ELECTRIC LIGHT OWNERSHIP

Advantages and Cheapness of Municipal Control.

PUBLIC BENEFITS VERSUS MONOPOLY

Marked Sentiment in Favor of Government Management—Instructive Statistics—Extortionate Prices of Electric Lighting.

I.

Victor Rosewater in N. Y. Independent.

The movement toward municipal ownership and control of public electric lighting has, during the past two years, assumed unexpected proportions; that is, unexpected by all save those who had previously investigated the underlying forces leading to such a result. Additional towns have set up municipal plants and others have enlarged and extended their service. The phenomenon is no longer localized. It extends to almost every state and territory in the union, and a complete list of towns owning and operating their own electric lighting plants for at least a year would, under a conservative estimate, approximate 150, while many more are at present providing such installations. The mayors of no small number of the larger cities—New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Omaha, New Haven, Atlanta—have discussed in their annual messages the advisability of the governmental assumption of these undertakings. And all this has occurred in the face of a powerful and persistent opposition from the interested electric lighting corporations. Its explanation must be sought in the economic principles which lie at the foundation of the movement.

Elements Involved in the Discussion.

The arguments in favor of municipal ownership of electric lighting have not changed. They are in substance the same as have before been set forth in the Independent, namely, that electric lighting is one of the monopolies of service whose rates are necessarily precluded from the regulative influence of competition; that it requires the exclusive use of a portion of the public streets; that combination with the other monopolies of service conduces to cheapness; and that the unearned increment resulting from the natural growth of the city should inure to the benefit of the whole community instead of to the franchised corporation. These propositions hold now as they did before and would scarcely justify a rehearsing, were it not that they are being continually attacked and as continually illustrated by new facts. There have been numerous recent investigations of the subject by different official bodies, varying in accuracy and in scientific value. Two have been instigated by the government at Washington and, as far as they go, are the most complete and trustworthy that have yet been made. From these I shall make a few excerpts. The one is embodied in a report of the engineer commissioner of the District contained in Fifty-first congress, second session, senate miscellaneous document 56, the other the very recent report of the electrical commission printed in Fifty-second congress, first session, house executive document 15.

From the former we learn that in twenty-four of the largest American cities, nominal 2,000-candle power arc lights burning practically all of every night cost the municipalities $140 per lamp per annum for the year ending December, 1890, the average number in use being 628.3. On the other hand, by including a large number of smaller places, where, however, similar conditions existed, the corresponding figure for the average contract price in 148 towns and cities was reduced to $121.79 per arc light per annum. At that time Washington was paying $219, Baltimore, thirty odd miles distant, $127.75; Kansas City paid $200.75, while St. Louis was charged $74.95.

Comparisons of Cost.

For the statistics of cities owning municipal plants we must turn to the report of the electrical commission, where very complete data have been compiled, although from only a limited number of towns. A summary of the tables there presented is all that can be given. It is as follows:

ARC LAMPS ONLY.

CITIES.	Total Investment.	Number of Lights.	Hours of Lighting per Year.	Gross Cost per Lamp per Year.	Total Annual Expenses.
Aberdeen, Miss.	$10,000	35	2,920	$142 79	$5,947 75
Aurora, Ill.	18,851	83	2,627	110 32	9,156 46
Bangor, Me.	34,141	146	3,600	74 48	10,874 19
Bay City, Mich.	30,000	141	2,221	82 64	11,652 90
Bloomington, Ill.	75,000	220	2,747	122 55	26,961 75
Danvers, Mass.	15,579	75	1,709	70 98	5,323 41
Dunkirk, N. Y.	13,538	60	4,000	87 03	4,921 67
Fairfield, Ia.	5,000	10	1,578	150 41	1,504 13
Goshen, Ind.	9,000	31	3,559	110 11	3,424 00
Lyons, Ia.	17,500	59	2,555	110 43	6,496 21
Meadville, Penn.	20,000	70	2,920	104 74	7,332 00
Ottawa, Ill.	16,000	100	3,000	50 05	5,005 00
Paris, Ill.	10,500	60	3,000	48 25	2,895 00
St. Joseph, Mo.	62,000	255	2,920	91 33	21,106 72
Sharpsburg, Penn.	5,725	35	2,920	68 20	2,387 12
Sherman, Tex.	10,000	43	2,555	100 47	4,320 00
Topeka, Kan.	52,000	184	3,000	107 74	19,815 00
Xenia, O.	18,500	80	3,000	97 74	7,755 00

ARC AND INCANDESCENT LAMPS.

