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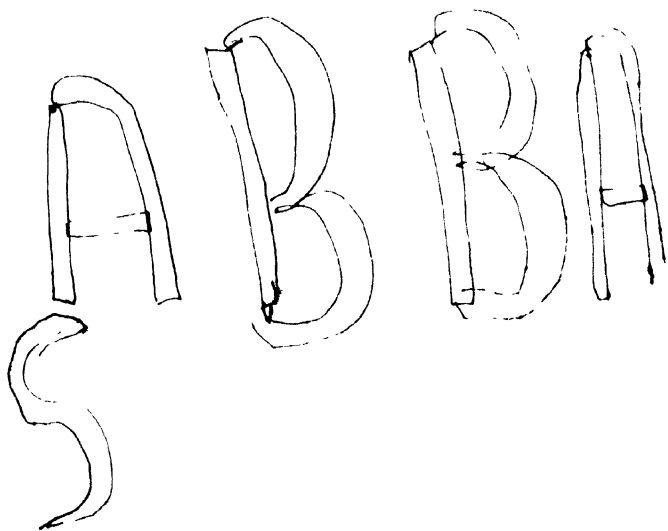
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HOW LOCAL
GOVERNMENT WORKS

In this well documented little book, Honor Wyatt explains the meaning of local government. She introduces the reader to the real people who live behind such titles as 'Mayor', 'Town Clerk', and 'Alderman', and describes their work. She tells the reader what happens at committee meetings, how an election is conducted, and shows how present-day procedure has grown from ancient custom. Above all, she emphasises the fact that local government is not something apart, but 'of the people, by the people, for the people'.

HOW LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORKS

HONOR WYATT



THE BODLEY HEAD . LONDON

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HONOR WYATT

Chapter One

THE MEANING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

ALITTLE while ago my younger son came home from his primary school very pleased but rather puzzled. He had been told that the next day would be a holiday because his school was being used for the Local Elections.

‘What does that mean?’ he asked. ‘What will be happening in the school?’

I told him that he had better come along with me to see for himself. So quite early the next morning—I wanted to do my voting before I went to the shops—we set out for the school. My son found the atmosphere very different from what it was on ordinary days. Just inside the door, instead of prefects sharply telling him that if he did not hurry he would lose a house mark, two of our neighbours stood politely saying ‘Good morning!’ and asked me for my number.

Then in the Assembly Hall associated usually with prayers and prize-giving, was a row of blackboards proclaiming neither mathematical problems nor the dates of the kings of England, but the names of all the streets in our district. From these boards I learned that I would have to cast my vote in room G. Robert was not allowed in the voting rooms (which to him, of course, were classrooms) so he waited outside. Through the open door he could see me going into one of a row of

little booths, rather like telephone boxes, from which I emerged half a minute later carrying a slip of folded paper which I posted in a box that stood on one of the desks.

The school continued to be a centre of activity for the rest of the day. Robert and his friends spent their time fishing, playing football and riding their bicycles, until the evening when it began to rain.

‘But I still don’t quite understand,’ he remarked at supper, ‘what it’s all been about.’

Well, what it was all about was what this book is all about: Local Government. On that day I and most of the other grown-ups in our district were choosing the people who would be responsible for seeing that we had a good field to play football on, that our cinema was well ventilated and protected against fire, that our roads were fit to cycle and drive along, that our dustbins were emptied regularly and our pavements cleaned—and very many other things that play an important part in our daily lives. The people, in fact, whose job it is to see that our district is pleasant, safe and comfortable. They are Councillors, members of our local government or council. Every district has a council.

You know that the government of Great Britain which meets in the Houses of Parliament at Westminster is known as the Central Government. But although the Central Government is responsible for the big things that affect the whole country, like Income Tax and Railways and the BBC, it obviously cannot keep its eye on every playing-field and dustbin in the British Isles. So Parliament asks—or rather tells—local governments or councils all over the country to see to these things. The

councils are made up of men and women who have been voted for by the people of their own district.

And in Robert's school that day, and in many other schools all over the country, people were voting for those men and women who, in their opinion, were best fitted to do the job.

Notes on Chapter One.

1. Local government is the government of a district by its local council.

2. The council is elected by the people of the district.

3. Do you know any of your local councillors personally? If so, do you know anything about their characters or abilities that explains why they were elected? Perhaps your parents can tell you.

Chapter Two

IN OTHER TIMES

LONG AGO in the history of our country, Local Governments were not necessary because it was divided into small kingdoms each under its own ruler. A king or chief of early Anglo-Saxon times would not have much difficulty in supervising his own little area without help. It was simple enough, for, say, a king of Wessex, but not so simple for a king of England. And when, in fact, the kingdom of Wessex grew so powerful that its king ruled all England, he had to do something about it.

One of the things he did was to divide the country into districts known as Earldoms which he gave into the care of some of his strongest and most trusted subjects, the Earls. Each Earldom consisted of two or more smaller districts known as Shires, and each did, in a sense, belong to the Earl who governed it. But the Earldoms were, all the same, a part of the king's England and were supposed to be governed on the king's behalf. I say 'supposed' because, in fact, the Earls did not much care for interference in the way they governed and the kings more or less accepted their right to do as they pleased.

But things were very different when Norman William took over. William had had a hard task conquering England, and what was the use of conquering a country unless you were indisputably in charge of it? He found

out almost all there was to know about his new subjects by sending officials to ask questions. They travelled to every part of England, finding out as much as they could, the size of every field and the number of people in each Manor. The answers were put in the famous Domesday Book. And he split up the old Earldoms into their Shires. From this time the Shires became known by a name of Norman origin: 'County'. (Though many of our counties are still also called shires. Devonshire, for instance, and Hampshire.) Each county, King William decided, should be governed in the king's name (and when he *said* the king's name he *meant* the king's name) by one of his own officers, a Sheriff.

A Sheriff did not own the county and he could be dismissed by the king at any time if he did not give satisfaction. But he was of high rank and very powerful, painfully so when it came to punishing wrongdoers and making people pay taxes. Small wonder that throughout the rule of the Norman kings the Sheriff was not exactly a popular character, particularly at the beginning when he would probably be a Norman, and therefore a foreigner. Everyone has heard of the Sheriff of Nottingham!

Within the counties there were various smaller units of local government. Some of these were centred round the big religious houses, the Abbeys. Others were centred round Manors.

A Manor was a kind of estate belonging to one man, its Lord. It could be big or small and it consisted of cultivated land on which stood the Manor House and the homes of the people who farmed the land for the Lord. These people were called villeins. They were not

free men, they were really part of the Lord's property and had to do as he told them.

The Manor House, in which the Lord lived, might be very big and made of stone or it might be quite small and made of wood, but whatever it was like, we may be sure it was much grander than the homes of the villeins, which were mostly hovels made of split logs with turf roofs and no opening but a doorway. It was the Lord's business not only to see that the Manor was well run and that his villeins kept his rules, but also that the King's laws were kept. He had various paid officials to help him: a steward, a hayward, and so on, and he was answerable to the Sheriff of the County in all matters that concerned the King's laws.

For example, it was against the law of England to kill a deer or a boar in the king's forests. William the Conqueror had ordained that anyone who did so should have his eyes put out. Under later Norman kings the offence was punishable by death. Well now, supposing a villein did kill a deer in the King's forest. He would, in such a case, be committing two offences, one against the King and another against his Lord, since it was strictly forbidden to go outside the precincts of the Manor. For this last crime the Lord might give whatever punishment he thought fit—the forfeit of two days' wages, perhaps, or the fine of a pig. But for the first crime, the actual killing, the villein would be handed over to the Sheriff. And the Sheriff, presiding over a court of law, would prescribe a punishment that would make any other discomforts the villein may have suffered pale into insignificance, poor man.

The Lord of the Manor, too, presided regularly over a

court, a Manor Court. Manor Courts were held quite often and everybody belonging to the Manor—which may have included one or several villages—had to be present. They were held not only for administering punishments, but also for hearing complaints and disputes. Under a good Lord, villeins were helped by the Manor Courts. Under a bad Lord, so much the worse for them.

Here is a story of part of the proceedings at a Manor Court in mediaeval times. It is not quite a true story because we do not know exactly what happened. But we do know from old records the kind of things that happened. And I want you, if you can, to decide when you have read it, what big difference lies between the local Government of those times and the Local Government of to-day. And what kind of man was the Lord in this particular case, do you think?

* * * *

The scene is an English village, a huddle of hovels and a twist of lanes surrounded by fields fresh with young crops, for it is summer. And enclosing it all, green, unknown and somehow menacing, are those forests where no man ventures but the Lord and his friends. The Manor House, built of stone, stands on a gentle slope, rimmed with farm outhouses, dairies, and barns. The Lord's fishpond gleams in the sunshine.

In winter the Courts are held in the big Hall of the Manor, but to-day the place chosen is the shade of a big oak, a tree so old that it seems a part of the furniture of the village. Here the people are assembled on this summer day, some seated on benches, others standing,

and the Lord installed in a big chair with his manager—or Steward—beside him. It is silent except for the birds of the air, who, unimpressed by the solemnity of the occasion, trill and chirrup among the foliage—and the voice of the Steward reading from the list of cases to be dealt with.

‘The case of John of the Mead, who did allow his little dog to kill and devour one of the Lord’s peacocks. The case of Thomas Rois, who did take unto himself a nest of wild honey. The case of Agnes, widow of Robert son of William, who seeks permission to farm the land of her deceased husband. The case of various persons who did continue to gather peas for their own use after the Hayward blew his horn . . .’

Suddenly there is a disturbance, caused by someone scuttling crab-like across the village green and joining the assembly as though he hopes not to be noticed, with the result everyone notices him immediately. The Lord, who has hitherto been anxiously scanning the sky and fearing rain (he intends to hunt that afternoon) looks down with interest. The Steward frowns and fixes the newcomer with a stern glance.

‘Peter the Shepherd, wherefor do you come at this late hour to the Lord’s Court?’

The shepherd, hot and breathless, falls on his knees in a kind of mock penance. He is a slight man overburdened by the goatskin pipes he carries over his shoulder. There is something of the clown about him, for though he droops respectfully, he cannot keep the merry gleam from his eye.’

‘If it please Your Honour, I was late in receiving the summons. And when I did receive it I had the task of

enclosing my flock—and that, as Your Honour knows, is as difficult as enclosing the tongue of a scolding woman in her mouth.’

‘You do not speak the truth, Master Shepherd,’ said the Steward. ‘I myself sent the Hayward to summon you and all the workers in the fields and pastures of the Manor, and it was in good time.’

‘Yes, Your Honour, but it was a great while before I could discern Master Hayward’s words from the bleating of the animals, there is such a likeness in their voices.’

A gasp rises at this impertinence and the Steward flushes with anger. But happening to turn towards the Lord and seeing the Lord smile, he says hurriedly, ‘Very well, you may stand back, Peter Shepherd, but in future be here upon the hour or a day’s wages will be forfeit. Now let John of the Mead stand forward!’

John of the Mead is very old and half-blind. He Shuffles into the open space holding a wolf-like dog by a leather thong. His answers to the Steward’s charge are faint and quavering. Yes, it is true that his dog has killed a peacock. He, John, had not perceived the bird and the dog had pulled himself free with great strength and suddenness. It was a grievous crime, but if the dog were destroyed then it would be John’s eyes that His Honour would be destroying, for he has no other means of finding his way about.

At this point the Lord leaned forward and spoke in his Steward’s ear. They conferred quietly for a minute then the Steward asked, ‘Is there any man who will care for John of the Mead if his dog is destroyed? For our Lord feels, in his great goodness, that it is not right

that an old man should be alone with his blindness.'

There is no answer. And this is not for want of sympathy but for want of time. For every person there, both man and woman, has work to do, both their own work on the small strips of land allowed them for their use, and on the Lord's land. And their work does not spare them for a single hour of the day, as the Lord well knows. The upshot of it all is that John's dog is ordered to be destroyed, but that a well-trained animal should be provided from among the Lord's own hounds.

Next comes Thomas Rois, he who had taken the wild honey. And a wild man he is too, young and untamed, with ruffled hair and sulky eyes.

'If I find a thing', he mumbles, 'then it is mine, just as my house is mine and my spade and my jacket . . .'

At this the Lord stands up, eyes blazing, and speaks in a voice of thunder. 'That is a strange word thou hast learnt, Thomas—'mine'! Dost thou not know that all thy goods and chattels are thy Lord's, and that thou hast no belongings but thy stomach?' He turns to the Steward. 'This man shall forfeit six day's wages.'

And so it is.

There follows the widow, Agnes, who pleads that she might be allowed to farm the land of her dead husband. Permission is not granted, since the Steward is able to prove that Robert (Agnes' husband) had expressed the wish that his land should pass into the care of his brother. Agnes's tears and demands as to what is to become of her and her little ones are met with the kind assurance that work would be found for her among the women at the Manor—though the

Steward is not able to say exactly when the work will be available, or whether it will be sufficiently well paid to feed Agnes and her family, or how she will be able to keep an eye on her babies while she works. The widow retires, weeping, into the crowd.

The case of the people who continued to gather the Lord's peas for their own eating after the Hayward had given them the signal to stop is easily disposed of. Half a day's extra work on the Lord's land for all. The Steward adds further, with extreme severity, that anyone who curses the Hayward or assaults him at his duty will be punished accordingly; and many eyes fall, for the Hayward is not liked.

"Walter of the Moor!" calls the Steward. And a burly, shy-looking man stands before him.

'Walter of the Moor, thou art attached to answer in this court wherefore by night and against the Lord's peace thou didst carry off at thy will divers manner of fish. How wilt thou make amends?'

'Sir,' says Walter, 'by thy leave I will impart.' Glancing at the cold eyes of the Steward he turns towards his Lord. 'For God's sake my Lord, do not take it ill of me, but I went the other evening along the bank of the pond and looked at the fish which were playing in the water, so beautiful and bright, and for the great desire I had of it I carried off a tench. Only a tench, my Lord, and that was all. For my wife's sake I took it, who for a full month has not been able to eat or drink to her liking.'

The Steward snorts and seems about to speak, but the Lord holds up his hand. 'Walter!' says he kindly, 'is thy wife very sick?'

'Very sick, my Lord, and near death. All the night she cries and all day, too, for all I know, but I am not there to tend her since I have to be about your work and mine.'

'Yes,' says the Lord of the Manor. He leans back in his chair and once again he considers the sky. Then he says, 'And was the tench to her liking?'

Walter looks round him uneasily, suspecting a trap. But he answers simply, 'My Lord, she ate the whole of it even to the tail.'

The Lord nods. Then he looks at Walter sternly. 'At least thou hast confessed in this court a tench taken and carried away in other wise than it should have been. Thou mightest have come by it in fairer fashion. Dost thou swear to me that thou hast not taken any other fish at any other time?'

'My Lord, I swear it!'

'That is well, for I trust thee. This penance only will I lay upon thee . . .' There is a pause, while Walter and all that are gathered there wait to hear what the punishment will be. 'Thou shalt come to the Manor every week upon a Friday and receive fish according to thy wife's liking and carry it to thy home, no matter how heavy it may be.'

Walter stares. 'But my Lord,' says the simple man, 'that is not a penance!'

Upon which the Lord throws back his head and laughs. And so does everyone else at that court—except the Steward.

* * * *

Well, what did you think of the Lord of this par-

ticular Manor? I think myself that he was neither very bad nor very good, but, like many in his position, a man, and a man with power. He could be kind when his sympathy was stirred, as in the case of blind John, and Walter, whose wife was ill. But if he was defied, as Thomas Rois defied him, then he was perhaps more severe than just.

As to the main difference between the kind of government exercised by a Manor Court and that we are used to to-day, did you spot that?

Supposing blind John of the Mead were alive now and had no one to look after him, would he be left to fend for himself? No. He could if he chose, go to a Home for the Blind, where he would be well looked after. And poor Agnes the widow, worrying about her children—to-day she would be able to arrange for them to go to a nursery school while she went out to work. She would also have a widow's pension to help her as well as—like all mothers—a family allowance. And Walter of the Moor's wife, who was so ill and alone all day would, of course, be in hospital.

All these things would either be provided by or arranged by the local Council.

But the Manor was not concerned with what we call welfare—that is, the care of the old, the very young, the sick, and the poor. It was far more concerned with handing out punishments or administering justice, a justice which often depended for fairness on the character of the person who presided over it. The Steward of the Manor did not cry, 'Build a hospital for the sick!' 'Look after old people!' 'Take care of children's health!' But, 'Catch that thief!' 'Hang that

criminal!' 'Drop that scolding woman in the river!' and 'Forfeit six days' wages for being impertinent!'

Naturally, there were in those days, as there are to-day, wealthy and powerful people who were as kind as they were rich and did all they could for those on their lands. The Lord of the Manor's wife would often give food and clothing to the villeins if she were such a person. But kindness depended on goodness of heart. There was no law that made kindness a duty.

Notes on Chapter Two.

1. Local Government became necessary when a ruler's kingdom grew too large for him to manage alone.

2. In England, William the Conqueror divided the Counties and appointed a Sheriff to govern each County in the king's name.

3. Within the Counties, smaller units of Local Government included the Manors.

4. What big difference, as illustrated by the Manor Court, lies between Local Government in Norman times and that of to-day?

Chapter Three

STILL LONG AGO: THE BEGINNINGS OF WELFARE

WE HAVE seen that in mediaeval times everybody who had authority was responsible to a higher authority for everything he did, except, of course, the Monarch.

The Lord had to answer to the Sheriff and the Sheriff to the King himself. The Sheriff would not be concerned in such trifles as the punishment of an innocent villein, but if a high road that passed through Manor land was in such bad repair as to be a danger to travellers, then the Sheriff might well have something to say about it. And the Sheriff in his turn, should he fail to collect the right amount of taxes in his area, or be unsuccessful in bringing a dangerous criminal to justice, would have to explain himself as best he might to his sovereign.

But in the course of time—in the course of hundreds of years in fact—both the King of England and the Lords would sometimes be willing to give up their right to rule over certain towns. They would give up this right for payment of money. The towns who bought their freedom would be prosperous towns in which lived not only villeins but free men, merchants who had grown rich in the trade with the East which had resulted from the Crusades.

Now that I have mentioned the Crusades you will

have some idea of the exact place we have reached in History, for the Crusades, as I expect you know, took place chiefly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. They cost a great deal of money, and quite often the King and nobles would be badly in need of a few hundred pounds for yet another journey Eastward. To whom should they turn? To whom could they turn but the merchants? The village or villages on a Lord's estate would, in some cases, have developed into prosperous towns by now, and the King owned several Manors. So what more natural than that they should ask these towns to help them? As a rule the merchants would agree, on certain conditions.

At first the conditions might be moderate. If the Lord would give them the right to fish in his pond or hunt in his forest then they would certainly make him a present of a hundred or two hundred pounds. (A pound was worth a great deal more then than it is now). And it was agreed.

But the next time, perhaps, the demands of both the Lord and the people might be greater. The Lord would ask for a very large sum and the town merchants would reply that four hundred golden pounds would be his in exchange for a written promise that the townspeople might manage their own affairs without any interference. In the case of the Lord being the King himself, then freedom from interference by the King's Sheriff would be asked for and probably granted. The written promises made by the Lords were called Charters. If made by the King, they were Royal Charters. And the town or city that had a Charter or Royal Charter (they hold them to this day) would establish a Council

elected by its freemen. The head of the Council was called a Mayor, and the other officials were important citizens known as Aldermen.

It was during the reign of King Richard the First, who reigned from 1189 to 1199, that Charters began to be granted frequently.

So here was another form of local government. The town or city Council. And it was the beginning of independence.

Once again, although most Councils did something towards protecting their people from poverty and illness, their main concern was in making rules and punishing those who did not obey them. The rules were generally made for the good of everyone and it was certainly reasonable that, for instance, a baker who sold bread underweight should be dragged through the town by horses with a loaf hanging round his neck! But there were no rules about helping the sick or the poor.

However, there was one place where the sick and the poor would always find help and that was in a Monastery or Abbey. Monks and Nuns were better educated than other people, they could read and write, and knew something about medicine. Most important of all, they regarded service to their fellow beings as an essential part of their service to God. So there would always be a mattress and a meal for anyone who knocked at their gate. And most people were content to leave such charitable work chiefly in the hands of these dedicated men and women. But, good as they were, monks and nuns could not give of their charity to all who stood in need of it. And you will remember that in any case

the time came when Henry the Eighth, breaking away from the Church of Rome, in 1534, put an end to the Monasteries.

What happened then to the poor and needy?

They became beggars.

In bands and hoards these beggars roamed the countryside, carrying staves, very often to beat up anyone who refused to help them. Desperate men are often violent, and I expect you know the old nursery rhyme :

*Hark ! Hark ! the dogs do bark
The beggars are coming to town.*

This speaks of the fear and helplessness citizens felt towards these poor people who were no one's responsibility. And it was perhaps as much because of the menace of the poor as for their suffering that by the time of Elizabeth the First, who came to the throne in 1558, a change had taken place and people were obliged by law to give money, in the form of taxes, to the needy. You have probably heard of the Elizabethan Poor Law.

Manor Courts were no longer held in Elizabeth's time. All matters that needed to be judged by a court came before big district courts presided over by Justices of the Peace, an office which had replaced that of Sheriff. The functions of the Justice of the Peace, though carrying even more power than that of a Sheriff, still did not include that of administering to the poor. The Poor Law was put into the hands of the Parishes.

Nothing has been said about Parishes up to now. The Parish centred round a church, had in fact been a unit of Local Government since very early days.

Sometimes the boundaries of a parish would cross or include part of the land belonging to a Manor. Often there were parts of several Manors in one parish. All the same, the parish would be responsible for everything on the Manor land that concerned the church, whether it was the upkeep of the church building or the collecting of church taxes from the parishioners.

This, then, was the ready-made instrument that Queen Elizabeth's government commanded to administer the Poor Law. Each Parish Council appointed a special Overseer of the Poor in its own district. His duty was to give the poor people work to do, to collect materials for them to work with, and to see that the other people of the district paid their share of money towards helping the poor.

So it was partly in this way that Local Government began to take that responsibility for people's well-being that is so much a part of Local Government to-day.

