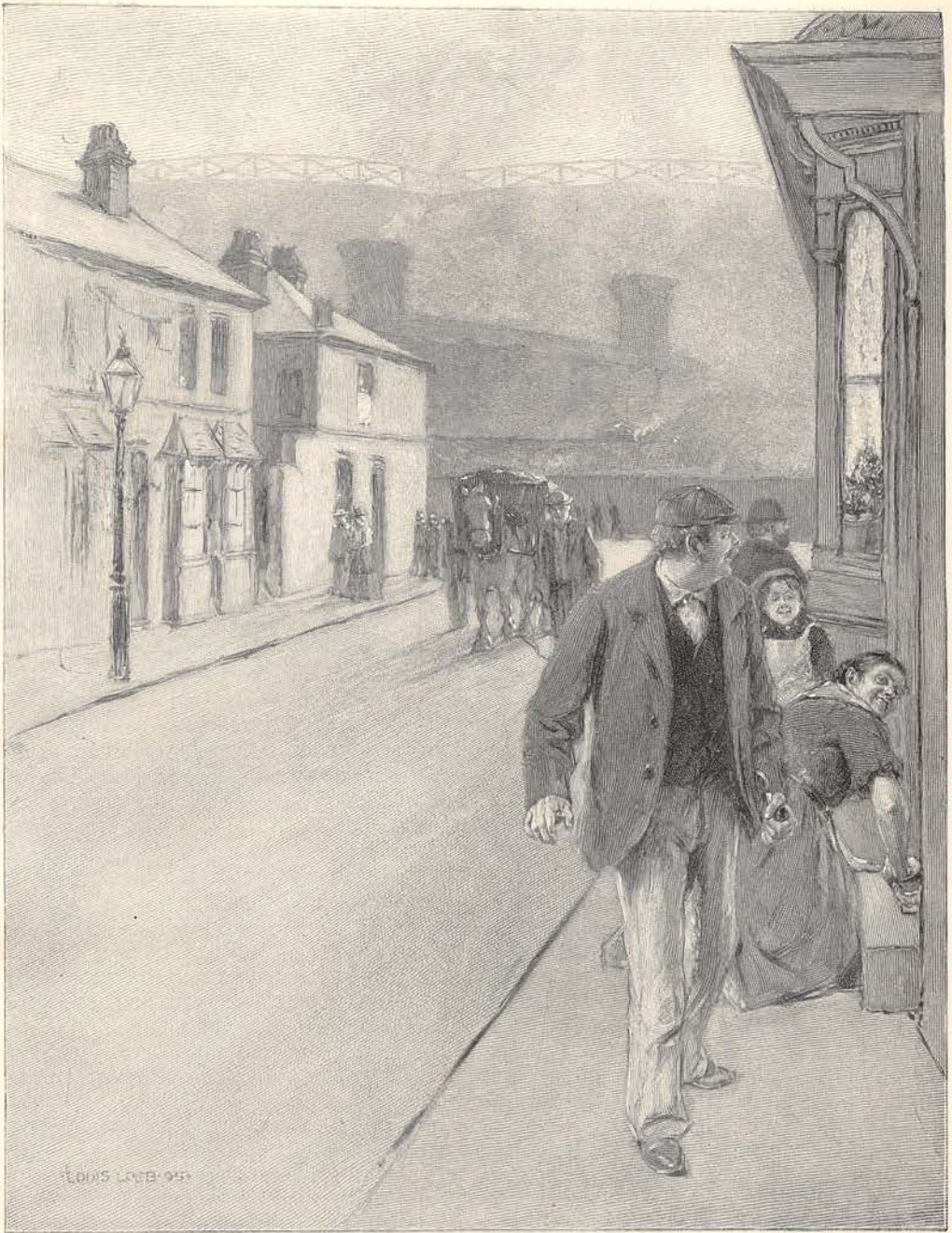
Birmingham was the first corporation to take advantage of this act. The medical officer of health, in accordance with law, made a report declaring the crowded central district insanitary. The new committee presented a scheme condemning over 90 acres of land, covered with 3744 houses, with a total population of 16,596. Of these, 3054 were artisans' houses, in which the number of inhabitants was 13,538. The key to the proposed improvement was the making of a new street, 22 yards wide and 851 yards long, through the condemned area, the widening of other streets, the destruction of many of the houses, the building of artisans' houses cutting a very small figure in the original estimates and plans. The gross cost was estimated at £1,308,221, and the net cost, deducting the value of the land not used for making new streets or widening old ones, £461,958. Work upon this scheme was begun in 1876, and continued until about 1882. The character of the central part of the city was entirely changed; but the example, united with the vigilant action of the Health Committee in enforcing the law, brought about

an amelioration of conditions in every crowded quarter of the city.

For some years the corporation made no effort to build or to procure the building of artisans' houses on the surplus land. Sixty-two houses and twenty shops were built on one part by private capital; but the high price of land, and the stringent rules as to the kind of houses, made it difficult to get builders to take it up. The corporation had altered and repaired the existing houses where this was possible. It took down some of them, put in windows, enlarged and paved the courts, perfected the sanitary arrangements, and they have since been rented with success. In 1889 application was made for leave, under the act, to erect a block of artisans' dwellings, and during the next year twenty-two cottages were completed, at a cost of £4000, or an average of £181 each. These were at once let, care being taken that they should be occupied by the artisan classes, for whom they were intended, at inclusive rents—that is, all rates paid—of from 5s. to 7s. 6d. per week. In 1891 eighty-one additional dwellings were erected from different and perfected designs, at a cost of £14,000—an average of nearly £173 each. In general, these houses consist of a front living-room, 13 feet by 12 feet 6 inches, and a kitchen, 12 feet by 9 feet 6 inches, on the first floor, with bedrooms of the same size on the second floor, and an attic room 13 feet square—five in all. Each is furnished with ranges in the ground-floor rooms, and grates in the bedrooms, and has a separate water-closet and coal-bin, but no cellar. They are furnished with penny-in-the-slot machines supplying 25 cubic feet of gas, enough to keep one burner going four hours.

