

Civic Responsibility

By HARRY BRAGG.

The subject of "Municipality Responsibility" was discussed in the previous special issue of the Journal, and an endeavor was made to point out the responsibility of each individual municipality to the welfare of its sister municipalities—and, indeed to the whole Dominion, and the Empire.

As conditions are much more serious to-day than they then were, any ideas leading to the betterment—not of Canadian conditions only, but to those of the whole world, are worth discussion.

Of course, it must be admitted that the responsibility of municipal activities along the best lines rests with the Councils. And as the Councils are elected by the people, this is correct and just. The Council, under our elective system, is actually representative of the people, both of the voters who have cast their votes for them, and those who have neglected their duty by not voting at all. For, unfortunately, there is a large number of citizens, who for some reason or excuse, shirk their duty, and do not take the trouble to vote. They deserve to be despised, for they are slackers and shirkers. But they deserve more than the contempt of their fellows; they should be punished by disfranchisement or fine, or both. Why should a citizen be penalized for shirking his duty as a jurymen, when he can get away from his duty as a voter, without punishment?

The result of this civic apathy is that, in some cases, the personnel of the Council does not come up to the standard of the critical citizens or the press, and the Council is vilified, the most severe critics being those who did not vote.

To-day, with conditions as serious as they are—with the threat of a world famine before us, and the almost certainty of a greatly prolonged war, it is incumbent upon everyone, both Council and private citizen, to co-operate to the fullest extent, for the general welfare of all mankind.

The Councils can, of course, do much. But the individual citizen must not shift his own personal responsibility on the Council. He must not only support them loyally in every measure of conservation and production, he must get out and do "his bit" himself.

And in this way, he can not only back his own Council, but rally to the support of the Federal Government in all the war measures which seem necessary to those who are far better posted than the man in the street.

The Conservation of Food can be ordered by the Government and urged by the Council; but it is the individual man who can make this really effective or not.

The use of substitutes for meat and wheat—which are as necessary as the production of ammunition—can only be really made successful by the action of the individual. And he can make this more drastic than any Government would wish to order.

"Civic Responsibility" does not mean simply that of the Council. It implies that each loyal citizen shall make his own conscience the real power that will show what is the best he can do for humanity in this awful crisis. No man can feel himself clear of guilt, unless he can say to himself, "I have done what I could."

Every citizen should do his utmost to back up the authorities, and to co-operate with them to the fullest extent in all the orders and suggestions that may be issued by them.

The formations of Citizen's Associations or Committees is desirable; but their aim should be—not to criticise, but to support the Council, and work harmoniously with it towards carrying out the emergency measures rendered necessary by the grave conditions now existing.

It is not only the "Boys at the Front"—self-sacrificing as they are—who are fighting in this great war for God and Right; but every man, woman and child has a share in the war, and we are all fighting for our lives and liberty, as well as for the Liberty of the World.

One writer has urged everyone who is not handling a rifle to remember that he can fight with his knife and fork, and this is quite correct. The war depends, very largely, upon the food question, and everyone can help in that, although far from the trenches where our boys are giving up their lives that we may live in safety.

How many will read the following verse, by Kenneth Goesbech in "Life," and then solemnly repeat it, with a full consciousness of the binding import of its meaning? If every citizen would do so, the food shortage would vanish.

"Dear God in heaven, in whom I trust,

Turn the food in my throat to dust,

If I miss one chance which may come to me

To bring them home with victory."

As Parker, the dramatist, puts it in his Christmas verses to the Boys in the Trenches:

"The less we eat

The sooner you'll march down our street.

In God's name, what are eggs and tea

Compared with final victory?"

WOODEN SHIPBUILDING.

The Imperial Munitions Board has announced that no further orders for wooden ships of steam propulsion will be contracted for in British Columbia. The reason announced is that the British Admiralty has refused to convoy these ships through the war zone which on account of their low speed renders them somewhat difficult to protect from enemy submarines. Another reason which might be mentioned although not stated by the Board is that of their excessive costs when constructed in British Columbia yards under the present system of cost and profit. Notwithstanding the tremendous demand for tonnage to be used for war purposes the place of the wooden ship in this service has been steadily losing caste. Not only are they no cheaper to build than steel ships, but by reason of the necessitated slower speed their efficiency for this work is greatly reduced. The United States Government has recently announced that no further orders for wooden ships of less than 5,000 tons dead weight capacity, will be built in American yards and as time goes on it would appear that these orders will be further curtailed.

The place of the wooden ship however is not now in war work but in neutral or peace trade and the demand for these ships although not actually serving a war purpose is only less necessary in carrying on the trade of the world.

The shipyards of British Columbia will soon not have a wooden ship in course of construction unless something is done and done promptly. We believe that the character of ships that should be built—and the need is excessive—is on the order of the ships constructed under the British Columbia Shipbuilding Act, of which twelve were built and all are now operating in the deep-sea trade. These ships were sailing ships with Diesel engine auxiliary power. These boats have been in profitable employment since the day they were put in commission and there is room in the trade for which they are suited for hundreds of ships of like character. Their low cost of construction and the high charter rates which they obtain should operate as a strong attraction to private interests to engage in the building and operation of this class of vessel. Many of these vessels pay for themselves in their first year of operation and some have paid for themselves with one return voyage. In the face of such reasonably assured profits we cannot understand why private interests do not undertake this work. We think that financial interests in Vancouver and Victoria could safely engage in this work to their own profit and to the benefit of the wooden shipbuilding industry. In one case a shipyard on Burrard Inlet when it learned that no further orders would be placed by the Imperial Munitions Board has undertaken to build seven ships for its own account. Not all the shipyards of the province have the financial ability to build ships for its own account, but if those financially capable would only take an interest in this matter ships would be built by the citizens of Vancouver and Victoria which would give a handsome return to their owners and would at the same time build up the maritime importance of our coast cities. We have the materials in abundance. We have the yards established. We have experienced labour. All those elements which are necessary for the successful building of wooden ships is at present at hand in our shipyards and they should not be permitted to lie idle when the demand for ships is so great and the profit from their operation is so substantial.—B. C. Financial Times.