

How to obtain an ample and cheap supply of water is one of the most important questions a municipality is called upon to decide, and is unquestionably the greatest problem now before the people of this city. For years we have paid from four to six times as much for water as other cities of the same size, and our monthly contributions have served to build an extensive system, to establish a rich corporation and make a few men wealthy. The same money would have given the city a complete system free from debt, and an ample supply to all consumers for at least one-third the present rates. Our business men have been freely criticised for their failure to establish or encourage manufactures, yet in this respect their conduct is blameless when compared with the apparent indifference of the taxpayers concerning this water question. Before manufacturing can be successfully engaged in here, so as to compete with Eastern cities, we must first render the necessities of life obtainable at prices somewhat comparable with those that prevail elsewhere. Water rates are directly a material factor in the cost of nearly all forms of manufacturing, and indirectly so far as it affects the wages of workmen. So long as the laborer, mechanic, salesman and bookkeeper must pay more for water than for bread, it is idle to talk of manufactures flourishing in this community. The cost of flour per year for a small family does not exceed \$20, while the same family must pay for one hydrant, a bath tub and a water closet, the outrageous sum of \$42. Water is, of all things, the great necessity of human existence, and should be obtainable at the least possible cost. It is the duty of a city government to protect the people from extortion of water companies as well as to procure water for public uses at a minimum cost. There is being urged upon the city a water proposition generally denominated as the "Morey Scheme," by which certain parties hope to procure a valuable franchise and bind the city to a contract for the payment of \$40,000 annually for a term of twenty years, a total of \$800,000. There is but one proper light in which to view this proposition, and that is to disassociate it from the present company and compare it with conditions found elsewhere. When this is done it is found that rates to consumers are extremely high. By making this contract we fasten those high rates upon us for twenty years without hope of relief. Now we are free to help ourselves; then we would be bound hand and foot; and for the privilege of being so bound the property of our taxpayers would be mortgaged for \$800,000. The sum asked for would be sufficient to give the city a complete system of water works, while the revenue derived from rates (50 per cent. less than the Morey schedule) would be ample to maintain it, pay interest on the cost and create a sinking fund for extinguishment of the debt. About this there can be no question. The experience of cities everywhere in the United States proves it. Nearly every city of the size of Portland owns its own water works, and supplies its inhabitants with water at one-sixth the rate, in some instances, that are now extorted from our people monthly. Long and costly experience by the older cities of the

East has demonstrated the fact that every city should own its own water works, and that to do so is to materially lessen the cost of water to the municipal treasury for fire purposes, and to consumers for domestic uses, manufacturing and the manifold purposes for which water is needed. Fortunately for us we are not called upon to be pioneers in this matter. Other cities have gone through all the experimental stages and have paid dearly for the whistle of experience. We are so situated as to profit by what has cost them so much, and it were the very acme of folly not to do so. With this end in view THE WEST SHORE recently addressed letters to the mayors of numerous cities in the United States whose population ranges from 25,000 to 100,000, asking several leading questions in regard to their water supply. In response was received a mass of letters, municipal reports, water reports, schedules of water rates, rules, etc., that form a valuable collection of data upon the subject. From these the table on the opposite page has been carefully compiled. Reports more or less complete were also received from Cambridge, Mass.; Kansas City, Mo.; Wilmington, Del.; Detroit, Mich.; Harrisburg, Pa.; Rochester, N. Y.; Paterson, N. J.; St. Paul, Minn.; Springfield, Ill.; New Haven and Hartford, Conn.; Leavenworth, Kan.; Davenport, Iowa; Dayton, Ohio; Bangor, Me., and Austin, Texas. Of thirty-nine cities reporting, twenty-seven have their own water works and twelve are served by companies, rates in the former averaging much lower than in the latter. The table is clear and needs no explanation, except to say that in reporting the cost of systems some cities have included the amount spent for maintenance during a series of years. Special attention is called to the fact that only in cities having two to four times the population of Portland is the entire cost of maintenance equal to the sum the city alone would be required to pay under the Morey contract. Attention is also called to the excess of revenue over cost of maintenance of each city system, derived from rates far below those offered or now prevailing here. The table should be carefully studied by every taxpayer. In the light of such statistics it is difficult to conceive how a man who expects to own property, do business or pay rents in Portland during the next twenty years can approve of putting the city's neck into the yoke of the Morey scheme, or, what is even worse, submit quietly to the present burden. Now is the time for the citizens of Portland to assert themselves and settle this question by providing for a complete system, to be owned and operated by the city for the benefit of the people. If, however, it be deemed inadvisable at this time to increase the burdens of the city, already groaning under excessive taxation, then let the taxpayers take the matter directly into their own hands, and deal with it as they would with any other subject involving their personal interests. We have sufficient confidence in their ability and integrity to believe that some plan will be evolved by which the people may be relieved from the payment of these enormous water rates, and provision be made for the ultimate possession of water works by the city.