In carrying out the improvement scheme, there has been expended as capital £1,676,465, and for maintenance £354,607, a total of £2,031,072. For this the city has 45 acres of land, mostly let on leases for seventy-five years, many of them having only sixty years to run. The land, being centrally located, commands the highest rentals, and is occupied with the best business buildings of the town. These must be kept in perfect repair until the expiration of the leases, when they will become corporation property. The best estimates of the present actual sale value of the property included in the scheme are £2,250,000.

The effect upon the health-rate in the area covered by the scheme was immediate. For the three years, 1873-75, the average annual death-rate in nine of the worst streets in



LOUIS LOEB-95

DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

WORKINGMEN'S COTTAGES NEAR THE GAS-WORKS.

cluded in it was 53.2 per thousand of population. For the three years, 1879-81, the average death-rate in the same streets was only 21.3 per thousand.

When the work of regeneration was taken up, one of the pressing problems was the general sanitary condition. Fortunately, in

1872 Parliament passed a general act consolidating sanitary authorities, and greatly increasing their powers. Immediate advantage was taken of its provisions, and Dr. Alfred Hill, who had been borough analyst since 1859, was appointed medical officer of health, which place he still holds. In 1875

the report, based upon personal inspection by the members of the Sanitary Committee, was made to the Council. The conditions disclosed as existing in crowded districts were about as bad as could be. More than half of the buildings inspected had no back door, being built back to back, and the inhabitants of two fifths of them were dependent for their scanty supply of water upon wells liable to corruption from surface sources. The number of inspectors was found to be utterly inadequate. The report emphasized the fact that the public health had been declining for several years, and that sewerage and drainage, the paving of streets and foot-paths, and a thorough system of scavenging, were absolutely necessary. The work of doing all these was undertaken and carried out with such success that the death-rate of 26.8 in the thousand in 1874, and 26.3 in 1875, declined to 22.4 in 1876. This continued, with slight variations owing to local or temporary conditions, until, in 1888, the average had fallen to 18.2, since which time it has slightly increased, owing mainly to epidemics of influenza (the grippe), smallpox, and, during the last few years, of diarrheal affections among children. An average reduction of about 4 per thousand, or nearly 2000 per year, in the death-rate tells the story of hard and intelligent work.

One of the worst features under the old management was the disposal of the sewage. By way of remedy two systems have found adoption. Under one the Health Committee collects the offal of houses, and either destroys it or turns it into fertilizers. This is more offensive and less successful than it might be made, but is apparently a necessity until the pan system has been abandoned. A sewage-farm of nearly 1300 acres has been developed several miles from the city, some 400 feet lower in elevation. The sewage, first mixed with lime to prevent too rapid decomposition and to assist in the precipitation of the solid matter, is passed through a series of depositing tanks, during which process the mud is removed. The remainder is dug into the land, one third of which is dealt with each year, the effluent being discharged in a harmless state into the river Tame. Upon the other two thirds are grown early vegetables, and grain and hay for cows kept for milk and market. The net annual cost to the city is about £24,000.

STREETS, PARKS, AND TRAMWAYS.

BIRMINGHAM has emphasized its ownership of the streets. Early in the present régime

the policy was adopted of requiring new streets to be put into permanent condition, graded and macadamized, before acceptance. Most of the 257 miles of streets are paved with macadam varying from 6 to 18 inches in depth. It is well adapted for the less crowded residence districts, although somewhat costly to maintain. In the business quarter stone blocks are used, their average life being twenty-five years. This is done by the Public Works Committee, with laborers working by the day or week. Other streets in the same quarter are paved with wood blocks, insuring greater freedom from noise and more cleanliness. This is laid by contract, and is supposed to have an average life of fourteen years. Whatever material is used, the streets are kept in the best repair. Street-cleaning gangs meet in the business quarter at five o'clock each morning, sweep up and cart away the accumulated dirt, and water the streets before and after the operation, until those laid with wood look as if they had been carefully scrubbed. They are also kept clear of litter during the day. In residence districts they are swept once, twice, or three times a week, as required. As a result, they are everywhere kept so clean as to cause surprise. It cannot, however, be said that the foot-paths are so well kept, the practice of every man sweeping before his own door not being common, except for the removal of snow.

More to assert and maintain its control of the streets than for profit, the Council in 1871 assumed the building of tramway lines. These are constructed by the Public Works Committee, and let on leases to run twenty-one years, the lessee maintaining the pavement. Thus far they are a burden rather than a profit. When the property, including rolling-stock, engine-houses, storage-battery motors, and all fixtures, falls in, it is thought it will pay expenses. As the use of trams increases, — which it does slowly, and not by leaps and bounds as in American cities, — the property will doubtless become remunerative.

