

CHAPTER XIV.

MUNICIPALITIES, CORPORATIONS, AND
DISTRICT COUNCILS.*Grants-in-Aid.*

CORPORATIONS. — RATES LEVIED ON CITIZENS. — CORPORATIONS CAN BORROW MONEY ON THE SECURITY OF THEIR RATES. — DISTRICT COUNCILS. — RATES FOR DISTRICT PURPOSES. — CHECK TO CENTRALIZATION. — EXAMPLE OF CENTRALIZATION IN SOME EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. — ENGLISH AND AMERICAN PEOPLE PREFER LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT. — GRANTS-IN-AID. — ROAD BOARDS.

IN the early stages of our colonial life the government took charge of all public improvements, but as population increased, and the towns and farming districts got settled, it was thought advisable that these towns and districts should manage their own local affairs. The citizens or ratepayers of Adelaide and other towns elected **municipal councils**, with a **mayor** to preside over them. These have the power to make streets and footpaths, to light the streets, to plant the squares and park lands, to license cabs and omnibuses, to regulate weights and measures, and to employ inspectors of nuisances likely to be hurtful to the health of the people in the town. In order to find money to pay for these useful things, the **corporation** levies **rates** on the property in the town. The mayor, who is chosen for one year, and the councillors, who are elected for two years, form together the corporation. This rating is a **direct tax** (see chapter VI., page 44), which is demanded

by the city rate collector to be paid on a certain day. There is generally a good deal of interest felt as to who should be the mayor, as he is the only one of the Adelaide corporation who has a salary, and as he represents the city on all public occasions. But there is not sufficient interest taken in the election of councillors, who have each as much to do with levying the rates and spending them as the mayor himself. In fact, the mayor, like the speaker of the House of Assembly, never votes at all unless the votes on both sides are equal; and it is really of greater importance that we should have sensible and honest councillors than that we should have a mayor who can make a good speech at a public dinner.

Corporations can borrow money on the security of their rates, as governments can do on the security of their general revenue. Many large city improvements are carried on with borrowed money. Some great works, such as deep drainage, are helped by the general revenue. The corporation cannot levy a rate higher than one shilling in the pound of assessed rental, for ordinary purposes in one year. For extraordinary work like deep drainage, the corporation is able to levy as much as two shillings and sixpence in the pound. The assessed rental is always a good deal less than the real rent or value of the property.

Country districts, instead of corporations, have **district councils**.* These district councillors are elected by the ratepayers within the limits of the district. They choose their own chairman, who presides over the five or six councillors. These district councils raise money to make and repair the roads by rates on land and houses. They also regulate the slaughter-houses, and settle when stubble may be burnt, and other local matters. It is a very good thing to save government from these little duties, and also they are generally done better and more cheaply by people

* They are called shire councils in Victoria and New South Wales.

on the spot. We saw that the government employed many boards of private gentlemen to manage various departments, and this is not only to save the time and trouble of government officers, but for the purpose of **checking centralization**. This is a long word, but not really difficult to understand. If South Australia was greatly centralized as to government, a road or a culvert could not be made or mended in a country district without asking for permission and money from the commissioner of public works. A destitute person could not be relieved without applying to the chief secretary. A man could not kill cattle and sell the meat without permission from an official in Adelaide. There have been, and still are governments in Europe where the most minute regulations are sent from the metropolis or the centre of government for all such sorts of trifling matters, and this requires an enormous staff of officials and clerks to receive and answer letters, and to record all this unimportant business. English and American people prefer **local self-government** for all such minor matters. It is also a great security against despotic power on the part of the sovereign.

In order to encourage the districts to spend money for local improvements, whatever portion of the rates is not spent in salaries, but actually laid out on roads, bridges, &c., is supplemented or added to by the general revenue at the rate of pound per pound: this is called a **grant-in-aid**. The main roads are made and maintained altogether at the expense of the general revenue, and the management of them is now entrusted to several boards of gentlemen belonging to the several districts. There is the midland, the north midland, the northern, the south-eastern, and the Yorke's Peninsula road board. The district roads used by the farmers and others to get from their homes to the main road are made with money obtained from the district rates, helped by the general revenue.