

PROGRESS IN CIVIC IMPROVEMENT

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THAT a strong movement for civic and rural improvement has set in on this continent is plainly evident to all who travel, or even to those who depend on the newspapers for their information. Just what it may result in, it is impossible to say at present; but it is safe to predict that this movement is going to have a marked effect on the general appearance and character of our country.

The civic improvement movement has been the outcome of a growing appreciation of art and a desire for real beauty, which naturally has resulted from the prosperity of the times and the tendency to travel. Its origin may, no doubt, be traced to Europe, where many of the towns and cities have become centres of attraction for American tourists. Those who have visited Europe always speak with delight of the architectural and landscape beauties of Paris, Brussels, Vienna, and Edinburgh.

ITS BEGINNING IN AMERICA.

Just when and where the civic improvement movement first made its appearance here cannot be definitely stated, but like many other movements, its effects were first seen in the country to the south of us. The little town of Stockbridge, Mass., claims the honour of having, nearly fifty years ago, the first organisation having for its object the preservation of natural beauties and the general improvement of the town surroundings.

During later years many such organisations have

undertaken to make Ottawa "the Washington of the North." Whether or not the Provincial Government will assume this responsibility, it certainly deserves credit for the aid already given to such work in those sections of the province where the people have shown by their efforts that they are sufficiently alive to its importance.

There are now in Ontario about seventy organisations known as local Horticultural Societies, which are to all intents and purposes civic improvement societies. These societies receive an annual grant from the Provincial Government based upon their membership and the amount they expend on horticultural and improvement work. The total amount of Government aid to these societies last year was \$8,000. The societies at Ottawa, St. Catharines, and Hamilton ranked in the order named as the strongest, and consequently drew the largest share of the Government grant. It is by no means, however, in the largest places that the most progress is made, for many of the smaller towns and even villages have Horticultural Societies that are doing splendid work in educating public taste in the beautifying of home surroundings and civic conditions.

Nearly all of these local organisations are affiliated with a central organisation known as the Ontario Horticultural Association which meets annually in November in Toronto and is attended by delegates from the local societies all over the province. The annual report of this convention is published

4. In some places where systematic tree planting has been done along the boulevards there are now fine avenues of street trees. But just here is where so many towns have been spoiled because the street planting has been left to the individual property owners, no two of whom have the same idea of what kind of trees should be planted, or where they should be placed on the boulevard. This has rendered it impossible to make a uniform, continuous row of trees, because of the great variety selected and the haphazard method of their arrangement.

The street planting and care of trees in every village, town and city should be under the management of a park board or commission, which can adopt a definite plan for the regular planting of certain kinds of trees on certain streets and see that they are properly cared for.

5. In a number of our cities and most progressive towns, park boards or commissions have been appointed, as provided for by the Ontario Parks Act. This means that much greater progress will be made in such places, and other places will wake up to the necessity of similar action.

6. Within the last few years many of our Ontario towns and villages, to say nothing of the larger cities, have seen the advisability of making park reservations, and have purchased lands for park purposes. In some cases, the development of these has been undertaken by the town council and in others by a park board; but experience has proved that greater continuity of action may be expected from a board or commission which is more or less permanent.

Evidences of progress in the establishment of parks may be seen in such places as Ottawa, Brockville, Havelock, Toronto, Brampton, Hamilton, Galt, Guelph, Berlin, Waterloo, Woodstock, Stratford, Barrie, Orillia, London, Leamington, and no doubt many other places which I cannot now mention.

For a town of its size, I know of no place making greater progress in the establishment of beautiful parks than the town of Galt. It has now three good sized parks and seven or eight small plots and squares about the town which help to make Galt a "town beautiful."

HOW TO MAKE THE WORK MORE EFFECTIVE.

The civic improvement movement offers an ample field for the best efforts of all public spirited citizens, and the work to be accomplished is so varied that all with talents, few or many, may have a share in it. In this, as in many other lines of work, co-operation is the keynote to success.

The following might be mentioned as a few of the means of making such efforts most effective:

1. By conducting an educational campaign in awakening public interest to an appreciation of the value of neatness, order and beautiful surroundings. To this end it is well to make good use of the local press.

2. By enlisting the support of the rising generation by flower competitions, and also by making school as well as home surroundings as beautiful as possible. Young people brought up amid beautiful surroundings may be counted on in later years to work for rural and civic improvement wherever they may be placed.

