

GLASGOW'S MUNICIPAL SERVICES.

A LEAD TO THE WORLD.

By JAMES WILLOCK.

YES, we Glasgow citizens are rather proud of Glasgow. Not because our city is the Second City of the Empire. That is a mere distinction of numbers. Besides, we have doubts as to whether or not Calcutta has more people within its borders than we have. And there is also Birmingham. What does it matter? Greatness of population is no standard of greatness of a city.

Our pride is based on something higher than mass of population. It is based on Glasgow's pre-eminence in the provision of services by the municipality for the benefit of the citizens. In many respects Glasgow has anticipated measures which would more properly belong to the Socialistic State. It believes in municipalisation, not nationalisation. And from the practical expression of its belief has grown the many successes of its civic enterprise. As a kind of foster-parent to the citizens, the Corporation provides them with various necessities of civilised life, as well as with what some people regard as the luxuries of existence—literature, art, and music. Of course, Glasgow citizens growl just like the citizens of any other town about the high

rates. It is human nature to growl. But were they to take the trouble to examine the details, they might realise that they get quite a good bargain for payment of the rates.

Municipalisation is no recent growth in Glasgow. It began early. As early as 1760, when the Corporation set out to improve on Providence by tackling the deepening of the Clyde. For forty-nine years the civic fathers continued the work, but in 1809 harbour and river were handed over to the Clyde Trust, now the responsible body for the control of the busy docks of Glasgow. Water seems to have exercised an irresistible fascination on these early pioneers of municipalisation. Their next enterprise was to provide an ample water supply for the city. Private enterprise had done so for over forty years. But the Corporation, convinced that communal enterprise could do better, decided to do something for itself, and, incidentally, for posterity. It lifted its eyes to the hills of the Highlands, some thirty-four miles to the north of the city, and proposed to tap Loch Katrine, the jewel of the Trossachs. Impressed by the opinion of the Admiralty that the Corporation scheme would affect navigation on the River Forth, and the views of a professor, who maintained that the action of water on lead would render its use exceedingly dangerous, Parliament rejected the Glasgow bill asking for powers. But the Corporation, though dismayed, was determined. It examined the case for the opposition, collected rebutting evidence, and, twelve months after its defeat, obtained Parliamentary permission to carry out the scheme. It also bought



Loch Katrine and Ben Venue

out the private companies, and in 1859 Queen Victoria opened the works at Loch Katrine. As the result of continuous development and the purchase of other lochs and reservoirs, the municipality can now supply 110,000,000 gallons of water each day to the citizens.

Providence and the Corporation were partners in that enterprise. Providence supplied the water; the Corporation brought it to the homes of the citizens. But the Corporation was wholly responsible for the tramway system, a famous feather in the cap of the municipality. Again Glasgow was ahead as a pioneer. In 1872 the Corporation constructed the first tramway line in the city. Ever since that year the tramway lines have always been part of the communal property. Only, the city did not work the system. The municipalised track was leased to a private company for twenty-three years. In 1894 the Corporation, however, undertook the working of the tramways. Six years later the whole system was electrified. The success of the trams has been remarkable, and, though they do not provide a revenue sufficient to abolish rates, as has been alleged by foreign admirers, they are the chief contributor to the civic reserve fund. The system, which, measured in single track, extends over a length of $198\frac{1}{4}$ miles, is most efficient, and the fares charged are the lowest in the country, though a year ago they had to be increased in sympathy with the increase in the cost of everything. The traffic revenue this year was £2,347,218, and over 431 million passengers were carried. This far-flung system of municipal transport, to which the Subway

has been this year added by purchase from a private company, has a distinct social value. It efficiently and conveniently links up the suburbs and the open country beyond with the city. The facilities it provides for getting about are constant invitations for the citizens to leave the overcrowded centre and live outwith the city. The trams will undoubtedly help to solve the problem of overcrowding in the congested areas in Glasgow—the problem of problems of the city, the skeleton in our civic cupboard which we do not care to trot out for the gaze of strangers.

