

The "CITY BEAUTIFUL"

By W. S. RAWLINGS

There are many indications that citizens are more alive today than at any time before to the importance of something being done to make Vancouver more attractive from the aesthetic point of view, and that they are ready to support any reasonable scheme to that end.

Vancouver has much to offer as a tourist centre; it has advantages which few cities possess—its natural scenery and beautiful setting being outstanding features. Great efforts are being made by the Publicity Bureau to make these conditions known continent wide, and the number of tourists visiting the City in 1923 has been far in excess of anything of the kind in previous years. The special publicity campaign also is certain to result in ever greater tourist travel here in the future.

What goes to make a "City Beautiful"? A City may be rich in natural surrounding beauty, but if it lacks parks, open spaces, and has badly lighted and ill-kept streets and boulevards, it cannot hope to make any great appeal to visitors, and one can look for little progress in its development.

Vancouver is set amidst wonderfully beautiful and natural surroundings of Forest, Mountain and Sea, a setting such as few cities can boast, and which man cannot duplicate. One cannot help wondering sometimes if we have not taken too much for granted, and in accepting things as we find them, rested contented in the hope that perhaps nature will do the rest and in time make attractive that which is without beauty.

For the most part nature works in her own way and needs no assistance from man; but there are occasions when the opposite is true. Nature is not always at her best. Nature often has to be assisted. A piece of waste land, if it is dug, cultivated and cared for, will become a place of life and beauty; neglected, it becomes overgrown with weeds, and an eyesore.

Without personal, individual effort, the ideal of a "City Beautiful" cannot be attained. It is all very well to look around and say nature has done wonders for us, and to look to the Civic Authorities to provide parks and open spaces, and beautiful buildings and streets, but if we rest at that, we have fallen very short of the ideal. Individual effort (and that means work) is the only logical way in which the full scheme of the "City Beautiful" conception can be realized. It is true that we must look to the Civic authorities to give the lead, but we cannot expect everything to emanate from them and in this respect every citizen has an obligation to the City.

In this connection the Park Board has always endeavored to give a lead, and by force of example to show our citizens what can be done.

One striking instance of this is in the many small rock gardens which are to be seen in every part of the City. The rock garden in Stanley Park undoubtedly solved a difficult problem for many amateur gardeners. One of the greatest hindrances to the householder has been the expense of dealing with a front or back yard which is, as is so often the case, a veritable quarry. We have had the same conditions to deal with in our park work, and the householder is meeting it just as we did,—by utilizing these rocks and producing beauty spots. I have seen a number of these little rock gardens in the City, upon which, in point of their conception and layout, we could not hope to improve.

The rose gardens and nursery in Stanley Park are features of our work which are well calculated to inspire the amateur gardener. It is the desire of the Park Board that these shall be looked upon by our citizens as educational features for their benefit. We wish the public to make the fullest use of them, and to ask questions of the gardening staff. Their difficulties we are anxious to hear about, and if we can help in the solu-

tion of them, we feel we are fulfilling one of the purposes for which the Park Department exists.

Perhaps I have said enough to show that the Park Department can exercise, and is exercising a big influence, which cannot but have the effect of stimulating the "City Beautiful" ideal.

Having referred to the brighter side of the subject, I am going to take the opportunity of presenting the other side, and in so doing to point out some of the problems that are ahead of the Park Board. Under this head the boulevard question is the most important. This is a subject which has always called forth the most severe criticism locally, as well as from visitors to our City. For years past there has been a persistent agitation to have something done to improve the deplorable conditions which exist, but every scheme brought forward by the Park Board with the object of making a beginning in a permanent improvement undertaking, has had to be abandoned on the ground that no Civic funds were available.

What has tended to bring about the existing condition of things? In the early days, 25 years ago, the City Council, in an unfortunate moment, made it known that they would pay the sum of \$1.00 for every tree planted on the City boulevards by property owners. Under this scheme many trees were planted, and many dollars paid as a result of the enterprise of the individual. As can easily be imagined haphazard planting resulted. No regard was had to the kind of tree suitable for the locality, and conditions of soil; proper spacing and alignment were disregarded; forest maples for the most part were used, and we see today these immense trees planted closely together on a narrow margin of boulevard, instead of in Stanley Park, from where they were taken as seedlings, and where they now should still be in their natural beauty and immensity.

If the figures were available of the cost of maintaining these trees, the sum would be startling. And to complicate matters, there is very naturally a great sentimental value placed upon them by the old timers who planted them, and it can be readily understood the criticism that is raised when the question of their removal is contemplated. On the one hand we have the sentimental side, and on the other the objection to their presence by the person who claims he is deprived of light and air because of their great size, and that the house is damp in consequence, and that nothing can be grown in the garden on account of the network of roots spreading great distances.

Then of the more recent planting, which has been the work of the enthusiast, we find conditions little better. True, trees of a more suitable nature were planted, but no two persons seemed to like the same kind of tree, with the result that in many instances as many as 8 varieties of trees can be counted in a single city block at varying distances apart, and of all ages and sizes; truly a difficult situation to supervise.

What is the solution to this problem? Let me make clear what is in the mind of the Park Board concerning the future treatment of the boulevards. A few years ago a Charter provision was obtained which enables the City Council by resolution to place under the care of the Park Board such boulevards as they deem fit for the purpose of their maintenance and upkeep, and by assessment on land fronting such boulevard such sum as will not exceed 25c per foot for the cost thereof.

Now it must be understood that before you can maintain, you must construct, and as we have today very few permanently constructed and planted boulevards, the reason is obvious why the provisions of the Charter have not been put