

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN KANSAS.

JAMES H. CANFIELD.

*"Of all systems of government * * * it may be asserted without fear of contradiction, that the most difficult to establish and render effective, * * * the one which evidently requires the greatest maturity of reason, of morality, of civilization, in the society to which it is applied, * * * is the federative system of the United States of America."—GUIZOT.*

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS little volume endeavors to secure practical results with the utmost simplicity and directness of statement. To be successfully used, it must be regarded as one of those "thin" books which are necessarily supplemented by earnest and competent instruction. It is a book of texts—as every true text-book should be.

Such matters as are peculiarly liable to change have been avoided, or touched as lightly as possible; the intention being to sketch the groundwork only—that which may be regarded as reasonably permanent.

In order to prevent possible confusion by reason of too many details, and to place the remuneration for public service where it belongs—subordinate to the service itself—no definite salaries have been stated.

As far as it has seemed desirable, the language of the statutes has been used.

As the purpose of the work is simply to report the present facts of local government, there is very little criticism; very few words as to what such government ought to be. Such criticism and discussion might be very properly considered out of place in the common schools of the State.

Suggestions that look to improvements or corrections in future editions will be welcomed. The appreciation of those received during the past four years is shown by their appearance in this revision.

As there was but one motive in undertaking the task of preparing this manual, so there should be but one in using it—an earnest desire to advance good citizenship in this imperial Commonwealth.

J. H. C.

LAWRENCE, May, 1889.

In issuing a Revised Edition of this work, the publishers would state that the entire book has been carefully revised, with the author's consent, by JUDGE W. C. WEBB, of Topeka, who has incorporated the changes rendered necessary by recent legislative enactments, thus bringing it down to the present time. A few other corrections have been made, and some omissions supplied. It is believed the matters stated in the book are reliable, and in entire harmony with the author's purpose.

PHILADELPHIA, May, 1894.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE are two great principles which may be called the corner-stones on which our Government—National, State, and local—rests. These are—

1. The active and intelligent participation of each citizen in political affairs;

2. Office is a trust, and public officers are the servants of the people; responsible to the people for the proper discharge of every duty.

With regard to the first, some one has well said that the public business of America is the private business of every citizen. This fact should never be forgotten. We acknowledge no king, we have no governing class. All power is with the people. Those who neglect to exercise this power really have no share in the Government. They are disfranchised by their own act. Those who do not exercise this power intelligently soon come under the control of the cunning and the crafty. In either case there is only a pretense of self-government, and there is ever-increasing danger that even the pretense may come to an end.

The second principle, expressed in the plainest terms, would be: every public officer, from President down, is simply a "hired man." His first and best efforts are due to those who hire him. No business of his own may interfere with his work for his employers. This is measurably true of a legislator also. In certain general questions he may act according to his best judgment, but always following the wishes of his constituents as far as he understands them. On specific issues he must do their bidding exactly, or give place to some one who will do so. To determine whether an official, or a legislator, is a worthy servant, one to be hired again, the people must know what to expect of him, must understand his duties, and must be able to decide how he has discharged them. Here is another demand for popular intelligence in public affairs.

The great mass of our voters are plain, hard-working men. Most of them toil daily with their hands for bread. All the machinery of state, therefore, should be as simple as possible, that public affairs may be easily understood by all citizens. If any action on the part of the Government is so complicated that very few people can comprehend it, there is great danger that some one is making use of our ignorance to his own advantage. This is not necessarily true in every case, but is so often true that we cannot afford to take any chances. But no Government can be carried on intelligently, if it must be kept within the comprehension of ignorant people. It is therefore the duty of every citizen to seek all possible information on public questions, that the line of government may rise. This is why we have public schools, and why instruction is given in United States History and in the Constitution of the United States. But we have thus far forgotten that local government is just as important as national government; that it touches our daily lives and personal affairs even more closely than the latter does; and that only when our local business is well cared for, can we hope to have a wise administration of the affairs of the nation. Moreover, if we understand our local affairs, we much more easily comprehend what is going on in the nation. To extend this knowledge of home government is the purpose of this little book.

Our experiment in free government depends for its success on our being an enlightened, unselfish, far-sighted people. Just as these foundation qualities are either weak or wanting, the building is unstable, and disaster is more or less imminent. If we ever reach a time when ignorant, selfish, and present-policy men are permanently in the majority, the building will fall.

If this nation is to stand for all time, growing purer and stronger and more worthy of the admiration of the whole civilized world, it must become and remain, in the very broadest and best sense of the words, "A government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

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THE SCHOOL DISTRICT.

1. Prelude.—The State establishes free schools for the sake of securing good citizens. No one can be a good citizen unless he has a fair understanding, at least, of the workings of his own government—the machinery of public affairs. Only as this runs smoothly, continuously, and with the least possible friction, is it of much real value to those in whose daily lives it necessarily plays such an important part. In a free government like our own, offices are filled—sometimes, it must be confessed, in a rather hap-hazard way—by persons chosen from the people and by the people. Hence, it is peculiarly necessary that every one, whether he serves or determines who shall serve, shall possess a fair degree of knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of the positions which he may be asked to fill, or in which he places his neighbors and friends. Without such knowledge, the civil service would soon become both inefficient and corrupt. In securing this necessary information, it is best to begin at home; with that in which we are naturally most interested. This will be the School District.

2. The School District.—One of the smallest civil divisions which the State recognizes is the School Dis-