

A Municipal Department for Quebec Wanted

We recently had occasion to consult the official Municipal returns published by the Province of Quebec, and were surprised to find it dated 1912. We found that many of the municipalities were not on the list, and some under wrong titles. For instance, the City of Westmount is designated a town, and the town of Outremont a village, and the whole thing is so jumbled up, that even what information is given is hard to understand in its true value. It is very evident that the Provincial Government of Quebec does not attach much importance to the municipalities. In every other province of the Dominion all municipal data are kept up-to-date, and the latest information can be had by return of mail by anyone desiring it. Why the Quebec authorities should be so lax in their municipal duties is hard to say, but for all they seem to care, there might be no incorporated cities and towns in the Province, and yet it is from these same incorporated municipalities that its principal income is derived, though if the officials base their figures on their own list that income must suffer considerably. But there is another side which the authorities seem to overlook, that for the money derived from the municipalities adequate returns should be made, and certainly nothing is more important and helpful to the incorporated cities and towns, in the placing of their issues than reliable information given by an independent and responsible authority.

Municipally speaking, the Province of Quebec is

too casual in its working for the present era—the legislature too easy, and the government too careless. The municipalities, instead of getting proper support, are too often considered good for plucking purposes. Should one of the smaller municipalities of Quebec want to place a bond issue on the market, its chances would be small indeed, because no facilities have been made by the government to help them.

What is wanted badly in the Province is a municipal department, or at least something approaching to what they have in Manitoba, or as in Saskatchewan (headed by a French-Canadian lawyer formerly of Montreal), with a responsible man in charge. Such a department would do more than anything else to stimulate the municipalities to greater ambitions and infinitely better results would accrue to the Province. A municipal department, properly handled, as in the cases of the Provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, would make it impossible for politicians to juggle with the franchises of the people, and would stop the wasting of public money, through carelessness and mismanagement. There is no doubt that the civic life of the Province, if given a chance, would be equal to that of any other part of the Dominion, whereas to-day it is in several respects behind the other provinces, not because of lack of ambition on the part of the municipalities themselves, but because the proper support has not been forthcoming, though it has been well paid for.

Civic Instruction in Schools

In the United States they are attempting to bring about a universal system of civic training in the schools. The National Municipal League of that country some months back made an enquiry to find out to what extent municipal education was being given. The result is instructive not only to citizens to the south of the line, but to Canadians. The gist of the enquiry was in the finding of "a surprising ineffectiveness of most of the training given in this line (municipal education) and an almost universal desire on the part of the schools to do something radically better." This lack of proper training on the part of teachers is also noted by the United States Commissioner of Education in a letter to educational institutions under his charge, urging better municipal training.

Canada in the matter of municipal education is not even as well off as in the United States, for only in exceptional cases is there any desire for civic training shown by educational authorities, one dominee pointing out that school syllabuses were already too full to allow for the study of municipal affairs. We have no wish to criticise the systems of education in the Dominion, but it does seem absurd on the face of it that in the education of the future citizens of this country the fundamentals of communal existence should be left out of the curriculum. It is also reasonable to suppose that a better knowledge of civic affairs would create a keener interest in municipal matters by the average citizen, and that more voters would take advantage of the franchise than do at present. We are not going to say that better men would seek municipal honors,

for taking Canada as a whole her municipal representatives are a credit to her, but the criticism of their work would be more intelligent, and not so carping.

It must be remembered that in the United States municipal government is largely professional, so that from the American point of view municipal education is essential, for it breeds more experts to choose from. In Canada on the other hand the development of municipal government is still largely of a sacrificial nature, good citizens giving up their time in the interest of their fellows. In other words, Canadian municipal representation is usually a privilege and honor which brings responsibility and hard work, with little or no pay. But to keep Canada attuned to this ideal every school should have at least one teacher capable of imparting the ethics of Municipal government, and if the teacher really knows his or her business, the work can be made very interesting as well as instructive. In the Old Country they have text books on municipal government, which at times take the place of the ordinary reader, and extracts even taken for dictation, so that when a boy, or girl, has gone through the elementary school, at least a fundamental knowledge of civic government has been inculcated which he never forgets. And why not Canada? Her children are as precocious as those of the Old Land and her teachers as intelligent. All that is required is adaptability on the part of the educational authorities in changing the syllabus to allow the introduction of one or two text books or even chapters on municipal government—the teacher will do the rest.