

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

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JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE.

1749-1832.

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## MUNICIPAL LIFE IN NEW ZEALAND.

BY THE HON. SIR ROBERT STOUT, K. C. M. G.

WE ARE APT to overlook the fact that municipal government is more important than what is called general government. The social life of the people is more deeply influenced by the government of the township and the city than even by a federal constitution. The New England town meeting has probably more deeply affected the New England life than the form of the State or Federal Government. If we are to know a people we must know not only their external constitution but their internal government. And if all government is on its trial—if no one admits that the ideally perfect government has yet been discovered—comparisons of municipal life in other countries may not be uninteresting to American citizens. I read with profound interest the sketch of "Chicago and Its Administration" by the Hon. Lyman J. Gage, appearing in *The Open Court* of April this year, and I thought it might be worth while detailing to the readers of that journal how municipal affairs are managed in far-away New Zealand.

A few general remarks about New Zealand's population may not be out of place. At the census taken in April, 1896, there were 703,360 people in New Zealand, mainly Europeans or of European descent, and 39,854 Maoris or aboriginals. The colored people included in the 703,360 people were 3,719 Chinese, 124 negroes, and 15 Japanese, and perhaps 100 others of all kinds. Our population is therefore mainly white. There were 441,661 born in New Zealand, 118,689 in England and Wales, 50,435 in Scotland, 46,037 in Ireland, 21,681 in the Australian colonies, 1,749 in the United States, 1,412 in Canada, 4,595 in Germany, 4,900 in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, 881 in Austria-Hungary, 698 in France, and a few hundreds each for other European countries. Those born in



New Zealand are descended mainly from the people of the United Kingdom. This will be seen if the census of 1867 be taken. In 1867 the number of the population was, exclusive of Maories, 218,668, and their birthplaces were: New Zealand, 64,052; England and Wales, 66,933; Scotland, 34,826; Ireland, 27,955; Australian colonies, 11,313; foreign countries, 271; unspecified, 769. We are sprung then from a people long used to self-government.

We have three kinds of local government—the borough and city, the road district, and the county. The borough and city system is for centres of population; the county for country districts, and road districts are part of counties, and only in force in some special districts. For practical purposes we may look at the former alone, as the road district is only a branch of the county system. There are two main statutes dealing with the borough and city system and county system, both passed in 1886. They were consolidating statutes which put under one act multifarious laws that were on the statute book regulating local government.

There are ninety-six boroughs in all; six of these are called cities. The name city is a mere name, for except in the name there is no difference in management between an ordinary borough and a city. Each borough may be divided into wards. The lowest number of wards in a borough, where a borough is divided into wards, is two, and the highest number six. There are eighty-one counties, and each county may be divided into ridings. The number of ridings may vary from two to nine. The population of the four chief cities is as follows: Auckland, 31,424; Wellington, 37,441; Christchurch, 16,964; Dunedin, 22,815. There are, however, suburban boroughs adjoining the chief cities, and if the population of these be added, and they should be added to get an accurate idea of the urban population at the four centres, then the figures will be as follows: Auckland, 57,616; Wellington, 41,758; Christchurch, 51,330; Dunedin, 47,280.

If the parts of Christchurch and Dunedin within a radius of eight miles be added then the population would be: Christchurch, 55,288, and Dunedin 49,181. Before leaving the question of population; one may judge of the kinds of people we have by the religions we profess and trace our descent through our creeds. They are:

Church of England (Episcopalians).....	282,809	Wesleyan Methodists (non-Episcopal).....	73,367
Presbyterians.....	159,952	Small sects, Freethinkers, etc..	37,351
Roman Catholics.....	98,804	Object to state.....	15,967

Congregational Independents...	6,777	Hebrews .....	1,549
Baptists .....	5,538	Unitarians .....	375
Buddhists and Confucians (Chinese) .....	3,391	Society of Friends .....	321
		Unspecified .....	1,122

The "freethinkers," so-called, and "no denominations" are 7,487; "agnostics," 562; "no-religion," 1,490; atheists, 117. The Presbyterians have the largest church accommodation and the largest number attending church. In Southern New Zealand the Scotch Presbyterians predominate.

I now come to the way in which our cities are managed. The franchise is uniform throughout all the boroughs and cities. All occupiers of land or houses are, if they are owners, and if tenants, if their tenancy is at least a six months tenancy, entitled to be enrolled as burgesses or citizens, and they alone of the inhabitants have the right to vote. Every borough, and hereafter I include in a borough the cities, has a council consisting of a mayor and councillors. The number of councillors varies from six to eighteen.

When the borough is divided into wards, three councillors sit for each ward. The term of office is three years, one-third of the council retiring each year, one from every ward. The mayor is elected annually by the entire borough at a general vote of the burgesses, each burgess having one vote only. In the election of councillors, however, plural voting is permitted and is thus regulated:

One vote up to £50 yearly value of holding, two votes if over £50 and under £100, three votes if over £100 and under £150, four votes if over £150 and under £350, five votes if over £350.