CITIES.	Total Investment.	Number of Lights.	Hours of Lighting per Year.	Gross Cost per Lamp per Year.	Total Annual Expenses.
Allegheny, Pa	$175,000	A., 422; I., 2,500	4,000	$108 40	$71,500 00
Brainerd, Min	40,000	A., 30; I., 1,000	1,450	71 85	9,340 00
Galton, O.	26,901	A., 71; I., 600	3,600	73 41	9,618 58
Galveston, T	59,990	A., 125; I., 1,500	5,000	114 28	24,426 80
Herington, K.	30,000	A., 20; I., 1,500	1,825	149 79	9,855 00
Statesv'lle NC	8,500	A., 30; I., 270	.....	70 42	3,662 00
Vancouver, W	17,000	A., 35; I., 540	4,380	87 80	7,822 00

INCANDESCENT LAMPS ONLY.

CITIES.	Total Investment.	Number of Lights.	Hours of Lighting per Year.	Gross Cost per Lamp per Year.	Total Annual Expenses.
Charlton, Ia.	$24,000	4,380	4,380	$5 92	$7,091 00
Falls City, Neb.	9,000	1,460	1,460	8 73	3,400 00
Tecumseh, Neb.	7,000	1,825	1,825	5 12	2,900 00

The first column includes cost of both plant and buildings. Under the total annual expenses are comprised the items for insurance, superintendence and labor, fuel, carbons, repairs, sundries and interest and depreciation calculated at 16 per cent of the investment. In the second table ten incandescent lights are assumed to be equal in cost to one arc light. Quite a number report receipts from rented lamps, while Charlton is said to clear $15,000 per annum.

Considering the Tables.

To make accurate comparisons of statistics such as these is a most difficult task, perhaps an impossible one. The figures are, in many respects, approximate, and the reports from different towns include items so variant as to render strict statistical methods inapplicable so long as the unlike elements are not eliminated. But much may be learned from partial and incomplete statistics, and these tables furnish ample material for a general comparison. In this they are vastly better than those given by census bulletin 100 which, for our purposes, are absolutely worthless, inasmuch as the actual amount of service rendered is not there shown. The statistics here quoted at least prove this much, that the municipal plants are at no disadvantage in the matter of expenses, nor as to the cost of the services rendered. They offer sufficient data for the experts upon the electrical commission to conclude that:

"Though the comparative number of lamps and the hours of lighting in these cases are disproportioned to the cost of the plant, and though the main factors of the expense are interest, maintenance and supervision, so that if the lights were increased in number or the hours of daily lighting were augmented, the proportionate cost per hour would be less still; even as they are, the results show an average rate per lamp nearly about the same or a trifle less than the average present contract price of an equal number of cities. It must be borne in mind that in the cases cited the cities only light the public streets, whereas, if their plants were also utilized for private lighting, the expense account for public lights would be materially reduced. It is clear, then, that if, under the most unfavorable conditions, municipal lighting can be maintained as cheap under public as under private ownership, the lighting under usual conditions can be maintained at decidedly lower figures."

Some of the contract rates reported are distinctly stated to be averages of the prices paid. This does not mean that there is any competition in the ordinary sense of the word. It means simply that more than one company have bid to light different portions of the city at different rates. As a usual thing the prices paid each company, where several exist, are identical, but differentials are sometimes allowed for the more distant districts. The history of electric lighting in New York city is a typical illustration of the utter lack of competition. The Brush company put up twenty-two experimental arc lights in January, 1881, and soon secured a contract for fifty-five lamps at $7,400 per annum. In 1882 two companies obtained contracts, each at $355.50 per light, and this continued to be the price until May, 1887, notwithstanding improvements and the annual increase in the number of lamps employed. Several other corporations then pre-empted different districts, and the prices paid have since varied slightly. In December, 1890, all the bids were rejected by the board of electrical control for the reason that they evidenced a combination on the part of the companies by which competition was completely strangled. The new bids were accepted, although there was no additional show of rivalry. There are now six companies which receive annual contracts, but the bids are only for lamps in their respective territories with not even a pretense at competition. The experience of every other large city has given the same result—either actual combination or tacit agreement. The prices of electric lighting are purely monopoly prices unrestrained by the ordinary industrial checks.

