

The Civic Improvement Movement in Ontario*

Prof. H. L. Hutt, Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph

IT IS very evident to those who travel, or even to those who merely read the papers, that a strong movement has set in on this continent for civic and rural improvement. Just what it may result in, it is impossible to say at present; but it is safe to predict that the movement is going to have a marked effect on the appearance and character of our country generally.

ITS ORIGIN

The civic improvement movement has been the outcome of a growing appreciation of art and a desire for real beauty, which has resulted from the prosperity of the times and the tendency to travel. Its origin might be traced to Europe, where many of the towns and cities have become centres of attraction for American tourists. From the old land we have learned much and have still much to learn. European travellers always speak with delight of the architectural and landscape beauties of Paris, Brussels, Vienna and Edinburgh.

Just when and where the civic improvement movement first made its appearance here cannot be stated definitely, but like many other movements, some good, and others not so good, its effects were first seen in the country to the south of us. The town of Stockbridge, Mass., claims the honor of having, nearly fifty years ago, the first organization having for its object the preservation of natural beauties and the general improvement of the village surroundings. In later years many organizations having similar aims have been formed in various parts of the country, but the one which has been the most active in giving a national impetus to the civic improvement movement has been the American Civic Association. This association was formed in 1904, by the union of two associations which had for years been working along somewhat the same lines, viz., "The American Park and Outdoor Art Association," and "The American League for Civic Improvement." The new organization was said at the time to represent 480 local improvement organizations.

Mr. J. Horace McFarland, whom many of us had the pleasure of hearing at some of our local society meetings last spring, has been president of the new association since its formation, and he has by judicious use of the press kept the work of the association prominently before the people of the whole continent. There are at present twenty-two members of the American Civic Association in

Canada. These are scattered here and there from Halifax to Calgary. In this connection, I may say I think it would pay all of our Canadian horticultural societies to get in as close touch as possible with this progressive national association, and make the work, at least, if not the organization, international in character. Our Superintendent, Mr. J. Lockie Wilson, and I expect to attend the annual meeting of the American Civic Association to be held in Pittsburg, Pa.,

The aim of the civic improvement movement put in a nutshell, is for "A better and more beautiful America." The scope of this improvement may be inferred from an enumeration of the departments of work undertaken by the American Civic Association. These are fifteen in number, with a vice-president at the head of each department, and include: arts and crafts, women's outdoor art league, children's gardens, school extension, city making, factory betterment, libraries, outdoor



The Bill-board is a Public Nuisance and an Obstruction to Civic Improvement

The unsightly display illustrated is to be found in St. Catharines directly opposite the residence of Mr. W. B. Burgoyne, honorary director of the Ontario Horticultural Association.

next week, and we hope to get many pointers that may help us in furthering the work in this country.

The organization of our Ontario Horticultural Association three years ago was in itself a result of the influence of the American association formed a year or two previous. For it was felt that we should have a Canadian organization with similar unselfish aims.

Attending this convention, we have delegates from a large number of the sixty-six local horticultural societies already formed in this province,—all interested in promoting local civic and rural improvement. It should be the duty, therefore, of this association to take the lead in assisting, directing and promoting such movements in all parts of the country. We have a big field for operations, and a splendid work to do.

art, parks and reservations, public nuisances, public recreation, railroad improvements, rural improvements, social settlement, and the press.

One of the strong features of the work of the American Civic Association has been its use of the press in educating public sentiment and spreading abroad information regarding what has been accomplished in different places and what may be done in others.

In Ontario we need not at present undertake so many kinds of work, but it would be well for us to begin at once to concentrate our efforts on a few lines which need most attention at present. To this end, I would suggest that our association appoint committees or departments this year to deal with such problems as: 1, The improvement of home surroundings; 2, the improvement

*One of the many excellent papers read at the convention of the Ontario Horticultural Association held at Toronto in November