A person who has not paid his rates is not entitled to be enrolled; women have the same right to vote as men.

The duties a borough has to perform are the following: (1) Construction of roads and streets, (2) lighting the streets, (3) providing water for the people, (4) general municipal improvements (including sewage, etc., sanitary arrangements), (5) management of recreation and other reserves, (6) fire brigades. Neither the boroughs nor counties have any control of the police. They are under the central, general, or colonial government. Education also is not under the boroughs or counties. It is managed by boards and committees. There are thirteen education boards, and almost every district in which there is a public school has a committee. The maintenance of hospitals and the dispensing of aid to the poor are under separate boards. The boroughs and counties have, however, to pay part of the expenditures of these hospital

and charitable aid boards, and the councils of the boroughs and counties have the right to elect a certain number of members to such boards. Harbors are also controlled by separate boards. Counties have, however, the control of irrigation, and in the dry region of Canterbury in the South Island one county has thousands of miles of water races.

The revenues of the boroughs are first rates. A borough may levy a general rate not exceeding one shilling in the pound on the annual value per annum. It may levy a small special rate for hospitals and charitable aid, and rates called special rates to pay interest and sinking fund on loans, which have been borrowed either with the express sanction of the colonial legislature or by the vote of the people at a poll. The rule as to borrowing is that a borough council can borrow if a vote of the burgesses is polled and a majority in number vote for the loan, provided that the majority must be at least one-half in number of the votes which can be exercised by the whole number of burgesses.

The ratable value of property means the value at which any property would be let from year to year, deducting therefrom twenty per cent. in cases of houses and buildings and other perishable property, and ten per cent. in case of land and hereditaments, but shall in no case be less than five per centum of the value of the fee simple thereof. A small subsidy is paid by the colonial government to the boroughs. License fees are also part of their revenues. The license fees are obtained from the licensing of hotels or public houses and other places licensed to sell alcohol, the licensing of public conveyances, the licensing or permits for building, etc., etc. Some boroughs have considerable revenue from the rents of reserves owned by them. Then some boroughs own gasworks and make a profit in selling gas to the citizens. Others own the waterworks that supply the borough with water, and for that supply a special rate is charged. The boroughs own the cemeteries and there is a profit made out of the sale of burial lots.

To show the practical outcome of the local government system we may take two of the cities—Dunedin and Wellington—and state what they do.

Dunedin has an area of 1,420 acres, and is bounded on three sides by a reserve called the "Town Belt," 500 acres in extent, and which is set apart for recreation purposes. The city is divided into four wards, and its council therefore consists of a mayor and twelve councillors. It is well endowed, and its rent roll from its reserves that are let is £9,600 per year. The capital value of the reserves



is at least twenty years' purchase of the rents. It has forty miles of finished streets with asphalted footpaths, all supplied with drainage, underground and surface, with gas and water. It has 525 gas lamps to light the city, the cost of which is £3 each per annum. The lighting, extinguishing, and cleaning cost £821.10s. more. The total cost of lighting is therefore £2,396.10s. The city is well lit. The ordinary general rates are about £12,000 a year. The only other rates are the water rates. Its general rates cover lighting, hospital, and charitable aid and interest on loans. The water rates—which include rates for the use of water—are about £13,000 per annum. The total revenue annually in the general account is about £42,000, in the water account £20,000, gas account £27,000. There are other separate accounts kept, such as cemeteries, recreation reserves, abattoirs, etc. The debt of the city is £611,125, but £157,637 sinking fund has accrued, so the net debt is £453,488. There are assets against that of reserves worth close on £200,000—gas-works, £100,000; water-works and credits, £246,000, and there are town hall, fire brigade buildings, plant, etc., etc. The rates including all rates but water rates generally average  $\frac{1}{3}$  in the pound on the annual value. The water rates are charged by a percentage on houses and about one  $\frac{1}{3}$  on the rates on land. The total rates are 2:8 $\frac{1}{2}$  on the rateable annual value.

In Wellington the rates are higher, but the rents from reserves are lower, and Wellington has not gas-works. The profits from gas in Dunedin are about £3,000 a year. The rate per 1,000 cubic feet to consumers is about 7s. In Wellington the rates were, general and special, 2:5 $\frac{1}{4}$ , and water 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. Wellington has water-works, public library, public baths, recreation grounds, etc. The general rates, rents from endowments, licenses, etc., amounted to about £37,000 annually. In addition there are water rates, about £20,000, special rates for interest on loans, charitable aid, and library £19,000. The total gross debt of Wellington is £620,000. Against this there is a small sinking fund. Wellington is lighted by electricity. There are two large arc lamps and 630 lamps of twenty-candle power. The cost of lighting is £4.10s per year for each twenty-candle power lamp. There are forty-eight miles of streets properly formed and metalled, and ninety miles of made footpaths. A sewerage and drainage scheme costing about £185,000 is nearly completed. The sewerage will be taken right out to sea. Forty-five and one-half miles of sewers have already been laid, and about 4,000 houses connected with the public sewers.