Of course, electricity and gas are municipalised. What of less material things, which pay no financial dividend, only dividends in the moral and physical advancement of the people? Well, the municipality is enthusiastic and enterprising in the sphere of the uplift. It has thirty-one parks, several outwith the city boundaries. One unique in parks is at Ardgoil, a Highland ridge of a wild and picturesque nature between Loch Long and Loch Goil. Another is situated on the shores of Loch Lomond, bought by the Corporation in order to preserve for the benefit of ordinary people a bit of “the bonnie, bonnie banks” of the Queen of Scottish lochs; a third is Cathkin Braes Park, three miles from the eastern boundaries, and two outside the southern bounds are Rouken Glen and the Linn Park. Many of these have been gifted by generous citizens. In addition to its parks, the city has ninety open spaces, giving a touch of gaiety to congested areas, and providing resting-places for the old and playgrounds for the young. Nor has the spirit of play been banished from the parks, for many of

them have facilities for football and cricket, while municipal golf courses and bowling greens and tennis courts have been established. And these are being increased each year, as the old policy of reserving public parks for sheep and "keep off the grass" notices has now vanished into the limbo of forgotten things.

Music, too, is a feature of the parks of Glasgow. The Corporation has Parliamentary powers to spend £4000 each year on the provision of music in the parks, but the expenditure is often over £10,000, the deficit being met from the revenue derived from reserved seats. The municipality also provides cheap vocal and instrumental concerts in the public halls at a small charge, and in its spacious Art Galleries at Kelvingrove, which contain pictures calculated to make American collectors envious, organ recitals are frequently given. Nor are the claims of literature ignored, as all over the city are free libraries, with the Mitchell Library, containing well over 200,000 volumes, as the heart of the municipal library system.

So much for the mental and moral well-being of the citizens. What about the physical? Well, the Public Health Department is up to date and efficient. Its efficiency is perhaps best indicated by the continuous decline in the death-rate. In 1870 the rate was 29·6 per thousand, compared with 15·0 in 1920, the difference being equivalent to a saving of over 16,000 lives per annum. Cleansing of streets, disposal of refuse, measures for the prevention of infectious diseases, the provision of hospitals and sanatoria, sanitation, public baths and wash-

houses are all enterprises inspired and controlled by the municipality, which is determined to make Glasgow a healthy city.

Do we claim Glasgow to be a kind of half-way house to Utopia? In exalted moments we may. But, alas! we recognise there is a fly in the ointment. We are none too proud of our housing. But—let it be put to our credit—we recognise the blemish on the escutcheon of our municipal eminence, and are trying hard to wipe it off. Only, we move slowly. The job is so big. And so costly, especially when money is scarce and a Ministry of Health has rather limited ideas of what a real house ought to be.

Glasgow characteristically began early to take an interest in the housing of “the under-dog.” The first step was taken in 1866, by the passing of the Glasgow Improvements Act, under which dilapidated and insanitary dwellings on about 90 acres in various parts of the city were demolished; 30 new streets were formed, and 26 existing streets were widened and improved. It was a very notable purge, showing that the municipality was in earnest. By another Act, passed in 1897, seven congested and insanitary areas in the centre of the city were cleared, but the Corporation at the same time took steps to provide houses for the poorer classes, at a cost of £73,000. Of course, the problem of the slums is now complicated by the problem of housing in general. At present Glasgow requires something over 57,000 houses, and the municipality has set up a Housing Department to undertake the job. Since the Armistice about 4000 houses have

been built by the Corporation. Frankly, the situation is worse since the signing of the Peace Treaty. The conditions are appalling. As many as eight persons have been found living in a single apartment, with only one bed. In a two-apartment house two families were discovered, eleven persons altogether. One of the adults had tuberculosis. In the East End two families, comprising fifteen persons, tenanted a room and kitchen suitable for four persons. In the city there are 40,654 one-apartment and 112,672 two-apartment houses. In Sheffield the average person has three times more room than the average person in Glasgow. In the one case density of population works out at 19 per acre; in the other, 56 per acre. That is why Glasgow has to spend, roughly, £800,000 per year on health measures, principally on the treatment of disease—tuberculosis, fevers, measles, and troubles which flourish in the fetid atmosphere of congested areas.

Housing is the importunate problem of Glasgow, which contains one-fourth of the population of Scotland within its borders. The municipality is alive to the urgency and importance of the problem. At present it builds within the civic boundaries. Ought it not, as it did in the water problem, lift its eyes unto the hills which ring Glasgow—ideal sites for garden suburbs, where people might live away from grey streets and towering tenements and sordid slums?

On a hill one lifts the horizon to visions of a brighter and better life.