In 1871, though there were nominally three parks, containing a total area of 90 acres, there was really but one, — Aston Park, with its 49 acres, and Aston Hall (one of the best remaining examples of a Jacobean mansion, and to which Washington Irving has given a new lease of immortality by making it the model for those delightful studies of old-time life which radiate from « Bracebridge Hall »), — the others being little more than bare pieces of land, with no attractiveness, natural or artificial.



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

ASTON HALL PLAYGROUND.

In the face of many difficulties, something has been done to supply the lack of open spaces. Now there are seven parks, five recreation-grounds, and two gardens, fourteen in all, well distributed in the town and suburbs, with a total area of 350 acres. Two

One feature rather surprising to an American is that every park is made for use. There is no fear lest the grass may be injured, but in every ground adapted for them are cricket-and football-fields, picnic-grounds, croquet-lawns, tennis-courts, bowling-greens,



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

THE LIBRARY—NEWSPAPERS.

ENGRAVED BY H. DAVIDSON.

of these were the gift of a public-spirited woman, the late Miss Ryland, who refused even so much as to permit either of them to bear her name. These are highly creditable, containing pools, out-door swimming-baths, flower-beds, and the accessories of modern parks. Most of the others are play and recreation-grounds, well adapted for their purposes, and useful to the crowded population about them.

the use of which is permitted for a merely nominal payment.¹ Every park, large or small, has one or more concerts each week during the summer, paid for by a neighborhood subscription. Less need exists for large parks than in American cities of the same size, because the better class of houses all have ample gardens.

¹ It is easier to keep grass in good condition in the moist atmosphere of England.—EDITOR.

FREE LIBRARIES, ART GALLERY AND SCHOOL,
AND TECHNICAL SCHOOL.

LIBRARIES, free and subscription, have long had a place in Birmingham, and an attempt was made to take prompt advantage of the act permitting corporations to support free libraries. But public sentiment was lax in 1853, when, economy ruling the day, the proposition was defeated by failure to command the support of the requisite two thirds. This decision was not reversed until 1860, when the experiment was entered upon with success, with the result that a slow and steady growth followed until about 1872, when the forward sweep of public sentiment gave it a decided impetus. From the beginning the Council admitted outsiders into a share of its work, on the ground that it was technical, and to insure success needed men instructed in its mysteries. Samuel Timmins and J. Thackray Bunce have been on the committee from the beginning, though never members of the Council, and their services to the free libraries, covering more than thirty-four years of hard work, cannot be measured or exaggerated. With the librarian, Mr. J. D. Mullins, they have bought the books, organized and maintained the staff, enlarged the scheme as it became necessary, created the public sentiment which made expansion possible, and given ungrudging, unpaid attention to the task. The Central Lending Library was first developed, and the policy of starting branches, of which there are now seven, was entered upon. A reference library, opened in 1866 in a modest way, has grown until it is one of the best in the Old World, special attention being paid to the technical books relating to the trades of the district. As in providing for mental as well as for physical wants, the interests of the working-people have always been in mind, and, in return, this element has been the main reliance for support. In 1879, when the Central libraries were burned, the town arose as a man, and assisted in the raising of money to rebuild and to buy books, the working-people making collections in their shops. These subscriptions were so liberal that their success was greater than ever before. The growth from 1871 to 1894 has more than kept pace with the progress of the town. The number of volumes has risen from 57,857 to 187,443, and the annual issues from 436,445 to 1,126,830, the greater ratio of increase being shown in the reference library. Nowhere in the kingdom is there a more complete Shaksperian collection, and it attracts special students from far

and wide. There are also special collections devoted to Byron, Cervantes, and Milton,—proof that bibliographical interest may be maintained even in an institution dependent on popular favor.

A school of art, with reference to the industries of the district, has been in existence since 1821. It was supported by private subscriptions until, by the liberality of three donors, steps were taken in 1881 which led to its transfer to the corporation, which assumed responsibility for its maintenance. It is housed in a building designed for the purpose,—the last work of John Henry Chamberlain,—and is fully equipped with a corps of well-qualified teachers. Since its transfer to the corporation it has been managed with conspicuous success. In addition to the central school, fourteen branches have been opened in School Board buildings, close relations having been established and maintained between the art schools and the elementary schools. The number of students during 1894 was 3536, and the training is based on industrial and decorative uses, upon the principle that if art can be applied to the ordinary affairs of life, it will naturally lead to development on higher and broader lines. Of the entire cost of £56,000, nearly three fifths have come by gifts from liberal citizens.

Closely related to the art school is the museum and art gallery, toward which a beginning was made as early as 1867, with about a dozen pictures, which had been presented from time to time. With these as a nucleus, the work was earnestly taken up when the forward movement began, but it was not until 1880 that substantial progress was made. In that year Mr. Richard (now Sir Richard) Tangye, one of the men whose benefactions to the libraries, art school, and art gallery are among the glories of the town, on behalf of himself and his brother, tendered £10,000 for the purchase of pictures and art objects. This was supplemented by other donors, until, when a fund of £17,000 had become available, it was intrusted to an Art Gallery Purchase Committee, composed of members of the Council, and eight representatives of donors and art organizations. The money thus raised has now been spent, and collections of pictures and objects of art, to the value of about £50,000, have been presented to the gallery and museum. Many of the great English artists of this century are represented by excellent examples; but more attention has been paid to the museum, wherein is gathered a notable collection of things for use, interest, and instruction. These are



DRAWN BY C. A. VANDERHOOF.