But this does not mean that Local Government automatically became a perfectly ordered machine. Far from it. Through many hundreds of years it had a very up-and-down story. At one time many local authorities were far too severely controlled by the Sovereign. Then, after a kind of revolution in which people tried to put this right, local authorities took too much power to themselves. The Justice of the Peace became a much feared and disliked person who could do more or less as he liked without any interference from either throne or Parliament. And what he liked was often to his own advantage—heavy taxation whose proceeds found their way into his own purse, and so on.

The confusion caused by this state of affairs came to its height in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the time when new machinery and factories were making England a busy industrial country. Round the new factories towns and cities grew and increased and became more and more difficult to manage. Even when a Local Government was honest and efficient—sometimes it was neither—it was unable to cope with the industrial growth which seemed to spread like fungus before people's very eyes.

In those days the sense of public duty had not reached such a high standard as it has to-day, but luckily there were a few imaginative and compassionate people who not only realised that something must be done, but managed to get themselves into the Central Government in order to do it. Certain reforms were introduced, and these resulted in the formation of local committees elected by people in their own area. Their business was to look after definite aspects of welfare. The schools, for instance, public health, the sewers, the workhouses.

These committees were known as Boards, and the people who served on them were Commissioners. The Boards had considerable powers. The School Boards, for instance, could not only say that a school must be built here or there, but could also appoint its teachers and supervise its rules. (Some of the old Board School buildings are still in use. Perhaps your primary school was one.) The Workhouse Board was responsible for seeing that the Workhouse in their district was run without too much expense and without too much distress to the inmates. That at least was the idea. But

if you have ever read Dicken's *Oliver Twist*, and know the terrible fate that overtook Oliver when he dared to ask for a second helping, you will know that workhouses were often places of cruelty and misery. This is how the writer Arnold Bennett describes a workhouse of those times. Although the description appears, like that of Dickens, in a novel, it is based on the true experience of one of his own relations who had been admitted to a workhouse with the rest of his family when he was a child.

'They were put into a cellar and stripped and washed and dressed in other people's clothes, and then separated. Darius was pitched into a large crowd of other boys, all dressed like himself. In the low room where the boys were assembled there fell a silence and Darius heard someone whisper that the celebrated boy who had run away had been caught and would be flogged before supper.

Someone brought in candles and laid them at the end of the long table. Then somebody else brought in a pickled birch rod, dripping with the salt water from which it had been taken, and also a small square table. Then came some officials and a clergyman, and then, surpassing the rest in majesty, the Governor of the workhouse, a terrible man. The Governor made a speech about the crime of running away and then the clergyman talked in the same sense. And then a captured tiger, dressed like a boy, with fierce darting eyes, was dragged in by two men and laid face down on the square table, and four boys were commanded to step forward and hold tightly on to the four members of

this tiger. And, his clothes having been removed as far as his waist, the rod was raised and descended, swishing, and blood began to flow. But far more startling were the shrill screams of the tiger; they were so loud and deafening that the spectators could safely converse.

Gradually the screaming grew feebler, then the blows ceased and the unconscious child (cured of being a tiger) was carried away.

After this supper was prepared on the long table and the clergyman called down upon it the blessing of God, enjoined the boys to be thankful, and departed in company with the Governor. And never had Darius with all his experience, seen or smelt anything so foully disgusting as the bread and gravy which was put before them.'

It was a wonder, wasn't it, that men could play any part in such a scene, particularly a man of God, like the clergyman who enjoined the boys to be thankful! And yet the clergyman, and perhaps the Governor too, might have been honest citizens, well liked by their friends and relations. But their attitude to the poor seems to us strange. It was almost as if it was a crime to be poor. Certainly the inmates of a workhouse could hardly have been treated with less sympathy had they been criminals. Even children suffered. It may have been that although it was now necessary by law to be charitable, too many people—factory owners and employers—were growing too rich to think of their less fortunate fellows as human beings. Many of the Commissioners sincerely considered it their duty to instil in the poor and needy a sense of gratitude for the

food and shelter they received. If they received kindness as well, they might take charity for granted, and that, of course, would never do!

Apart from all this, the Board system tended to increase the confusion in Local Government. There were always people being allotted to different Boards at different times of year. There was always an election to something being held somewhere. But there was one way in which all these different elections were taking a step in the right direction. They were making the average man and woman take an interest in what was going on in his or her own area, even if the interest was not quite as loving as it might have been. It had not been easy to take an interest when the local authority—in the person of the Justice of The Peace—was appointed by the Monarch through the Central Government. But when you yourself were asked to choose people to be responsible for local affairs, then naturally you began to give the matter more thought. And in due course (1871 to be exact) the Central Government formed what was known as a Local Government Board. This simply meant a department of the Central Government which would keep an eye on what was going on in Local Government throughout the country without interfering any more than was necessary.

In 1888 the whole country was divided in Local Government areas. Some of these areas were based on old divisions and counties. The English always like to use an existing frame-work when they can. They're not always very convenient, but there is something colourful about the past, and we are more romantic than we realize! In each of these areas Councils were set up,

to be elected at certain regular intervals, so that a councillor who was not satisfactory could not remain on the Council indefinitely. The different local Boards, which had been interested in one thing only, were disbanded. The Councils were to be a body of people interested in everything, who would meet regularly to discuss all the various needs of their district and prepared to carry out any suggestions on which they were agreed, provided that these suggestions were approved by the Local Government Board at Westminster.

Which brings us back to where we started, back to the day when your school was being used for the Local Elections, the day on which your parents voted for the councillors whom they wished to represent your district. The system to-day is very much the same as it was at the end of the nineteenth century. The only difference with which you need bother is that the Government Department concerned with Local Government is The Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

We have now finished our short but important history lesson. It is essential for you to know a little about how Local Government has developed in this country if you want to understand exactly how it works to-day.

Notes on Chapter Three.

1. During the Crusades towns and cities sometimes gave money to their Lords in exchange for freedom to manage their own affairs. The written promises which the Lords gave them were known as Charters.

2. A chartered town established its own Council,

led by a Mayor and Aldermen. This was the beginning of independent Local Government.

3. The Elizabethan Poor Law was one of the first laws which made care of the needy the responsibility of Local Government. The Poor Law was administered by the Parishes.

4. After a disturbed history during which local government had at one time too little, and at another time too much, power, local Boards were set up to deal with such matters as Sewers, Schools, Workhouses. Their object was to deal with the increasing problems created by the growth of industrial areas.

5. The Boards were not entirely successful partly because of their lack of human sympathy. But since they were elected by the *people*, they served to increase public interest in Local Government.

7. Are there any buildings in your district that were built by the old Boards? If so, you will probably find an inscription on them to this effect.

8. In 1871, a department of the Central Government was formed to look after Central Government affairs. It was called the Local Government Board.

9. In 1888 the country was divided into Local Government areas which mostly still exist to-day. Each area had a Council re-elected at regular intervals.

Chapter Four

AREAS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

WELL, HOW *does* it work? It works, first and foremost, democratically. That is to say, Councillors are elected by their own people, which means that every District is, in fact, governed by its own people. Just as you are really governing your own class in school if you vote for your own class captain. You take his advice and you do as he tells you. But he is only in this position because you have put him there.

Secondly, it works independently, without any interference from any area outside the District, except where necessary the highest authority of all, the Central Government. In the same way, what happens in your class has nothing to do with any other class, though it has something to do with your teachers, who decide about the school rules.

This country is divided into different areas for the purpose of Local Government—Administrative Areas, we call them.

As I have said, the country is divided into counties. These do not, in Local Government, exactly fit the geographical counties on your map, but they are roughly the same.

Every County has a *County Council*, which is the highest authority in the county.

Each town and city in the country has its *Council*.

These Councils, big or small, are called *Local Authorities*.

Every City and every Town that is in some way important—perhaps because it is very old or because it has some important industry—is a *County Borough*. This means that its Council does not refer to the County Council, but manages its own affairs entirely, except in matters which are the responsibility of the Central Government. The industrial town of Birmingham is a County Borough, so is the ancient city of Bath. You will often find that a County Borough is a descendant of a town that was granted a Charter or Royal Charter many hundreds of years ago. These Charters are still granted. Only recently the Duke of Edinburgh presented a Charter to the town of Merthyr Tydfil in Wales. This means that the town now becomes a County Borough.

All other big towns are simply *Boroughs*. A Borough Council refers to the higher authority of its County Council. Cambridge, Bury St. Edmunds and Salisbury are Boroughs.

The rest of the country is divided into districts, each centred round a town. If the town is a good-sized one, the district will be known as an *Urban District*. I myself live in a town in Surrey, and ours is an Urban District.

If the town is a small one then the district is called a *Rural District*.

Each Rural District is divided into *Parishes*. Parishes are not, as they were in the old days, concerned with church matters, but with a number of aspects of village life. Playing-fields, perhaps, or Rights of Way across fields and woods. Parishes are often very small and I always think of them as the

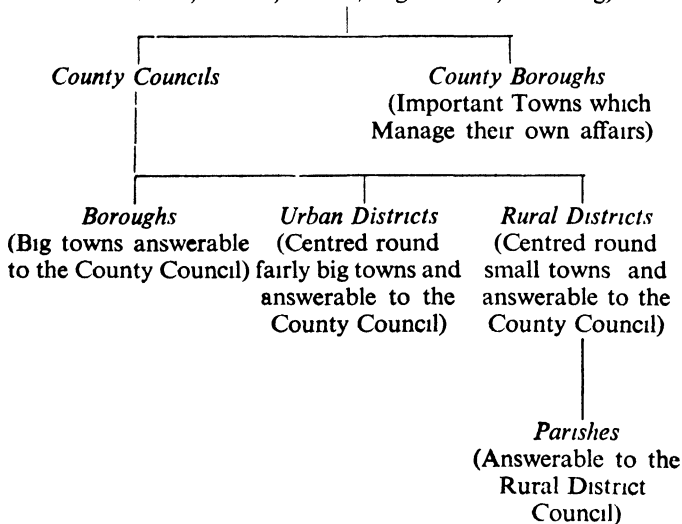
homeliest of all the divisions of Local Government.

Do not forget that even the highest authority in Local Government is bound to act according to the law of the country as laid down by the Central Government. Your school may be divided into Houses. The Head Boy (or Girl) of each House is an important person, but he must act according to the laws of the House as laid down by the Housemaster. The Housemaster is a *very* important person, but he cannot make any rules or decisions that go against the rules of the school as laid down by the most important person of all, the Headmaster.

Now I am going to give you a little plan which will, I hope, make it easier for you to get the various Local Authorities sorted out.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

(Responsible for such matters as Health, Transport,
Education, Police, Trade, Agriculture, Housing)



You will notice that I have made no mention of London. This is because London has its own special plan for Local Government. I will tell you about it in a later chapter.

Before we go any further will you, if you do not live in London, decide (or ask) which of these areas you live in yourself? You will then know how many Local Authorities you are concerned with. If you live in a very important town or a city there will, of course, be only one. But if you live in a village or in open country, then there are probably three.

As you see on the plan, the Central Government is chiefly responsible for many things that affect the whole country. For instance, not even a County Council or County Borough may decide to build more council houses or a new waterworks without permission from the Central Government.

But this does not mean that Local Authorities have no responsibility at all in these important matters. They most certainly have. For though it is the business of the Central Government to decide how much of the country's money shall be put aside for education, and what teachers' salaries shall be, it is the business of the County Council or County Borough Council to decide where and when a new school is needed. And though the Central Government is responsible for passing laws about Health (such as the laws which brought the National Health Scheme into being), it is the concern of the County or Borough Council to see that there are enough clinics in their area and that the hospitals are doing their job well. And though Public Transport is the concern of the Central Government, it

is the concern of your Local Authority to decide where your bus stops shall be. (If you wish there were a stop at the end of the High Street as well as in the middle, you would not be well advised to write to Westminster about it, but to your own Town Hall or Council Offices).

Not all Councils divide their responsibilities in the same way. In some cases the County Council will be responsible for such things as Fire Services and Roads; the Borough and Urban Districts for such things as Street Lighting and Public Parks; and Rural Districts for such things as Markets and Allotments.

But some Authorities may have a rather different scheme. And I would like to think that the moment you have finished reading this chapter, you will go and find out exactly what Authority is responsible for what in your District. If you happen to know one of your councillors personally, this will be easy. If not, go to your Town Hall or Council Offices and ask if you may make an appointment to see someone about it. Everyone in Local Government wishes that people would take a great deal more interest in it than they do, and your Authorities will, I am sure, be delighted to answer the questions of a young person like yourself!

You may be wondering what has happened to the administration of justice in Local Government. The Manor Courts and the Councils of chartered towns settled disputes and handed out punishments. Does Local Government not have anything to do with this kind of thing now? Yes, Local Government still has its part to play in seeing that people keep the laws of the country. But I am keeping this for a later chapter.

And now, having given you some idea of the pattern of Local Government, I must break the news to you that the complete picture is even more confused. As you grow older you will find that there are more fingers in every pie—in other words more groups of people concerned in everything—than you would think possible.

I remember living in an area where there was a pleasant little hospital for the people round about. It was known as the Cottage Hospital. It was cosy and friendly and had a charming garden, and everyone knew everyone else. Old Mrs. Jones was confident that the doctor knew all about her poor leg because he had been treating it for ten years, the doctor called many of his patients by their christian names, since it was he who had brought them in to the world. And the patients themselves knew all about one another, so that the whole business of being ill could be quite homely.

Imagine, then, the distress of the doctor and Mrs. Jones and others when it was learned that 'the Authorities' were planning to convert their Cottage Hospital into an Isolation Hospital for Infectious Diseases! This meant that people with illnesses which were not infectious would have to go to the hospital in the nearest town. A hospital whose Matron they had never even met, if you please, and whose cook had no idea that Miss Brown was partial to a little creamed fish, and Mr. Green to a nice apple-pie!

Who was responsible for this idea? Not, of course, the Rural District Council, since this never has any say in the running of hospitals. Then surely it must have been the County Council, which is responsible for the

hospitals in its District? No again. It was a body called the Regional Hospital Board. Regional Hospital Boards are set up by the Central Government to make sure that the health service is adequate in their own particular region. A region may cover several counties. In this case the Regional Board had clearly decided that there were not enough Isolation Hospitals in their Region, and that our little Cottage Hospital was not really necessary. In the long run the decision of the Board must be taken as final, though an energetic County Council may sometimes persuade it to change its mind. And quite a lot of people take part in the argument. In our case, irate villagers wrote angry letters to the local paper saying they would rather die than go all the way to X' Borough to have their appendix out. Our doctor had several interviews with members of our Rural District Council in the hope of persuading them that it was well worth while to try and inspire the County Council to argue with the Hospital Board. Well, the County Council did argue with the Hospital Board, but to no avail. The Cottage Hospital came to an end. It was now called an Isolation Hospital. This may have been a good thing for the Region as a whole if more such hospitals in fact were needed, but it was not a good thing for our villagers. The County Council was annoyed with the Board for not changing its mind and the Rural District Council was annoyed with the County Council for not having made the Board change its mind. And you may imagine what poor Mrs. Jones and the others had to say about it!

So you see, although Local Government is inde-

pendent and brooks no interference with any authority that is not higher than itself, there are quite a number of authorities that are higher, authorities appointed by the Central Government. And not only are there more groups of people involved in such matters than would appear, but a good deal of bickering can and often does go on between the various Authorities. It would be very nice if all were sweetness and light in Local Government. But unfortunately, it is not.

Notes on Chapter Four.

1. The country is divided into Counties, County Boroughs, Boroughs, Urban Districts and Parishes. Each has its Council.

2. All Councils acknowledge the authority of the Central Government.

3. Every Council has its special responsibilities. Can you mention six activities of your daily life for which your local Council is responsible?

4. Can you find out if there has recently been any disagreement between your local Council and your County Council? If so, what happened in the end?

Chapter Five

LITTLE WOODEN MEN

A FRIEND OF mine, on hearing that I was to write a book on local Government, said, 'Goodness, how difficult!'

Although I do not agree with her I do know what she meant, for the fact is that the whole subject of Local Government—and Central Government too for that matter—is bristling with apparently dull phrases. Some of them we have had already. Local Authority. County Council. Urban District. Administrative Areas. (How *can* one think of Urban Districts and Administrative Areas quite simply as real places where real people live?)

And more will follow in due course. County official. Sanitary Inspector. Welfare Officer. Rate Assessment. Committee. Sub-Committee. And Standing Committee. (This does *not* mean that members have to remain standing during meetings).

Phrases like this are bound to make one think of Local Government as something that happens in offices among a lot of rules, regulations and documents. 'Council Meeting' conjures up in the mind a gathering of little wooden men in dark suits, and bowler hats.

The reason why I do not, all the same, agree with my friend that Local Government is 'difficult' to understand or write about is that I happen to know that those

apparently wooden figures are not wooden at all. They are flesh and blood. A Sanitary Inspector, for instance, is not only a Sanitary Inspector. He is also John Taylor or Richard Bailey, who loves to potter about his garden and gets irritable when he breaks his shoe-laces. In other words, he is a person, and people are not difficult to get to know. One of my aims in writing this book is to make you realize that Local Government is in fact a human activity, not a collection of phrases.

But first there is one more point I must explain.

For each matter in which a council has responsibility, it elects from among its councillors a special committee to discuss it. Some Councillors are on more than one committee if they happen to have more than one special interest. For instance, a councillor who is a housewife and mother may well be interested in Education and in Health, so if the Council feels that she has studied these things and knows enough about them to be helpful, she will be elected to both the Health Committee and the Education Committee. She may also be appointed to a sub-committee. A sub-committee is a small committee within a committee. Many committees are divided into sub-committees to deal with certain aspects of a subject. An Education Committee might well have a sub-committee to deal with primary schools and another to deal with secondary schools.

All Committees and sub-committees meet regularly to discuss their own subjects and projects. Their decisions and suggestions are then put before the Council, which also meets regularly. If the Council agrees with the decisions and decides to adopt the suggestions, then

any work involved is put into the hands of a *Council Official*.

Council Officials are experts appointed by the Council to undertake various kinds of work. The setting up of a new clinic, for instance, would be put into the hands of an official known as the Medical Officer of Health, the repairing of a road or installation of a sewer would be the concern of the Council Surveyor. Anything to do with providing for the needy and disabled is chiefly the concern of the local Welfare Officer, though he would no doubt consult the Medical Officer of Health. These officials, most of whom have a staff to help them, are not councillors, they are appointed and paid by the Council. But their appointment and the amount of their salary must be agreed by the appropriate department of the Central Government; the Ministry of Health in the case of the Medical Officer, the Ministry of Education in the case of the Education Officer, and so on.

Local Government Officials work under the general guidance of an official known as the Clerk of the Council or—in a Borough—a Town Clerk. The Clerk of the Council must know exactly what the Council may and may not do by law, he must know all about its duties and its policy—that is, its attitude to the whole question of local government in its district. I have heard the Clerk of the Council described as a kind of managing director of a large firm which has several departments, and I think that explains his position very well. The Clerk of the Council or Town Clerk is, like other Council Officials, appointed with the consent of the Central Government.

I think we had better have another little plan. We will

base this plan on the idea that a certain County Council is considering the possibility of building a small pavilion in that part of the local park where team games are permitted.

The Parks Committee

Discusses the question in detail. Is it necessary to have a pavilion? Yes. Where exactly should it be placed? The Committee puts its views before

The County Council

Which discusses the opinions of the Parks Committee, perhaps makes certain changes, but finally agrees, and puts the responsibility for the new pavilion in the hands of the

Chief Officer Of Parks

Who will be guided as to how much he may spend and what the law demands with regard to ventilation, cloakroom accommodation, and so on by

the Clerk of the Council

Now a paragraph about the order of importance of the councillors themselves.

In County Councils, County Boroughs, Urban Districts, Rural Districts and Parishes, the leader of the Council is known as the Chairman. The Councillors look to him as their head.

In County Boroughs, those who come in order of importance after the Chairman are the Aldermen.

Aldermen are not necessarily members of the Council, they are distinguished residents. They are chosen by the Council, not by the people.

In Boroughs there are also Aldermen. The leader of the Council is chosen from among the Aldermen and is known, not as the Chairman, but as the Mayor or Lord Mayor.

In all Councils, of course, the main body of the Council is composed of Councillors.

So it is like this:

County Borough

Chairman of the Council.

County Aldermen.

County Councillors.

Borough

Mayor (or Lord Mayor)

Aldermen.

Councillors.

County Council. Urban District Council. Rural District Council. Parish.

Chairman of the Council.

Councillors.

But who, after all, are the most important people of all in local Government?

We—the people!

Only the Council that remembers this can be said to be doing its work successfully.

Notes on Chapter Five.

1. Every Council has specially chosen committees and sub-committees to discuss various aspects of council work. If you know any councillors, ask them what committees they are on, and what are the problems under discussion at the moment.

2. A County Official is an expert employed by the Council to take charge of matters covered by his special knowledge. Who is your local Medical Officer of Health? Surveyor? Chief Education Officer?

3. A Clerk of the Council is a link between all the branches of a Council's work. In my town the Clerk often gives talks to Senior schools describing his work.

Chapter Six

REAL PEOPLE

1. *The Mayor*

IN THE parlour of Exborough Town Hall, Alderman Griffin waited to be asked to accept the office of Mayor. From the Council Chamber beyond the parlour door he could hear the murmur of speech-making and the polite clatter of applause, which indicated that the retiring Mayor was saying kind things about Mr. Griffin. Mr. Griffin smiled as he thought of his wife in her new dress, seated beside the retiring mayoress and beaming bashfully at each well-turned phrase. 'Alderman Griffin's sincere concern for the welfare of our beloved city . . . his many services to Exborough need not be dwelt upon now . . .' and so on and so on.

Of course the whole business was merely ceremony, a ceremony that suggested that Mr. Griffin was being elected Mayor at this very moment, which was not so. It was in fact some time since Alderman Griffin, returning from his office one evening, had announced,

'I had a visit from Alderman Todd and Alderman Smith to-day.'

'Oh?' said Mrs. Griffin, depositing some fish on her husband's dinner plate. 'And what did they want?'

'They asked if I would be willing to accept the Mayoralty if it were offered to me.'

'And about time, too!' said Mrs. Griffin.

