Typical Theses.

COURSE IX.

[A Comparison of the Double and Single Chambers in Municipal Governments of the United States, by W. Thornton Parker, Jr.]

ONE of the most important and interesting problems with which American Administrative Law is at present concerned is the question of the organization of the municipal legislatures. It is with one phase of this question, whether the legislative body shall be composed of one or two chambers, that the present thesis attempts to deal.

The original form of municipal government in the United States was taken directly from the English system of the seventeenth century, and so we find that our early charters, almost without exception, provide for a single chamber composed of aldermen, councilmen, and a recorder.

The separation of the aldermen and councilmen was the germ which naturally developed into a bicameral form of government. Two distinct classes of members could not long remain as one body, especially under the powerful influence of the two-chamber system of the Federal and State legislatures. So, by the middle of the present century, the bicameral type prevailed.

During the past decade, however, there has been a decided tendency to return to the single chamber. The two systems are now found scattered, without apparent rule, over the entire country, but in general, small cities, recently incorporated cities, and cities whose charters have been revised within the last ten years, have the single chamber. Among the large cities having the single chamber are Chicago, San Francisco, New Orleans, Detroit, Cleveland, Indianapolis, and all the cities of New York State except Buffalo.

The bicameral form is found in Philadelphia, St. Louis, Baltimore, Louisville, and generally in the cities of New England and Pennsylvania. Boston has the double chamber, but the strong feeling against it will probably cause the abolition of the lower house within the next year.

When two systems, so radically different, are found existing in close proximity in cities of every size and interest, the arguments in favor of each are naturally numerous and diversified. It is claimed for the single chamber that it fixes responsibility, is more consistent with modern municipal conditions, such as the substitution of professional heads of departments for the board system and the development of the corporate functions. Then the single chamber is held to be a partial cure for lobbying, gas rings, ward corruption, and extravagance, and so brings a better class of men into the city government.

The bicameralists, of course, take many of the same arguments and turn them around. They say that a double chamber prevents hasty legislation, undue extravagance, and rings. They also claim that it is the natural and consistent form of American government.

In such a problem as this there is necessarily a great discrepancy between the claims of the opposing factions, yet by taking the experience of a large number of cities, it is hoped to derive the true significance of these various arguments.

A secondary object of this thesis has been a study of the details of organization of single chamber legislatures to discover, as far as possible, the best form under that system. In this connection the proportion of councilmen to the population of the city, their terms of office, and other facts, have been especially considered. Particular attention has been given to the new charters of Holyoke and North Adams, Mass., which represent the most recent theories of municipal government.

H. B. Shattuck & Son, of 249 Columbus Avenue, have offered an 1897 Stearns wheel to the winner of the Individual Athletic Championship.