BIRMINGHAM MUNICIPAL TECHNICAL SCHOOL—SUFFOLK STREET ELEVATION.
ESSEX, NICOL & GOODMAN, ARCHITECTS.

housed in appropriate galleries built over the offices of the Gas Department, and out of the profits of that investment. All collections are open two hours for visitors on Sunday, and the average number for that day is about 2000. Admission is free at all times. The attendance, which rose to nearly 1,200,000 in 1886, declined to an average of about 900,000 during the last four years. Successful attention has been paid to cataloguing, so that the issues, at the price of a penny, are a wonder to the managers of other galleries. No attempt has been made to acquire the last picture by the artist who has just become the rage, the policy of making a representative collection having been followed. A collection has thus been made which gives a better idea of industrial and decorative art, and has more representative pictures than any other in England, outside of London.

Technical education was an important element in a district which was one of the busi-

est workshops in the world, and this was supplied for many years by the Midland Institute. But in 1890 Parliament passed a law making contributions, from local taxes collected by the imperial government, for the promotion of trade education. The Council, taking immediate advantage of the act, took over the Technical School, placing the management in the hands of a new committee. There was at once a marked increase in the number of students, and 80 classes were organized. In order not to exclude even the humblest, the fees were reduced to ten shillings, free scholarships were offered in connection with the board schools, and the facilities for study and experiment were improved. The courses were made progressive, so that the student might go from one branch to another. Prizes in the various branches taught were offered by employers, and close relations were established, and have been maintained, with the labor organizations.

The number of classes has increased in three years from 80 to 119, and the individual students from 794 to 1528, representing 120 occupations. This rapid growth has made necessary a new building, at a cost of about £80,000 for building and grounds. The fees have been so reduced that, while only £457 were collected from this source, £1094 were paid for chemicals, apparatus, and diagrams for the use of students. Thus another institution has been added to the educational facilities of the town, in which young mechanics may learn at night everything about the trades they pursue during the day. The Technical School Committee admits outside persons as members, an experiment which has already been tried successfully with the committees on free libraries and museum and art gallery, and also artisans, or their representatives.

THE FINANCES.

PERHAPS the most difficult part of the work has been the management of the finances. Such vast sums have been necessary that many men have been forced to study ways and means. The resources at the beginning were small, the expenditure meager, and the debt insignificant, so that even the boldest might have been appalled at the prospect. The indebtedness in 1871, less sinking-fund and cash on hand, was only £546,393, and the average rate of interest something over four and a quarter per cent. The three great schemes entered upon in 1874 and 1875 alone increased this tenfold, while expenditure has gone forward steadily until the debt, aside from sinking-funds and money on hand, is £7,861,615, nearly fifteen times the amount due twenty-three years before, and the average rate of interest—unnaturally high because of the issue of perpetual irredeemable four-per-cent. annuities in payment for the gas and water schemes—is now about three and a half per cent. For capital expenditure, corporation stock to run sixty years is issued; that at three and a half per cent. is now worth 116, while the current issue at three per cent. is quoted at 105. A sinking-fund is provided for each item of indebtedness, arranged to pay both interest and principal in from ten years to a hundred.

The present capital account is represented by the net debt, and £1,825,726, the amount of sinking-funds provided from income, for debt redemption.

No rigid limit of indebtedness is fixed by law, but when it is desired to make a new loan, application is made to the local govern-

ment board in London, which sends an inspector to report upon the necessity for the proposed improvement. If this is favorable, the borrowing powers are granted. If the city asks Parliament for a bill giving special authority to do anything, the mayor submits the matter to a meeting of ratepayers in the town hall, at which a poll may be demanded; *i.e.*, a vote «yes» or «no» by ballot. Each ratepayer under £50 annual value has then one vote, and an additional vote for each £50 up to £250, six in all. If he is owner as well as occupier, his votes are doubled for each qualification, until he may have twelve in all. This modified referendum has been resorted to five or six times since 1871, and in no case has a proposal to increase indebtedness failed to carry.

Money is raised by a borough rate and an improvement rate, both collected under arrangement by the poor-law overseers, and paid into the city treasury. The imperial authorities collect licenses from publicans, game-, tobacco-, and plate-dealers, appraisers, auctioneers, house-agents, pawnbrokers, and for armorial bearings, dogs, male servants, and for leave to kill game or carry guns, a proportion of the proceeds being returned to local authorities under the name of «exchequer contributions,» from which certain specified charges must be paid, the balance being turned into the city treasury. For 1893 the amount allotted to Birmingham was £91,569, the net amount carried to the relief of rates being £29,713. The receipts from the Gas Department were £595,709, from the Waterworks, £178,621, the income of the other committees, £234,812, leaving £460,920 for collection under the borough and improvement rates.

All accounts are examined by independent auditors, chartered accountants appointed by the Council or its committees, who must examine and certify to their correctness.

The average rates of all kinds, which were 14s. per head of population in 1871, have risen to 23s. 6d. in 1894, the profits from the gas and water schemes doing their full part in carrying on great improvements.

As work and responsibility have increased, the salaries of the principal officials have also grown. They are now: Town Clerk, £2200; City Surveyor, £1400; secretary of the Gas Department, £1250; chief engineer of the Water Department, £1200; City Treasurer, £1050; one engineer of the Gas Department, £1200; and the second, £1050; Medical Officer of Health, £1000; Chief of Police, £920; and the secretary of the Water Department, £600.