For she could scarcely pretend to be surprised. The

Mayor was always chosen from among the Aldermen, and every Alderman usually had a chance to be Mayor at some time. Mr. Griffin had in fact been a councillor for many years, then he had been made an Alderman, and the benefits he had showered upon Exborough were numerous. He it was who had suggested the new system of street lighting which had made so much difference to the town, he who had persuaded the Education Committee to instal a drinking-fountain in the playground of Church Street Primary School, he who had established the yearly Christmas party for orphans—to say nothing of the generous amounts he had given for charity whenever the profits of his successful business permitted. (Mr. Griffin owned the biggest restaurant in the town). In his wife's opinion, in fact, it would not have been out of place if her husband had been elected Mayor two years ago in the place of Alderman Gray, or one year ago, in the place of Alderman White. But still, better late than never.

'And of course, my dear,' Alderman Griffin continued, 'I told Todd and Smith that I would consult you before giving them my answer. After all, if I am Mayor you will be Mayoress, and you, too, will have to attend tiring functions . . .'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Griffin thoughtfully. 'And I only have one evening gown and my afternoon frocks are hardly the latest fashion. It will mean several new clothes I'm afraid.'

But Mrs. Griffin was not really afraid at the prospect of buying new clothes. She was delighted. And, as her husband had expected, she graciously signified her

willingness to accept the office of Lady Mayoress for the usual term of one year.

After that the matter followed the customary course. There had been a special meeting of the council's Selection Committee while Alderman Griffin had waited modestly in the Mayor's Parlour, as he was doing to-day. The meeting had discussed his fitness for the rôle of Mayor, and this, as is always necessary, had been agreed unanimously. He had then been asked to step into the Committee room, where he was greeted with applause and congratulated on being Exborough's Mayor Elect.

And now at last the day had arrived when he was actually to become Mayor. As he waited, Alderman Griffin glanced round the Parlour with some satisfaction. It was a dignified apartment. Wood panelling and engravings of Old Exborough flickered in the light of a bright fire. Desk, inkpot, and municipal cigarette-box (silver and engraved with the city's motto 'Forward in Strength') gleamed with polish. There was a pleasant and luxurious aroma of cigars. It was a Parlour, he thought, worthy of this historic place whose charter had been granted so far back as 1272. He wished he did not feel so nervous, that he had not that sensation known to him during his days at Exborough Grammar School as Butterflies in the Tummy, caused, in those days, by the imminence of a school play or a football match. Why did he have it now? Perhaps it was the thought of the costume he would shortly be wearing, the mayoral robe, scarlet and fur-trimmed, the black tricorne hat. Distinguished, of course, as much a part of the country's tradition as Dick Whittington. Yet he could not help

feeling that they turned a fellow into a cross between an admiral and Santa Claus.

Suddenly, in the Council Chamber, the tumult and the shouting died. All except for footsteps approaching the Parlour door. Mr. Griffin rose to his feet. He was about to be summoned to his high office.

* * * *

Never would Alderman Griffin forget his dismay when the retiring mayor, Alderman Gray slipped the mayoral robe off his own shoulders on to those of the new mayor. For Mr. Gray was a tall man and Mr. Griffin rather small, so that the distinguished garment trailed about the feet of the new mayor like a train. However, luckily the wooden division that separated the mayoral bench from the council and the public was high enough to hide this comic effect as he took his oath ('I swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, so help me God.')

and made his carefully planned speech in which he thanked Exborough for the great honour it had shown him and expressed his intention of doing all in his power to prove himself worthy.

On the whole Mr. Griffin was not displeased with his year of office. Remembering that he was now the leader of the council as well as chief magistrate (for judging certain offences), he was determined to make a real job of it and not only attended charity balls which would have been held whether he was there or not, and open bazaars which could easily have been held without him, but also to conduct a great many of the numerous

council meetings in person. And it was curious, he reflected, how, having accepted the mayoralty with some feeling of personal importance and been duly impressed at being the town's chief citizen, at being addressed as 'Mr. Mayor' by men who had been at school with him, he soon forgot the importance and remembered only the responsibility. It was as if he somehow grew to the stature that this ancient and respected office demanded. And he made up his mind that he would leave Exborough the richer for the fact that he had been its mayor.

One of the ways in which he did this was to organize a Friendship Society among the old people of the town, the people who were confined to their beds and could not belong to a Darby and Joan Club or go to special Christmas parties and Summer outings that were held for old people. This Friendship Society consisted, quite simply, of people who gave freely of their time to visit the old folk in their homes, do their shopping for them, take them little gifts, and read to them. And the touching letters that the mayor received from these people. ('For a year not even the postman knocked at my door, and now I feel I belong to the world again . . . ' 'I never thought it was possible to be so lonely as I was after my wife died, the visits of the friends bring a light into my week'), were quite sufficient reward.

Then there was the hospital, so well designed, so solidly built, with so many beds. Yet the beds were empty because there was not enough money to open it. A hospital fund started by the Mayor and pursued with untiring vigour led to the day when he and the Lady Mayoress attended the opening ceremony, amongst cheers and bouquets.

Yes, it was a good year for Exborough, and when it was over Mr. Griffin had no regrets. He was conscious of a job well done, and handed over his robe rather sadly, but without envy, to the next Mayor, Alderman Cliff. (Though he was rather amused at the new Mayor's appearance in his robe. For Mr. Cliff was a pole of a man and the distinguished garment barely reached his knees.)

2. *The Town Clerk*

ROBERT ENGLISH led two very busy lives. One in his charming home just outside the town of Plowton, and the other in his capacity as Town Clerk to the borough of Plowton. These two lives, Robert English liked to think, he kept quite separate. When he was at home he was at home, helping his children with their homework or scolding them for trampling over his magnificently stocked flower-beds, or else bowling cricket balls at them with a wildness that was disastrous to his magnificently stocked flower-beds. And while he was at home, no word would pass his lips—and scarcely a thought would cross his mind—of his civic duties and problems. But the moment he started his car in the mornings, edging it carefully out of the garage and on to the gravelled drive, his home life became almost non-existent. Out of his mind went all awareness of his pleasant drawing-room, the television play he had so much enjoyed last night and even the tiresome fact that the plumber had still not come to replace the leaking tap in the bathroom; into his mind came once again the disturbing report of the Public Health Inspector who had

reported no less than three diseased animals at last week's market, the request of the builder who wished to buy a certain portion of land on which to erect new houses, and the fact that the applicants for the post of Assistant in the Council's Architect's Department were not particularly promising.

It was in fact on this particular morning at the exact point when Mr. English's home life was fading and his work life taking over that Mrs. English came running after him.

'Bob! Just a moment! Bob! I almost forgot. The Keelings are coming to dinner this evening and I think we ought to have a couple of bottles of wine.'

Mr. English nodded. 'I'll see to it.'

'I'm sorry to bother you, darling, but with the Wine Merchant so near the Council Offices . . . you won't forget, will you?'

'I won't forget,' said Mr. English, promptly forgetting as (pausing cautiously before entering the main road) he said to himself, 'That fellow Wilcox might be the best bet. He's rather young but with experience I think he has the makings of a competent architect.'

* * * *

Robert English was one of those lucky people who had known even as a boy exactly what he wanted to be. A solicitor. He had the clear, quick mind which finds pleasure in working through all the intricacies of Law, and he did so well in his final examinations that his father suggested that he should aim for a post as Town Clerk.

'A Town Clerk has usually to be a solicitor, as you know,

and a really thorough knowledge of the law is needed, because you have to advise the council on pretty well every problem which involves the law of the country. So of course the salary's good, and quite apart from that, the Clerk to the Council is Someone in any community.'

So it was that young Robert took his first step to a clerkship by applying for and obtaining the post of solicitor assistant to the Clerk of a small town in the West of England. Here he stayed for two years before moving to a better post—that of Deputy to the Clerk of a town in the North. Another few years saw him settled as Town Clerk of Plowton, and here, since it was a pleasant district and the salary very adequate, he was content to remain.

* * * *

The first thing Robert English attended to at the office on this particular morning was, as on most mornings, his post. And his secretary's pencil flew over her pages while he dictated answers to his letters. There was one from a council tenant complaining that a neighbour was using his shed as business premises for repairing people's bicycles which was not allowed. ('I will investigate this matter and if I think fit report it to the housing committee with a view to bringing the nuisance to an end . . .'). There was a note from the Chief Librarian stating the number of books long overdue and giving names and addresses ('I will get in touch with those concerned and take legal action if necessary . . .'). A letter from a manufacturer of canned dog's meat who wished to buy the offal from the Municipal Slaughter House. ('I regret to inform

you that we already have a purchaser . . .') and soon.

'I'll get these done at once,' said his secretary as she closed her pad. 'It's rather a busy day!'

Robert English glanced at the diary which lay open on his desk. 'Busy' seemed an understatement. Six people to see in the morning and three Committees to attend in the afternoon. Lunch looked a bit unlikely, but he could always send out for sandwiches.

One of his interviews was with a very determined lady, a member of the local Defence Corps, who was of the opinion that the Council should be prepared to pay for a really good Christmas party for the Corps. As a matter of fact her determination was quite unnecessary, as Mr. English agreed that anything which would make the Defence Corps attract more members would be well worth the expense. He would put it before the next meeting of the General Purposes Committee, and if they agreed it would be brought up at the next Council meeting.

There followed an irate gentleman, the owner of The Stag public house. Now it happened that The Stag was a delightful seventeenth century building, the pride and joy of Plowton High Street. Its owner was not, however, so much interested in the beauty and age of the Stag as in the fact that it was old-fashioned, and the rooms were too small to accommodate as many clients as he would like. He wanted to pull it down and build in its place a modern roadhouse affair. But there was a difficulty. The Stag was officially listed as a Public Monument, and no public monument may be touched without official permission. And in this case permission was refused.

Robert English sat looking patiently sympathetic (though he did not feel it) while his visitor shrilled and boomed about 'the council's interference with the private citizen.'

'I'm sorry, Mr. Grant, but I must remind you that the Council is acting according to its legal right. The wishes of the many is the Council's concern, you see, and in this case they are held to be more important than the wishes of the individual.'

Mr. Grant was purple. 'And I have no rights at all? Have I got to take this sitting down? Is there nothing I can do?'

With a sigh Mr. English felt compelled to inform Mr. Grant that there was something he could do. He could appeal to the County Council. If the County Council supported the Plowton Council, then Mr. Grant could appeal to an even higher authority, the only one which had the right to overrule the decisions of local authorities—the Central Government at Westminster. If the Ministry of Housing saw fit, it would send down its own inspector to make a decision.

Mr. Grant departed somewhat mollified and was replaced by a Trades Union Official worrying about insufficient payment to certain workers in his union. Then there appeared a lady with an eager expression and a note-book. She was a journalist who happened to be preparing a book for young people on the subject of local government, and she was anxious for her readers to understand that human beings lived behind such official titles as Mayor, and Town Clerk. In short, could Mr. English give her a picture of his work?

Mr. English could not give it in short, so he gave it in

long, telling of his various activities without giving a hint of his anxiety that she should depart in time for him to get a good hot meal. The result of his patience was that the journalist found the interview so interesting and asked so many questions that she did not leave till half-past one. So it had to be sandwiches after all, which the Town Clerk ate with one hand while signing letters with the other.

The committee meetings in the afternoon—Education, Health and Works—were on the whole uneventful. Were it not that it was the duty of either the Town Clerk or his Deputy to attend them all, Mr. English would have felt his presence unnecessary, except of course for the purpose of keeping him informed as to what was going on. Only at the Works meeting did an incident occur which caused Robert English some amusement. Some months previously the traffic congestion in a certain street had been discussed. It would be impossible to widen the street as this would mean demolishing a great many shops and private houses. As usual, the Town Clerk's opinion was asked. Had he anything to suggest? He had. He suggested that the junction of this particular street and a street leading off it was the bottle-neck which caused the congestion. This, he felt sure, could be widened without much difficulty. The only buildings which would have to go were half a dozen dilapidated little houses which were scarcely fit to live in. As Robert English also attended the meetings of the Housing Committee, he felt in a position to express confidence that it would be possible to find alternative and better accommodation for the families concerned. So everyone would benefit.

The Works Committee thanked the Town Clerk for his idea. The idea had been adopted and the work was now completed. At this afternoon's meeting the Committee showed that it was very pleased with itself, and the Town Clerk—as always under such circumstances—found himself congratulating all concerned on their brilliant idea for widening the road junction of Pelham Street and Crosbie Avenue.

But that was part of a Town Clerk's duty (he reflected as he drove home). If you suggested something which was successful then you congratulated everyone else on having thought of it. If you suggested something that failed, then you went round apologising.

And now, leaving the town behind him, Robert English left his work behind him too, and began to look forward to a cosy evening, a real meal . . . oh, the Keelings were coming . . . the Keelings! He was actually at his own gate when he remembered the wine. He put away the car and rather guiltily entered the house. His wife had heard him and was waiting at the front door.

'My dear Mary, I'm very sorry but . . .'

'You forgot the wine. I knew you would, so I dashed into town myself and got it. I just knew, you see, that by the time I asked you, you weren't Bob English any longer, you were the Town Clerk of Plowton.'

'The Town Clerk of Plowton?' said Bob English as he kissed her, 'who on earth is he?'

3. *The Chief Librarian*

THE PUBLIC Library of the County Borough of Silverford opened precisely at ten o'clock. And it was

at precisely one minute after ten o'clock that a small, grey-haired man of frail and timid appearance knocked at the office door of Miss Tome, the Chief Librarian. A voice asked him to come in, and the grey-haired man did so. He was gratified to see Miss Tome already at her desk, as neat and businesslike as ever.

'Mr. Jennings!' said Miss Tome. 'How are you?'

Mr. Jennings lowered himself gingerly onto a chair. 'You know as well as I do, my dear, that I'm very upset.'

'Upset? Why's that?' asked Miss Tome, who knew perfectly well.

Mr. Jennings drew an envelope from his pocket. 'I've just had your letter. And I'm very upset. It says, it says . . .'

'I remember. It says that we have inquired at libraries all over the country for the book you want to borrow, but none of them have it. I'm sorry, but there it is.'

'But can't you buy it for me?'

'We could, of course, but the fact is that it's rather expensive. Three guineas.'

'Surely I have the right to have it? This is a public library and I am a ratepayer. You can't deny that my dear girl.'

Miss Tome, who was not a girl, but thirty-five, smiled and thought 'If you think you're going to flatter me into this you stubborn old rascal, you're greatly mistaken'. Aloud she said, 'Of course you're a rate-payer, Mr. Jennings. But we only have a certain amount of money at our disposal, you know. And we have to think very carefully before making an expensive purchase exactly how useful it's going to be to our other readers. And I

don't really think many people are going to want to read about Ugric Marriage Rites.'

'If I don't get it,' sulked Mr. Jennings, 'the whole of my book on Ancient Nordic customs will be useless. I shouldn't attempt to publish it if it lacked any reference to the Ugrics.'

Miss Jennings looked at him with her head on one side. It was all she could do not to smile. Mr. Jennings's project of writing a book on Ancient Nordic customs was so old that it, too, was verging on being an ancient custom. At least twenty times Miss Tome had borrowed rare and heavy volumes from other libraries at considerable postage expense, and at least twenty times Mr. Jennings had sighed that if he could not get hold of this or that very special report or treatise his book would never be published. Miss Tome was pretty sure that the book would never be published anyway, but what matter? The old gentleman was completely happy amongst his primeval icebergs, that was what mattered.

'I tell you what I'll do,' said Miss Tome. 'I'll bring the matter up at the meeting of the Library Committee early next week. But the Committee's decision will, of course, be absolutely final.'

Rather shakily the old man rose. 'You'll do your best for me?'

'I'll do my best for you!' The telephone rang as Mr. Jennings was going out and Miss Tome smiled a good-bye as she asked, 'Who is it? Oh yes, Mrs. Lacy. The Townswomen's Guild? Yes, I'd be pleased to speak to them. Any particular subject? Oh, not local history again? My goodness I've given about six lectures on local histories in as many weeks. I'm getting to the

stage of directing strangers to go to the Museum by taking the first turning after the ancient Saxon settlement, quite forgetting that it isn't an ancient settlement now, it's a Woolworths!' (Miss Tome paused for the laughter, she had made this joke before.) Never mind, local history it shall be. What day had you in mind? The 18th? Just a moment.' Miss Tome reached for her diary. 'No, I'm afraid the 18th won't do. In fact that seems to be rather a busy week. On the 19th I'm talking to the Grammar School about Librarianship as a career, and on the 20th I've been trapped into appearing on a Brains Trust at the Town Hall, and on the 21st I'm launching a discussion group here in the Library. Will the following week do? The 25th? Yes, fine. Not a bit, I'll enjoy it. Perhaps the Archaeological Society will have dug up a new bit of history by then!'

Miss Tome put down the receiver, picked it up again to call the Borough Surveyor about designs for the new staff lavatories, and reflected that long ago, in her innocence, she had thought that librarians had nothing to do but read and issue books. She now knew that an enthusiastic and efficient librarian's main interest was life itself. And after all (in Miss Tome's opinion at least), life and books were a part of one another.

One of the younger assistants brought morning coffee and Miss Tome sipped it while she began the compilation of a reading list for the Worker's Educational Association, who had asked her advice about a course of reading on the Industrial Revolution. While she was doing this, the Children's Librarian was sorry to interrupt her, but would she mind glancing at the latest pages, of the magazine that the Children's Club

was making? They'd brought in some lovely things last night.

Willingly Miss Tome turned the pages of a thick, brown-paper scrapbook entitled 'Club Magazine.'

'John Hallam's poems are really witty!' she remarked, chuckling. 'How old is he? Only ten? And this little picture, *Corner of my Garden*, by Sheila Alcroft, it's got atmosphere. The club idea is working very well, isn't it!'

'It is!' The Children's Librarian was an enthusiastic person who, not very long before, had been a child herself. 'We had two new members yesterday and such a good discussion on Adventure Stories. Then we thought it would be a good idea to have book reviews in the magazine, so we voted for two critics for the first month.'

Miss Tome nodded approvingly. 'At this rate the next generation of Silverfordians will be the best read in England.'

'And the nice thing is,' said the Children's Librarian as she put the magazine under her arm, 'that the parents of several of my members were in the Library at the same time, listening to the talk on broadcast poetry. That's what you like, isn't it, Miss Tome, having the Library used by the whole family.'

Yes, that was what Miss Tome liked. She liked families to come to and choose their books together, to listen to lectures together which would suggest further reading. Each book, whether it was science or travel or biography or fiction was, she felt, a world in itself. And people who enjoyed these worlds with all their experiences—which in fact the reader himself might never

experience—could never, Miss Tome felt sure, be dissatisfied with the world in which they actually lived. Indeed, Miss Tome, could not believe that anyone who read a lot could be entirely miserable, or that any family which shared and enjoyed their library could fail to be completely happy.

Miss Tome looked at her watch. There was time before lunch to finish her list—oh, and she must write to the Dramatic Society with the suggestions for one-act plays for which she had been asked. Then she would go along to the bookseller with the titles of the new books that the library needed.

It was one o'clock when Miss Tome walked through the Library in her hat and coat, noting almost unconsciously, yet with real pleasure, the well-filled shelves; the corner devoted to This Week's Suggestion (books on a little known European country, chosen to coincide with a visit to England of its President); the notice-board with its colourful jackets of new books and notices of concerts and meetings; the readers busy looking for books; the assistants looking pleasant and helpful. It was a friendly library, dearer and far better known to the Chief Librarian than the sitting-room of her own flat.

However, she did sigh a little when someone ran after her just as she reached the door. 'Oh, Miss Tome, Mr. Jennings wants to speak to you on the telephone. He says its most urgent, so I thought I'd better try to catch you!'

'Yes, Mr. Jennings!' Miss Tome spoke with bright patience.

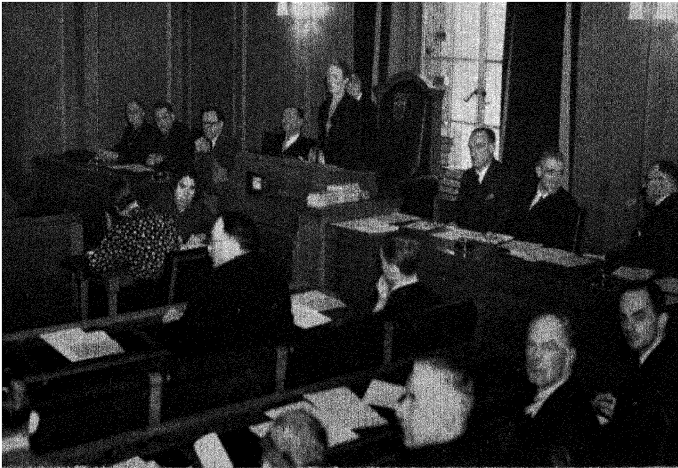
'Ah, Miss Tome, that is you, isn't it my dear?'



Fox photos

The High Sheriff of Denbighshire, his Chaplain, the Judge, and the Under Sheriff leaving for the Assize Service at the parish church, Ruthin, before the opening of the Assize in the County Hall.

A conference in session at County Hall, Westminster, the headquarters of the London County Council *L.C.C. photograph*





Town and country planning

Fox photos

In the public library

Fox photos



‘Yes, Mr. Jennings, it’s me.’

‘Well, I knew you would like to know at once. A most remarkable thing has happened. I have been browsing in my library of books on European culture and I came across an article I had never noticed before on the subject of—what do you think—Ugric Marriage Rites! I am telling you at once because I felt sure you would be worrying about me.’

‘How splendid!’ cried Miss Tome. ‘I am glad, Mr. Jennings.’ And she meant it. It was true that she had been a little worried, because she knew almost certainly that the committee would not for a moment consider buying the book that Mr. Jennings wanted.

4. *The Sanitary Inspector.* (A member of the staff of the Medical Officer of Health).

IT WAS a bright Spring morning when Mr. Barrett, Sanitary Inspector in the Rural District of Rosewall, stopped his car outside a little eating-place called the Kozy Kafé.

As usual, he allowed himself a moment’s irritation in which to wonder why mis-spelling was such a popular method of naming small businesses. (Rosewall also had an Olde Worlde Florist and a Booklover’s Korner Library), but he approved of the Kozy Kafé all the same. If all restaurants in the area were as spick and span as this one, his work would be lessened by a third, and even then, in Mr. Barrett’s opinion, be quite enough for one man. But that didn’t alter the fact that he had something to say to the owner of the Kosy Kafe which would not, he knew, be very welcome.

It was early in the day and there were only a few

people at the shining glass-topped tables, being served with tea or coffee by a waitress whom Mr. Barrett did not recognize. He asked if he might have a word with the proprietress—in private, and was duly shown into a small but neat kitchen. Here a woman turned aside from stirring something that smelt very good to look at him rather anxiously.

