

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1893.

## YANKEE TOWN TOPICS.

### THE WAYS MASSACHUSETTS HAS IN MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT.

The System of Aldermen and Councilmen—How it Works—A Sample Town Meeting—Supplied by Much Divided Billerica—Points for St. John Voters.

LOWELL, Sept. 12.—Some months ago a member of the Lowell common council died, and an election was held the other day to decide upon his successor.

Not one person in one hundred knew an election was being held, yet it cost the city several hundreds of dollars to elect a councilman for a term of three months.

It was very much like a St. John municipal election, when people have to be dragged to the polls; where people do not seem to care who is elected to office, but kick like steers when the tax bills come in year after year; when people who become almost frantic over a Dominion election seemed to think nothing of municipal affairs, in which they should be as much interested as in ones private business.

Here a different state of affairs exist, for as I stated some time ago local politics are run on national lines, and there are always two opposing parties in the city government. One watches the other, and the result is beneficial.

Then again they have a common council and a board of alderman, the former elected by wards and the latter by the city at large.

There is always talk about abolishing the common council, but the present form of government finds popular favor, and there is much to be said which would warrant its continuance. I heard it stated not long ago that nobody could name a "job" to defraud the city, which had originated in the common council, while scores of them had been started and often times worked successfully by the aldermen.

The members of the common council are as a rule young men, budding politicians who enter it as a stepping stone to higher office; who take an interest in the affairs of the city, and are willing to remain silent for a year, perhaps, while they get the run of things, and learn enough to enable them to hold their own in debate.

The older members do most of the talking, and the new men, of both parties get along swimmingly under their leadership, for there are seldom any "breaks" on either side.

It is only of recent years that young men have been able to obtain recognition in St. John, and the few who have succeeded in getting elected to office have put a new aspect on provincial politics. Here in Massachusetts the younger men have a hand in almost everything; from municipal to national affairs, and they usually come out of the fray right side up. "Boy candidates" are plentiful enough, so plentiful that youthfulness is hardly ever referred to in a campaign, and the young fellows take their stand alongside the bald-heads and wise-acres, and count for something too.

However, talking about the common council, the word "common" means something. The young men who compose it get right down among the common people; they know them, know their wants; know what they expect, mingle with them, and are their true representatives.

The aldermen, on the other hand, elected by the city at large, are better known; business, or professional men, who are supposed to take a broader view of public affairs than the young men who represent the people of some particular section, and have not the opportunity, or experience, which would give them that "weight" necessary in a body of men who shall give the final decision in matters numbering thousands and tens of thousands of dollars of public money.

So, one body acts as a balance for the other, and when a measure passes both and is signed by the mayor, it is more likely to be all right than it would be were it decided by a body of men all powerful, few in number; so few that a wily contractor could smile upon them all and cover them with soft soap in a single afternoon.

Not long ago, I heard ex mayor Hart of Boston, who is now a candidate for the Republican nomination for governor, say in his opinion more wisdom, more bright ideas, and more good suggestions for the public good originated in the city of Boston than any body with which he had ever come in contact.

Up this way, the country town meeting is looked upon as the model form of government, and it is claimed that the common council of the city government is the nearest approach to it possible.

These meetings are very different from those held in the country towns of New Brunswick, where public affairs, on much the same principal as those of the cities. A town meeting in Massachusetts is decidedly interesting, and during the last eight months I have had the pleasure of attending a number of them in different parts of the country.

The town hall is one of the sights in every village, and often times it is a picturesque little building, of which the

people are proud, even if it has placed the district head over heels in debt.

In it, however, all the questions of the day are discussed at that town meeting, and one man is as good as another.

The "town warrant" is prepared and printed before the meeting, and everybody gets a copy of it, long enough beforehand to discuss at the village store, the railway depot, or around the hearthstone, every proposition it contains.

In some places there are bitter fights between different sections of the town, as regards the location.