Tendency to Monopoly.

Another phase of the movement which has received renewed affirmation is the tendency of the monopolies of service to accumulate in the same hands. This is, from an economic point of view, legitimate and desirable; for it leads to economies in superintendence and in the use of machinery and buildings. That it is best, if they are to be so united, for the municipality, the source of all such franchises, to unite them under its own control is scarcely controvertible.

Of the twenty-eight municipal plants mentioned in the table above, five are operated in conjunction with water works, while quite a number of private companies have combined similar undertakings. At least five corporations, if not more, join electric lighting with electric street railways. Two cities own at the same time gas and electric lighting plants, while a paragraph went the rounds of the electrical journals about a year ago to the effect that more than 300 were then operating electric lights in connection with their gas works. This seems to be a very good beginning for consolidation. If it continue at the same rate, it will not be long until the various monopolies of service in each city will be under the control of but one corporation. The question at issue is, will it be a public or a private corporation?

SIEFERT GOES BACK.

Chicago Detective Comes After the Repentent Druggist—Police Notes.

Yesterday Detective Bander of Chicago arrived in Omaha after Henry Siefert, who is now confined in the city jail for being a fugitive. It is alleged that Siefert embezzled $120 from his employers, Givenheimer & Lorenz, 5275 Halstead street, Chicago. The Chicago officer will have his requisition papers here Monday, but may not yet his man after all, as friends of the prisoner are using every effort in their power to have him released on habeas corpus proceedings, as they claim the matter has been satisfactorily settled.

Two little ragged girls, claiming to live at 1221 Paul street, were down town yesterday on a begging expedition. A policeman discovered that they were frauds and that there was no such number in Paul street and ordered the girls to skip for home or be arrested. They preferred to quit the game to going to jail and quickly disappeared.

Mrs. W. H. DeFrance reported to the police last evening that her jacket and purse containing $15 had been stolen while she was looking at some bonnets in a down town millinery shop. The coat containing the purse had been left lying on the counter. Detectives will try to recover the property.

Several days ago Judge Berka sentenced John B. Brown, colored, to a fine of $25 for fighting. Yesterday Dr. Somers recommended that Brown's unexpired fine be remitted on account of sore eyes. Brown will be turned loose again tomorrow morning.

A Mrs. Jensen, who lives down on the low lands bordering on the river, was fined $1 and costs yesterday afternoon by the police judge for stealing coal from the Union Pacific.

Yesterday Mrs. M. Shirk of Plattsmouth came to town and while shopping lost her 4-year-old boy. She reported the matter to the police matron and the blue coats were notified. During the evening the lost boy was found and the mother was happy again.

The three men, Haley, Sangren and Hammond, who were arrested Friday night on suspicion were identified last night as the trio who broke into H. McCrary's house on North Sixteenth street a few nights ago and now a charge of housbreaking will be placed against them.

Police Detective Vizard, who looks after the pawn shops and receives reports of stolen property, now has an office in the police court room and occupies the quarters recently vacated by the boiler inspector.

ARREST OF A SWINDLER.

How a Brazen English Fraud Deceived Good Natured People.

NEW YORK, Nov. 12.—William Bant, a sleek young English swindler, who has operated all over this country, is under arrest at the police central office. The prisoner admits that he is a brazen fraud and gloats over the fact that he has duped hundreds of good natured people between here and San Francisco out of sums ranging from $10 to $50. He represented himself to engineers as a grandson of Robert Stevenson, the famous civil engineer, and explaining that he was temporarily embarrassed borrowed money, which in the aggregate ran into the thousands. When searched, letters of introduction to Commodore Theodore T. Wilson and Chief Engineer George W. Melville of the United States navy were found on him. They were signed by Charles E. Emery of the Bennett building. In them Bant was described as Charles Mitchell of Newcastle, Out. The swindler said that on the money which he procured by false representations to professional men he was able to live in style at the Fifth avenue hotel. While in Chicago recently Bant says he duped Sir Henry Wood, secretary of the British commission of the World's fair, out of $25.