• LOUIS LOEB • 1855 •

DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

LOOKING UP NEW STREET.

THE CITY COUNCIL.

THE governing body, executive as well as legislative, is the City Council. The eighteen wards are each represented by four members, one having the title of alderman, and three that of councilor, all meeting in a single body. One is elected annually for each ward, so that two thirds of the councilors, and all the aldermen, have had experience. They are chosen by burgesses, who are male or female occupiers of any dwelling-house, shop, or manufactory, or of any land or tenement of the annual value of £10. The difference between burgesses and parliamentary electors is that women are admitted to the former. The parliamentary electors number 81,097, and burgesses and School Board electors 92,709, the difference representing with fair accuracy women voters. Members of Parliament are elected by districts, councilors from wards, and the School Board on a general ticket. No two classes are voted for at the same election, though practically the same machinery is employed. The expenditure permitted to municipal candidates is about £60 each. Vacancies in the Council are filled by special election. One alderman from each ward is elected by the Council for six years, half the terms ending every three years. As a rule they are reelected indefinitely, party or factional considerations having little influence.

The Council is reorganized on the 9th of November of each year, when the General Purposes Committee, comprised of the mayor as chairman, and the chairman of each of the working committees,¹ nominates the committees for the ensuing year. Outside persons are appointed as additional members of the Museum and School of Art, Free Libraries, and Technical Schools Committees, who in practice control the technical work, the Council members retaining financial management.

Each member of a committee proposed is voted for separately. The wishes of individuals are rarely consulted until their names are presented, when they may decline and be excused. None may serve on more than two committees, nor be chairman of more than one. Every effort is made to secure the very best results. No precedents require the ap-

¹ The committees are as follows: Baths and Parks, Estates (custody of city property), Finance, General Purposes, Markets and Fairs, Health, Public Works, Watch (police and fire), Lunatic Asylums, Industrial School (reform school), Gas, Water, Improvement, Free Libraries, Museum and School of Art, Art Gallery Purchase, and Technical School.

pointment of old members even to important committees, and a new member known to be capable and interested in some special work has no difficulty in obtaining an assignment that may enable him to do his best. But in practice the experienced men are reappointed without question. Each committee selects its own chairman.

The Council is a thoroughly representative body. Of the seventy-two members of the present Council, twenty-three are manufacturers, six are classified as gentlemen (men retired from business), six are provision merchants, five are brass and iron founders, solicitors, jewelers, and medical men respectively, three are merchants, there are two each of auctioneers, chemists, and drapers, while printers, teachers, butchers, bakers, glass-workers, tin-plate-workers, and newspaper managers each have one. So far as I can find out, but one publican has ever been in the Council, although this class had much influence prior to 1871.

No member has any privileges on a railway or public conveyance of any sort, even on the tramways belonging to the city, or admission to a theater or entertainment, and none is permitted to vote on a question when he has a personal interest. He is subject to a fine of £50, with loss of office, if he enters into any contract with the city, or sells an article of even the smallest value to the Council, or to any of its subsidiary or associated committees or departments. So strictly is this observed that a member of a committee, suspected of a desire to sell eligible property to the city, was forced to retire from public life.

When the work of a committee is to be discussed, it presents a report of all it has done since its affairs were last before the Council, setting out what it proposes. This report or agenda must be printed and sent to each councilor three full days before the meeting. In some cases, especially when a new scheme is proposed, each member is requested to make a personal investigation of the conditions with which it is proposed to deal.

Of the members of the Council in 1894, twenty-two had served for eleven years and more. One entered in 1852; another in 1855; one each in 1866 and 1867 respectively; two in 1870; one each in 1871, 1872, and 1873; two in 1874; one each in 1876, 1877, 1878, 1879, and 1880; and two each in 1881, 1882, and 1883. Of the prominent members who have either retired or died during the last twenty years, one, the late Thomas Avery, served continuously from 1862 to 1892; the late Sir

Thomas Martineau from 1876 until his death in 1893; J. Powell Williams from 1877 to 1890; Joseph Chamberlain from 1869 to 1880; Jesse Collings from 1868 to 1886; and Richard Chamberlain, formerly M. P., from 1874 to 1886.

The time required of the principal members, chairmen of the leading committees, is from two to four business days per week, and of ordinary members from one to two days. A return sent me by the town clerk, showing the terms of service as chairman on some of the principal committees, is interesting. Alderman J. Powell Williams gave five and a half years to the chairmanship of the Finance Committee, and Alderman Clayton has devoted seven years to the same work. Alderman Cook has been chairman of the Health Committee, devoting himself unflinchingly and unflinchingly to a most important and disagreeable work, for twenty years. Alderman Lawley Parker was nine years chairman of the Public Works Committee, and two years chairman of the Water Committee. Alderman Pollock has been chairman of the Gas Committee thirteen years, and the late Alderman Avery saw the same period of service as chairman of the Water Committee. Alderman Richard Chamberlain was five years chairman of the Improvement Committee, and Alderman George Baker has served eight years.

THE MAYOR.

