

Vacant Plots Should be Cultivated

A Wide Movement is on Foot to Cultivate Vacant Plots in Large Cities

By E. T. COOK

A WIDESPREAD movement is on foot to bring forward in the most practical and commonsense ways the futility of allowing vacant plots to remain idle when they might be put to some good use. Great cities are in the course of formation and this watchfulness on the part of those who have the welfare of the community at heart is a splendid sign of a deep-seated interest in the peoples of this land. Complaints are loud of the high prices that have to be given for the ordinary necessities of life and there is also the stimulating effect of a partial outdoor life on those who till these barren acres in our midst. Sometimes a plot of land faces a public school. The vacant plot is unused, never has been used, or possibly will not be for years, the scholars meanwhile seeking recreation on a paved yard. Such instances as these are not uncommon, and it is with a view to bringing these into something like cultivation that the experiences of such authorities as Mr. Lockie Wilson and Mr. Bougher, of Minneapolis, are detailed. They apply to all large cities from north to south and east to west.

The movement should have far-reaching results. One side issue has been already broached, the bringing of ploughmen in the vicinity of great centres for a day to plough the vacant land and in this way make those who live on a farm more in touch with the hives of industry. It was suggested in the *Canadian Farm* that there should be a "farmers' day," a holiday for those who are busy far from the haunts of men, but whose work is the most important in the whole Dominion. The farmer and the town dweller should rub shoulders a bit; it is to the mutual advantage of both, and the young men of the city will take no hurt from companionship with the sturdy sons from the land.

Mr. Leroy Bougher, President of the Garden Club of Minneapolis, in an address given before the American Civic Association, at Washington, gave the following important particulars, which serve to emphasize the remarks that have been made concerning this praiseworthy work for the betterment of great cities:

More than 600 men and women, at least, writes Mr. Bougher, either have been given an opportunity to return to the soil whence they came or to go to the soil of which they know nothing. How is a man to go back to the land unless he knows he wants to go back, and if he has lived in a city all his life how better can he find out than upon the small patch of land that lies next to his home? The use of the vacant lot answers the appeal of the soil.

So many vegetables were grown on the vacant plots of Minneapolis that complaints were made by grocers. Tomatoes were plentiful at 75 cents a bushel, whereas a year ago (1910) they were scarce at \$1.50 a bushel. The economic value of the vacant lot gardens to those who took them up greatly outweighed the cost.

The opportunity for exercise comes to most people of the gardening class only on Saturday afternoon or Sunday. Our gardens developed a healthy tendency towards early rising, and the sun rose daily on hundreds of people hoeing, weeding, killing cut worms or pruning tomatoes, hands dirty and faces glowing. These hundreds must have enjoyed better health because of better exercise and better food.

Nearly 90 per cent. of the gardeners had sons 12 to 15 years old, and it transpired during the summer that many had taken the gardens to keep their children at home. The providing of pleasant work under parental direction for city boys who have none of the mischief-averting "chores" that their fathers had was of the greatest value.

Those who decorated for the civic celebration had for their keynote window boxes of flowers that covered every store front and street post down town. No visitor to Minneapolis failed to know Minneapolis as a garden city. We planted a model vacant lot garden at the fair grounds and this gave our project state publicity.

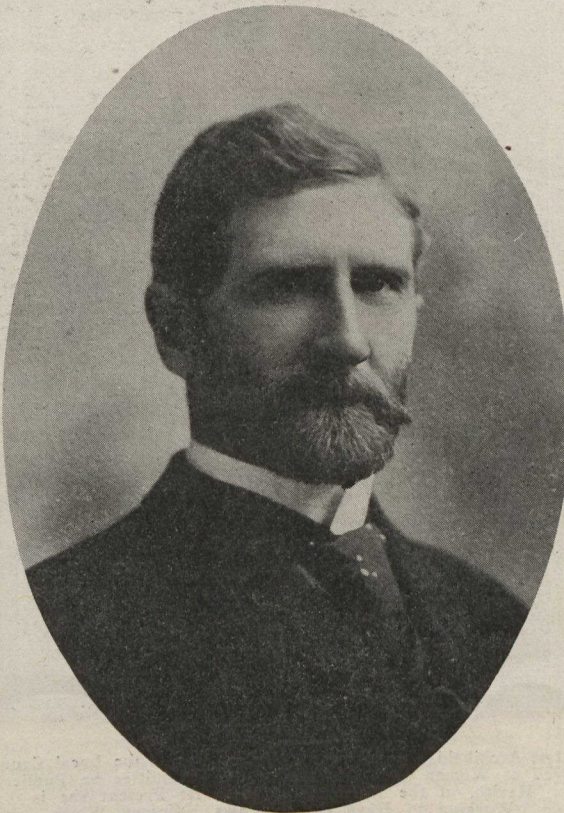
"This year (we quote from a letter to Mr. Wilson from Mr. Bougher relating to 1912) you will be interested to know that we have continued the work of vacant lot gardens this year on a much larger scale than in 1911 and with most satisfactory results. . . . The season has been a very successful one, the total number of gardens being, in round numbers, five times as many as in 1911.

"The club this year has brought about the plant-

ing of 1,002 vacant lots to vegetables and flowers. This compares with 302 in 1911 and 1 in 1910. In addition, home gardens are being cultivated, and in these twice as many rose bushes and apple trees have been planted by its members. There were no home gardens in 1911 under the auspices of the club.