The prisoner admits that he attempted to swindle Mrs. Frank Leslie Wilde by pretending to be a grandson of Mrs. M. E. Braddon, the English novelist.

Through an introduction by a Mr. Rand, a member of the engineers club of this city, Rand says he got money from a dozen of the members. In some cases the arrant fraud says that he borrowed overcoats and failed to return them.

Bant says that his home is at Gosport, Northumberland, England, but he was forced to leave there for swindling a man out of $100. Eighteen months ago the young confidence man says he began a ten months tour of the continent with Sir Edward Grey, and during the trip Bant says the nobleman gave him $250 and a gold watch. Representing himself as on the staff of the London Daily News, the prisoner asserts that he had conversations with ex-Minister Phelps, Robert T. Lincoln and Hon. W. E. Gladstone, all of which he turned to good account in his subsequent swindling schemes. He came to this country last June.

Bant was arraigned in the Jefferson market police court today and as no complainant appeared against him he was discharged.

Earnings of Roads.

NEW YORK, Nov. 12.—The gross earnings of 133 roads for the month of October were $51,685,330, an increase of $937,665; of sixteen roads from January 1 to October 31, $429,812,810, an increase of $23,822,412; of seventy-four roads for the fourth week of October $12,386,713, a decrease of $164,680, and of twenty-three roads for the first week of November, $1,321,632, an increase of $27,969.

Serious Accident at a Celebration.

WEST POINT, Miss., Nov. 12.—While the democrats were celebrating the result of the election a cannon burst as the parade was passing. Five people were seriously injured, including Mayor Ware, who had both legs broken and may die.

FOR SWEET CHARITY'S SAKE

Omaha's Society People Will Unite in the Presentation of "Ben-Hur."

THOSE WHO WILL TAKE PROMINENT PARTS

Beautiful Scenic Effects and Costumes—A Happy Combination of Tableaux and Pantomime—Preparations for Producing the Play Well Under Way.

Omaha's society people will unite next week in the presentation of "Ben-Hur" for the benefit of the Associated Charities of this city, and it promises to be the most beautifully staged and costumed combination of tableaux and pantomime ever seen in the west. Nearly 150 people will participate in the presentation of this dramatic representation of the story detailed in General Lew Wallace's great work, and all will be selected from local society circles. Although a vast deal of effort and hard work is involved in the preparation, it has been taken up in earnest by a number of the most prominent ladies of the city, and its success is assured. The patronesses are Mesdames A. P. Hopkins, Joseph Millard, W. J. Broatch, James McKenna, Purvis, Thomas, Kilpatrick, General Brooke, Connell, J. J. Brown, D. H. Wheeler, jr., Colpetzer, Howard Smith, Ben Gallagher, J. N. H. Patrick, William Wallace, Levi Carter, Adolph Meyer, Joslyn, Will Redick, T. L. Kimball, Curtis, J. L. Webster, Joseph Barker, Gillespie, Colonel M. Sheridan, O. M. Carter, W. V. Morse, W. J. Preston, Dr. Denise, A. P. Tukey, Cady and Robert Burns, and the preliminary work is well under way, while the whole is being pushed with all the energy that natural enthusiasm and inspiration born of a worthy cause can lend.

This is the fourth season of this unique dramatization, and it is replendent in entirely new scenery and costumes and a revision in several particulars that marked a decided improvement in the presentation on the opening night at Indianapolis on October 3 of this year, over the original presentation at Terre Haute three years ago. General Wallace was present on both occasions and expressed his hearty approval.

When First Presented.