At the annual meeting on the 9th of November, the first business is the election of a mayor for the next year. He may be chosen from the body of citizens, but this has been done only once. As municipal work becomes intricate, it is more and more difficult for any man to be mayor without a Council training. In most cases, though not in all, the mayor has reached the title of alderman. If only a councilor, courtesy demands that he shall be elected to fill the first aldermanic vacancy. This may not occur during his mayoralty, but come when it may, he has a right to expect that he will be chosen. The choice of a mayor is made about the middle of July before his service is to begin. This is not done in public, but by a private meeting of all the members. The man himself is generally consulted, and given an opportunity to accept or decline, but a known seeker for the place is seldom selected. Just before the annual meeting, a requisition signed by a majority—and in some cases by all—is presented to the candidate, so that there has only once

Immediately after his formal election, the

mayor takes his place as president of the Council, and the appointment of the committees is proceeded with. A man may reach the mayoralty in from four to ten years, Joseph Chamberlain's case being an illustration of the shorter period. As a rule he is not thought of for mayor until his fitness for the place has been proved. Without exception, during the recent years the mayors have been men of good standing in business, none of large wealth, and none really poor.

There is no prescribed scale of expenditure for a mayor. He fixes his own standard of entertainment. He need invite nobody to his house, nor hold even an annual reception; but every mayor gives an annual entertainment or reception in the Council House, attended by from three to five thousand people. The cost of a year's service as mayor, under accepted conditions, is not less than £1000, nor more than £2000. The latter expenditure will be necessary only when a number of important official functions are held.

He has no staff except a private secretary, who is a permanent official, and has been in office many years. He cannot appoint or remove an official, however humble. His only new power is as president of the Council and in his membership of every committee. During his term he can give little attention to business or profession, his whole time being required for official work. As showing the work expected of the mayor, and actually done, the following return for the last four years may interest American readers. During the year 1890 the mayor was summoned to 416 meetings, either of the City Council or its committees, and attended 358; in 1891 he was summoned to 450, and attended 338; in 1892 he was summoned to 375, and attended 322; and in 1893 he was summoned to 387, and attended 342. The total number of meetings of the Council committees, sub-committees, and of public bodies in which the Council is represented, was from 1155 to 1201 during different years of this period.

At the end of his term the mayor returns by courtesy to the chairmanship of a committee. Of the twelve mayors of Birmingham now living, nine are still engaged in Council work. The fact that a member of the Council has been mayor makes him alderman in due time, allows him to choose his committee, and confers a sort of undefined dignity. Upon the expiration of his term he becomes deputy-mayor, on the principle that his recent experience fits him better than any other man for presiding over the Council, or as a substitute in ceremonial matters.



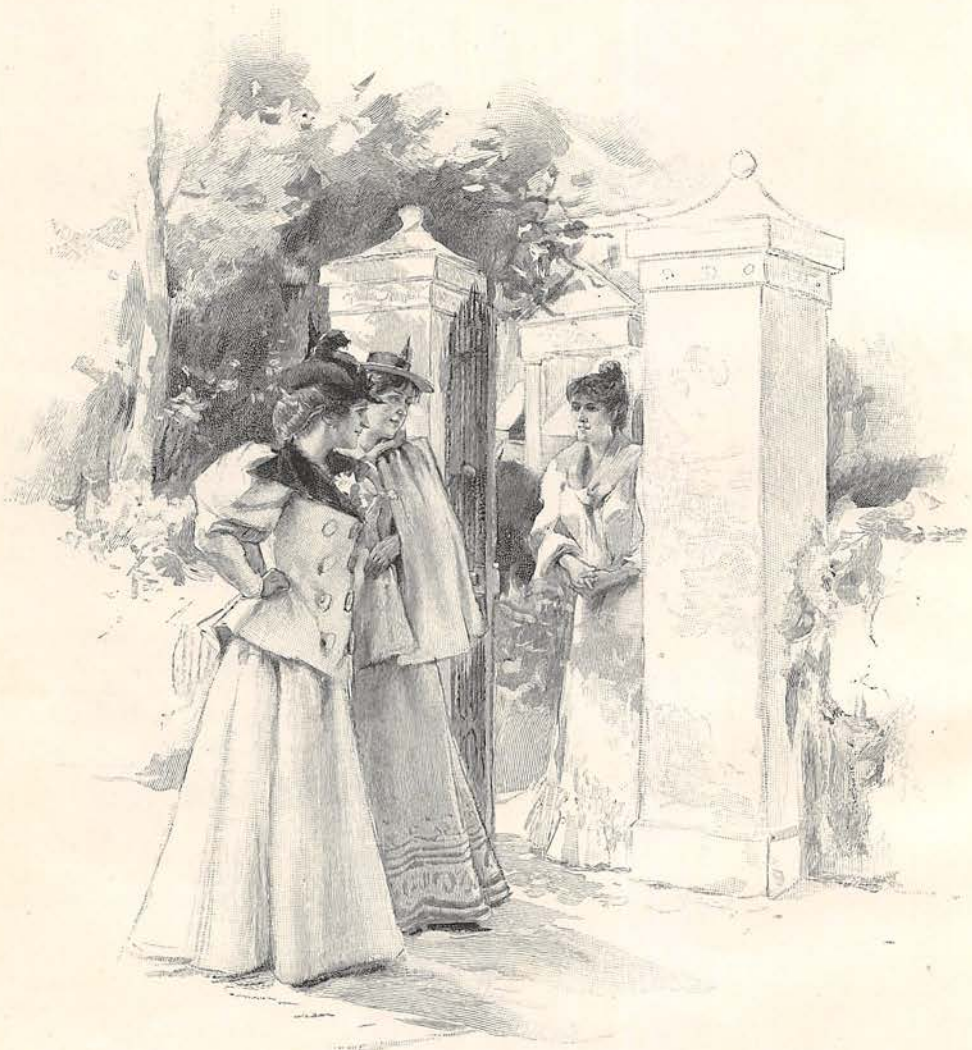
DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

TOWN HALL—MASON COLLEGE—CHAMBERLAIN MEMORIAL—LIBERAL CLUB—COUNCIL HOUSE.