“Mr. Barrett!”

“Good morning, Mrs. Anderson,” said the Sanitary Inspector pleasantly. ‘I see you have a new waitress.’

‘Just a temporary.’ Mrs. Anderson told him. ‘Mary’s away for a day or two with a bad finger.’

‘With a bad finger?’ Mr Barrett looked thoughtful. ‘That’s interesting.’

‘Why, what is it? There’s nothing wrong I hope? But anyway, do sit down and have a cup of coffee.’

Mr. Barrett accepted the coffee with gratitude and professional pleasure. No dirty spoons here, he knew, no cups with cracks harbouring the germs of other people’s colds.

‘There’s nothing wrong that’s your fault, Mrs. Anderson, I’m sure,’ he said, carefully putting six lumps of sugar in his drink (as his wife wasn’t here to scold him for extravagance), but there *is* something wrong, I’m afraid. The fact is I’ve had a telephone call from Dr. Linton this morning.’

‘Oh yes?’

‘It seems that five of his patients are suffering from food-poisoning. Not very serious, but quite definitely food-poisoning. And the point is that all these patients had their lunch here yesterday.’

‘Oh my goodness!’ Mrs. Anderson sat down on a

chair rather heavily. 'You don't think it was Mary's finger?'

'Now don't get upset, Mrs. Anderson . . .'

'She wore a finger-stall all the time, really she did!' Mrs. Anderson was getting more upset every moment. 'A clean one every day, and I wouldn't let her touch anything even so . . .'

'No, no, I'm sure . . .'

'Just stir with a spoon or a knife was all I'd let her do. And I said to her: "When it comes to mixing pastry or anything you leave it to me. It's not safe," I said, "touching anything that's to be eaten with a cut finger that's gone septic." And the moment I saw it was really bad I told her to go right home.'

'Yes, yes, I'm sure you did.' Mr. Barrett sighed patiently. 'I don't suppose this food-poisoning has got anything to do with it at all. But you know it's my job to make enquiries over things like this, to try and find clues, as it were. Of course, the finger may be a clue, but it probably isn't at all. My office is ringing round to other doctors to find if they have any patients with the same trouble. We'll clear the mystery up all right. You know I don't like having health troubles in Rosewall.'

'Thank you for the coffee, Mrs. Anderson. Yours is the best in Rosewall. I'll be looking in with more news this evening. Good-bye now, and don't worry!'

So Mr. Barrett departed, leaving Mrs. Anderson very worried. Back in the car he took a paper out of his pocket and glanced at a list of the jobs for the day.

First to the new half-built estate where the workmen had just laid water-pipes.

As he made his way over the beams of floors as yet

unlaid, in and out of the shells of houses yet un-lived in—trees and bushes were everywhere coming to flower and leaf on this land which had so recently been open country—Mr. Barrett, who was a sentimental man, wondered what little pattering feet, what men and women still unborn, perhaps, would know the joys and griefs that make a life-time in these homes of the future. But he was not too sentimental to notice that the joint in one of the waste pipes was a bit loose. He politely drew the foreman's attention to this, pointing out that a leakage from a waste pipe serving sink or lavatory might well seep into the soil. This would be unhealthy enough itself, but even more so if for any reason it found its way into the drinking water supply. He then examined the drinking-water pipes. They were intact. The foreman, watching him, silently consigned all interfering Sanitary Inspectors to perdition but knew, all the same, that his comments were perfectly justified.

Then, with a nod of the head and a brief compliment on the excellent job that was being done on the new estate, Mr. Barrett made his way to his next job, which was to look into a complaint that had been received from the inhabitants of Briar Street. Briar Street, apparently, suffered from dustman trouble. Every week after the bins had been emptied the place was a litter of orange-peel and potato peel. Careless emptying, grumbled Briar Street. But Mr. Barrett, driving slowly past the side entrances in which the bins were situated had an idea that the fault did not lie entirely with the dustmen.

He knocked at the door of Number One and was

told 'Not to-day, thank you, whatever it is. I can't afford it.'

Mr. Barrett explained that he was not selling anything. He was the Sanitary Inspector. He believed there was a question of litter . . .

At this, Mrs. Number One perked up and announced that yes indeed, it was a disgrace, the dustmen simply weren't doing their job properly.

Mr. Barrett then asked politely—politeness being a Sanitary Inspector's greatest asset—whether he might have a look at the dustbin of Number One. Permission granted, the following conversation took place:

Mrs. One: I don't see what my dustbin has to do with it. It's just like everyone else's.

Mr. Barrett: I don't quite agree that it's *just* like everyone else's. Do you notice that the lid doesn't sit on top very tightly?

Mrs. One: Oh well, no it doesn't. But then I've had it a good long time, and it's got a bit out of shape. But there's nothing really wrong. I mean, there are no holes in it or anything.

Mr. Barrett: But don't you agree that perhaps part of the litter which you think is dropped by carelessness is caused by the ill-fitting lid?

Mrs. One: I hadn't thought of that. But anyway, what can I do about it? I don't really want to buy a new one, they're so expensive.

Mr. Barrett: Perhaps your husband could knock it into shape for you?

Mrs. One: Well, I'll ask him. And if it's no good then I'll just have to get another one, I suppose. As a matter of fact, this one is a bit too small.

Mr. Barrett So some of the rubbish may have fallen out because the bin was too small?

Mrs. One: Perhaps it did.

Mr. Barrett: It really isn't safe to let rubbish fall about, you know. The flies love it and then they come and sit on your food afterwards, carrying dirt and germs into your kitchen.

Mrs. One: Oh well, I'll have a word with my husband.

Mr. Barrett: Thank you very much. Good morning, and thank you for your co-operation.

Then he called on others in the street, generally with the same result.

The rest of the morning was devoted to the inspection of the Refuse Disposal Works, and the entire afternoon to the Blood Poisoning incident. At five o'clock Mr. Barrett paid another visit to the Kozy Kafé—and none too soon, for by now Mrs. Anderson was, to put it bluntly, in a regular pother.

'Well, my dear lady,' said Mr. Barrett, 'your troubles are over. The bad finger had nothing to do with it.'

Weak with relief, Mrs. Anderson had once again to sit down rather heavily. 'Then what was it?'

'Well, we've learned that there are a good many other people suffering from exactly the same trouble, people who didn't come near the Kozy Kafé. However, there *is* one thing they all have in common. They all ate a certain kind of pie . . .'

'Those pork pies!' cried Mrs. Anderson 'I know the ones you mean. They've only been on sale for the last few weeks. They taste very good.'

'Maybe they do, but I think they're the cause of the trouble, all the same. We've collected some from other

cafés and had them analysed—I'd like to take some from here, if I may. They must all have been from the same batch because they all have some impurity which is full of germs. I shall go to see the manufacturers tomorrow. We've already been on the 'phone to them!

'Well!' said Mrs. Anderson, 'what an extraordinary thing. I thought they were quite safe, they're so nicely wrapped up and everything.'

'That's all to the good, of course,' Mr. Barrett assured her. 'I like to see pies and cakes wrapped up. But an important thing to remember is that wrapping isn't a guarantee of cleanliness. Certainly it makes sure that no dirt gets on the food *after* it leaves the factory. But if some impurity is there before wrapping . . .'

'I see what you mean!' Mrs. Anderson, her good humour completely restored, prepared to make a joke. 'You mean that if there's something wrong with the food before you wrap it, then putting wrapping on is rather like locking the stable door after the horse has bolted!'

'That's it exactly.'

* * * *

At tea-time, Mr. Barrett was, as usual, asked by his wife if he had had a busy day.

And, hiding his cup behind the teapot and ladelling in the sugar (his wife knew quite well what he was doing but said nothing), he told her about the pies, the dustbins, the pipes—and the pies again.

Mr. Barrett rose from the table to fetch the kettle. 'You seem to have done some really useful work, darling!'

The Sanitary Inspector smiled on his sausages and

mash. And returning with the kettle, his wife bent to kiss a small balding patch on his head. For to her, you see, Mr. Barrett was not a Sanitary Inspector, he was her dear Harry.

Notes on Chapter Six

1. In this chapter you have read about a few of the officers whose work is very important to your daily life. Choose an officer you have not read about here and see if you can find enough about him to write a little piece about a day in his working life. Remember that people do not mind talking about themselves if you ask nicely and are really interested.



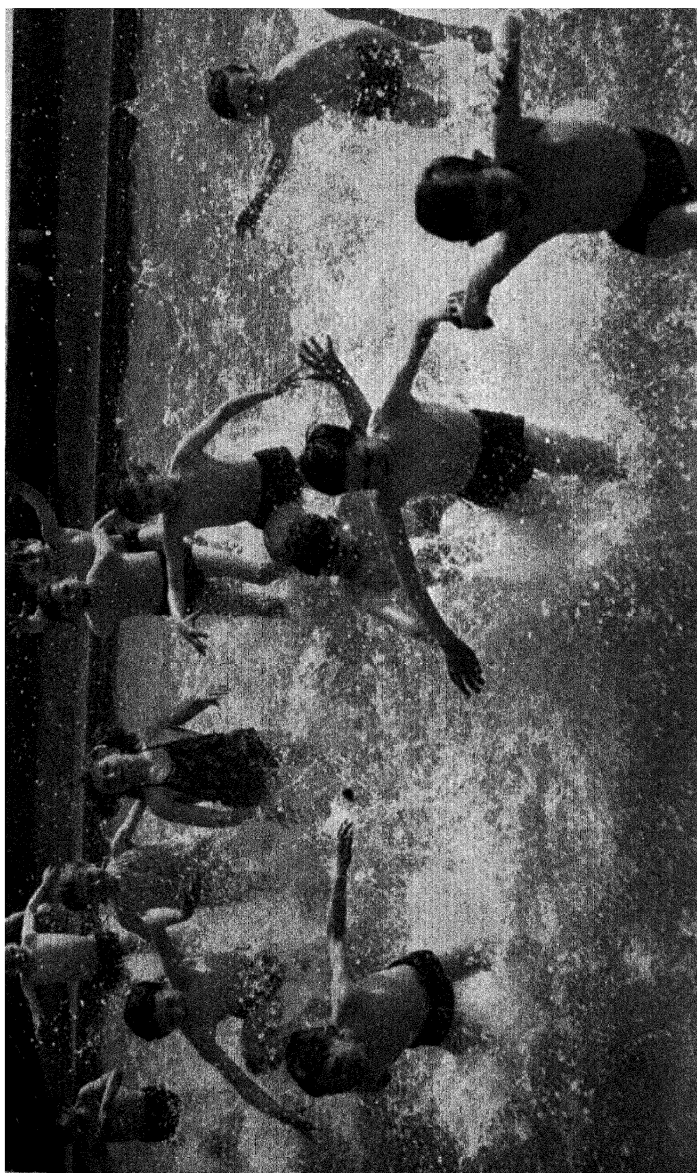
L.C.C. photograph

Cowboys and Indians at a L.C.C. nursery school

Overleaf

Keeping cool at the public swimming bath

Fox photos



Chapter Seven

RATES AND PARTY POLITICS

IN THE last chapter I told you about some of the paid officials of Local Government, people whose jobs are permanent. Now we come to the Council itself, to the people who are not paid for their services and whose jobs as councillors are not permanent.

A councillor is elected for three years. At the end of that time he has to stand for re-election. Perhaps he will be chosen once again, but if he does not seem to have done very much for the district or if he has persuaded the council to do something of which the residents do not approve, someone else may be chosen instead.

Not all councillors are perfect, you see. A man or woman who appears to be very enthusiastic and energetic when trying to get people's votes may turn out, after election, to have no interest in the work at all. Then it is realised that the reason why he wanted to be a councillor was not in order that he might be helpful but in order that he might be called Councillor Jones (or Councillor Mrs. Smith). He forgets that he is expected to work *for* people, and thinks of himself as a person in authority, more important than others who are not councillors—which is not so at all.

It is up to those of us who vote for our councillors to attend council meetings and learn for ourselves not only

well decide that the value has gone up. But if property owners feel that the increase in rateable value is unfair, they may complain, and their complaint is always seriously considered. Only recently I read in my local paper that Tuesday was the first day for lodging objections to assessments in the new valuation list. Appeals which are not settled between the ratepayer and the Valuation Officer will go to the County Valuation Panel which is to be strengthened to deal with the expected large number of cases.

It looks as though our Council had increased rateable values rather alarmingly, doesn't it!

Of course, rateable values vary a good deal. A big house with three bathrooms standing in extensive grounds will naturally have a higher value than a small, old-fashioned house with no ground at all. Every ratepayer (ratepayers, by the way, are the owners of property, tenants do not usually pay rates) pays so much in the pound on the rateable value of his property. A big house such as I have described may be rated at a thousand pounds a year, and the local rate may be thirteen shillings in the pound. This will mean that the owner pays the enormous sum of six hundred and fifty pounds a year to the council. But a man owning a house whose rateable value is a hundred pounds a year will only have to pay sixty-five pounds.

Does this seem to you rather unfair? Just think, though. The man in the big house is probably very rich or he could not have afforded to buy it. He probably has a car, perhaps two, and a gardener, and a cook and a housemaid and a chauffeur. The man in the little house probably has a television set, but not much else. Do

you think it is wrong that rich people should help to pay for such things as swimming baths and nursery schools for those who are not so lucky as themselves? Some people do think it wrong. They say that if a man is clever in business and makes a lot of money he should not be penalized by having to pay other people's bills.

This kind of problem is always coming up in local government. The rents of council houses, for instance. Some councillors will argue that a man who earns ten pounds a week should pay less rent than a man who earns fifteen pounds, even though their houses are exactly alike. But others say that the man who earns fifteen is probably better at his job than the other, that he is more ambitious and hard-working. Surely he ought not to be punished for this by having to pay a higher rent? Is there any point in working so hard if he is not going to have any more money to spare than his less well-paid neighbour?

I think myself that this question is much more difficult to answer than the one about the rich man and the poor man. While you are growing up you should think about these things and decide for yourselves what you think about them. Then when you have a vote—as you will have when you are twenty-one—you will perhaps vote for a councillor who has the same opinions as yourself.

I say 'perhaps' because people do not always vote for a person. Sometimes they vote for a Party. And that brings me to another aspect of Local Government on which there is some disagreement.

You know, of course that our Central Government is

based on the Three Party System: Conservative, Liberal, Labour. This is becoming increasingly true of Local Government, too. Most councillors stand for the policy of one of these Parties, though a few—as in the Central Government—are ‘independent’, that is to say, they reserve the right to think for themselves at all times, even though their views may not be that of any particular party.

Broadly speaking, the Conservatives stand for the Individual, the right of every man to own his own business and become rich if he can, while Labour stands for the People, believing that we should all have a share in the country’s industries. Liberals are between the two and think that some industries are better publicly owned and others privately owned.

This is rather a dangerous simplification of politics, but it is a subject you must study very carefully for yourselves before deciding which party you will support. Besides, in Local Government these big questions do not play such an important part as they do in the Central Government, and many people think that party politics should not come into Local Government at all. But whatever they think, it looks as if party politics have come to stay in Local Government.

There are good, honest and enterprising people in all parties and, speaking for myself, when voting for a councillor, it is particular qualities that I vote for rather than a certain party. If a councillor has these qualities and also stands for the party I support, so much the better.

What will you do, I wonder, when the time comes? Will you say ‘Well, Mr. X isn’t a very good chap, and

he's rather lazy, but as he's Conservative—or Labour—I'd better vote for him.'

That is another thing you will have to decide!

We have seen, then, why it is not only our duty but our right to vote at Local Elections and to take an interest in our council. Because we are ratepayers. (Even if we are tenants the rent we pay depends to some extent on the rates that our landlord has to pay.) And we have seen that when we vote for councillors we may sometimes have to choose between a person and a party.

Now let us see exactly what happens at an election.

Notes on Chapter Seven.

1. Rates are local taxes which we pay to our councils to enable them to do what is necessary in our district. We pay so much per pound on the rentable value of our houses. How much are the rates per pound in your district? If your parents are householders, what rates do they have to pay?

2. What political party is in the majority on your council at present?

3. Do you approve of politics in local government? Ask your parents and their friends what they think, but do not necessarily agree with them. Try to make up your own mind.

4. In this chapter you have read about certain council trading, i.e., Swimming Baths, Markets, Water Works. This is called Municipal Trading. What Municipal Trading does your own council do?

Chapter Eight

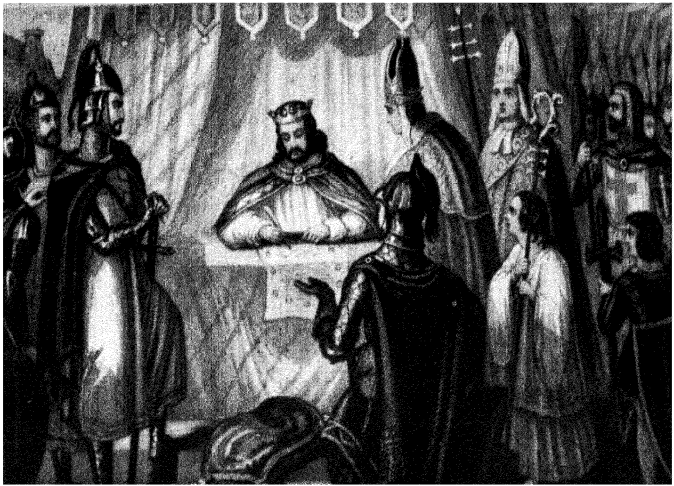
A LOCAL ELECTION

COUNTY COUNCILS are elected every three years. But in most County Boroughs, Boroughs, Urban Districts, Rural Districts and Parishes an election is held every May. Each year a third of the councillors will have finished their three years of service and will either decide not to be councillors any more or will stand for re-election.

So that you may have an idea of how an Election is organised, I will tell you about the last Election in my Urban District, as I remember it.

About five weeks before the Election a meeting was held of all political parties, including the one that I support.

A local political party is really a kind of association or club of people who believe in the party's policy as followed in the Central Government, and it is these local parties who advise, support, and finance the candidates who are 'on their side'. The financial aspect, in fact, is the one most responsible for the part politics play in Local Government. A prospective councillor who is independent will have to pay his own expenses. He will have to hire a room in which to hold public meetings, he will have to pay for posters to be put up asking people to vote for him, for the printing of the letters every candidate sends to all voters, and for the cost of posting them. But if he is Conservative, Labour, or Liberal,

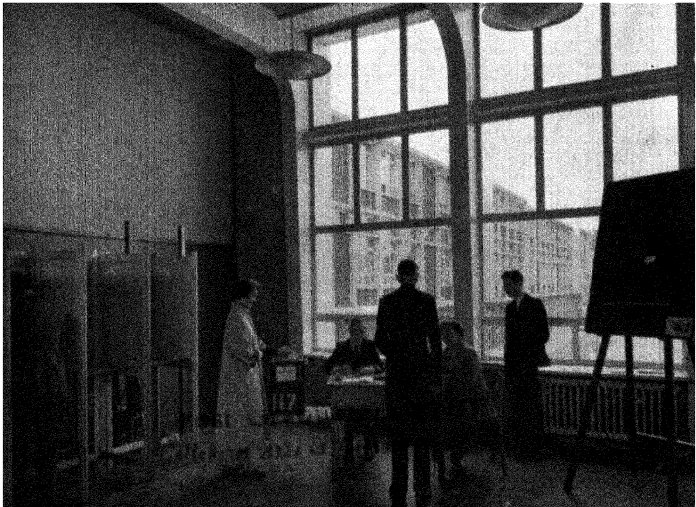


Picture Post

King John signing Magna Carta

Voting at a polling station during a general election.

L.C.C. photograph





Sixteenth-century town hall, Thaxted, Essex

Picture Post

Twentieth-century town hall, Norwich, Norfolk

Picture Post



then his party will meet these expenses out of party funds. The amount each party may spend is fixed by the Council, at the same limit for each.

Five weeks before the Election, then, 'my' party held a special meeting and an Election Committee was nominated. Every district is divided for election purposes into divisions known as Wards. These Wards all have names, such as Town Ward, Strand Ward, Hill Ward. Each Ward nominates a candidate. If in a certain Ward the retiring or 're-standing' candidate is of the opposite party, then someone will be chosen to oppose that party.

Once the prospective candidates have been chosen (sometimes it is the party who will ask them to stand, sometimes they suggest themselves), then all information concerning them is put before the Election Committee. This Committee wants to know what kind of people they are, whether they have ever served on a Council before, what job they do, whether they are married and have a family, whether they are likely to have the time and flair for Council work.

Once the Committee has the answer to these questions, it interviews the people concerned and then, unless there is a good reason against it, confirms that they will be the party's candidates at the next Election.

At this point, in the Election I am telling you about, 'my' party held a General Meeting.

And this is where I come in, making my way rather anxiously to the room in the Community Centre where the meeting is taking place, and greeting my friends with a worried expression.

The reason for my anxiety was this: The candidate

I had always voted for in my Ward (though he had never got in) had decided not to stand again. Rumour had it that a certain Mrs. X was to be nominated. Now Mrs. X was certainly a live wire and very intelligent, by my word for her was 'bossy'. I felt sure that she had once been The Most Unpopular Prefect at St. Ethelred's, and I was certain she would be more interested in getting her own way than in doing what was the best for everybody. She would get it, I suspected, by foul means if fair did not succeed.

My own choice for a candidate would have been Miss Y, a quiet and modest person with a sympathetic nature, a keen mind, and a surprising ability to let off steam when required.

If it was decided to nominate Mrs. X, I would certainly not vote for her even though she held the same political opinions as I did. I would rather vote for the other party's candidate, who would probably be rather a stick-in-the-mud, certainly, but at least kindly and honest.

I need not have worried, though, for in the course of a little speech about the forthcoming Election, the chairman of the meeting had these heartening words to say.

'As many of you know, Mrs. X, whom we had hoped would stand for us this year, has recently had a serious operation. And although she is thankfully recovering, she feels that service on the Council would be too severe a tax upon her strength.' (This was news to me but 'It's an ill wind,' I thought, 'that blows nobody any good'.) 'However,' the chairman continued, 'I am happy to be able to tell you that Miss Y has kindly consented to try her luck!'