The first attempt that was made to present any of the familiar features of "Ben Hur" in a dramatic manner was three years ago at Crawfordsville, Ind., at an entertainment given by a number of the young people in honor of the birthday of General Wallace. He was so well pleased with the result, that he induced Mr. Cox to mount it as a pantomime and prepare a libretto. Mr. Cox secured the assistance of Mr. Clark, and "Ben Hur" was prepared as something entirely new and unique in the dramatic line. The scenery for the presentation was painted by Thomas G. Moses, who spent years in the old world and is one of the best living painters of oriental scenery. There is a whole carload of the scenery and stage properties, including fifty-six drops and a vast quantity of as fine stage settings as ever graced a stage.

During the first seasons the principal parts were taken by professionals, but that plan was abandoned, as it was found that the local talent in the cities where the pantomime was presented could do just as well, and the presentation was much more satisfactory to those who took part. There are ten people, however, who are inseparably connected with it—a French draper and costumer, manager, stage carpenter, scenic light operator, master of properties and several drill masters. It is claimed that there is nothing that was ever seen on the stage that could equal the costumes that are to be seen in this presentation of "Ben Hur." There is not a line of dialogue, as everything is represented by action, although it is not a series of tableaux. There is not an interval of more than thirty seconds, so there are no tiresome waits.

Pretty Effects.

The graver scenes are relieved by dances of the blackbirds and butterflies and revels of the naiads and priestesses in all the splendors and bright colors of the orient. The dance of the butterflies, little girls between 10 and 12 years of age, is said to be exquisitely beautiful, as the little folks in many colored costumes and dimy wings execute their poetic movements in the grove of Daphne by moonlight. The Hindoo scarf dance, the march of the naiads, the march of the Roman soldiers, the tamborine dance by Arab maidens, the dance of the gondoliers and the dance of the Graces are other features that appear with splendid effect under the constantly changing scenery and shifting lights.

The principal parts will be cast as follows: Ben-Hur, Mr. Funkhouser; King Herod, Prof. James; Simonides, Thomas Kilpatrick; Messala, Mr. Wright; the Wise Men, Colonel C. S. Chase, Jules Lumbard, Jesse Lacey; Valerius Gratius, Charles Wilson; Esther, Miss McKenna; Iras, Mrs. Clement Chase; Amrah, Miss Preston; Tirzah, Miss Mary Brown; Naiads, Misses Dundy, Wallace, Curtis, Lowe, Smith, Nash, Reese, Wakeley, Millard, Doane, Balcombe, Clarkson, Warrick, Kinzie, Chambers, Morton, Copeland, Wallace, Nightingale, Lowe, Hughes, Hibbard.

Many of the classes are not yet filled, as those in charge have not had an opportunity to see half of those who are expected to take part, but the drilling of some of the classes has already commenced.

It is the intention to make this society's big public demonstration of the year, and unlike the Creche and charity balls and other features of former years the mistake will not be made of putting prices at a prohibitive figure, but the regular prices at the Boyd, where the four presentations will be given, will remain as usual.

A rate of a fare and a third has been secured on all railroads, and it is expected that the great theater will be packed on each evening, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and at the Wednesday matinee.

Movements of Ocean Steamers.

At Kinsale—Passed—Kansas, from Boston for Liverpool; Bostonian, for Liverpool.

At Glasgow—Arrived—Manitoban, from Philadelphia.

At Fire Island—Arrived—Etruria, from Queenstown.

At Flushing—Passed—Rhineland, from Antwerp for New York.

At Amsterdam—Arrived—Belova, from New York.

At New York—Arrived—Fuerst Bismarck, from Southampton; Zaandam, from Amsterdam.

At London—Arrived—Othello, from New York for Antwerp; Persian Monarch, from New York.

At Lizard—Passed—Helvetia, from New York for Liverpool. Signaled—La Gascogne, from New York for Havre.

John Horr Dangerously Ill.

NEW YORK, Nov. 12.—John Horr, ex-president of the Adams Express company, is lying dangerously ill at his apartments at Delmonico's. Grave doubts are expressed by his physicians and family as to his recovery. The disease from which Mr. Horr is suffering is chronic Bright's disease.

Reducing Their Force.

READING, Pa., Nov. 12.—A telegram from Phoenixville this morning says the night turn on two mills of the Phoenix iron mills has been taken off and will be followed by a general reduction of force all over the works on Monday. A lack of orders is ascribed as the cause.