TOWN CLERK AND PERMANENT OFFICIALS.

THE oldest office in connection with local government is the town clerk. Originally he was the learned man—perhaps the only one among gilds and local magnates who could

sits with that body. He gives his opinion when asked, and in many cases is able thereby to shape its action. He assists the mayor at such public functions as the opening of the assizes, or the visit of a royal person. He directs the election machinery, and



•LOUIS LOEB • 1895 •

DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

IN EDGBASTON (BIRMINGHAM).

ENGRAVED BY H. DAVIDSON.

read and write. The town clerk has now become legal adviser of the mayor and Council and all committees. It is his duty to investigate carefully the law of every new scheme proposed; to conduct the litigation of the city, or to secure the public rights without it; to draft measures for submission to Parliament, and to prepare cases for submission. In addition he is the clerk to the Council, and

the clerks to the committees are part of his office.

The city has been fortunate in its officials, nearly all having been long in its service. They are not only efficient in the public duties assigned them, but take their part in the incidental work. The city surveyor has held his place since 1857, the treasurer since 1867, the medical officer of health since 1859, the chief

constable since 1882, the secretary of the Gas Committee since 1875, the engineer of the Waterworks since that project was taken over, and for ten years before; the clerk of the Drainage Board since its organization, while the secondary officials have had a long and useful experience.

No civil-service examination is necessary for entrance into the clerical or labor force, appointments and removals being made by their superior officers or the committees. All assignments to duty are temporary, and if found unfitted the men are dropped without question. Laborers are taken on or off as needed, but permanence is the rule. Outside the Police and Fire Departments, there is no regular system of retirement, although a few pensions are paid to very old men, or to those injured while on duty.

Policemen are appointed as the result of a pass examination by the superintendent, supplemented by the most exacting inquiries covering their entire career. Police superannuation has gone on rapidly of late years, under a law permitting retirement on two thirds of their salary after twenty-six years' service. The police contribute two and a half per cent. of their salaries toward this fund, the burden upon the rates being very light thus far.

The question of political opinion does not enter into the selection of permanent officials or working force. Heads of departments are anxious to secure effectiveness in the force under them, as any deficiency would soon become apparent to the committees, in whom real responsibility is lodged. As is the case everywhere, there is some complaint that men grow old and practically useless, but this is generally dealt with by transfer to lighter work.

POLICE COURT AND POOR-LAW AUTHORITIES.

The police courts are held by one stipendiary magistrate, who is paid, and has the authority of two justices sitting together, and eighty-eight justices, who sit by twos or threes. Each sits on a certain day, generally once a fortnight, the sittings lasting from two to four hours. The mayor is chairman of the bench, remains a justice for one year after the expiration of his term, and is then generally appointed permanently. They may suspend a policeman, and report him to the police superintendent and the Watch Committee, but this power is seldom used. They sit by committee as a court for licensing public-houses, theaters, and concert-halls, and action in such cases is reviewed by the

entire bench. Another committee inspects the prisons at regular intervals, and, in doing so, its members may go into the cells and question the prisoners, and they must read the Riot Act in time of commotion, if called upon to do so. These men hear with patience each case that comes before them, the accused getting the benefit of all doubts, without necessity for counsel. Justices, who are the leading men in the community,—one fourth of the present bench being members of the City Council,—have as advisers clerks who must be well instructed in the law, though without actual power in making a decision. The time required is considerable, but, as in all other cases, it is given with apparent ease, although probably not one in twenty is really a man of leisure. To be once a justice is to be always a justice, as it is an office that cannot be held for a time and then resigned. There is no escape from it, except by disgrace or death.

The details of poor-law administration do not fall within the limits of a study of municipal conditions, but the guardians and overseers in the three parishes or parts of parishes of which Birmingham¹ is composed number more than eighty. They lay and collect rates, producing something like £120,000 a year, which are expended under their control. Their machinery is used to collect the rates levied by the City Council. They constitute one more governing body the members of which give unpaid time and attention to public duties. From their ranks, as from a training-school, have come many men who afterward did good service in the Council or other bodies.

The task of developing a city from what was little more than a village is practically over. Much of the work remains to be completed, but no large new schemes are necessary. Progress has not been so rapid as to hinder assimilation to new surroundings and conditions. Civic patriotism and civic pride have more than kept pace with development. Although the work of execution is done by a few, its benefits are fully appreciated by the many. Reliance has been placed upon the new voters as the suffrage has been enlarged, and no proposition to restrict it has been suggested.

¹ AREAS AND POPULATION UNDER DIFFERENT BODIES OR COMMITTEES.