A ripple of polite laughter followed this remark, then applause. And I left the meeting a happier woman than I had entered it. It might be that Miss Y did not stand a chance, but in our Ward the parties ran a pretty close race, so I felt quite hopeful.

The next thing all the candidates had to do was to go to the Council Clerk and apply for permission to stand for the Council. Each name would have to be accompanied by the signature of twelve citizens. The Town Clerk would then declare them officially nominated. After this notices appeared outside the Council Offices, the Post Office, and various other public places:

URBAN DISTRICT OF X TOWN.
Election of an Urban District Councillor.
For the X Ward of the Above District.

Notice is hereby given that a Poll for the Election of an Urban District Councillor for the above named Ward will be held on May 12th between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m.

The full names of Candidates and description of each Candidate and names of persons who signed the nomination papers of each Candidate are as follows:

These follow. And the Notice is signed by the Returning Officer. (The Returning Officer is the man who is officially in charge of the Election.)

The Committee had taken a special room in the town for polling work. (The poll, as I expect you know, is the name given to election voting). And for the next few weeks I spent a certain amount of time there addressing envelopes in which the printed letters would be either posted or delivered.

In due course letters from our two candidates—Conservative and Labour—fell through my own letter box.

One letter said something like this:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For the past three years I have served as your representative on the X Town Council, and I now offer myself for re-election. I have served on all the main Committees and I thus feel well-qualified to look after your interests. Should I be successful at the Poll, I assure you that, as in the past, I shall continue to work for the improvement of our District, the safeguarding of our amenities, and the housing of our People.

The following are matters to which I would particularly draw your attention:

HOUSING

Since the end of the War the Council has completed 1,054 new houses, and a further 244 will be built this year. These figures are more than sufficient to indicate that our promise of Homes for the People is being fulfilled.

RENTS

I support to the full the Council's Differential Rents Scheme. The scheme is designed to ensure that Tenants who can afford to pay a higher rent will do so, while the lower paid Tenants, *i.e.*, those earning less than £8 per week, will have a rent reduction.

Do you realise that You the RATEPAYERS will pay approximately £8,700 towards the rents of X

Town council houses during the next year, and that You, as TAXPAYERS will be paying a further £28,021 to the Central Government towards the cost of housing? Don't you agree that if tenants can afford it they should pay the higher rent?

X TOWN HIGH STREET

The Council has in hand plans for the improvement of the High Street, together with the provision of a centrally situated Car Park which will be ample for the needs not only of local residents, but also for all those whom we hope to attract to X Town. The aim, with which I am in full accord, is to make the High Street a Shopping Centre worthy of the District.

RATES

During the past two years it has been possible, by very careful pruning of expenditure, to keep the Rate steady at 18/- in the pound, and I shall continue my efforts to see that the Ratepayers' money is not wasted. This year it has been possible to provide for the new Community Centre and the provision of a number of new bus shelters of a superior type, together with many other improvements—all without having to increase the Rate, and my efforts will be directed towards a similar satisfactory state of affairs in the future.

Finally, if you are in agreement with the main points of the Policy I have outlined above, will you please be sure to give me your vote on Thursday, May 12th.

Yours sincerely,
CANDIDATE Z.

This letter was folded like a Christmas Card. On the front was a picture of the Candidate and a list of the Committees on which he had served: Housing, Allotments, General Purposes. There was also the statement that he was a bank official by profession and a resident of the Ward for the past eighteen years. On the back was printed: 'Polling Day, Thursday, May 12th. Polling Station: Millbank Primary School, Leathorpe Road. Your polling number is 1012. You have one vote. Vote for Candidate Z.'

Well, I did not think a great deal of this effort. For one thing I knew very well that the housing programme of which it boasted has been considerably pushed forward by councillors of the other party. And wouldn't a few real life examples of what had been done and what was planned have been more interesting, more likely to make us think 'I like this person'?

The second letter I received at this time went something like this:

Dear Electors,

This year I have been privileged to have been selected as a candidate for your Ward.

In seeking to win this Election my only ambition is to be able to work for the betterment of the community as a whole. I want to see better living conditions and amenities, especially for our children, who in many cases have to travel outside the district for the facilities which should be available in X Town.

I am fully aware that improvements, however small, cost money, but with wise spending, improvements can be carried out without throwing undue burdens

on the community. We all want the best possible value for our money, and if I am elected I will do my best to see that it is so.

Yours sincerely,
Miss Y.

And after this: 'Your Vote Is Precious. Make sure you use it and vote for Miss Y.'

Although I am sure every word in Miss Y's letter was true, it did not say very much, did it? And it did not seem to me to have any more spirit than Candidate Z's. There was not an ounce of 'human touch' about either of them.

A few days after the letters arrived, I received a visit from a woman I had previously seen only in church and in the shops. Our relationship consisted almost entirely of 'Good morning, isn't the weather cold for the time of year!'

This lady, whom we will call Mrs. Court, was a Canvasser.

Canvassers are people who visit the electors for two purposes. One, for finding out how they are going to vote (so as to give their party some idea of how many votes to expect), and two, for trying to persuade them to vote for their party if they did not already intend to do so.

Some people who have not quite made up their minds are pleased to discuss things with a canvasser, but to those of us who *have* made up our minds they do seem to come at rather tiresome moments, when one is doing the week-end baking, perhaps, or turning out the

linen-cupboard. I was turning out the linen-cupboard when Mrs. Court arrived.

Canvassers of my own party would not, of course, trouble to call on me. They thought they knew how I was going to vote (and on this occasion they were right). Mrs. Court probably knew too. But there was no harm in trying.

I politely deserted my linen and invited her in for a cup of tea. We started by saying how cold it was for the time of year, then Mrs. Court, taking the plunge, embarked on praise of the candidate she supported.

I listened sympathetically, murmuring from time to time, 'Yes indeed, an excellent person in many ways.'

After a while Mrs. Court rose to go, thanking me for the tea, complimenting me on my rock cakes, and asking 'May we count on your vote, then?'

'No, Mrs. Court, I'm sorry but I'm afraid you mayn't.'

Mrs. Court laughed—really she was rather charming. 'Well, you're making a great mistake. But never mind. I don't expect you people will get in anyway.'

Which was exactly what I feared. Our canvassers' reports were not very definite. I myself put up posters in my window advising passers-by to vote for Miss Y. But as a good many people on 'the other side' put up posters too, I didn't think that mine would have much effect.

I also attended the one and only Public Meeting held by Miss Y. Here again, I did not feel that it would do much good. Certainly she answered various questions that were troubling her audience. Did she agree with the other party, for instance, that our High Street ought to

be improved? Answer, Yes. Our High Street was a disgrace. (The two parties do in fact agree on many points and there is by no means always dissension between them). But after all, most of the people in the room had already decided to vote for Miss Y. And the maddening thing was that, as she addressed us in her quiet but strong voice, I felt more and more certain that she was the Councillor for us. If only more of the uncertain ones could hear her I was sure that they would become certain on her behalf at once! Of course, Miss Y could not possibly visit all the electors, but she would have been very pleased to see anyone who wished to see her. What a pity this point had not been made clear in her printed letter! 'If anyone would like to talk things over with me,' she might have written, 'please write to me or leave a message at the Committee Room.' As it was, at least half the residents in her Ward probably did not even know what she looked like. Come to think of it, though, they probably did not know much about the other candidate either. So they would just vote for their 'political party' with scarcely a thought for the person who represented it.

The Great Day came, and I found myself at Millbank Primary School at a very early hour indeed. For I was to be a helper at the Poll. My job was to stand at the door of the school greeting each voter with a polite smile and making a note of their number. This would be the number printed beside each name in the Council's list of voters. They are checked officially in the voting rooms. My job was on behalf of my party, so that we would know who had voted among those who had promised to vote for us.

I was also pleased to receive, in some cases, a copy of our candidate's printed letter. When I was given this I would know that we had the giver's vote. Many people, of course, would rather not let it be known how they were voting. These just gave their numbers and swept on. The poll is secret. No one need know how anyone has voted.

The other helper who was on duty at the same time as myself was none other than Mrs. Court. She naturally hoped to be given the printed letter of Candidate Z. We greeted each other amiably and stood side by side waiting for the rush.

At the beginning I rather enjoyed myself. Most of the early voters—people on their way to work, mothers taking their children to school (other schools, not this one)—seemed to be in favour of Miss Y. I tried not to look too pleased. But after that came a falling off. The later workers, the business men and women on shopping expeditions, gave letters to Mrs. Court. And then I suppose Mrs. Court tried not to look too pleased.

After a while we went off duty, but not off work. Both of us dashed to our Committee Rooms, doing little last-moment jobs, checking up on those who had not yet voted and yet had agreed to vote for us. We went round calling on these people, reminding them that every vote counted. Some of our helpers had brought cars for fetching old and sick people to the Poll.

At eight o'clock the Poll closed. The votes were all put in a big box called a ballot-box, and sealed with red wax. A policeman was in charge of this proceeding to make sure that all was rightly and quietly done. The box was then taken to the Town Hall. To the Town Hall

went also the Receiving Officer, the Town Clerk, the people who were going to count the votes, and those friends of the candidates who had promised to help in the counting process. I was one of these. And so, again, was Mrs. Court.

Once the ballot boxes of all the Wards in the district had arrived, the Town Hall doors were firmly closed and locked. No one would be allowed in or out till the results were known. (Therefore, no dashing out to tell one's friends, 'They've counted so many for us already, it looks as if we may have a chance.')

Before the counting began, everyone present had to sign a form promising not to give away any private information that came our way by mistake. If, for instance, we recognised anyone's voting paper (though how one could do this when the only writing on it is an X is difficult to say) then one must not tell anyone who that person voted for.

The counting began. Two rooms were used for this. One big room for the votes that had come from the polling stations, and a smaller room for the postal votes sent by those who were away at the time.

I was in the big room. The counting was done at long tables by people called Tellers. I was a Scrutineer. That is, I watched very carefully to see that the Tellers did not put a vote on the wrong pile. Tellers can be, of course, of any party, and they are watched by Scrutineers of all parties represented at the Election.

Once again my opposite number was Mrs. Court, and we were amused at the coincidence which seemed to have brought us face to face throughout the campaign.

Do you know what a voting paper looks like?

It looks like this:

JONES, JOHN	
SMITH, MARY	

All the voter has to do is to put an X by the name of his choice. No party is mentioned on the paper, so it is important to remember the name. If the voter puts anything in addition to the X then the vote does not count. You might think that no one would want to put anything but X. You would be wrong. I once saw this:

JONES, JOHN	Not on your life!
SMITH, MARY	X She's the girl for me!

And although the voter had certainly made his views clear, his vote was not accepted.

The Tellers at the table I was scrutinising did come across a few papers on these lines. They also occasionally put votes on the wrong pile by mistake. Very easy to do. Mrs. Court and I, however, kept our eyes on them like watchdogs.

Once the votes had been counted they had to be checked with the numbers of people who were known to have voted. If the number of votes counted altogether was not given as the same as the number of people who were known to have voted, then there had to be a re-count. The numbers always tallied in the end, as it is almost impossible for a vote to be lost, so strictly are they handled.

It was all very long, tiresome and anxious—particularly so for Mrs. Court and me, as there did not seem to be any great difference in the sizes of the two piles on our Tellers' table. We were in the Town Hall for several hours before, at long last, shortly before midnight, the Returning Officer was ready to make his announcement telling us who our councillors were to be.

It seemed to me eternity before he reached our Ward. Each announcement was, of course, greeted with cheers. The unsuccessful candidates looked crestfallen, angry, or indifferent, according to their natures, while the successful candidates looked bashful, triumphant, or indifferent according to theirs.

And then, right at the end, it was our turn. Mrs. Court and I smiled at each other rather nervously.

'It is my pleasure to announce,' said the Returning Officer, 'that in the Town Ward Miss Y, of 3 Pond Cottages has polled 985 votes. Candidate Z, Hillview, Marley Hill, has polled 980 votes.'

Our candidate was in by five votes!

'Well,' Mrs. Court remarked good-humouredly, 'it's not exactly a walk-over for you, is it?'

I laughed. 'No, but may I remind you that our candidate did not get in last year, so there must have been a good deal of conversion to right-thinking in our Ward!'

'You just wait till next time!' said Mrs. Court.

All the successful candidates made a little speech. Some of them spoke simply, thanking their supporters for their confidence in them, expressing their determination to be worthy of it. Others beamed and waved their arms and said this was the happiest day of their

lives (more as if they had been chosen queens of the May, I thought, rather than selected for a most responsible and important task).

Miss Y, modest and blushing, spoke extremely simply. She started by saying, 'I am very happy to be on the X Urban District Council, because I have what I think are very good ideas about improvements for X Town. All the same, I gather that my election was not exactly unanimous! This will ensure that I don't get too big for my boots!'

This was greeted with laughter and considerably more applause than had met the announcement of Miss Y's election. I was very pleased. I thought, 'Even the people who didn't vote for her are beginning to like her already!'

Notes on Chapter Eight.

1. In Urban Districts, Rural Districts, and Parishes, elections are held once a year.

2. Councillors of the above serve three years, then they retire or stand for re-election.

3. For election purposes each district is divided into Wards. What is the name of the Ward in which you live?

4. The councillor who was elected in your Ward at the last election probably made certain promises about things he would try to get done. Have these promises been fulfilled?

5. In this country we have a *secret ballot*. What does this mean?

Chapter Nine

PORTRAIT GALLERY

NOW I AM going to tell you about some of the many councillors I have met. I shall not give them their real names and I shall say nothing about their political opinions.

Councillors come from every type of family. They may be rich or poor. They may be tradesmen, craftsmen, office workers, or belong to one of the professions. They may be men or women. They may have different reasons for standing for their Council. Perhaps they are not satisfied with the way things are being run. The roads may be in a poor state and the Council doing nothing about them. The local library may be inefficient, or the Health Clinic inadequate. Or it may be that a person who has made a special study of, say, the care of old people, or architecture, or education, or who has a direct and convincing way of speaking feels that he could be useful. In any case, it is certain that the councillor has to fit in his local government work as best he can with the demands of earning a living or running a house. Take the case, for instance, of:

1. FARMER JONES, RURAL DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

Farmer Jones' farm is extensive, with several acres of crops and several hundred head of cattle. He has a busy life, up before daybreak and working at accounts and

orders long after sunset. He would not have time, one would think, for any extra activity. But in this world, curiously enough, it is only the really busy person who has time to do something extra, and Farmer Jones considers that his council work is extremely important.

It all began one afternoon in Long Meadow, when he noticed a peculiarly unpleasant smell coming from the river, running along the meadow's edge. He had been vaguely aware of this for some time, but to-day, being high summer and hot weather, it was almost unbearable. Farmer Jones went to have a look and saw that the water, instead of being clear and smooth-flowing, was nothing but a greyish, frothy scum. He had never seen it quite like this before, but he knew the reason for it very well. The nearby village was still without main drainage. The drains from the houses ran straight into the river, emptying their contents over a weir. The unpleasant froth was caused by the detergent washing powders, which housewives seemed to be using in larger amounts every day. Obviously this state of affairs was not a very healthy one for the inhabitants of the village. But Farmer Jones was not only concerned about people. What worried him just as much was that his precious cows should be subjected to such filth. He knew that the Rural District Council had been discussing main drainage for years and was constantly deciding that it could not afford it. Could not afford health and sweetness!

Farmer Jones, snorting with rage, suddenly had an idea. In five minutes he was in his car, bound for the market town and the Council Offices. Here he offered himself as candidate for the Council at the next election.

And in due course he was accepted and elected, for he was known to be man who gets things done.

That was two years ago. And only once—at lambing time—has Farmer Jones missed a Council meeting. It has become a bit of a joke that every time he rises to his feet he talks about drains. At first he made little headway, beyond persuading his fellow councillors to make arrangements for the river to be dragged and cleaned at regular intervals. Main drainage, many of the councillors felt, though of course, on a list of things to be attended to eventually, would for the moment be too heavy an expense. It would mean that the rates would go up, and people would not like that.

Farmer Jones had little patience with this view. Health, he pointed out more than once (more than twenty times in fact) was more worth spending money on than anything else in life. And yet it had come to his knowledge that the Highways Committee was considering installing lamps in the village street! Lamps at eighty pounds each, and each costing twelve pounds a year to keep up! What folly was this when the village thus lighted would still be pouring open drains into the river? For himself, Farmer Jones had always found a torch an excellent thing on a dark night, and the darkness grew no deeper as the years went by, whereas the dirt in the river was certainly growing deeper.

He was a good talker and by dint of talking not only in the Council Chamber, but also in the Fox and Hounds public house, in the market-place, and in the village shop, he brought a good many people round to his way of thinking.

There is still no main drainage in the village, but at

least the Council has decided to give it immediate attention. A contractor has been consulted, plans considered. Perhaps it will not be more than a year or two before sewers are laid. And while the villagers rejoice in the new facilities, Farmer Jones will think, with great satisfaction, of his precious cows being fittingly pastured.

2. MR. FORBES, TOWN COUNCILLOR.

The Forbes family had lived in the town for many hundreds of years, and as several members of the family had been in Local Government, Mr. Forbes, Solicitor, was not surprised when he was asked to stand for the Council. His election was taken for granted.

Mr. Forbes is fond of saying that he has no particular axe to grind, as the saying is, that his inspiration in all matters concerning the management of local affairs is his love for his town, his wish that it should be good to look at and pleasant to live in.

The problem of housing, for instance. With the building of new factories and the rush of workers to the district, there were not sufficient homes to go round. But Mr. Forbes felt that it would be a pity to solve this problem with a rash of new houses on the outskirts. Why not a group of well-designed, pleasant-looking flats surrounded by gardens? They would, in this way, be able to house far more people per square mile.

Then there was the dispute over the grounds of the late Lord X. Beautiful grounds with woods and lawns. A private builder put in an offer for it with the idea of building cheap houses and making a fortune. Mr. Forbes was in favour of the Council buying the land

and using it as a park. There was a good deal of argument about this. For the ground was expensive and a park, some people pointed out, was not 'useful'. To which Mr. Forbes replied that it depended what they meant by 'useful'. He would have thought that an open space of country where children could play and where the townspeople could enjoy green and growing things would be useful in the best sense of the word.

Mr. Forbes won his point over the blocks of flats and lost it over the park, which is now a private building estate with diminutive gardens and doorways like coffins. But that is how it is. One cannot get one's own way every time, And even when people disagree with Mr. Forbes they respect his views because they know that he is honest and sincere in wanting the best for his town. The citizens feel that so long as Mr. Forbes is on their Council nothing will go seriously wrong with them. It was because of this confidence that they elected him.

3. Mrs. BARNES, BOROUGH COUNCILLOR

The clock outside the leather shop in Little Berwick Street is always five minutes slow. But this does not in any way tally with the character of the shop's owner, who is never slow to do anything for the good of the town and serves on no less than four of the Council's Committees : Housing, Health, Child Welfare, and Education.

And yet in spite of so much public work, the leather-dealer still finds time to carry on a thriving business that was established as long ago as 1790.

You may think that such a person must be an

extremely competent man. But there you would be wrong. It is not a man at all, but a woman. The only woman on the Council, in fact.

Thirty years ago Ada Barnes found herself a widow with two young children and a business of which she had no knowledge at all. She knew though, that the leather trade had meant a great deal to her husband and she was determined to carry on with it. She set herself to learn the technical side of the trade, and in a few months was in a position to direct the work of her assistants. She grew to love leather, the chestnut shine of it, its softness and its strength. To her there is nothing lovelier in the world than a pair of wool-lined leather gloves, a well-made saddle, or jacket. And to her the smell of leather is the smell of life itself.

It was not until her children grew up and left home that Mrs. Barnes became a councillor. She already knew that her prosperous trade added a great deal to the town's reputation, and this encouraged her to take an interest in everything that went on in the district.

At sixty Mrs. Barnes is grey-haired, be-spectacled and dignified. She has very definite opinions. In a sense she stands for a way of life that is passing, for handcrafts and simple unmechanised pleasures, for lamplight rather than electricity, for sing-songs round an old piano rather than gramophone records.

Perhaps this was why she opposed the idea of a nursery school to which working mothers could send their children. Mrs. Barnes did not approve of mothers who went outside their homes to earn money. If it was necessary for a woman to work—as it had been for her

—then they should arrange to do it in such a way that their children should not suffer. Take in sewing, perhaps. She made quite a speech to the council on these lines, saying that family life was in danger of losing its intimacy, that a mother's love and care should be diffused over the rooms of her home, not lost in factories and shops. 'Nothing,' said Mrs. Barnes with pursed lips, 'nothing will make me give my vote to the extremely dangerous project of building a nursery school.'

Then one day, on entering the workroom behind her shop, Mrs. Barnes noticed that one of her employees, young Mrs. Wright, was looking rather ill. Mrs. Wright had only been there for a few months but she was already proving herself to be well worth training. 'She understands leather,' Mrs. Barnes told her friends, 'and it's no good trying to work on leather if you don't understand it.' It was going to be a great pity all round if Mrs. Wright's health were to give way. But in answer to Mrs. Barnes's inquiries, Mrs. Wright said, oh no, she wasn't really ill, just rather tired. She had such a long way to take the children in the mornings.

Mrs. Barnes was amazed. She had had no idea that Mrs. Wright had children. There were two of them, it turned out, aged eighteen months and six months. As there was nowhere in the town they could be left, Mrs. Wright took them to a town some miles away and left them with her mother. Then of course they had to be fetched after work.

'Well,' said Mrs. Barnes gently when she became acquainted with these facts, 'do you think, my dear, that you ought to come out to work? I don't like to say this,

because it looks as if you might be valuable to me and I can see that you enjoy being here. But is it fair to your children, do you think?’

To which Mrs. Wright replied that she would certainly not come out to work for any longer than was necessary. ‘But you see, my husband’s still a builder’s apprentice and he doesn’t get much money for that. When he finished his National Service he did think perhaps he ought to take an unskilled job in a factory for about ten pounds a week. But I knew he really didn’t want to do that, that it wouldn’t get him anywhere. It was better for him to learn a trade thoroughly. He’ll earn good money in the end but it means waiting. And meanwhile we just can’t manage on his money.’

‘I see,’ said Mrs. Barnes. And she went away looking very thoughtful.

At the next meeting of the Child Welfare Committee Mrs. Barnes had a surprise for her fellow members. ‘I have decided,’ she announced, ‘that I was quite wrong to oppose the Nursery School. I am an old woman and some of my ideas are out of date. I know now that times have changed and that for many women it is absolutely necessary to have a well-run centre where they can leave their children during the day. I would like, therefore, to cast my vote in favour of putting up the suggestion for a Nursery School before the Council.’