Of a school house for instance, or whether the children of a certain section shall be driven to school or walk it; or perhaps there will be a big factory in one part of the town, and the other a farming district, and the operations and the farmers will have different interests.

About 20 miles from Boston, there is a very pretty little town called Billerica, which comprises Billerica Centre, North Billerica, East Billerica, and a whole lot more other Billericas, the town being divided pretty much as I have described. The result is some pretty warm town meetings.

The town hall has a large room with a platform at one end and a railing for voters to pass through much the same as those usually found in front of a ticket office.

On the platform sit the moderator, the selectmen and the town clerk, and in the body of the hall all the people.

When the warrant is read everybody is at liberty to discuss it; mill operatives deliver addresses that would astonish a St. John alderman, and an old farmer will talk more horse sense in a minute than a lawyer-alderman would in an hour,—and they do a vast amount of business.

Not long ago there was a bitter war in Billerica, which will go to show how the people of a town up this way fight for their own interests.

The north and the centre were divided. The fight was bitter. The mills of the north shut down to give the operatives a chance to vote, and all the farmers of the centre mustered in larger number.

The north wanted their children to be driven to school, and the farmers wanted money expended on the park at the centre. The town couldn't afford to do both, and the fight was to see whether the north or the centre should have its way.

A lot of side issues entered into the question, and the discussion lasted until night-fall. The farmers were defeated in regard to the park appropriation, and the north thought it would have everything its own way, so some of the voters went home before dark. The farmers captured the meeting and defended the north, on the school question; then had the park appropriation reconsidered and got that too.

This is the way they go at it in some of the country towns, but the great point is that every body can have a say in affairs of the town. When a vote is taken the people speak. There is very little show for outside parties who want to fleece the district, for it would be pretty hard to buy up every body in the place.

The system of government is looked upon as the best possible and the common council of a city is thought to be the nearest large community can get to a town meeting.

The question of local government is always being discussed no matter where one happens to be, and today in St. John the people are voting with a change in view.

Here in Lowell the people will vote on a revision of the city charter a month or so hence, and if the revision is passed some very radical changes will be made.

Hitherto the alderman have been elected for one year. The new charter proposes that they shall be elected for two years, and that a certain number of them shall retire each year.

By this means it is intended that a complete change in the Board will not be possible each year; that there will always be members fully informed in regard to public improvements unfinished at the end of a year, and new men will not have to take up work where others left off.

In St. John under the present system, there is very little possibility of a complete change in the board of aldermen. The new association may bring it about, and the foregoing idea will be appreciated.

R. G. LARSEN.

### Strange Gods.

The post-office in India is regarded as so miraculous an agency by the more ignorant natives, that in some out-of-the-way places the very letter-boxes are worshipped.

A man will post his letter in a box, and then shout out its destination to the presiding spirit, whom he supposes to be inside; while others will humbly take off their sandals while approaching the receptacle, go through the various ceremonies of piety before and after posting the letter, and finally place a small gift before the box as a propitiatory offering, retiring in the same attitude of humanity.

A teacher was explaining to a little girl how the trees developed their foliage in the spring time. "Ah yes," said the wee miss, "I understand; they keep their summer clothes in their trunks."

## HALIFAX SCHOOL BOARD.

### CLEAR CUT PICTURES OF THE MEN WHO COMPOSE IT.

They Rival the City Council in Their Ideas of Liberal Expenditure—Inside Facts Told in Plain Words—Good and Bad Points Shown.

