

said George William Curtis, "is not eternal cringing to party, but eternal fidelity to our own mind and conscience," for "while the method of republican government is party, its basis is individual conscience and common sense." Of nothing is that so true as of municipal government. The reformers of New York and Chicago appealed to the "individual conscience and common sense" of the people, and the people answered their call joyfully. So will it be in every other city and State in which the experiment shall be repeated.

The Government of English Cities.

ANY American who wishes to preserve the comfortable assurance that ours is the best-governed country in the world should by all means refuse to read Dr. Albert Shaw's recent volume on "Municipal Government in Great Britain." In view of the fact that nearly one third of our people now live in cities, it can hardly be claimed that the country is well governed if the cities are misgoverned. The municipal governments touch the life of the people much more nearly in many ways than those of the State or of the nation: if they are efficient and intelligent, they can greatly promote our welfare; if they are corrupt and incapable, they may grievously afflict us. That they are, as a rule, scandalously inefficient, and in many cases dishonest, is the general confession. The impression seems to have prevailed until recently that this was a matter of course, that cities must needs be the prey of the spoiler. Of late a different idea has begun to obtain: a number of people are now persuaded that cities may be well governed. The exhibit which Dr. Shaw's volume makes of the kind of government which the English citizen enjoys will furnish food for reflection to sober Americans.

It would probably be not far from the truth to say that the average English city spends about half as much on its government as an American city of the same size, and gets about twice as much for it. The English municipal governments are, in almost all cases, believed by the citizens to be wholly free from jobbery. They enjoy, in an eminent degree, the confidence of those whose affairs they administer. Our British cousins know how to get those whom they can trust to serve them in the city governments. "At the end of its three years' work," says Dr. Shaw, "the first London council had so conducted itself that its friends could say, without contradiction, that 'through all these years of administrative labors, as complex and confusing as ever fell to any governing body in the world, no shadow of a shade of personal corruption has attached to any single member of the council.' The members had served without a penny of reward, direct or indirect. Yet many of them had given all or most of their time to the municipal service, while the whole body of 140, though composed of men who for the most part had private business or professional duties that could not be abandoned, gave an average of one third of their working time—two whole days each week—to council and committee meetings, and labors connected with the public affairs of the metropolis."

The municipal organization of the great towns of England differs widely from all the American types. The entire power, legislative and executive, is vested in the council—a great committee of the citizens number-

ing from sixty to one hundred members, elected for three years, one third retiring every year. National politics do not enter largely into municipal affairs, and many of these councilors are returned without opposition for many years. In Manchester Dr. Shaw reports one alderman who had served for 45 years, another for 42, another for 37, another for 32, another for 27, seven more for from 20 to 24 years, and the rest for from 13 to 18 years. The terms of the ordinary councilmen were not apt to be so long.

The council elects the mayor, who is simply its presiding officer, and has very little executive responsibility; and it divides itself into committees, to each of which it assigns some department of municipal activity. In Manchester there are seventeen grand standing committees, as follows: on art gallery, on baths and wash-houses, on cleansing, on finance, on gas-works, on buildings and improvements, on markets, on parks and cemeteries, on paving and street work, on free libraries, on sewage disposal, on sanitary administration, on town hall, on police, on water-supply, on ship-canal, and on technical instruction. There are also nearly a hundred subcommittees. Each standing committee employs a skilled and well-paid chief executive officer, whose position is permanent. This chief attends, of course, to the details of administration. The work of the committee is supervisory. Each standing committee regularly reports its work to the council, and obtains authority and grants of money for its purposes.

It will be observed that there is no such division of jurisdiction and responsibility as uniformly exists in American cities. The council is the sole and supreme municipal power; the mayor and the city clerk are appointed by it and are responsible to it; all the executive officials are its employees. Although the body is a large one, there is a practical concentration of responsibility, and the publicity with which all the business must be conducted leaves little room for maladministration.

Dr. Shaw argues cogently for the superiority of the English system. He declares that it is "as simple, logical, and effective as the American system is complicated and incompatible with harmonious and responsible administration." It is quite true, as he declares, that "city government in America defeats its own ends by its 'checks and balances,' its partitions of duty and responsibility, and its grand opportunities for the game of hide and seek." Yet the expectation of electing a council of seventy-five men, in any American city, who could be trusted to administer its affairs with honesty and economy, seems rather sanguine. It is not unlikely that we shall come to that, but we have apparently not yet reached a development of municipal patriotism which would make it possible. The council is always the weak point in the American municipality. It may be questioned whether any American city of the first class has ever succeeded, for any length of time, in electing an incorruptible council. Cities do sometimes succeed in finding one man in their population to whom it is safe to intrust power; but the attempt to secure sixty or a hundred men, of real capacity and unquestioned honesty, who would devote their time to the administration of the affairs of the city, would be attended with some difficulty. Such a system depends, also, upon the complete elimination of party politics from municipal affairs—a consummation not yet so near as might be

wished. For the present it is doubtful whether we can do better than to concentrate executive responsibility in the mayor, dividing, as wisely as we can, the executive from the legislative functions, and removing as far as possible the opportunities for contentions and collisions.