Since then the Ministry of Housing and Local Government has, in fact, passed an Act making Nursery Schools obligatory, but Mrs. Barnes is pleased to remember that she spoke in favour of them before this happened. Mrs. Wright’s husband has just started his own business and his wife no longer needs to earn

her living. All the same, she still does part-time work for Mrs. Barnes.

‘It’s a good thing,’ Mrs. Barnes has decided, ‘for you to have an interest that you can carry on with when your children are grown-up. Goodness knows what I should have done without one.’

Mrs. Wright agrees. ‘And besides, the older children are at primary school now, so they don’t need me till tea-time, and the baby really enjoys the Nursery. They have a rocking-horse there!’

Mrs. Barnes smiled. ‘Do you know,’ she admitted, ‘I was very much against the Nursery at first. But then I changed my mind. I’m like my clock, you see. Never more than about five minutes behind the times!’

4. MR. DON, TOWN COUNCILLOR.

Councillor Don is a kindly-looking man with silver hair and twinkling blue eyes. And yet, as his noisy Austin car chugs up the High Street each weekday morning, at precisely ten to nine, the groups of boys sauntering on the pavements seem to undergo a chastened transformation. Hands hurry out of pockets, ties are straightened, caps respectfully touched and footsteps quickened. For the fact is that Mr. Don is not only a councillor. He is also the Headmaster of the local Grammar School. And the boys well know that the man who inaugurated the Christmas Party for the children of the town can make other children feel most uncomfortable when, clothed in gown and mortar board, he waits for them to translate a latin passage. His eyes don’t twinkle then. They glint.

His pupils like Mr. Don all the same, chiefly because

he is tolerant of every failing but one, and that one is lack of individuality. Let a boy show firmness of character and stick to his own opinions, and Mr. Don respects him, even if he does talk on the stairs and have difficulty with his Algebra. A weak spirit, in fact, is the one thing he cannot abide, and on one occasion, when he had corrected a mistake in Latin Grammar and the pupil had politely said, 'Yes, Sir!' the Headmaster flashed, 'Well, Bates, aren't you going to argue with me! Can't you stick to your guns, boy?'

Mr. Don is a man whose private and public lives are one. As a councillor he never forgets that he is a teacher. (He is chairman of the Education Committee). And as a Headmaster he never forgets that he is on the Council. To make his boys into good citizens as well as good scholars is his aim. 'You must always remember,' he will say, after sending a boy two hundred yards to pick up a toffee-paper, 'that a good citizen doesn't drop litter.' And if, on finger-nail inspection, he had cause for displeasure, he will tell the culprit that he's a disgrace to the school *and* the town. He insists upon sixth-form boys attending at least one council meeting a year, and in the School Debating Society he encourages discussion on local affairs. He himself, of course, is always willing to set the ball rolling with a well-informed speech.

A good deal of Mr. Don's life is spent making speeches. Speeches in class, speeches at prize-giving, speeches in council. But 'speech' is not the word his pupils use in this connection. Their choice is 'pi-jaw'. 'Old Don,' they say, 'does nothing but pi-jaw. Can you imagine him at Council meetings? Bet he

doesn't let anyone else get a word in edgeways!'

But in this they are wrong. Mr. Don is not only a good talker, he's a good listener. A very important quality in a councillor.

5. Mr. PRESS, RURAL DISTRICT COUNCILLOR.

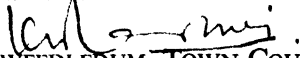
Mr. Press is a newsagent, and his shop is so small that it is impossible to explain how it manages to contain every football fan in the town at the same time. But it does so once a week, on Saturday evenings. And in the midst of the throng stands Mr. Press, handing out copies of the late Sports Edition.

In this little shop football matches are lost and won, for Mr. Press, besides being a Town Councillor, is Secretary of the local Football Club (at present top of the X and Y League). In appearance Mr. Press is narrow-faced and sou-looking. He does not indulge in jovial gossip. On the contrary, if you go into his shop and ask for a certain magazine, he will probably say sharply that magazines are for people who order them, and people who don't order them don't deserve to get them. And then, that very evening (or perhaps a day or two later), you find the magazine you wanted pushed through your letter-box. Which indicates that a kind heat beats under Mr. Press's navy serge jacket. As a man and a councillor his most noticeable trait is 'nagging'. In the man this is tiresome, in the councillor invaluable.

Why is it that the death-trap crossroad on the edge of the town has been converted into a safe roundabout with adequate signs and lights? Why is it that there is now a public swimming bath and that the roads are properly

treated during icy weather? It is certainly partly because Mr. Press has nagged and nagged and nagged.

Moral : A foible in a human being is often a virtue in Local Government.


Mr. TWEEDLEDUM, TOWN COUNCILLOR.

As you may guess, this is not his real name but it is the name the town's children give him and would probably be the name you would give him if you were to see him riding through the streets on an old bicycle—a lady's bicycle, too, of all things!—with his enormous tummy resting on the handlebars and his rosy face beaming under a rakish straw hat. A comic old boy, you might think, and rather a silly old boy. But in that you would be making a great mistake. For Mr. Tweedledum is none other than the Chairman of the Council. And if you were to see him at a Council meeting, looking very grave and responsible with his chain of office round his neck, and if you were to hear him expounding with authority on some local problem, you would know that he is far from being silly.

At one time Mr. Tweedledum was not very popular. This was for the simple reason that he had only lived in the town for two years before expressing the desire to serve on the Council. There does not seem to be anything very wicked in this but the fact is that the residents of a town rarely consider a newcomer as a resident for at least ten years.

However, who could resist Mr. Tweedledum's friendly grin as he bicycled through the town? And who could deny that he really had some excellent ideas about the lay-out of the public gardens and the brightening of the

Council offices with flower-filled window-boxes? Mr. Tweedledum, a Horticulturist by profession, did not hesitate to give his expert views on such matters without being asked.

After a time, when the Council realised that it had used quite a number of Mr. Tweedledum's ideas without giving him the credit, it was fair enough to suggest that he should put himself up for election. He got in by one vote! But, as Mr. Tweedledum cheerfully remarked, that one vote was the best of the lot since it got him in.

At the first two meetings he attended he was tactfully quiet and only spoke when spoken to. But at the third he created a sensation by leaping to his feet with a suggestion.

It had occurred to him, he said, after reading the town's history and burrowing in its ancient records, that what was needed was a Historical Pageant, to be held, for preference, on Midsummer's Day. Scenes could be staged in the Market Place re-enacting the visit of Queen Elizabeth in Fifteen Something, the triumphant entry of the Roundheads in Sixteen-Something, and so on. Many hundreds of citizens, including the children, could be involved. Think what fun they would have dressing up!

The Council sat aghast. When it recovered its breath it used it for protest. Such expense for such frivolity! Impossible!

Undeterred, Mr. Tweedledum beamed around him. Expense certainly but ought not civic pride to be encouraged? And what could achieve this more effectively than a Pageant? And then the people of the surrounding district would hear of it and come along to

share the fun and take away with them pleasant memories and increased respect for this ancient town. And besides, Mr. Tweedledum really did think (his rosy face shining with enthusiasm) that the ratepayers expected not only good drains and good roads, but a little pleasure from the Council also.

So Mr. Tweedledum went on. And it began to seem a pity to disappoint him. Other councillors were heard to murmur that well, perhaps . . . really, there did seem to be an idea there . . .

And at last, to the astonishment of everyone but Mr. Tweedledum, a Pageant Committee was formed, with Mr. Tweedledum as Chairman. And in due course posters appeared in the town announcing a Great Historic Pageant.

Mr. Tweedledum had certainly been right about the pleasure this would give to the townspeople. Excitement ran high as the committee interviewed citizens and cast the various parts. As was to be expected, there were one or two disappointments and jealousies. Mrs. Lard, the Grocer's wife, for instance, had certainly thought that with her lovely red hair she would be asked to be Queen Elizabeth the First, and was quite outraged when the role fell to the Barbers' wife, whose hair was less red. However, Mrs. Lard was given the part of an angry market woman in the Roundhead Scene, and was able to tell her friends that this required real acting.

So in the end everyone was happy except Mr. Tweedledum, who, unknown to anyone else, was having sleepless nights in case the great day should be a wet one and everything in the town, including Mr. Tweedledum's name, would be mud.

But he need not have worried, for the sun rose bright and hot on the Historic Pageant, on a town gay with bunting and flowers planted in every available tub and box, according to Mr. Tweedledum's suggestions.

Visitors arrived in their hundreds, too. And the shopkeepers did such excellent business in food, drink, and souvenirs that those who had shaken their heads over the cost of the festivities were now heard to declare that Mr. Tweedledum was a right good fellow who knew how to bring a bit of life to the place.

So the Councillor who had been so grudgingly elected had his first sound sleep for weeks.

And the very next year he was made Chairman of the Council.

6. MISS FORSTER, URBAN DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

One of Anne Forster's earliest memories is of having supper at tea-time because her mother had to get off to a Council meeting. When the meal was cleared away and Anne's mother had dashed for her bus, leaving her husband and daughter to 'look after each other and take care of yourselves', Anne would while away the time before she went to bed 'playing at being Mummy'. This involved ranging chairs in rows and addressing an imaginary audience on such matters as Dangerous Crossings. ('It's disgusting, waiting for people to get themselves killed before they do anything') and School windows ('Anne's a strong child, but I do assure you her nose has been running all Winter, and I'm as certain as I stand here that it's those draughty classrooms with windows that don't shut properly').

Anne had heard her mother discoursing on these

matters over the garden fence, and imagined that she expressed herself in exactly the same terms when she went to Council meetings. She could hardly wait till she too, would grow up and be a councillor and tell people what should be done.

Anne kept to this resolve, but as she grew older it underwent a certain change. Anne would not, like her mother, stop at Local Government. Her aim was the Central Government, Parliament itself, where she could tell the whole country what should be done.

I make no secret of the fact that Anne is rather a bossy person. But luckily she is intelligent, too, and very charming. 'That young woman could get away with murder,' people say, and though they exaggerate, she has certainly got away with the opening of a Public Library in a town which had, it thought, managed quite well without one for centuries.

At twenty-five, Anne is the youngest member of the Council, and though she cannot be said to have a main interest—the whole of government is her interest—she soon realised the importance of making a fuss in one particular direction. She chose Culture. A great reader herself, she honestly thought it wicked that the only literature available in the neighbourhood should be a hundred or so novels to be hired at twopence a time from the local newsagent. So she allied herself with those forces in the Council who were in favour of providing a library service.

There was a good deal of opposition to it: 1. A library would cost money. Anne said the small increase in rates would be nothing like so much as housewives paid the newsagents for reading a few silly novels a

year. 2. It would mean engaging a librarian. Two librarians, corrected Anne, for of course, there would have to be a children's library as well. 3. There was no building available and a new building was out of the question. But here, too, Anne, and others of her opinion, had an answer. They wanted to know what the Temperance Society's Hall was doing standing empty most of the time? There were two unused rooms upstairs which would do excellently for a library, and she was sure the Society would be willing to rent them for a modest sum.

Gazing at Anne's young and earnest face, older members of the Council felt themselves, as it were, slowly dissolving. Although Anne was not the only councillor who wanted a library she was certainly the most persuasive. The climax came when Anne made a moving speech, starting with the doubt that there could be another Council in Britain reluctant to give its people a pleasure that was now taken for granted by the majority of the public, and enlarging on the terrors of ignorance and the delights of knowledge. She described a world of joy whose doors were closed to their town for want of a library. Surely they weren't going to allow their little children to grow up without the glorious heritage that was theirs, to go out into life, knowing nothing of what awaited them . . .

The Council stared, held its breath, flushed with excitement, paled with horror, mopped away a tear, and agreed unanimously that to be without a library for another month was unthinkable.

I feel sure that one of these days, when the members of that Council read in their national papers how Miss

Anne Forster, the Honourable Member for X, ticked off the Foreign Secretary in the House of Commons, they will smile and say, 'That's exactly how she used to talk to us!'

7. Mrs. ALLSWELL, PARISH COUNCILLOR.

Mrs. Allswell is on the Rural District Council as well as on the Parish Council, but it was with the Parish Council that she started her local government work. She is the wife of a farmer and lives in an old farmhouse which is beautiful to look at, though Mrs. Allswell says that the long passages and numerous stairs do not seem very beautiful to her when she is scrubbing them.

The Allswells came to the village ten years ago and were horrified to find that the nearest public telephone was three miles away, that there was no main water, and that the school was lit by gas. The Parish Council consisted of pleasant but elderly people whose main idea seemed to be that what had been good enough for their grandfathers was good enough for them. Mrs. Allswell, who had two children to bath and educate and get the doctor to when necessary, did not agree with the 'what was good enough for our grandfathers . . .' point of view. So she lost no time in signifying her willingness to join the Parish Council.

At that time parish councillors in this particular village were elected by a show of hands in the school hall—it was cheaper than having an election. And as the school hall was a blur of gaslight shadows, it was often difficult to see who had put up their hands and who had not. Mrs. Allswell's husband maintains to this day that his wife was only elected by an error of counting the

shadows of hands as well as the hands. But he does not really mean it!

No one can say that Mrs. Allswell has not more than justified her position. Apart from the fact that she worked very hard to get a telephone in the village and electric light for the school, she was, at the beginning, the only person in the parish who 'stood up to' the Rural District Council. Mrs. Allswell was quite aware (she said) that the Rural District Council was responsible for the building of new houses in the village, but she did not agree that it should decide on the tenants. Only the people of the parish can know the particular needs of the people who live there. And when Mrs. Allswell learned that a new house was to be allotted to a childless couple who could well afford to build a house for themselves, she hurried in no time to the Rural Council Offices and told them all about the Joneses, who had four children and another expected, and were living in two rooms. Of course the R.D.C. ought to have known already about the Joneses, but it happened that it did not, and that it was extremely grateful to Mrs. Allswell for bringing the matter to their notice, and put up no opposition at all at the time. Mrs. Allswell's version of the affair, however, was that she had 'told the R.D.C. where it could get off'. Now that she is on the R.D.C. herself, of course, she does not talk about it quite like that, and is much more sympathetic to its difficulties.

Another parish incident in which Mrs. Allswell was involved could be entitled *The Footpath Over The Stream*. Footpaths, stiles, and rights of way are always the concern of the Parish Council, and in this particular

parish the right of way carrying a footpath over the stream had always been a nuisance. For it was nothing more than a plank, and the plank was constantly disappearing. Twenty times the owner of the land was instructed to replace it, and twenty times the owner did so, complaining, however, that every time he put down a new plank it was stolen for firewood.

This had been going on for some years when Mrs. Allswell joined the Council, and when she heard the story she laughed so much that her fellow-members were quite offended. When at last she was able to speak through her laughter she made a simple but brilliant suggestion. Why shouldn't the Clerk of the Council write a letter to the local builder asking him to put a concrete slab over the stream? The cost could be divided between the Council and the landowner.

This was done.

Notes on Chapter Nine.

1. Do any of the councillors I have described remind you in any way of your own councillors?
2. Try to 'write up' at least two of your councillors, as I have done.

Chapter Ten

COMMITTEE WORK

NOW LET us try to bring a little human meaning to this word 'Committee'. Councillors do a great deal of work in committee, and a Committee, as I have explained in an earlier chapter, is a group of people who meet to discuss one particular aspect of Council affairs. If every small matter had to be discussed in all its detail at Council meetings, then these would last for a week at least and its members could hardly be expected to show any interest in anything by the end of that time!

So Committees, you may remember, are formed to discuss, for instance, Public Health, Finance, and Town Planning. Their opinions and suggestions are put before the Council at a Council meeting. But even subjects like Town Planning and Public Health have a variety of problems, and just as the Council cannot discuss every detail of Public Health, neither can the Public Health Committee be expected to do so. So Sub-Committees are formed.

For instance, the Highways Committee may appoint a Sub-Committee to talk about Street Lighting, and another to talk about Maintenance and Improvements.

The Sub-Committees put their findings before the Committees, who eventually pass them on to the Council.

The number of Committees and Sub-Committees

depends, of course, on the size and importance of the district.

Let us attend two Committee meetings of the X Town Council. First, a meeting of the Baths Sub-Committee of the Public Grounds Committee.

Councillor Barclay is in the chair. Among others present are the chairman of the Council, Councillors Price and Varnum, Mrs. Councillor Coates, and the Town Clerk's assistant.

The scene is a Committee Room, the furniture is solid and polished with wear. The atmosphere is cosy, for this is a small meeting and the procedure more chatty than formal.

The Chairman sets the ball rolling by asking the Town Clerk's assistant to make a statement on the money available for repairs and improvements to the Lido Public Swimming Baths. The latter accordingly rises to his feet.

TOWN CLERK'S ASSISTANT : The Treasurer reports that £2,000 is available for repairs and improvements to the Lido during the coming year. I understand that members of this Committee have recently inspected the premises, and it is up to you to keep your suggestions within the financial limit. There is, of course, no obligation to spend up to the limit!

(Laughter)

COUNCILLOR PRICE : That's a great relief. We're all wondering how we're going to spend any money at all on the baths, what with broken brickwork and complete lack of seating accommodation. Excuse my sarcasm.

COUNCILLOR MRS. COATES : People go to the baths to swim, not to sit!

CHAIRMAN: Joking apart, what does the committee feel about recommending the Public Grounds Committee to provide certain new equipment? Chairs and tables, for instance, really do seem to be in rather short supply.

COUNCILLOR MRS. COATES : Need we have all that number of chairs and tables? They only encourage people to sit about all day, and it really isn't fair when there are queues waiting outside.

COUNCILLOR VARNUM: But there's a time limit for each bather, surely, and I do think we should provide adequate accommodation.

COUNCILLOR Mrs. COATES: Yes, perhaps you're right.

COUNCILLOR PRICE: How many chairs and tables then?

CHAIRMAN: Well, say thirty tables and a hundred and twenty chairs. That, if my arithmetic serves me, is four chairs a table. Does that seem a suitable number to you?

(Murmurs of agreement. Chairman and Town Clerk's Assistant make notes.)

COUNCILLOR VARNUM: I've heard several young ladies say they'd like a weighing machine at the Lido.

COUNCILLOR Mrs. VARNUM: Oh, nonsense! Quite unnecessary. People can always get weighed at a chemist's shop.

COUNCILLOR VARNUM: Yes, but at the baths they can do it with - er - practically nothing on. And they can't do that at a chemist's shop, you know!

CHAIRMAN: I should hope not! Can we have a show of hands on this please? Those in favour of a weighing machine.

(only Mr. Varnum's hand goes up)

Well, that settles that. No weighing machine. Now I have a suggestion. It seems to me that there should be a special water-chute for the children . . .

And so it goes on. The children's water-chute is discussed, also a children's paddling-pool, the painting of cubicles, and the repair of brickwork. Feeling on these issues does not run high and most decisions are unanimous. A few verbal fireworks arise, however, at the introduction of the subject of Public Address Equipment with Music Relay System.

TOWN CLERK'S ASSISTANT: Knowing that you were going to consider this proposal, the Town Clerk had a word with the Surveyor, who told him that the cost is likely to be about £290.

COUNCILLOR PRICE: Quite a tidy sum for relaying the most discordant set of noises in the town. All the screaming and shouting! And when I think of Light Programme so-called music being added to it, I shudder.

COUNCILLOR Mrs. COATES: That's only because you're growing old, Mr. Price! I think it's a happy noise myself. I like to hear people enjoying themselves.

TOWN CLERK'S ASSISTANT: On this point, Mr. Chairman, I would draw the Committee's attention to a letter received from a resident of Biggen Street, which, as you know, runs just behind the Lido. This letter complains in very strong terms about the noise already to be heard coming from there. What the writer will say if a loudspeaker is added I cannot imagine!

COUNCILLOR Mrs. COATES: I know who that is! Old Harris. He buttonholed me in the High Street the other day to talk about noise. The selfish old So-and-so.

CHAIRMAN: I must remind you, Mrs. Coates, that if

something distresses one of our residents it's our duty to look into it, no matter what we may think of the person's character. Have there been other complaints on the same lines?

TOWN CLERK'S ASSISTANT: No, Mr. Chairman, just this one.

CHAIRMAN: In that case it does look as though we should remember the wishes of the majority. And there's no doubt that the majority likes music.

COUNCILLOR PRICE: And much as I dislike the things, I admit a loudspeaker is essential. At the last inter-schools Competitions I could hardly hear a word the announcer said.

COUNCILLOR VARNUM: And we could, after all, ask the Bath Superintendent to use his discretion about volume. To keep an eye on the noise.

CHAIRMAN: Keep an ear on it, you mean!

(Laughter)

This discussion brings the meeting to an end, and the chairman, in closing it, hopes that he will see all members at the Public Grounds Committee meeting, when the suggestions of the Baths Sub-Committee will be brought forward.

So what about going to the Public Grounds Committee Meeting and seeing what happens there to the report of the Baths Sub-Committee?

This is a more formal affair than the last and the Chairman, a different councillor from the Chairman of the Sub-Committee, has a slightly more important air. There are several people present, including most of the members of the Baths Sub-Committee.

We will not attend the whole meeting. We might find

it rather boring. Instead we will enter quietly at the point when the Town Clerk, having submitted an application from the local section of the British Fire Services to use X Town Park for their annual competition (this was granted provided they used only the North side away from the flower-beds), is just about to read a letter from Brown's Technical College.

TOWN CLERK: 'To the Town Clerk, X Town. Dear Sir, May I draw your attention to what we at this College feel to be a desirable addition to the Sports Pavilion in the Sport's field? This is a partition. The reason being that a hundred boys and girls share changing accommodation there on Wednesday afternoons. Yours, etc.'

(One or two people smile)

A COUNCILLOR: I suppose he means that if it was Thursday afternoon a partition wouldn't be necessary!

CHAIRMAN: (sternly). It seems a reasonable request. Is the meeting agreed that we should ask the Town Clerk to get an estimate for the work?

(Murmurs of assent and the Town Clerk makes a note)

CHAIRMAN: (referring to a typewritten Agenda of matters to be discussed): Next, the Report of the Sub-Baths Committee.

THE TOWN CLERK reads this. We already know about most of it so we need not bother to listen.