HALIFAX, Sept. 14.—PROGRESS has given some attention to extravagant civic expenditure in Halifax, and has merited the approbation of prudent citizens in doing so. There is great need of caution, and if people would only think for a little, the seriousness of the situation would be more fully realized. Ex-Mayor Mackintosh is a leading broker of the city, and one who is well able to form an opinion. He says the fact that a loan advertised for by the city for weeks, and which at the end of that time received no offers, except one for half the amount, at a very high rate, should set people thinking. He holds that when a city's debt is equal to 10 per cent of the assessed value of the property, then it is time to "call a halt." That is how the proportion of debt and property stand in Halifax today, and he asks the public to draw their own conclusions. Notwithstanding this, our reckless alderman go on spending every cent they can get. One of the most wasteful things they are doing is tearing up fairly good brick sidewalks and putting down concrete pavements. The latest example of this is a sidewalk along the west side of Granville street past the Herald office, where alderman Dennis is employed. A good enough sidewalk has been there, but to please certain parties possibly his employers of the Herald, Alderman Dennis used his influence to have thousands of dollars spent there, not satisfied, as he certainly might have been, with squandering over \$60,000 in the suburbs, where he had property which he wished to improve in value. Dennis knows how to work the oracle.

But the city council is not the only body that is extravagantly spending the citizens' money. The board of school commissioners for Halifax find no difficulty in parting with \$101,500 a year. Every year the amount demanded by the school board increases. Improvements, no doubt, are introduced from time to time, but the property of the city does not warrant those "improvements,"—which are profited in mainly by the more well-to-do people, rather than the poorer tax-payer. The supervisor of schools for the city is largely responsible for the sudden manner in which the high water mark in school expenditure has been reached. A considerable proportion of supervisor McKay's time is taken up apparently in devising something new in connection with the school system, and something which invariably adds more to the taxation. But it looks as though the supervisor had reached the end of his spending tether. There are men in the school board now, whose chief reason for holding their seats is that retrenchment may be accomplished. Though they are yet in the minority, their influence is being more and more felt.

PROGRESS some time ago gave a pen and ink sketch of the members of the city council. A similar effort on behalf of the school board will probably furnish interesting reading, and enable people to see what chance there is for a more economic administration of affairs in the future. The board consists of twelve men with the secretary and supervisor. Six of the twelve are aldermen, appointed by the city council. They are commissioners Duggan, Hubley, Wier, Eden, Morrow and Ryan. PROGRESS has already described them in their character as city fathers, and the representation holds equally true of the six as school commissioners. The other six are appointed by the provincial government. They hold office for a term of three years. Are they, with the aldermen, the kind of people to properly spend \$101,500 annually, and keep that outlay from increasing? Look at them.

The chairman of the board, J. H. Symons, in the first place, has only the remotest idea how a meeting should be conducted. Unless the board runs with perfect smoothness he absolutely loses control of it and looks on hopelessly, though fitfully he tries to appear authoritative. He made a fortune in the tobacco and fishing tackle business on Granville street in the old times, when there was no competition. Mr. Symons has for some time been retired from the business, satisfied to draw his dividends from the Gas Company and the Union Bank in both of which institutions he is a director. But educationally he is far behind the age—though perhaps fully abreast of the times of—say Columbus. Some time ago in discussing a certain question he remarked that that was a result of those "modern public schools, which teach so much more than they should." The three R's are all the instruction that should be imparted, in his opinion, in the schools, but Mr. Symons has not strength of character sufficient to do more than protest. He let matters drift. His great public achievement was securing the chairmanship of the board, to do which he had to de-

feat Alderman Wier, the leader of the Anti-Archbishop party in the board. Personally Mr. Symons is a kindly man, affable and good-natured with benign countenance and is very well liked by teachers and public. If there is a tie on a question of expenditure Mr. Symons may be depended on to cast his vote to keep the money in the treasury.

Mr. James R. Cragg is a pronounced Liberal in politics. He is a Roman Catholic and a peculiar combination of liberality and narrowness in his ideas. While Alderman Wier is the enemy of Archbishop, Commissioner Cragg, on the other hand, is his Grace's champion. Whatever will please the Archbishop will certainly please Commissioner Cragg. Apart from semi-religious matters Mr. Cragg is progressive and enterprising. He is a well-informed, intelligent man, and is one of the rising business men of Halifax. He goes in for generous expenditure on the educational system.