	Aeres.	Population June 1894 (estimated).
Birmingham	12,705	492,301
Drainage Board	42,278	691,700
Gas Department	75,000	700,000
Water Supply	83,192	667,409

At no time, since the task of regenerating the city was taken up, has there been difficulty in procuring help from honest and efficient men. In the earlier days it was insisted that no man not fitted to become mayor should be sent to the Council. Many who entered that body between 1867 and 1873 did attain the mayoralty. The theory now is that if the Council can always have in it twenty-five of the leading business and professional men, with the remainder less prominent and less able, though no less honest and

desire or intention to reward questionable personal or political service, has thus far entered into account in the choice of a single councilor. Sharp contests occur every year, but they are not between a good man and a disreputable one, or between two of the latter. So, while it is sometimes said that the Council is degenerating, it is difficult for an outsider to see in what this degeneracy consists. The average of ability and character is now so high that it is difficult to imagine the existence of conditions un-



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

« ST. PHILIP'S »—COLMORE ROW.

well meaning, the best standard of work may be maintained. This would give, roughly speaking, a man of high merit and ability for mayor, and one for chairman of each of the principal working committees, with a second for colleague. The members approved by long or conspicuous service, who were willing to do the work when the workers were few, are safe in control. There have been some conspicuous instances in which really useful men, with a record of well-recognized service for the city, have been defeated for nomination or election; but dishonest or unworthy men have never been preferred, as the Council does not contain one such. None of the vile influences of disorderly houses or saloons, none of the behests of bosses, no

der which it could be kept permanently at a better standard. Judged by the efficient way in which public work is done, and the uniform desire among all kinds of people to maintain this position, there is every reason to believe that public sentiment is becoming more rather than less exacting concerning the way that the civic life shall be administered.

I have seen no attack upon the honesty of the Council, or of any of its members. In the worst times, even when inefficiency was common, never was there a scandal about paving, street-cleaning, or public works, or corruption alleged about the management of the police. Criticism is heard about matters of opinion, this or that policy is pronounced a

mistake, but no intimation is uttered that a man in a public place is using it to make money for himself or his friends. This, too, in spite of the fact that no people keep closer watch on their public bodies, and that nowhere is the ratepayer so universally a grumbler, with complaints to fill newspapers and echo from every platform. Even did opportunity permit, public sentiment is so exacting that a man less honest in a public capacity than in his private business could not remain in the Council for a day.

This conspicuous success has not been achieved in a day, or maintained without effort. The men who began the work learned everything possible about the needs of their community, and proceeded by speech and writing to explain them, and to demonstrate the necessity and policy of undertaking reforms. One class has not transacted the public business, leaving to another the management of

charitable, religious, and educational institutions; all has been treated as part of the civic life that must be carried on. No close corporation has been possible. The leaders have come from every part of the kingdom, and it is a curious feature of an old country to find that so few are natives of the town. They live well, but without ostentation, and make no attempt to form an exclusive society.

Nor is it due to conditions unusually favorable. Elevation above the sea, remoteness from any body of water, a broken, uneven surface, and a turbulence accepted as a characteristic of the population, were serious defects to be remedied. On the other hand, the concentration of population, and the fact that the different elements of which it was originally composed have become thoroughly assimilated, the convenient suburbs, the democracy of the people, and the variety of the industries, have all made for good government.

George F. Parker.

THE PARLOUS WHOLENESS OF EPHRAIM.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE CAT AND THE CHERUB," ETC.



SOME of the people forgot the admonition about avoiding the main road, and they went by the Junkins place, and were seen by Zesty as she sat at the window sewing pieces of apples on a string. Cory Judd, who scorned riding, walked past without a look, which was perhaps because of his shame at his pride in his new clothes.

"Now, what 's Cory Judd all handsomed up for?" said Zesty. "Do you s'pose he 'll tramp clear to Boston, same 's he threatens?"

Ephraim sat in the wooden rocker with the "Book of Seven Hundred Ailments," which was opened at Ailment No. 440.

"I dunno," replied Ephraim. "You holler down and ask him 'bout that (Man-and-Beast Salve.) I 've got 440 sprouting out 'twixt my shoulder-blades, sure 's you live; and if it strikes in, it 'll lead to 441, and that 'll be my end. I 'm going to have another one them spells, for I believe I must of et something."

"I sh' like to come and ketch myself a-hollering to Cory Judd!" said Zesty, casting a glance at the "Book of Ailments." "You 've got forty-seven salves. I s'pose the next book will be (The Complete Barnyard Physician.) Then you 'll be a-howling round with the pip, and the distemper, and connipion fits. If I was you I 'd tumble int' the

cellar and git a new set of griefs; you ain't quite miserable enough these days. Now, I do wonder what Cory Judd's a-kiting so for. I sh' think 't was Fourth July, the way he 's slicked up."

"Mebbe I sha'n't ever be slicking up any more," replied Ephraim. "I 'm a pretty faded man, Zesty, and you don't two thirds realize it. Don't suspect you will till I 'm took. Here 's 201 I 've had for years, and 213, and 697, and I felt a touch of 149 this morning, just as plain as your face: (aching back, dull eye, shooting pains, pale tongue—)"

"(Can't lie awake by night, no appetite after meals,)" interpolated Zesty. "Overwork 's what 's done it. Yesterday you cleaned a lamp-chimney, and day before you wound the old clock. If I was you I should n't set and watch me sewing apples; might tucker you out. Now, if there ain't the Spinneys in their new wagon, so washed and dressed they dasn't sneeze! Do you s'pose it 's Sabbath, and we 've mislaid a whole day from this week? What do you s'pose—?"

"Why can't ye yell to Elziry Spinney to tell her boy to pull some that yell-dock root out back their house," replied Ephraim. "I kinder hanker after it, and it drives off 622. I sh' think you could; might be my dying wish, for all you know. I can feel my liver palpitating 'bout twice too fast. Zesty, I 'm persuaded