(There is a brief silence)

CHAIRMAN: Has anyone any comments to make on this report?

(Councillor Thwaites lifts a hand)

Councillor Thwaites!

COUNCILLOR THWAITES: (rising to his feet). It strikes

me, Mr. Chairman, that a children's paddling-pool is an unnecessary expense. The shallow end is perfectly safe for young children to paddle in.

(The Chairman looks inquiringly at the Chairman of the Sub-Committee, Councillor Barclay, who nods.)

COUNCILLOR BARCLAY: Mr. Chairman, in considering the question of a children's paddling-pool, the Baths Sub-Committee came to the conclusion that the shallow end of the Baths is by no means safe for young children. Take the case of a mother who has a two-year-old child with her. She herself goes swimming in the deep end and puts the child in the shallow end. Now, that child may quite well try to reach its mother, and in doing so get out of its depth. On a crowded day tragedies can happen very easily. Only last year a case was brought to our notice in which a child got into serious difficulties in this way. The Baths Superintendent does his best to keep an eye on the bathers, but when there are so many he cannot be expected to be omnipotent. In this case disaster was fortunately averted. But what a risk! Now, if there were a children's paddling-pool, the Mother could place her child there with absolute confidence.

WOMAN COUNCILLOR: I entirely agree with the last speaker.

CHAIRMAN: Has anyone else any argument to raise against a children's paddling-pool?

(Silence)

Or any points to make on other suggestions in this report?

(Silence)

Then if it is your wish that we should pass all the

suggestions in the report of the Baths Sub-Committee, will you signify in the usual way?

(There is a showing of hands)

After this the Town Clerk reads a list of the Band Concerts proposed for the coming season. The WRACS can perform on Whit Monday at a fee of £60, a contingent of the Parachute Regiment on June 8th, fee £55, and so on.

This is followed by a reading of the number of burials which have taken place in the cemetery, and somebody comments that the residents of X Town will soon have to be forbidden to die; there won't be room for them.

A discussion follows on the development of a piece of land newly acquired by the Council. It is proposed that the land should be converted into a Garden for the Blind, with sweet-smelling flowers and shrubs. No one would dream of opposing this charming idea. All the same, Councillor Thwaites insists upon making a sentimental speech about it.

We will not stay for this speech, as I suspect it will be rather long.

Notes on Chapter Ten.

1. Members of the public may not usually attend Committee Meetings, and you will probably not know what happened at them till after the Council Meeting, which is reported in the papers. Try to keep your eyes open for reports of Committee and Council Meetings.

2. What would you do if you heard that games were forbidden in your local park, and you didn't feel there was a good reason for it?

Chapter Eleven

A COUNCIL MEETING

NOW I would like you to come to a full Council Meeting. This is a meeting of a County Borough Council, that is, a town which manages its own affairs without referring to the County Council. We will say that it is the County Borough of Silverford, whose Librarian, Miss Tome, you met in Chapter Six.

We will arrive at the Town Hall at about seven-thirty, when the meeting is due to begin. Many Council Meetings are held in the evening so that those councillors who work during the day—and most of them do—will be able to be present.

We will go up the main staircase because that will take us into the Gallery of the Council Chamber. The Gallery is open to any residents who wish to attend the meeting. There are already some people here, but not nearly enough in my opinion. To think that out of the thousands of inhabitants of the borough, only about forty seem to want to know what is going to be decided this evening about things which are of importance to them and their families!

We have arrived just as the Mayor is about to enter. A voice calls out 'Ladies and Gentlemen, His Worship the Mayor!' And everyone in the room rises, the visitors, the councillors sitting at the long tables below us, and the various officers who are present. And here

is the Mayor now, followed by the Aldermen. (The Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors are sometimes known as the Mayor and Corporation.) The Mayor, dressed in a way which our friend Alderman Griffin described to himself as 'a cross between an Admiral and Santa Claus' makes his way to the dais and sits in an imposing carved armchair. As a matter of fact, he looks impressive. It is indeed an impressive moment when the Council shows its respect for the dignified office which its Chairman holds. Local Government may have many faults and be prone to silly bickerings, but at times like this we realize that it is based on a solid and honourable tradition of duty and service.

The meeting is ready to start, and you will notice that everyone taking part in it has a booklet of about the thickness of a monthly magazine. It is an Agenda or programme of what is going to happen and be discussed. It contains an account of all the Committee Meetings that have been held since the last Council Meeting. (Council Meetings must be held at least three times a year.) The Committee reports are divided into numbered paragraphs. These Agendas save a good deal of time. Each councillor received one some time ago and, we hope, has read it thoroughly, and will have decided whether there is any comment he wishes to make on any particular paragraph. So there will be no need for the Town Clerk to read out the Reports in full.

While I have been talking (it is just as well we are not really at a Council Meeting, as talking is not allowed in the Gallery!) the Mayor has opened the proceedings, and the minutes—or account—of the last

meeting have been read. Now the Council is turning its attention to the report of the *Housing Committee*, and a councillor is having something to say about Paragraph 3. This deals with the question of widows letting rooms in their houses. Up to now, widows with lodgers have paid a 'lodger charge' to the Council, but it has been decided to cancel this on the grounds that widows need all the financial help they can get. The point that the councillor is now making is that many widows are able to make extra money by doing domestic work, or taking in sewing, and in consequence are quite well able to pay the 'lodger charge' Why shouldn't they help the Council's finances by doing so?

The answer to this, given by the Chairman of the Housing Committee, is that the charge was only to be cancelled in the case of widows who were not able to make money any other way. The protesting councillor is satisfied with this explanation, and the Council turns over the pages of the rest of the Report—the page-turning makes quite a rustle. No one else has anything more to say about it, but I notice that the visitor next to me has made a note on the back of an envelope: 'Why shouldn't widows make as much money as they can without having to pay the Council? Don't they have enough to put up with as it is?' No doubt he will take the matter up with one of the councillors of his ward.

REPORT OF THE HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE. A woman councillor has something to say on this.

WOMAN COUNCILLOR: I would like to express slight concern, Mr. Mayor, at the proposition to experiment with various types of street lighting in several small

roads. Does this mean that the residential areas of Silverford are going to look like a Christmas tree?

(Laughter)

CHAIRMAN OF THE HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE: I hope, your Worship, that this Council does not seriously think that my Committee could be capable of anything so frivolous!

(Laughter)

In actual fact the experiments will take the form of one type of lighting in each area and the areas will be fairly distant from one another.

WOMAN COUNCILLOR: I'm relieved to hear it!

There does not seem to be anything else for the councillors to be disturbed about in the Highways Committee Report; they sit mutely through the turning of pages recording that the Council intends to lease a portion of land near the station which is at present very unsightly, and transform it into a shrubbery; that an adequate direction sign is to be placed on the junction of C road and B road; that the Council has no objection to the owner of a certain factory erecting a fence on the North side of his property, provided the exact position of the fence be approved by the Surveyor, but that the Council is not prepared to help pay the cost.

LIBRARY COMMITTEE: This report includes a statement that Miss Evans, who was recently appointed as Children's Librarian for a trial period of six months, has proved thoroughly satisfactory and that the Library Committee recommends that Miss Evans be placed on the permanent Library Staff. Here another woman councillor has something to say.

WOMAN COUNCILLOR: Mr. Mayor, I would partic-

ularly like to say that not only does the Council pass this recommendation—as I gather we propose to do—but that Miss Evans' work has been noticed with great pleasure by both councillors and citizens. As a mother of children of reading age I would particularly like to commend Miss Evans' imagination and energy.

(Murmurs of Hear, hear!)

THE MAYOR: Yes, I think we would all like to confirm this. No doubt Miss Tome will pass on our comment to the young lady in question.

MISS TOME nods and smiles, but she does not smile when a councillor rises to his feet to protest against the large sum the Library Committee proposes to spend on new reference books.

MISS TOME: I would like to point out, Mr. Mayor, that the Committee has not drawn up its list without a great deal of consideration. On the whole the residents of Silverford tend to be of a studious turn of mind. More and more writers and research workers are coming to live here. It would surely be a pity to make them feel that they cannot turn to their own library for the reference books they need.

After a little furthing to-ing and fro-ing, Miss Tome carries her point and the Council turns to the Report of the *Town Planning Committee*.

Here a question arises about the old-world district on the outskirts of Silverford. Many residents have written to the Town Clerk protesting at the news that the Council has granted permission for bungalows to be built here. They ask the Council to withdraw this permission. Failing this, will the Council please make a reassuring statement about the many lovely old trees for

which the district is famous? Bungalows will mean that most of these will come down.

It seems that the Council has refused to withdraw permission to have the bungalows built (once again my neighbour makes a furious note, but I'm afraid it's too late for anything to be done about it now.) The trees, however, do present a bit of a problem. The Town Planning Committee has decided that little can be done about them, though it suggests writing a letter to the builder of the bungalows, Mr. Franks, to express the hope that he will be as sparing as possible in his tree-felling.

Several councillors express their disapproval. They do not consider that 'a letter expressing the hope' is adequate. What more can be done to preserve the trees?

The Mayor asks the Town Clerk if he can advise them. The Town Clerk can.

TOWN CLERK: Since, Mr. Mayor, the Council has decided not to withdraw permission for the building of the bungalows, you really have no authority to instruct the builder on which trees he must leave and which he may remove. On the other hand, I have had a word with the Borough tree expert on the matter, and he informs me that there are several trees in the district under discussion which, because of disease, are definitely harmful to neighbouring vegetation. I have also had a word with Mr. Franks, who is having the bungalows built, and he assures me that he has no wish to destroy the beauty of the area. I am sure that the Council will find that a friendly approach to Mr. Franks will have the desired effect. If the Council and Mr. Franks can agree to the expert making a thorough examination, I

am quite sure Mr. Franks will be prepared to have the faulty trees cut down and to preserve as many of the healthy ones as is compatible with his plans—provided, of course, that the Council is prepared to pay the expert's fee!

This strikes the Council as being satisfactory, and the matter of the trees is referred back to committee. This means that the Council wishes the Town Planning Committee to discuss the matter again with reference to what the Town Clerk has said. It is hoped that the Committee will recommend that the required friendly overture be made to Mr. Franks.

Well, shall we go now? There are several more reports to come, including the Report of the *Finance Committee*. But I feel that this will be difficult to understand, and I myself shall not be very interested as Silverford does not happen to be my home town. If it were I should certainly stay to hear how my money is being spent!

Note on Chapter Eleven.

Many councils welcome visitors at their meetings and only wish more members of the public would attend. Others, however, like people to ask special permission to attend. This is often granted. Try to attend one of your Council meetings. Imagine that you are a reporter who will be required to send an account to your local paper. Perhaps the School Magazine will print it!

Chapter Twelve

LAW AND ORDER

EVER SINCE the early days I told you about in Chapter Two—and long before that even—law and order have been among the chief responsibilities of Local Government. They still are.

A local council is concerned that the people of the district should keep the laws of the country and the laws of the district. The laws of the district are *bye-laws*, regulations made by a local authority.

The Central Government gives local councils power to introduce bye-laws provided that they do not go against the laws of the country and provided they are reasonable. It would be impossible to have a bye-law saying that public houses must provide a special bar for persons under sixteen, since the law of the country forbids persons under sixteen to enter premises where alcohol is sold. It would also be useless for a council to suggest a bye-law compelling people to walk only on the left-hand pavement of the High Street, for this would not be reasonable. These examples are of course, quite ridiculous, they would not occur to any council. I give them simply to illustrate my point.

No bye-law may come into force, in fact, until it has been agreed to by the appropriate department of the Central Government. The Ministry of Health, for instance, would be asked to confirm a bye-law for-

bidding people to bathe in a river near factories whose waste goes into the river water.

The Council is obliged to make what is known as 'public notice' of its intention to introduce a new bye-law. That is so that people may complain about it if they like. This might happen if, say a Parish Council decided that it wanted to make a rule allowing people to cross a certain farmer's field, to provide a 'right of way' across the field. The farmer might say, 'This will ruin my crops. The field is next to the school, all the children will take a short cut home and we all know how careless schoolchildren are.' He will put this point of view to the Council, who may or may not decide to abandon the bye-law in consequence. If not, the farmer may appeal to a higher authority, the County Council perhaps. An Inspector will come, and if he agrees that the farmer's complaint is justified, the Parish Council will be directed not to introduce the right of way. But perhaps the Inspector will decide that the short cut is going to save many children a long walk home and that a slight risk to the farmer's crops will be in a good cause. If so, the Parish Council will be allowed to pass the bye-law. Then, since the farmer is not likely to take so small a matter to the Central Government, he will have no choice but to obey and keep a path clear across his field. (Though in more serious matters the Central Government may well be consulted.)

To obey. That is the reason bye-laws and laws exist. To be obeyed. As individuals we may find some of them rather a nuisance, but they are made for the convenience and protection of us all. You yourself, for instance, may be irritated if you are not allowed to

picnic on the local cricket ground. But at the same time you will see quite well that if all and sundry spread themselves about the place with rugs and sandwiches, it will be impossible to keep the field fit to play on.

Bye-laws may be applied to any service for which the council is responsible: health, education, the Fire Service, housing, and so on. The Central Government sends out to Local Councils from time to time a list of bye-laws which it considers advisable to make. So you will find that a great many similar bye-laws exist all over the country.

How does the Council keep a check on the obedience or disobedience of its people? You know, of course, that the answer to that is, through the Police Force.

When Sir Robert Peel's nation-wide Police Force came into being in the middle of the nineteenth century, many localities had their own police force, though they were helped by the London Police, and London Police Inspectors kept an eye on them.

In 1888, when the Local Government Act was passed (see Chapter Three) special committees were formed for the organization of local police. These were composed of local councillors and local justices. Justices were people appointed to keep the peace. Justices of the Peace, you may remember, were first appointed to replace the Sheriffs of long ago.

To-day the forming and organization of local police forces is in the hands of the County Councils and County Borough Councils. County forces are administered through a standing (that is to say, permanent,) joint committee of councillors and justices,

and Borough Forces by what are known as Watch Committees.

So the policemen you see walking up and down your street looking rather suspiciously at loitering characters who don't seem to have any aim in life (are they examining shop premises with a view to breaking in?) and who puts out a hand to stop the traffic when your little brother lets his ball go in the road, is a member of a County or Borough Police Force (unless you live in London. We will come to that later.) It is his duty to see that we do not break the law of the land or the law of the district, that we neither steal our neighbour's goods, nor drop litter in the Public Park which belongs to our neighbour and to us. (Provided there is a by-law against litter in the Park, which there certainly ought to be.)

What happens when people do break laws and by-laws?

Whatever offence they are accused of having committed, they must go first to the local Police Court. The Police Court (which is not the same as the Police Station) is where the case against the accused is heard by magistrates, who decide whether the person is guilty and, if so, how he or she must be punished. Some offences such as forcing a way into someone's garden and damaging their hedge—may be tried in the local Police Court by Magistrates. More serious offences such as stealing are known as 'indictable' offences. All indictable offences may be heard, if the accused prefers, by a court with a jury. A County Court has a jury, but County Courts are only held four times a year at the Quarter Sessions. So if the accused chooses to be tried

in a County Court he must wait for the next Quarter Sessions, instead of being tried in his own Police Court, where trials are held once a week at Petty Sessions. When an indictable offence is tried by magistrates without jury, then we call this a 'summary' trial. Certain extremely serious indictable offences are not allowed to be summarily tried. These include burglary and murder.

Now, about Magistrates. Magistrates are judges and in the High Courts they are always referred to as judges. But in County Courts and Police Courts they are known simply as Magistrates. In London and other large towns, where there are a great many cases to be tried, the magistrates are men who have been trained for the work and are paid salaries or stipends. They are known as stipendiary magistrates. But petty session magistrates do the work voluntarily. They are not paid. Unpaid magistrates are often known as J.P.'s, which stands, of course, for Justice of the Peace. They are not, however, at all like those Justices of the Peace who succeeded the sheriffs. In those days a Justice of the Peace did a great deal of the work which a Council does to-day. He was often very powerful and very wealthy and had little sympathy with the difficulties of the poor. A modern J.P. is not necessarily either powerful or rich. A man or woman of any trade or profession can become a J.P. The appointment results, as rule, from the recommendation of a special advisory committee. Successful councillors are often asked to be J.P.'s. A Mayor and a Chairman of a Council is a J.P. while he holds office.

There must always be two J.P.'s to hear a case, and there may be more. One of them acts as chairman and takes the lead in the proceedings.

And now I am going to tell you how local authorities deal with young people who do not keep 'law and order.'

THE MYSTERY OF THE NEW GUN

As Police Officer William Landon turned the corner of Charles Street early one Saturday afternoon, a grim voice sounded from the top of a high wall:

'Stick 'em up, Mate, you've had it! If you don't give up I'll shoot!'

'All right, shoot then! I don't care!' said another voice.

There was a click. A small figure standing just under the high wall flung up its arms and crumpled to the ground. A choking sound came from it. It writhed.

Police Officer Landon walked on, smiling indulgently. It seemed only yesterday since he was playing games like that himself, and the boy on the wall was not unlike the boy that he had been. Tall for his twelve years, strongly built and bubbling with energy. Though certainly William Landon did not remember ever having quite such a handsome toy gun. At this thought, the Police Officer stopped in his tracks and looked back. The boy was now crawling along the top of the wall in an excellent imitation of a fugitive from justice. In his hand gleamed the gun, pearl-handled and glittering with silver paint. The Police Officer knew those guns, he'd seen them in the toyshops many times, and if his memory served him they cost fifteen shillings.

Now how was it possible for James Parkes, whose mother was a widow with four children and found it difficult to make her money last, to have bought a fifteen-shilling gun? It was not possible, decided the

Police Officer, walking on. Perhaps there was some simple explanation—a generous uncle or godfather. All the same . . .

At tea-time a stranger called on Mrs. Parkes, just as she was putting the jam on the table with one hand and restraining the twins from putting their fingers in it with the other. Mrs. Parkes may be forgiven for looking rather cross as she opened the door. Both twins had succeeded in reaching the jam, which was now being transferred to her skirt by their clutching fists.

‘Excuse me for troubling you,’ said the stranger, ‘but are you Mrs. Parkes?’

Mrs. Parkes said she was.

‘Could I see you for a moment?’

Mrs. Parkes said she didn’t know that it was convenient just now. But when the stranger added gently that he was a detective (and showed his badge to prove it), Mrs. Parkes turned rather pale and asked him to step inside.

The kitchen was very small, very untidy, very full of children, but very clean. James was on the floor with his eight-year-old brother, helping him to make a freight-train out of cotton reels and match boxes.

‘This gentleman is a detective,’ said Mrs. Parkes.

‘Oh!’ said James. He looked quite unruffled as he rose to his feet, and the superior smile with which he greeted the visitor was not unlike that of Humphrey Bogart when playing a cornered crook.

The detective said he hoped not to take more than a minute or two of the family’s time but he would just like to inquire whether Mrs. Parkes had bought her elder son a new toy gun recently.

'Good gracious no!' exclaimed Mrs. Parkes. 'I haven't of the money for that sort of nonsense.'

'Then has someone made him a present of one, ehhaps?'

'Not that I know of.'

The detective turned to James. 'But you have a new un, I believe?'

James, looking the detective brazenly in the eye, said that he hadn't.

'You were seen with one, old chap, by one of our Police Officers, about four hours ago.'

James said, oh well, that was different, in that case he had got a new gun, so what?

'Only,' said the Detective, 'that by a coincidence the headmaster of your school happens to have reported only yesterday morning that some money is missing from the cash-box in his office.'

James reddened and stared at the floor. He didn't look like Humphrey Bogart now, he looked like James Parkes caught out.

There was a short silence. The twins began to cry, and, 'Oh, shut up!' snapped Mrs. Parkes, cuffing both children. She was both frightened and exasperated. 'Do you mean,' she asked the Detective, 'that James took the money and bought a gun with it?'

'Did you, James?'

'I didn't spend it all on the gun,' said James, 'the gun only cost fifteen shillings, so I put the rest of the money under a brick in the yard.'

* * * *

Three weeks later James Parkes appeared before a

Juvenile Court. Juvenile cases are always heard in private—that is to say, only in the presence of the magistrates, witnesses, court officials, and any people who are given special permission to attend. Newspaper reporters, for instance. Members of the public are not allowed in, as they are in adult courts. Sometimes there is a special court room for juveniles (by juveniles we mean any person between the ages of eight and seventeen). Sometimes the children are tried in the ordinary court room, which has been cleared for the purpose. This was what happened in James' case.

He found himself in a large room with big windows. At one end was a kind of raised pew behind which sat three J.P.'s. One of them, James noticed, was a plump, cheerful looking woman, not unlike James' mother when she was all dressed up and not worried about anything. As she sat in the middle of the 'pew' she was presumably the chairman. This 'pew', by the way, is known as a 'bench'. You will sometimes hear the magistrates referred to as 'the bench'.

Although stealing is an indictable offence, James was too young to be tried by a jury. He was, therefore, to be summarily tried.

On one side of the bench was a square wooden enclosure marked Witness Box, on the other an enclosure called the Dock. This, James knew from the films he had seen, was where the prisoner stood. Directly below the bench a clerk sat at a table covered with papers.

The first thing that happened was that the Clerk read out the charge, that is, he read out the offence which James was being charged with having committed.

Then the chairman asked James whether he pleaded guilty or not guilty.

'I took the dough if that's what you mean.' James murmured.

He was rather annoyed because he had not been asked to stand in the dock like the prisoners he had seen on the films. Also everybody was being very polite. In films, court cases were always rather fearsome things with people rapping commands at one another and being called to order and even, in very exciting films, fainting and being carried out. To-day nothing like this was happening and the only sign of drama was the fact that Mrs. Parkes occasionally dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief, which, far from making James feel thrilled, made him feel ashamed.

As James had pleaded guilty no witnesses were to be called. So Police Officer Landon and James's headmaster who had come in case their evidence was needed, left the courtroom. The Police Officer looked back at James rather sadly as he went out. His superiors had congratulated him on having been quick enough to notice the new gun for this had, of course, been a valuable clue towards the discovery of the boy who had stolen the money. But in a way, Mr. Landon was sorry he had noticed it. There was a bright side to the picture though. Juvenile Courts do not exist so much to punish as to help, and perhaps the incident would show James the folly of going around taking other people's property. Perhaps it would put him on the road to being a good citizen when he grew up.