The most remarkable revelation of this interesting volume is that which relates to the growth of municipal socialism in England. There was once, we have heard, a Manchester school of political economy whose maxim was *Laissez-faire*, and whose contention was that the sphere of government should be sharply restricted. It is clear that political philosophers of this school do not now govern Manchester. The chapter which Dr. Shaw has devoted to the "Social Activities of British Towns" shows that England has boldly undertaken the municipalization of monopolies. In the principal towns the gas-works are public property; the price of gas varies from fifty to seventy-five cents a thousand feet; and the business brings large revenues into the city treasury. Many of the cities own the street-railway tracks, and lease them for short terms to operating companies, deriving from them also considerable revenue. Electricity has not yet been developed to the same extent as in this country; but it is evident that this is soon to fall under the control of the municipality. Baths, laundries, and lodging-houses are owned by many of the cities, and

several of them have become large owners and renters of real estate. In Glasgow, in Birmingham, in London, many people live in tenements built and owned by the city, and pay their rent directly to the city. All this, it must be owned, is contrary to orthodox teaching on the subject of government, and perhaps it is too soon to pronounce judgment upon it; but thus far, with some exceptions, it appears to be working well, and public sentiment in all these cities more and more strongly approves the policy of a large coöperation, through the municipal government, in the promotion of the general welfare.

American cities will probably go more slowly in this direction, serving themselves by the careful observation and occasional imitation of foreign methods. If any of these innovations, on experiment, are found to work well under American conditions, they will be adopted. But any such experiments here must go hand in hand with the adoption of the merit system in the civil service.

Mr. Bernheim's instances of the squandering of municipal franchises in New York, as set forth in the *MAY CENTURY*, show the necessity of a radical alteration of policy under this head in our American cities.¹

¹A valuable handbook is William Howe Tolman's "Municipal Reform Movement in the United States," with an introductory chapter by the Rev. Dr. Charles H. Parkhurst.

OPEN LETTERS.

Notes on Poe.

AT the head of an article on "Poe in New York," in the *OCTOBER CENTURY*, is a portrait "from a daguerreotype owned by Mr. Robert Lee Traylor." A footnote says:

This daguerreotype, made by Pratt of Richmond, was presented by Poe, a short time before his death, to Mrs. Sarah Elmira (Royster) Shelton, whom he had engaged to marry. It is believed to be his last portrait.

As more or less interest attaches to everything connected with Poe, I venture to tell what I know of this portrait.

During the Christmas holidays of 1854-55, I was walking down Main street, Richmond, when my attention was attracted by a picture in the show-case of a daguerreotypy, bearing this inscription: "*Edgar Allan Poe — taken three weeks before his death.*" I immediately climbed to the studio, and asked for further information, which was cheerfully given by Mr. Pratt.

"You know, of course," said he, "that the early part of Poe's life, as well as the last months of it, was spent in Richmond. I knew him well, and he had often promised me to sit for a picture, but had never done so. One morning — in September, I think — I was standing at my street door when he came along and spoke to me. I reminded him of his unfulfilled promise, for which he made some excuse. I said, 'Come upstairs now.' He replied, 'Why, I am not dressed for it.' 'Never mind that,' said I; 'I'll gladly take you just as you are.' He came up, and I took that picture. Three weeks later he was dead in Baltimore."

Being satisfied then — as I am now — that Mr. Pratt told the truth concerning his daguerreotype, I at once offered to buy it; but naturally enough he declined to sell what, even then, was of considerable value.

He told me, however, that he had made an excellent copy for the lady to whom Poe was engaged (not mentioning her name), and would make me one if I so desired. He did so, and this copy is now in my possession, in perfect preservation, after forty years.¹ It is in every respect, so far as I am capable of judging, quite as good as the original; but it is *not* the original, nor, I am inclined to think, is that of Mr. Traylor. Where the original now is, I do not know; but whoever examines it, or a good copy, closely, will see that the picture is not such a one as Poe would be likely to give to the lady of his love. The dress is something more than careless. The "stand-up" collar is turned *down* over a loosely tied cravat; the high-cut waistcoat, with a sprig of evergreen in the buttonhole, is buttoned at the top, but is open nearly all the way down, and into the space thus left a white handkerchief is thrust, as if to conceal the crumpled linen. The coat is thrown back from the shoulders in rather reckless fashion, and the whole costume, as well as the hair and face, indicates that the poor poet was in a mood in which he cared very little how he looked. Moreover, Mr. Pratt gave me distinctly to understand that the copy for Poe's lady-love was made *after* his death, and at her request; and I also understood that the original had never been out of Pratt's possession. Doubtless he made several — perhaps many — copies after mine; but I am quite certain of the genuineness and fidelity of my own.

In February, 1860, I was again in Richmond, and being still deeply interested in everything pertaining to Poe, I endeavored to enlarge my then rather scanty information by inquiries among those who had person-

¹Mr. Dimmock has since presented this daguerreotype to The Players, New York.—EDITOR.