

The New Civic Improvement League

R. O. WYNNE ROBERTS,

The conference which was held at Ottawa under the auspices of the Commission of Conservation, was attended by ladies and gentlemen who are actively interested in various branches of civic life, and the trend of the discussion indicated a strong desire for a concerted movement for improvements in many directions.

The attitude of the delegates toward civic ideals predicated a future full of lively debates, and stirring times for whilst the speakers were earnest and enthusiastic in their speeches, and submitted forceful arguments on behalf of their contentions, it was evident that all present did not accept the statements at full value. If such contentions were acceptable to all, then the meetings will produce little that will be permanent and beneficial, because it is only after severe refining process that gold is obtained, and likewise true and lasting advantages are to be had only by a free discussion by generous-minded people, when all points—palatable and otherwise—are energetically debated.

The objects for which the Civic Improvement League was inaugurated comprise many things which, if adequately considered, digested, and discussed, will provide abundant materials for thought and action. What, in short, are these objects? They include the constitution of municipal governments, town planning, conservation, education, recreation, art, music, sanitation, housing, assessments, etc.

The writer has in these columns discussed the question of municipal government, but the subject is a great and absorbing one, and here it may be stated that municipal government in Britain is administered by practically the same class of men as in America. It was stated at the Conference that the reason for the success of Municipal Government in Britain was due to the active part taken by men of leisure, who devoted their time for the good of the people. In the course of over thirty years' experience, the writer found but a very small percentage of leisured men on Municipal Councils. The electorate put in men who, like themselves, depend for their livelihood on the active pursuit of their individual business or craft, and therefore were alive to the fact that Municipal Government had to be both efficient and enterprising if their town was to maintain its position. The reason for success cannot be ascribed to the influence and guidance of the leisured class, so it must be found elsewhere. The writer would suggest that stability of any government is dependent upon the confidence it inspires. If an electorate is apparently indifferent to the manner in which their city is governed, it cannot be depended upon, because for some reason or other it will suddenly bestir itself, and then the old members are thrown overboard and a new set installed in their place. The results are not satisfactory, and the system is denounced. The Civic Improvement League, it is hoped, will kindle a lively and persistent interest in municipal affairs not for the purpose of knocking those who are in office and disheartening everyone, but in order to support those who strive to do their best. After all, municipal government is but the aggregate result of human effort, and being human, it is subject to faults and weaknesses. This applies to the best of them, and the sooner we accept the situation the better, for we will not then expect perfection, but will hope for as high a standard as can be humanly attained.

Another object of the League is to promote school and college courses in civics, and so on. This is an admirable object, because, if we cannot convert the older members of the electorate we can at least educate the young, who will one day assume their responsibilities and duties. It was with such an object that a number of graduates in New York took the oath of fidelity for the pursuit of knowledge in civic affairs, and the promotion of those things which would tend to rectitude in public administration. Courses in "Civics" constitute an important branch of the work in some colleges and schools. City problems require the best minds available, and it is to be hoped the day is not far distant when a rigorous collegiate training in civics will be necessary to hold office in Municipal Government.

Meaning of Town Planning.

Town planning in its main phases, is another object of the League. If town planning is of slow growth in old countries it is because it is difficult and exceedingly ex-

pensive to make the desirable changes. New avenues were laid out by Sir Christopher Wren after the Great Fire in London, but his plans were not adopted, and today the ratepayers have to incur vast expenditure to remedy that which should have been avoided. Is it much better in new countries? Are there not cities less than 50 years old where improved and widened streets are already required? There are new villages laid out on the plans of the old, and soon it will be found that inadequate and unsatisfactory provisions were made for efficient transport. Each town and city has its own advantages for certain industries, or as centres of education, or for agricultural markets. Each city should have a silhouette of its own, but the present tendencies are for all to become alike. Town planning is generally misinterpreted. It is usually associated with ideas of great civic centres, great parks and boulevards, in fact, one city is spending huge sums on beautification, whilst the street pavements are apparently overlooked. Town planning concerns everything, and every movement which has for its objects the building up of a healthy, active, beautiful, well-organized and balanced city. The prudent administration will consider each requirement of their cities in terms of what will be the ultimate dividend. Not necessarily today, but in course of time. It does not always follow that the trees which bear fruit the soonest are the best paying trees. Olive trees, it is stated, require a generation of great care to become mature, and then the return is abundant and lucrative. So with city schemes, due regard should be paid to the probable returns—years hence. Cities are built for all time, and thereby should be carefully and well laid out. There are many other objects which might with advantage be dwelt upon, but probably enough has been stated to show that the Civic Improvement League has a very important function to fulfil, and it is to be hoped that this League will receive the hearty and loyal support of all who love their country, and hope to see the town and cities built on the most acceptable lines, and that their administrations are carried on with the highest regard to the welfare of the people. The work of the League is not only a present one, but a permanent one, because municipal problems will increase in importance and magnitude with time, and what is achieved today forms but a stepping stone for further achievements.

CIVIC GOVERNMENT REFORMS.

Mayor Waugh, of Winnipeg, in a recent address before the Canadian Credit Men's Association laid emphasis on the value of co-operation between the local authorities and citizens' associations. Referring in particular to civic reform his worship said that for years he had placed himself on record as being an advocate of the most efficient form of government obtainable, and persistently urged that the people owed it to themselves and councillors to take a keener and more active interest in civic affairs. All were more or less guilty of apathy on matters of public interest, and he appealed to them to effect a change by instituting some sort of a citizen's league which would lend counsel and advice to the city council on important civic questions. The council would welcome the assistance of broadminded men who would form themselves into an organization having for its object the discussion of civic problems in a sympathetic and critical interest and co-operating with the city council in effecting all-round improvement and making Winnipeg a city of great achievement and intelligent development. Such an organization would have his whole hearted support.

Personally he believed that Winnipeg was well governed and honestly governed, but nevertheless they should strive to attain the very highest standard of community efficiency. "I am not saying 'go on,' but 'come on.' In saying so I do not want to be understood as assuming a leadership, but merely record the fact that I am in with you personally and officially in anything that will make Winnipeg in every sense a centre of real progress," he added.

His worship pointed out the advantages of such an organization, as a civic improvement league, stating that it would crystallize public opinion on questions of vital importance to the city.