

# MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENT

## THE UP-BUILDING OF THE SMALL TOWN.\*

BY FRED DE LAND.

Though we may not agree with the pessimistic side of the question Mr. Fletcher so ably presented in "The Doom of the Small Town," yet we must admit that he clearly pictured the silent tragedy which is being enacted in many towns and villages from whence the young, the hopeful, the more ambitious depart to seek more suitable abiding places, leaving the dullard, the ne'er-do-well, the rich-in-purse-but-poverty-struck-in-soul to rust on in unhelpful existence. And while citing many causes that may have led to present conditions his conclusion that "Whatever be the causes, unless tendencies be arrested, the future of the small town is extremely discouraging, and it is very doubtful whether any material change in existing conditions will soon occur," is not nearly correct.

But the question I propounded to myself while reading this article was: Has Mr. Fletcher shown us only one side of the shield and that the dark side? Is it not possible to gather statistics relating to small towns that would have shown a condition of prosperity in many, even though such a showing would rob the first portion of his paper of much of its gloom? For there is nothing new in villages being deserted for towns more favorably located or offering greater advantages to the inhabitants. Such movements in our country can be traced as far back as A. D. 1700.

The reverse side of the shield shows that never before have so many small towns enjoyed modern improvements that not only tend to make life better worth the living, but also to increase property values out of all proportion to original investment. In the very United States he mentions are towns of only six hundred, eight hundred and a thousand inhabitants with electrically lighted streets, with well kept roadways, and surrounded by that atmosphere of prosperity that attracts and invites the refined, the practical and the prosperous. In Michigan there are seventy-one incorporated cities varying in population from 237,837 (Detroit) to 746 (Gladwin), and in every city there is one or more electric lighting plants, which is not at all strange. But there are also 309 incorporated villages reporting a population in 1894 varying from 91 to 6,051. Of these 309 villages, nearly 100 have electrically lighted streets, though several reported a population considerably less than 1,000 souls. Compared with the census of 1890, the census of 1894 records a decrease in population in several towns and villages, but in no town of electrically lighted

streets was any decrease reported, while the growth in some of these electrically lighted towns is almost marvellous.

Speaking to a Michigan merchant on this subject, he replied that in his town of nearly 3,500 inhabitants the marked growth in population and in prosperity had its inception in the order of the village board directing that electric lights be employed in illuminating the streets at night. "Now the hanging of those big lamps in our streets has indirectly wrought as marvellous a change as often follows the placing of a new and attractive carpet in the reception room of the old homestead. Gradually the old style furniture is replaced by the modern and more attractive until finally the room is modernized throughout, is artistic and comfortable. So it was in our town. The arc lights gave us a taste of progressiveness and awoke a desire for other improvements. Later the main streets were all paved with asphalt or with brick, and additional lamps were placed at street corners. Then some old frame stores that had been a fire menace for years were torn down and a modern office building erected on the site. These improvements furnished our local editor with a subject to talk about, and soon the fame of our house cleaning had penetrated every hamlet in the state. That this fame brought its own rewards is shewn in the fact that we now have no less than seven factories, one of which employes 180 hands, and five large modern stores to say nothing of numerous small shops, two new school houses, three churches, while 583 new dwellings have been erected since the arc lamps were placed in circuit, and when I consider how remarkable are the changes that have been wrought, and how we might still be jogging along in the old way had the dozen oil lamps not been displaced by the big white lights, I feel very grateful for the wisdom and the forethought that ordered the expenditure that proved to be so profitable an outlay."

This is the homely illustration but thoroughly sensible and practical, and one that many a village resident might profitably ponder.

The author gives additional instances of like nature and then continues:

Surely it is more pleasant to read instances of this character than it is the despondent conclusions Mr. Fletcher has presented in The Forum. And it requires no vivid stretch of the imagination to conclude that just as satisfactory experiences might have been recorded in some of the Massachusetts towns that report such a marked decrease in population during the past ten years. The State census report just issued shows a loss in the ten years intervening between 1885 and 1895 in 140 towns and villages. The streets of some of these villages and towns have never been lighted with electric lamps, and the decrease in population reported in each ranges from 5 per cent. to 25 per cent., while, on the contrary, many other villages have advanced rapidly in population. Millis, for instance from 683 to 1,006, or an increase of 47 per cent. from the day that modern progressive methods predomi-

nated. Millis, it is needless to state, is a town of electric lighted streets. Then there is Dudley with a gain of 17 per cent. in population, and a dozen other electric lighted villages all showing marked gains, while their neighbors puttering along with dark streets had slowly degenerated.

### THE DEFINITION OF ENGINEER.

A question was raised recently in Stratford, Ont., which has a good deal of professional interest attached to it. An assesment was made for a sewer on the local improvement plan by the city assessor alone, he being specially appointed by the Council to do so. Objection was taken to the assesment so made, and the matter found its way into the courts. The City Council based its rights on the definition used in the amended ditches and watercourses act of 1894. According to this definition "engineer" shall mean "civil engineer", Ontario land surveyor, or such person as any municipality may deem competent and appoint to carry out the provisions of this act. The judge held differently, declaring that a civil engineer should have been employed. The power given to a municipality under the ditches and watercourses act, the drainage act, and the municipal act of employing any person they may deem competent has led to much work being wrongly constructed, and when an engineer has been called in to straighten out matters the odium of the errors has usually been cast upon him. This decision will have a beneficial effect in promoting the employment of properly qualified professional men to look after the construction of public work in Ontario.

### REPAIRING ASPHALT PAVEMENT.

The repairing of asphalt pavement is now effected in a satisfactory manner by a machine specially designed for the purpose and already adopted in several cities. It consists of a sheet-metal tank containing gasoline and mounted on a pair of wheels, so as to be easily moved from place to place. Behind the tank is a collection of burners, so arranged that when the vaporized gasoline is forced through them by means of a small air pump attached to the tank, the several jets of flame warm up the surface of the asphalt below them. The material becomes as soft as when first laid, and while in this condition enough of it is taken off from the injured portions by a hoe to secure a clean, fresh surface; on this the fresh asphalt is rammed and rolled, and as the old and new material is at about the same temperature when the tamping begins, it is found possible to weld the whole together into a homogeneous mass. Another advantage characterizing this method of repairs is that only the disintegrated portions of the old asphalt are removed, from half an inch to an inch in thickness, so that not only is less new material used, but the thin coating is more easily rolled and tamped and less likely to contract and leave a depression.

The Municipal Council has voted £40 in order that M. Mangin may study the question of the destruction of the trees in Paris streets from the emanations of the gas pipes laid down by the gas companies. The roots are attacked, and the trees perish.

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