The boroughs are managed as I have said by a mayor and councillors. At the beginning of each year committees are appointed, such as finance, reserves, fire brigades, library, building, etc., and these committees meet weekly, the council generally meeting every fortnight. The mayor is paid. In Dunedin the mayor gets £400 a year, in Wellington £200, but none of the councillors are paid. The officers of the borough are appointed by the borough, and though removable at the pleasure of the council are never disturbed in their offices so long as they remain efficient. Some of them have been in office for twenty years. The total salaries of officers in Dunedin are: General department, £2,450; water, £342; gas, £1,106—in all, £3,898.

It may be asked, What is the citizen's life? The colony is exceedingly healthy. The death rate for 1896 was only 8.6 per 1,000 people. I doubt if any place can show a lower death rate. The cities are healthy. In Wellington in 1896 there were only four deaths from typhoid fever. Typhus, smallpox, and cholera have never yet found a lodgment in New Zealand. The death rate of cities and suburbs was, including deaths in the hospitals, about ten per thousand. The mildness, and equableness of the climate no doubt have their effect on the death rate. In Wellington, for example, frost is unknown. The heliotrope blooms in winter, and in summer there is no extreme heat, the thermometer rarely registering in the shade 80°. Nights are always cool.

The intellectual life is cared for. Dunedin is the seat of a university. It has an art faculty, a medical school, and a mining school. There is a museum, an art gallery, and a large and valuable reference library connected with the university. It has also a high school for girls and a high school for boys, and six large public primary schools and a training college for teachers. There are also church and private schools besides. There is a public athenæum and mechanics institute having large reading-rooms and a lending library. There are many literary societies, an Otago institute dealing with science. Musical societies, art clubs, camera club, etc. The games of football, cricket, lawn tennis, have numerous societies and clubs for their votaries. Rowing, yachting, cycling, bowling, chess, draughts, etc., etc., all have their societies. The colonists are noted for their fondness of athletic and out-of-door amusements. There is no lack of church accommodation. In Dunedin proper the Presbyterians have five large churches, the Episcopalians have three, the Roman Catholics one, Congregational Independents two, Baptists three, Wesleyan Methodists and Primitive

Methodists three. There is one Jewish synagogue and there are also meeting places of other smaller sects.

In Dunedin there is one theatre and several halls that are used for concerts and plays. In Wellington there are two theatres and several small halls. Both have substantial municipal buildings.

As to literature, we have not only in our libraries and in our book shops the books and magazines that are published in the United Kingdom, but American literature is common with us. We read the *North American Review*, the *Atlantic*, the *Forum*, the *Arena*, *Harper's*, *McClure's*, *Cosmopolitan*, the *Century*, *Scribner's*, *The Monist*, *The Open Court*, etc., etc. And the literary men of the States are perhaps as well known to us as to the residents in the States. We have read Lowell, James, Hay, Clemens, Holmes, Craddock, Howells, etc., etc., not to mention the older writers, Longfellow, Prescott, Emerson, Theodore Parker, Hawthorne, etc., etc. And will not reading the same literature do much to weld us together in sympathy as partakers of the same high destiny?

As has been said, there are eighty-one counties in the colony. Every borough is distinct in government from a county, though geographically it may appear within its area. Counties are divided into ridings, not exceeding nine. There must be at least six councillors, but there must not be more than nine. The council annually elects its own chairman from out of the councillors. The councillors hold office for three years, and the electors are the rate-payers of the county. There is plural voting as in boroughs, the votes being from one to five. In counties the rates are levied on the capital values—that is, the selling value free from incumbrances, and the rates cannot exceed six farthings in the pound on the capital value. Counties cannot borrow beyond four times the amount of a year's general rates, and then only after a poll and by a majority, as in a borough.

The duties of counties are mainly confined to road construction, drainage, and water races. As a centre or village gets populous it becomes a borough and ceases to belong to a county.

This short sketch will show that we have a system of local government in New Zealand, and this can be said that hitherto it has not been the scene of party conflicts and there has never been charged against any of the local bodies or any of their members any corruption. Whether this has been because of the smallness of the revenues, the control of the rate-payers, or the restricted franchise, will be answered no doubt in accordance with the view

of those who venture to give an opinion. The fact that separate bodies control education, harbors, hospitals, and charitable aid, rivers, etc., may, by the very specialisation of functions, have promoted both efficiency and purity of administration. Like our brothers and sisters in race and language in Europe and America and Australia, we too, in our humble way, are playing our part in the world, and who knows but that they may even learn of us as well as we of them?