"The Garden Club has brought about the decoration with flowers and grass of 149 front yards in the congested Russian-Jewish districts of North Minneapolis. Children under 16 are doing this work, and not one of the lawns had been previously improved. Grass seed, vines, and half a dozen varieties of flower seed have been distributed to each child.

"Of the 302 gardeners of 1911 all but 16 (including those who have left town) are gardening again this year. Of all the 1,430 gardeners, 84 per cent. have never attempted this before. In all, 17,725 persons are concerned in the garden movement. Every one of last year's charity gardens became a cash member unsolicited this year. This is a most significant feature of the work. The vegetable and flower gardens of the club cover 160 acres—exactly a quarter section. About seven acres



MR. JAMES LOCKIE WILSON,
Government Secretary of Ontario Horticultural Association, who is urging cultivation of vacant plots.

of this area is planted to flowers. The frontage of the gardens is a trifle over 11 miles. Based on the returns of 1911, the total value of the crop will be about \$60,000, and the gardens have kept the price of vegetables in Minneapolis far below what it has been in previous years, and lower than in other cities.

"The total cost for all purposes is less than 20 per cent. greater than it was in 1911, although the gardens have increased in number 400 per cent., and this cost includes equipment, which is permanent," Mr. Wilson says.

Vacant lot gardening has proved to be a great success in the country adjoining ours. What have the members of the Ontario Horticultural Association, particularly in our cities, done to inaugurate this splendid movement, which would mean so much for the moral and financial improvement of the dwellers in the slums of our rapidly-growing cities? A great deal is being done by charitable citizens and organizations to assist those who have little visible means of support and who find it difficult at times to earn sufficient in winter seasons to maintain their families. Commissions are being appointed to investigate the causes of the high cost of the necessities of life. Our sister city of Minneapolis has, to a large extent, found a solution of the difficulty. Our own Queen City has within her

borders enough lots that are practically certain to be vacant for several years to come which could be utilized to produce each summer at least \$100,000 worth of vegetables and flowers. But the financial end, while considerable, is not the most important. Inducing men, women and children to become interested in the tilling of the soil and the growth of vegetables, plants and flowers with improved and healthful surroundings is, perhaps, the greatest consideration.

An Economic Enthusiast

A CHARMING personality linked with a true knowledge of the subject taken in hand spells unbounded success. Such a man is James Lockie Wilson, friend of horticulturist and agriculturist, ready to help forward in every possible way the progress of these great and far-reaching industries, and one of the most worthy of public servants.

The man on the street is aware that without the farmer and the market gardener life would be impossible. We depend upon them for our very existence and quietly, courageously, and persistently this kindly man through his own enthusiastic temperament in the holding of important offices disseminated a scientific knowledge of leading principles in the raising of vegetable produce and the finest types of animals on Canadian farms. Those who know nothing or little of his great work should read those faultlessly clear and concise reports on various subjects that appear from time to time under his guidance. They are masterpieces of precise knowledge and reveal ramifications to the heart of things that are truly astonishing. The farmer on the prairie and the market gardener striving for information and ways of co-operation find in Mr. Wilson a helper and a friend. The notes that appear in this supplement are some indication of his activity, but this is one drop only in an ocean of downright useful and necessary work.

Many columns would be needful to enter into the details of Mr. Wilson's career. Suffice it to say he is happily in the prime of life and enthusiasm in these sister branches of industries seems to wax more keenly as years speed on. The Ontario Horticultural Association, of which he is secretary, owes practically everything to his erudite management, and one of the treasures in his home is a presentation of Royal Crown Derby plate encircled and chased with silver in recognition of his services. Another office of immense importance is that of secretary and managing director of the Canadian Horticultural Exhibition, secretary of the Ontario Vegetable Growers Association, and a director of the Canadian National Exhibition, and each office is not regarded as a sinecure but an opportunity for work conducted on the best and most approved modern lines.

Personal experience has been gained in the laudable pursuit of raising pedigree cattle, the importance of which can be hardly over-estimated, and therefore farming and horticulture have in Mr. Wilson one who is engrossed in their welfare. He is a true son of the soil and a scientist as well.

A Warning to Daffodil Lovers

WILL you kindly allow me a brief space in your Country Life Supplement to warn growers of Daffodils in your country of a pest which inflicts one of the fairest of spring flowers. A sharp look-out should be kept for the Narcissus fly. This has been a scourge this year in many places, due no doubt to people not being careful enough with respect to it. If any Daffodils are seen dwarfer than the rest or looking sickly, the bulbs should at once be taken up carefully, washed in cold water and replanted in fresh ground. If they are very unhealthy it is best to burn them. Growers should be always on their guard for Narcissus fly and Mite, and I am certain that it is the right to isolate weak and sickly plants.

P. RUDOLPH BARR.

London, England.

The Scent of Daphnes

A SWEET scent mingles into the spring air. One wonders from whence it comes—strong and rich and not far away is a bush of the mezereum or Daphne Mezereum, a shrub smothered over with pink flowers before the leaves have dared to appear. A small group of it is a scent bag of delicious sweetness and a few twigs will fill a large room with Daphne perfume. It brings thoughts of the spring before spring has really come. A white variety is as white as the snow that will have dissolved before the little birds open to greet the warmer suns and bluer skies, but it is not common.