

Boosters and Blunderers

Second in a Series of Four Articles on Phases of Municipal Life

By B. B. COOKE

INDUSTRIAL commissioners, publicity agents and boosters have damaged more towns than they have helped. Nine times out of ten the commissioner and the agent are hirelings who have no real stake in your community, and the booster is once out of twice only a real estate playing "bull" until such time as prices touch top notch and he can unload. The best promotion any town can have is citizenship, just plain, honest, intelligent citizenship—which is almost the scarcest thing in the Dominion of Canada. Mr. Average Citizen, who is indifferent to the welfare of his community until its ills begin to affect him personally, and Mr. Booster, who has only another form of the same disease—are both objectionable, the one perhaps a little more than the other. But between the two is Mr. Intelligent Citizen, a rare specimen, but the best promoter any community can have.

A good industrial commissioner or a good publicity agent is worth more money than the average community can afford to pay him. Very few Canadian towns or cities are likely to bankrupt themselves on just that sort of an investment, because these good men are too scarce: There are very few on this continent. The average city of forty thousand or more that wants a commissioner finds him, as a rule, among the friends of the aldermen, some man who wants a job or more pay than he has been getting or perhaps a newspaper reporter, who has the glad-hand talent. Or it may indeed be some ex-alderman who lobbies himself into the position through lodge connections or personal pull. The usual qualification for the work is thought to be a speaking acquaintance with the newspaper world, prowess as a retailer of jokes and container of drinks, and a general proficiency in the art of looking agreeable, sounding plausible and offending nobody. This type is sometimes varied by the addition of a fine speaking voice and a stentorian way of saying, "Have a drink, boys?" The stentorian voice is considered an asset particularly if accompanied by a woolly moustache and a stock of jokes.

COMMUNITIES of less than 40,000 are prone to adopt young and enthusiastic newspaper reporters lately engaged on city dailies and known to have a "racey" way of writing. These young men command anything from thirty to fifty dollars a week. Sometimes they are worth more than that. On the whole they are better men than the more imposing sort employed by the larger centres. Like their fellow commissioners of that other class, they require travelling expenses and a large allowance for entertainment: Sometimes the entertainment has to be disguised as "cab-fare." They know a little about display advertising and succeed occasionally in getting the town's name or picture into some paper in a bigger city, which is considered quite an achievement. The commissioners of larger cities follow much the same principle, except that they buy wine where the others buy whiskey, and Martini's, where the others buy beer. Also, the big publicity commissioner goes in for elaborately decorated and illustrated folders, describing his victim. One man in a certain western "Progress" club spends thousands a year on de luxe booklets which nobody ever reads. That sort of thing means good business for some local printer, but not much more than that. I may add that this type of commissioner can sometimes make speeches and deliver lectures—probably good ones. He can always be relied upon to consume his share of spirits. It would be considered a *faux pas* amongst most of his brotherhood for any commissioner to refuse a drink or to neglect to urge a prospective citizen or a guest into every bar in the block.

I THINK I have not over-drawn this. I venture to believe if you go down street and have a look at your particular sample, whatever title he wears, you are more than likely to find him of this type. He may indeed be the exception to the rule; there are commissioners who combine with the art of buying drinks and the glad-hand habit, other and better qualities. Your commissioner may be a man who really *knows* your town, who has a real interest in it and sits up at night thinking of ways to help make your town a good little town that will grow up to be a great little town. But don't think he is a horrible exception if you find he is thinking more about some lots he bought at a bargain. He is probably only reflecting the general indifference or carelessness of your community.

Who brought the commissioner to your town? The boosters, of course. Who are the boosters? Are you one yourself—because you have some lots ten miles from the post-office which you want to unload? Is that why you voted a salary for a commissioner or "secretary to the Board of Trade," as sometimes you call these appointees? Is that why you are a booster? Or is it because everybody else was boosting and you caught the fever? Or is it because you were afraid they would call you a knocker? Thousands of good people who have wanted to "knock" have been forced to "boost" because somebody else started to "boost." Taking it by and large an honest knocker, who knocks because he believes something and not because he is dyspeptic, is worth twenty boosters who don't know a treasury note from a blue print—and don't care.

A certain western town aspired to be the divisional point for a certain new railroad. The railroad was planned to pass the town. The Board of Trade,

Ontario town and was now bent on improving his opportunity in the west. Already the west had given him successes the frigid east had denied him. He began to know the taste of success, the feel of money in his pocket and that sense of being *something* to the community instead of mere item in the landscape as he had seemed in the east. He was grateful to the west. He felt an affection for the bald, ugly town that had given him a chance. He opposed granting the money.

"But why?" his brothers demanded.

"Because it isn't right."

"But why isn't it right?"

"Because we're saddling this town with a debt to pay for something that is bound to come to it anyway."

"Shucks! Don't be a knocker, Jim. Why, this money wouldn't cost the town much—and look at the good it would do us! Let's submit it to the people. Get the council to pass it. You're just grouchy, Jim!"

"I'm no more grouchy than you are. If that rail-



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which consisted of good-natured men who had been school teachers, doctors, butchers, school boys and dock-labourers back east, got together to consider the matter.

"Boys," said the President, who used to teach school in Garafraxa township, "we gotta have those round houses and things in this town. It means everything to us. It means just so many dollars and cents in wages and in supplies. It's money and work and population for our little old town—the best little city on the map! Now, boys, are we going to sit still and see this opportunity walk past the end of our noses? Are we going to make an effort to get the railway located here or are we not? Gentlemen! The railroad asks that we give them a free site and a bonus to have them come here. What do a few acres of ground and a few dollars mean to us if for these considerations we can bring this new road to our town?"—and so on, *ad infinitum*.

Now, it happened that the railroad had sized up this town very shrewdly. It saw that the town would one day be a big one. It appreciated points about its situation which even the Board of Trade did not suspect. Moreover, on account of the broken land and slight grades elsewhere on this particular division the railway engineers would be compelled to locate the yards in this town. To place them elsewhere would mean an outlay of thousands of dollars for grading. Yet, being a shrewd railway and not unconscious of a need of money it decided to play upon the feelings of the Board of Trade and to demand the bonus and the free site referred to by the youthful president.

There was one "knocker" on that Board of Trade, a lean man who had failed to get rich in a certain

road won't come to this town on its merits as a town, then it oughtn't to come for a cash bonus. I'm going to oppose it!"

Now just here let it be said that this man should at least get credit for courage. Very few of us have the nerve to even threaten to do something which is known to be unpopular at the moment. And when the first flush of enthusiasm dies away we usually slide out by saying, "Oh, well, I'll go with the majority." This man was better than the average. Very few of us are that, especially in municipal matters. When it comes to courting the good opinion of our fellows we are below average.

HE did oppose it, through the newspaper. He made speeches. With what cash he had to spare he went to the provincial capital to get more facts about the railway's side of the matter. All of this he succeeded in laying before the people of the town. He was called "knocker" by half the children in the town. He was jeered as a man who had no patriotism, and he was beaten! The by-law was carried by the people; the railway got the money it asked. And why? Because it is always easier to boost than to knock. It takes only shouting to lead the average city to spend a million for a new city hall, but it takes brains and courage and genius to say the old one is good enough. The knocker in this particular instance became mayor of the town four years later, when the town realized its mistake. He went in on a policy of "No trunk sewer this year." The real estate offices wanted the trunk sewer and so did some of the retail merchants who yearned for the trade the additional labour would bring; it did not matter to them that the money being paid those labourers, if they had