Now the Magistrate asked everyone to leave the court except the other magistrates, the magistrates'

clerk, James and James's mother. Also one other woman who sat quietly saying nothing. She did not seem to have anything to do with the case, but she had a great deal to do with James as you shall hear.

The room had been almost cleared in order that the magistrates might study some reports which had been sent in by James's headmaster. The Clerk handed the reports to the Magistrates who read them and then handed them back to the clerk who read them aloud.

The doctor said there was nothing wrong with James either mentally or physically. He described him as thoroughly healthy and intelligent boy. The Headmaster said much the same, adding, however, that James only worked when he felt like it. He did well at the subjects he liked best, which was English, and wrote quite imaginative compositions. With subjects he did not like, however, he was lazy. Although an agreeable boy in some ways he was rather a nuisance because he was always leading other pupils into silly escapades. The Headmaster said, finally, that he was sure no pupil of his was a really bad boy, though perhaps some of them were rather adventurous and did not quite realize that many adventures were of the wrong kind.

When the Clerk had finished reading the reports the Chairman asked Mrs. Parkes if she thought they contained any statement which was untrue or unfair. Mrs. Parkes said in a low voice that they sounded quite true and that the Headmaster was very kind.

'And what about you, James? Do you feel that your doctor and headmaster have been fair?'

James said yes, the reports were O.K. There was one thing though. He wasn't really that good at English

The Chairman smiled. She then, after a quiet discussion with the other magistrates, announced that James was to be fined twenty shillings, but that he need not pay it all at once. She then asked Mrs. Parkes if she had anything to say.

Mrs. Parkes had. She said, with tears, that James was a good son. He helped a lot with the other children and had been the man of the house since his father died. She couldn't afford to give him things like other parents gave their children. Sometimes he went to the pictures on Saturday mornings but she wasn't sure that was a good thing because sometimes the films were all about rowdy cowboys and gangsters, which she thought put ideas into his head, because there was no doubt about it he could be very wild, and of course she knew it was wicked to steal, but after all he didn't get things given him like other boys. She was sure James would be a good boy if only she had more time to 'keep an eye' on him.

By now it was clear to everyone in the court that Mrs. Parkes was a very sensible woman. She knew perfectly well that because James did not in fact have so many things as other children, he considered himself justified in helping himself. She knew, too, that the trouble was caused because she was too busy and anxious to give him as much attention as she would have liked to give him.

The woman J.P. spoke again. 'Do you think, Mrs. Parkes, that it would be a good idea to put James on probation? That it would perhaps help you both?'

Mrs. Parkes said it was worth trying.

And the result was that when James and Mrs.

Parkes left the court room, they were accompanied by the woman who had not seemed, at first, to have any special place there.

This woman was a Probation Officer. Her name was Mrs. Elliot.

Now, as perhaps you know, a Probation Officer is a person whose job it is to help those who have broken the law. It is his aim to be a friend to the offender, to understand what it is that makes him break the law. A children's Probation Officer is generally a particularly kind and helpful person. He (or she) does not scold, is not severe, and is not for ever preaching.

Now if James had already committed other offences, or if he was impossible to control, or had committed a serious offence such as using real firearms, the Bench might have thought it a good idea to send him to a special boarding-school for a time, away from his family. Sometimes, you know, it is unhappy family life that makes children behave badly. But James had never been in court before and it was clear that he was not bad at heart. So he was just put on probation, which means that he was put on his honour to make a point of behaving himself for a certain period—in James' case a year. After that it was to be hoped that behaving well would become a habit!

The Probation Officer appointed to help James was, as you have heard, a woman. A very nice woman, too, with a good sense of fun. When she called on the Parkes family, which she did from time to time, she played hopscotch with the twins and set them all laughing. Mrs. Parkes liked her because she was sympathetic about all the work Mrs. Parkes had to do and some-

es she helped with the washing up. But what Mrs. Parkes liked about her best of all was that if she had worries about the children—about Timmy being so hot-tempered, or Jessy getting so many colds—she would talk to Mrs. Elliott about it all, and, as everyone knows, a trouble shared is a trouble halved.

Mrs. Elliott did not have time to visit the Parkes very often, but she made sure that she saw James regularly by arranging for him to come to her office once a month, just to tell her how he was getting on. James rather enjoyed these visits. It made him feel important, arriving at the Council Offices and being 'shown in' to a Probation Officer. He knew now that breaking the law and appearing at court was not, as he had once thought, particularly clever or dashing. Going to the Council Offices and being 'shown in' was, on the other hand, quite amusing, because he never quite knew what was going to happen. Once, for instance, when Mrs. Elliott asked him what he was reading just now and he said he only read the comics his friends gave him, she took him to the Public Library, helped him to join, and suggested some books that she thought he would enjoy. Next time they met he was proud to inform her that he had read three of them.

He also looked forward to telling her about the football match, when he'd been responsible for the winning goal. His mother always seemed to be bathing the twins or cooking a meal when he told her things like that, but when he saw the Probation Officer he knew that she only had one job on her hands at that particular moment, and that was to listen to James Parkes.

Of course, all this didn't mean that James was no

longer interested in playing gangsters and cowboys. But somehow he seemed to be far too busy nowadays to want things that he didn't have. And, as he remarked to the Probation Officer, what was fun about cowboys and gangsters wasn't only all the bang-bang stuff, but the smashing clothes you wore if you could afford them, holsters, wide-brimmed hats and red handkerchiefs tied round your neck. Only, as he couldn't afford to buy things like that, he might as well forget it. And the Probation Officer said, oh, he liked dressing up, did he? That was interesting . . .

unless.

* * * *

As Police Officer Landon rounded the corner of Charles Street, he was puzzled for a moment by a sign chalked on the pavement. It was a square with a figure six in the middle of it and an arrow pointing out of it. The Police Officer stared at it for a moment, then he heard a voice from the top of a wall saying quietly, 'Hey!'

The Police Officer looked up and saw a boy in Scout uniform grinning down at him.

'Hullo, James!'

'Hullo! I say, sir, do you mind not looking at that thing too long? I'm off to Scouts and that's a sign for my brother when he comes back from the swimming baths. I've been teaching him tracking signs, you see, and I want to see if he spots that one. It's only to tell him there's a letter hidden six paces farther on, and as a matter of fact the letter only tells him he's a silly ass! It's just for fun! Only if he sees you staring at it that'll make him look instead of finding it by himself.'

'Don't worry,' said the Police Officer, 'I'll be at the

other end of the road in three minutes. Have a good time at Scouts!’

The Police Officer walked on, smiling indulgently. It seemed only yesterday that he was playing games like that himself, and the boy on the wall was not unlike the boy that he had been. Perhaps, who knows, he too might join the Police Force in the end?

Chapter Thirteen

HOW LONDON IS GOVERNED

W. L. G.
BECAUSE I am giving a separate chapter to the government of London you might well think that London was governed in an entirely different way from the rest of the country and was populated by an entirely different kind of people—a place where there was no such thing as a Council and where everyone walks on their heads and goes to bed in the day time.

In fact, just as the people of London are no different from people elsewhere, so is the local government work done in London much the same as that done in local government elsewhere. Everything I have said about the problems that officers and councillors have to deal with—officers like the Sanitary Inspector, councillors like Mr. Tweedledum—is equally true of London officers and councillors.

What then is the difference between London and the rest of the country so far as local government is concerned? It is purely a difference in administration. Before I tell you exactly what this difference is, let us find out whether you know a little bit about it already. In the following paragraph is a statement which, though it is constantly made by people and newspapers, is not quite correct. Can you spot why?

‘As the crowds waited in the raw November weather, a flicker of palid sunlight turned the fog to

gold as elusive as the dream of gold that brought Dick Whittington to London town so long ago. And, as long ago the bells of London rang for Dick Whittington, so they rang again to-day while the colourful procession wound its way through the grey streets, and once again the citizens cheered while in a glittering coach there rode through the winter streets the historical descendant of the great Whittington, Sir X.Y., this year's Lord Mayor of London.'

Have you spotted the deliberate mistake? Sunlight turning fog to gold? Well no, I didn't mean that! The mistake I hoped you would find—and perhaps you have—is in the last sentence of the paragraph. 'Sir X. Y., this year's Lord Mayor of London.' Yes, he is generally called the Lord Mayor of London, but he is not really the Lord Mayor of London, he is the Lord Mayor of the City of London.

London, as far as Local Government is concerned, is divided into two areas. The City of London and the County of London.

The City of London is the oldest part of our capital. It covers one square mile of space, once walled with gates of which only the names remain: Aldgate, Moorgate, Bishopsgate.

The County of London is 'all the rest of it'.

The City of London is governed by what is known as a Common Council. It consists of twenty-six aldermen and two hundred and sixty common councillors. Instead of everyone having the right to vote, only certain property owners may vote for the Common Council of the City of London. The Aldermen are

elected for life, and the councillors every year. But as the councillors are nearly always re-elected, there is little, if any, breath-taking excitement about the election of the City Council or Corporation.

The Lord Mayor is chosen by the Council and by members of the big City Companies or Guilds. You have probably learned about the Guilds in your history lessons. They once represented big trades and protected the people who worked in those trades. Now they are merely wealthy societies of business and professional men. (They give some of their money towards the maintenance of schools and colleges that bear their names: Haberdashers, Merchant Taylors, Goldsmiths, and so on).

The Lord Mayor is usually a prosperous business man, and he certainly needs to be prosperous, for since, during his year of office he is the chief citizen of all London, it is his job, as London's representative, to entertain important foreign visitors and give enormous banquets to important people of all kinds.

The Lord Mayor is also Chairman of the Common Council, whose duties are similar to the duties of town councils and has certain responsibilities outside the city boundaries. The Common Council, for instance, is responsible for the big London markets such as Smithfield and Billingsgate, and also for the cleanliness of the River Thames from its mouth up as far as Teddington. (After this the river becomes the responsibility of a body known as The Thames Conservancy).

The City of London has its own Police Force.

And it has absolutely nothing to do, as far as local

government is concerned, with the rest of London, the County of London.

The County of London is governed by the London County Council, generally referred to as the L.C.C.

I wonder if you have ever seen the headquarters of the L.C.C.—County Hall? County Hall is the home of London Local Government just as the Houses of Parliament are the home of the Central Government. It is a big building on the South bank of the Thames almost opposite Westminster. I think myself that it is an impressive sight, and I find the knowledge that it holds the reins of government of a great capital an impressive thought.

Not that the L.C.C. is responsible for every detail of government throughout London. The area is too thickly populated for that. No, the County of London is divided into twenty-eight Metropolitan Boroughs. Each of these has a Council which is responsible for certain services such as street lighting, removal of refuse, the provision of libraries and swimming baths. But matters of more general importance—Child Welfare, Town Planning, Housing, for instance—are the responsibility of the L.C.C. Education is one of its greatest responsibilities and here the L.C.C. even has a certain authority in the City, where there are a certain number of L.C.C. primary schools.

The relationship between a Metropolitan Borough Council and the L.C.C. is much the same as the relationship between a Rural District Council and a County Council.

However, there are certain services which operate in

the London area for which the L.C.C. rather surprisingly has no responsibility at all.

The Police, for instance. The policemen one sees in London are members of the Metropolitan Police Force who work under the direction of the Chief Commissioner of Police at Scotland Yard. The Metropolitan Police Force does not work only in London but also in many counties near London.

Then there is the London Water Supply. This is in charge of the Metropolitan Water Board and has nothing to do with the L.C.C. Neither has London Transport, which is the concern of the London Passenger Transport Board. Nor are the Docks. These come under the Port of London Authority.

So you see there are a good many authorities in the County of London, and what makes things really rather confusing is the fact that the Post Office gives the name London to many areas that are not, strictly speaking, London at all, though they are near London. Some County Boroughs have a London postal address, though the L.C.C. is not responsible for any of their services. East Ham is one of these. Although if you write to someone living in East Ham you put London on the envelope, East Ham is really a County Borough.

It all arises from London getting too big and seeming to have no end, as I am sure you will agree if ever you have driven out of London in a car or bus. It is at least two hours before you reach the country. More's the pity. London is a wonderful place, but it is possible to have too much of a good thing. We are getting too much of London.

Notes on Chapter Thirteen.

1. In terms of local government there are two Londons. The City of London and the County of London.

2. Choose a part of London that you either live in yourself or visit sometimes, or have read about. Is it in the City of London or the County of London? If it is in the County of London, what Metropolitan Borough is it in?

Who is responsible, in the area you have chosen, for the Police? The water? The buses? The sewers? (You may have to make inquiries about the sewers as I have not told you anything about them. Strangely enough, the system of sewage disposal in London is very interesting.)

How many London authorities are concerned in the life of 'your area'? If you do not know, find out!

Chapter Fourteen

READING THE NEWSPAPERS

A VERY GOOD way of learning about the work of Local Government is by reading newspapers, especially local papers. Sometimes the news stories about Council matters are not so attractively headed as stories about film stars and football matches, but they are just as interesting really and far more important.

In this chapter you will find a selection of extracts from newspaper reports on Local Government that have come my way while I have been writing this book. Some are from national papers, others from local papers. I have not always given the actual names of people or districts, and here and there I have edited the report a little so as to make its meaning clearer. But now that you have read the foregoing pages these extracts should have some human interest for you.

1. THE PRICE OF MAYORALTY

1. The Mayor of Z was called on to pay the Customs £1,500 on his hundred-year-old chain of office when he arrived at the airport of Johannesburg, South Africa. The chain, valued at £1,650 was first worn in 1857. (N.B. The Mayor got a fright, but as a matter of fact the customs money was officially paid for him.)

2. The Mayor of R will no longer have to pay for his

office stationery, Christmas cards, official wreaths and the ringing of bells at St. Mary's Church on Mayor's Day.

The bills for such items will be paid by the Finance and General Purposes Committee instead of coming from the Mayor's expenses allowance of £600 a year, the Council have decided.

In the past civic hospitality has been the Mayor's responsibility. 'But rising costs and the increasing number of civic visits have added materially to the expenditure,' says the Council.

2. COUNCILLORS OF EVERY KIND.

1. *Young*

Several councillors under thirty. This is one of the features of Crawley's elevation from a Parish Council to an Urban District. The promotion was at the order of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, and none too soon for a once sleepy Sussex village that has rocketted to the status of a New Town owing to the many factories that have been built in the district and the many thousands of people who have recently gone to live there.

On Monday the new and old inhabitants of Crawley voted. They gave youth its chance. Mr. Albert Crane, aged twenty-eight says, 'We must have variety in housing. I shall do my best to see that we get it.' Mr. Percy Wales, the only Independent on the new council, said, 'Everyone is beginning to like each other. I've been here all my life and I welcome the newcomers.' He raised a cup of tea to the staff of his building business and said: 'To the future. As an Independent I'll keep

party people from fighting each other.' He has this advice for electors: 'Pay your rates or we'll be bust!'

A butcher, too, will be on the new Council. He is twenty-seven year old Mr. Portlock who began his business in the town two years ago.

Youngest councillor is Mr. Vygus, aged twenty-three

2. *And Old*

The Warwickshire village of Bishops Itchington can now claim to be the only township in the world ruled by grandmothers.

Mrs. Chapple-Hyam, the Parish Council Chairman has just become a grandmother and that puts her on an equality with the other five women councillors. The 'petticoat government' of Bishops Itchington began in 1949 when six members of the Women's Institute and one man were elected.

In 1952 the six retained their seats and Mr. Frank Moore replaced Mr. Marlow as the one man.

In the forthcoming May elections seven women will enter the field including the present six. The oldest councillor is seventy-two year old Mrs. Gertrud Heginbotham, who has five grandchildren.

Mr. Harold Morgan has been Clerk to the Council for fifteen years. 'When the ladies go I shall retire,' he says, 'the six wise grandmothers are a good working team and attend meetings better than the men ever did.'

The women are modest about it all. But Mrs. Chapple-Hyam admits that during the past six years a hundred-and-two new council houses have been built

in the village, a new sewerage scheme passed, and plans are all set for a new playing-field.

3. *And the Vague*

A farmer sat in the living-room of his home last night fingering a bill and facing a problem. The bill is for the supply of gas to the local parish hall. The problem is that the bill must remain unpaid because, although the farmer is Clerk to the Parish Council, the Council doesn't exist. It doesn't exist because six of the seven members forgot to submit nomination papers before the last election.

As a result social life in this hamlet with its twelfth-century church, set amidst picturesque scenery, has suddenly come to a standstill. The inhabitants are now denied such weekly treats as whist-drives, dances, and magic-lantern shows, because there is no Council to authorize the letting of the parish hall.

'It is the contentment here that did it,' says the farmer. 'Everybody here is so happy, including the members of the Council, that they thought everything would just go along in the old way without anyone bothering. So they forgot that they had to put in nomination papers if they wanted to be re-elected.'

Ex-Council Chairman, Mr. W., aged seventy, says: 'For twelve years I and another Councillor have been on the managerial board of the village school. Now we can't take our seats. Everything we ought to do would be illegal if we did.'

What is to happen? The Clerk has contacted the local Rural District Council and it is hoped that a Council may be co-opted. (Temporarily formed.)

3. A FEW DISAGREEMENTS

1. *Storm in a Duck Pond*

Villagers let loose live ducks as a sign of disapproval at the parish meeting of M last night. They wanted to keep the village duck pond.

The trouble has been that half the pond belongs to the Parish Council and the other half to a Major X who wanted to fill it in and build garages.

Recently when the Council wished to sell him its half a parish meeting barred the sale. Yesterday's meeting was called to see if the villagers had changed their minds.

Indeed they hadn't. And after they had recorded their determination it was announced that Major X had agreed to sell his half for £10

2. *Very Sorry . . .*

A Council Clerk will be asked to-night to write a letter of apology to every householder in L.B. at his own expense.

The reason is a letter that the Clerk of the Rural District Council has already sent to householders threatening court action if an order to change house numbers is not carried out in seven days. This letter was the first the inhabitants knew of the re-numbering. The new numbering will make it easier for delivery men to find their way along the village's one main road which has eight different street names. 'But it means changing title deeds, car log-books, and all the other documents,' said the local fishmonger, a member of the Parish Council. 'I shall bring the matter before the Parish Council to-night.'

Another Parish Councillor, a chemist, called the letter 'offensive.'

The Clerk to the Rural District Council said, 'I never dreamed my letter would raise the storm it has. Perhaps, on second thoughts, I might have sent it worded differently.'

3. *Houses and homes*

A's parish meeting on Tuesday evening broke up in noisy disorder after several members of the public who wished to voice their complaints about the method of allocating council houses had been ruled 'out of order' by the chairman, Mr. Dale.

'Allocating Council houses has nothing at all to do with the Parish Council. It is entirely a matter for the Rural District Council, and I can't allow it to be discussed here,' Mr. Dale had told the meeting.

After trying in vain for some time to end the discussion, during which it was often impossible to hear what was being said, Mr. Dale declared the meeting closed.

'If you want to carry on arguing that's up to you,' he said, 'but remember that as far as I'm concerned the official meeting is over.'

'All we want is fair play for our young married couples who are being chivvied this way and that on the waiting list for houses,' declared Mrs. E. 'And don't tell me I mustn't speak because that's why I and most of these other people have come here to-night.' Her daughter, she said, had been promised the key of a house on Friday and was all ready to move in, but at the very last moment she was told that the house was to go

to someone else. 'The same thing has happened time time again in this place,' she went on. 'The people getting fed up with it and demand that something should be done to see that they get fair play.'

After several complaints had been voiced, Mr. I again pointed out that the matter was no concern of Parish Council. Then someone shouted, 'Don't and get away with that story. We know who dishes houses out.'

Mrs. B.: 'Tell the public why my son, who has been here twenty-seven years, was promised the key to a house and then it was given to someone else.'

Mr. Dale. 'It's no earthly use asking us. The only people who can give you the answer are the R.I. District Councillors.'

With several people on their feet all speaking at once Councillor Giles said that if this had happened to him he would have taken the matter straight to the R.I. 'And if that brought me no satisfaction, I should have gone to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.'

It was then that the meeting finally broke up in confusion.

4. *Keeping The Children Out*

Parents at W. parish meeting on Monday complained bitterly that their children had been ordered out of playing-field; that because the land had been let for grazing purposes it was in no fit state for children to play on anyway ; and that the Parish Church had failed to instal any swings or other amenities to attract children from the roads.

One parent said he knew of a case where children had been told to go off and play elsewhere when they had gone to the field to play.

The Chairman pointed out that no one had the right to forbid the children to play in the field. The moment the Parish Council received a request from some organised body in the village, he was certain that they would see that everything possible was done to remedy the position.

One parishioner volunteered to erect swings and make a sandpit, a gesture which was greeted with applause, and the meeting unanimously agreed to the suggestion.

Among other items mentioned were: that the Coronation tree had died and another was to be planted; and that further steps for securing adequate passage-way for pedestrians on the main road, were to be made.

ONE THING AND ANOTHER

1. At Tuesday's meeting of the Rural District Council it was decided to approach the County Council for the provision of snow fences at exposed parts of X village, following complaints by the vicar, who spoke of recurring drifts at certain points during the recent severe weather.

The Parish Council was voted powers to raise funds (from extra rates if necessary) for the erection of a bus shelter at the top of May Hill. The chairman said the Y Bus Company (a private company) was willing to provide the material for a shelter but expected the Council to pay for the erection and maintenance. Councillor

Jones said he thought that the bus company was not quite playing the game, as this route brought in a lot of money to the company. The bus company should pay for the erection of the shelter, he maintained.

The Council agreed to write to the bus company to ask that they pay for the erection of the shelter and to try other methods to avoid the expense falling on the rates.

2. *Lights Out?*

The bright lights of Piccadilly will fade one day, and Mr. Walter Ison of the L.C.C. hopes it will be in his lifetime.

This is what he told a public hearing yesterday, when he opposed new neon advertisements on the Criterion building.

He said later that much of the Circus will eventually be rebuilt. Dazzling advertisement light will be out of place on the new buildings.

Did that mean London would lose its mass illuminated advertisement displays? Mr. Ison said 'Not necessarily. Leicester Square might adopt that role.'

Mr. Ison, Senior Assistant in the historic building section of the L.C.C.'s architect's office, told the inquiry that the Criterion was built in 1874.

The hearing, before Mr. S. J. Docking, Ministry of Housing Inspector, concerned an appeal by a neon-lighting firm against Westminster Council's refusal to allow the signs.