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### CONGO CANNIBALISM.

Terrible Atrocities in Some Portions of the Dark Continent.

The accounts given by the Belgian explorer, M. de Meuse, of the state of affairs on the upper reaches of the Congo show that atrocities and cannibalism of the most terrible nature are practiced there still. During the three years and three months M. de Meuse was traveling in the country he everywhere saw that human life was held in the slightest possible regard—indeed, human beings, both men and women, were for sale in every village for the purpose of being killed and eaten. The individuals who were slaves appeared indifferent to their fate. They invariably had a fork-like branch of a tree tied round their necks, which prevented them from walking about. Purchasers could come and select which part of the living man's flesh they would buy, and when the poor fellow was killed the flesh indicated was apportioned out. This practice prevailed in every village, and "tom-toms" were sounded to tell people of the approaching slaughter. The victim sat down with the tree branch round his neck, and was generally killed by a sharp instrument being thrust into his side near the heart. Every effort was made to prevent the body losing blood, so that the flesh would be more moist to eat.

Cannibalism was practiced throughout the whole district. The bands of slaves organized by the Arabs, whenever there was a scarcity of rice or other food, subsisted on their fellow creatures. This was carried to such a pitch that after a fight the natives would whip out their knives and cut two pieces of flesh from any of their comrades who had fallen. The fleshy part of the thigh was selected, the men putting the human steaks in their pockets, intending to cook them at night time, and continued on their march. Then again, when these marauding bands were travelling, they frequently run short of food. On such an occasion there are several of their men sick, and one of these they kill for food. Scarcely a week passed during M. de Meuse's journey but he had to fight with the natives, whose weapons were arrows. On one occasion he lost thirty-five of his men out of fifty, and had to fall back on a large Arab village for safety. He calculated it would take three generations to lapse after the introduction of civilization before cannibalism could hope to be eradicated.

### An Epitome of a Tragedy.

Eugene Aram was a Yorkshireman, born at Ramsgill, in 1794. He received very little education, but showed a desire to learn, married young and settled at Netherdale, and there studied Latin and Greek. In 1734 he removed to Knarborough, where he taught school for eleven years. In 1745 a friend of Aram, named Daniel Clark, suddenly disappeared, and Aram was accused of being an accomplice in some suspected swindling operations. He was acquitted, however. Then he deserted his wife and traveled about as an "usher" in various schools. In 1759 he was at Lynn, in Norfolkshire. In February a skeleton was dug up at Knarborough, believed to be that of Clark, and Mrs. Aram hinted that her husband and a man named Houseman could explain Clark's disappearance. Houseman was arrested and declared that the particular bones were not Clark's, but he offered to show where Clark's body was. A skeleton was found where he said, and Aram was arrested. Houseman testified against Aram, who, under the law, had no counsel, but conducted his defense with great ability. He could not rebut Houseman's testimony, but he attacked circumstantial evidence in general. He was convicted, however, and before his execution confessed that he had killed Clark because of an intimacy between him and Mrs. Aram. He tried to commit suicide, but failed, and was hanged August 6, 1759. Hood has written a poem on the story, Bulwer a novel, and Wells a play.

### Autographs that Sell High.

The signature of Christopher Columbus can always find a buyer at \$800, the one letter existing in Titian's handwriting fetched \$600 and an epistle of Raphael's to some fair dame \$300.

Moliere never seems to have written a letter; his signature alone is worth \$300. The one letter written by Corneille which was ever in the trade was sold to Mr. Alfred Morrison, the great English collector, for the sum of \$800.

The value of any particular letter varies exceedingly. Thus Napoleon I.'s last letter to the Empress Marie Louise was sold for \$800, yet one of his ordinary letters can be bought for \$100.

Royal autographs always command a certain price. Henry IV. and Louis XIV. signatures are worth \$200.