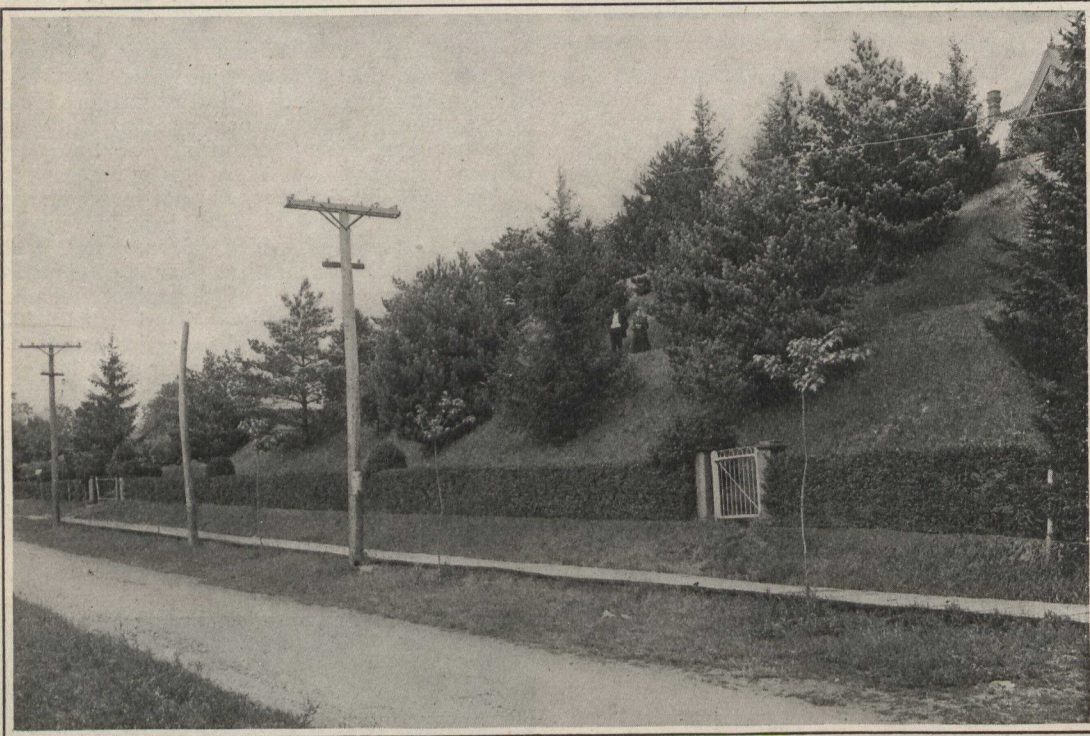
3. By seeking the co-operation of other influential local organisations, such as the town council, board of trade, or school board, which may be willing to assist in making local improvements. In union there is strength.

4. By working for the appointment of progressive local park boards or commissions, and urging such boards to get possession of suitable lands for park purposes while they are cheap. Plans can then be adopted for their gradual development and improvement.

The Ontario Parks Act provides that one-half mill on the assessment may be used by any park board so appointed for such purposes. And whenever such money is judiciously expended, the increased value of adjacent lands will soon pay a good share of the cost of such improvements in increased revenue from taxes.

The park board in any town might also be asked to establish a small nursery, where trees, shrubs, and vines could be grown in quantity for civic improvement work, and could be supplied to the citizens at cost for planting in their own grounds.

5. Every property holder should be encouraged by precept and example to contribute his share to the general improvement of the place by making his own lot as attractive as possible. If every citizen did his share, what a change would take place in the appearance of our country! Tourists from all over the world would come to see Beautiful Ontario.



Showing how a hill may be terraced and planted with trees so as to produce a pleasant and artistic effect.

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been formed, but the one which has been most instrumental in giving an impetus and a national character to the 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 organisation was said at that time to represent four hundred and eighty local improvement organisations. By the judicious use of the press, the work of the association has been kept prominently before the people of the whole continent. Last year there were twenty-two Canadian members belonging to this association, and these were scattered all along the line from Halifax to Calgary.

ORGANISED EFFORT IN ONTARIO.

Of the Canadian provinces, Ontario has so far made the most progress in civic improvement, because of a more general organisation of effort.

There are throughout Ontario quite a number of "Village Improvement" and "Town Beautiful" societies, which are doing good work in their respective localities. In Toronto, the "Guild of Civic Art" has during the past year or so worked out a comprehensive plan for the systematic bettering and beautifying of Ontario's capital city, and it has lately been decided on to ask the Provincial Government to assist in carrying out the scheme in the same way that the Dominion Government has

by the Agricultural Department of the Government, and may be obtained upon application to J. Lockie Wilson, Superintendent of the Horticultural Societies.

EVIDENCES OF PROGRESS.

As a matter of encouragement to those who may be looking for more rapid changes, it may be well to call attention to the steady and even rapid progress that is being made in many parts of the province. There have been a number of agencies contributing to this progress which may be used to still greater purpose in the future:

1. The more general use of cement in the making of pavements and sidewalks has had a marked effect on most every town and village in the country. In many Ontario towns cement has almost entirely replaced the old wooden walks during the past ten years.

2. Accompanying the laying of permanent walks has come the removal of street fences. In many up-to-date Ontario towns and cities we may now go block after block on the residential streets and see no fences, either in front or between lots.

3. Immediately following the removal of fences has come the proper grading of the lawns and boulevards to the line of the pavement, and more attention to keeping the grass nicely cut.

A prominent citizen of Woodstock told me that it was not many years ago that he owned the only lawn mower in the town. Now it would be hard to find the citizen who did not own and use one regularly.