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MUNICIPAL PROGRESS IN SASKATCHEWAN

The Saskatchewan government is making for itself an enviable record. Its ministers and officers seem to have arrived at an unwritten agreement not to issue stereotyped official reports, stodgy with statistics, fleshy with facts and dry as dust. Instead, the blue books which hail from Regina are informative, readable and, as the New Yorker would say, of "human interest." That element has been sadly lacking in our government documents. The annual report of the department of municipal affairs of Saskatchewan for 1912-13 is another example of how attractive an official report may be, without trimming its dignity. This department is presided over by Hon. George Langley, minister of municipal affairs, whom we rather suspect of some of this blue book originality, and by Mr. J. N. Bayne, a deputy who is responsible for an excellent report to the minister.

Mr. Bayne discusses the ever-present interest in municipal life and work in Saskatchewan, and incidentally notes that no village can borrow money by debenture until permission is granted by the minister of municipal affairs. It has been deemed advisable to withhold such permission in more than one case or to reduce very materially the sum proposed to be borrowed.

The deputy minister expresses regret that in some Saskatchewan villages municipal life is at a low ebb, a condition of affairs not found in any other class of our municipal bodies. The raising of the minimum number of people for incorporation, he thinks, might have a beneficial effect.

On September 1st, 1905, when Saskatchewan first came into existence, 882 townships had municipal or-

ganization as allowed under the old local improvements act. Now, there are 3,545 townships with similar privileges. This is a striking indication of the growth of rural areas.

Amounts approximating \$1,714,596 were spent last year by local council boards in Saskatchewan. Improved conditions in the organizations concerned testify to wise expenditure by self-governing bodies concerned. The experience gained by municipalities in expending public funds is doing much for the safety and convenience of those who travel the highways. If the people of a rural municipality so desire, it may borrow money by debenture and thus spread the repayment of the loan over a period not exceeding twenty years. No rash running into debt is allowed, for the loan must not exceed \$3,000 per township. Thus the debenture must prove attractive to purchasers when it is known that 144 quarter sections of land becomes security for \$3,000, when often each one of these quarter sections of one hundred and sixty acres each is easily worth the sum borrowed on the entire township.

The experience of the municipal department during the years of its existence has shown the necessity of its organization, says Mr. Bayne. The other provinces of the Dominion have watched Saskatchewan in this matter, with the result that several of their provincial municipal unions are urging their respective provincial governments to establish a department of municipal affairs in each province. The three prairie provinces are the only ones in Confederation, each of which has a department of this kind. On the whole, the municipal organizations of Saskatchewan are growing on safe, sensible lines. In some cases it has been necessary to remind a few municipal organizations that they are over optimistic and that the future should not be mortgaged too heavily. The