

## THE CITY.

### Frederic C. Howe's Hopeful New Book on Municipal Government and Its Many Problems.



THE city has been a fascinating subject for the political philosopher from the remotest time in which men gathered in fortified places and from thence ruled or robbed the surrounding lands. There are few evils and few blessings that have not been attributed to this form of organization of human activities, and in our later days the city is the puzzle of the student, the delight of the theorist, since in its curious and striking contrasts the former burrows patiently, with little success, for the clue to the mystery, and the latter finds ample support for almost any view he may care to push.

Mr. Frederic C. Howe of Cleveland, Ohio, is a good deal of a theorist, but, happily also, he is very much of a student, and he has written a book with the encouraging title, "The City the Hope of Democracy," (Scribner,) in which the fruits of his study are well worth careful attention, even—and especially—by those who cannot accept his somewhat radical theory. Unfortunately he presents both facts and inferences in a somewhat too rhetorical form. He is not without knowledge drawn from active participation in public affairs—he was elected to the State Senate of Ohio this Autumn—but his style, if he will pardon us for saying so, is too openly that of the lecturer. He works in his shadows with plenty of bitumen, and he touches in his lights with rather garish color. He has the habit of iteration, with variation only in form, not in substance, and the reader's attention is wearied thereby as the attention of hearers probably would not be. Nor does he always resist the temptation to destroy, with much clang of weapons, creatures of straw that might with safety and profit be left to dissolution by time.

FOR instance, at the very outset, he declares: "Reform organizations have voted democracy a failure." With long experience, sometimes weary, often amusing, in the observation of reform organizations we fail to recall any of them that have taken this position. Mr. Howe thus describes the aims of the persons here alluded to:

They would limit the suffrage. They would divorce National issues from city politics. They would pass civil service reform laws. They would elect better men to office. They would treat the city as a business concern, and put its affairs in the hands of commissioners or experts.

This is a queer jumble. Men might wish to do any one of these things, except the first, and not wish at all to do the first. But Mr. Howe holds a brief for democracy of a peculiar type. He will not be content unless he empties the court room of all other advocates. The city with its very obvious ills shall be rescued in his way and no other.

NOW this is a pity, because Mr. Howe has gleaned a lot of interesting information about cities, and his mode of presenting it is calculated to prevent sober-minded people from giving it the attention it really deserves. He has the same difficulty with his theories. There is much to sustain them. There are considerable tendencies toward the acceptance of them. The author's real attitude toward them is creditable to him. He is sincere and very much in earnest. He has done a good deal of work, apparently, of a practical character. His feeling is one of intense philanthropy and his ideals are lofty. But he seems to transfer to his means the profound confidence he has in the end he proposes, and he claims for the two measures which embody his notion of remedies more than the cautious reader can possibly accord. These two measures, so far as we can gather, are (1) the municipal ownership and operation of all

activities of general utility that are in the nature of monopoly, and (2) the collection of all municipal revenues from the taxation of land apart from building and improvements. The first of these, he is confident, will practically abolish corruption, because corruption arises almost wholly from the existence of corporate privileges and the desire to control them. The second will automatically yield a very large income, which the municipal government, freed from corruption by his first measure, will proceed to spend wisely, generously, and with purity in the promotion of the public welfare, in cheap and rapid transportation to cheap and good homes, and for all like purposes. By the happy operation of a moral principle, which provokingly suggests perpetual motion or the fabled purse of Fortunatus, the more and more difficult functions the city assumes the more wisely and purely, Mr. Howe thinks, they will be discharged.

IT is because of this latter assumption that Mr. Howe believes that the city is the hope of democracy. Being provided with practically unlimited funds by the taxation of land values, which are bound steadily and forever to increase, and being safeguarded from corruption or inefficiency by the operation of the magical principle referred to, the city necessarily becomes the most powerful agency for unmixed beneficence that the race has yet come across in its long experience—an agency, indeed, almost more powerful for beneficence more complete than the mind of the fondest and boldest dreamer has conceived. We wish it were possible for us to believe in it. And yet we by no means wholly reject it. We are convinced that the tendency is toward this far-off divine event. The functions of municipal organization are perceptibly broadening and the wisdom of taxation on realty—not on land alone—is more and more accepted. But it will take many generations to secure any substantial approach to ideally clean and efficient management of city affairs. Mr. Howe's book, we fear, will not advance that result as much as it might have done had it been more soberly written. E. C.