

## PRESENT SCOPE FOR PRACTICAL WORK IN IMPROVING CANADIAN CITIES.

THE objects and scope of the recently organized Civic Improvement League were presented to our readers in *The Canadian Engineer* for December 2nd, 1915. A conference of the League was held in Ottawa on January 20th, at which provincial and Dominion representatives were appointed as follows:

**Provincial Representatives.**—Ontario: Mr. G. Frank Beer, Toronto; Quebec: Hon. J. J. Guerin, President Montreal Civic Improvement League; Manitoba: Mr. W. Sanford Evans; Saskatchewan: Professor Oliver; Alberta: Commissioner Garden, Chairman Alberta Town Planning Association; British Columbia: Mr. G. R. G. Conway, M.Inst.C.E.; New Brunswick: Mr. W. F. Burditt, Chairman St. John Town Planning Commission; Nova Scotia: Mr. R. M. Hattie, Chairman Halifax Civic Improvement League; Prince Edward Island: Hon. J. A. Mathieson, Premier.

**National Representatives.**—Dr. J. W. Robertson, C.M.G., Mr. James White, Deputy Head, and Mr. Thomas Adams, Town Planning Adviser of the Commission of Conservation; Dr. P. H. Bryce, Hon. President of Canadian Public Health Association; Mr. J. S. Watters, President of Dominion Trades and Labor Congress; Mr. W. D. Lighthall, K.C., Secretary of the Union of Canadian Municipalities.

The chief paper presented at the latest conference was that by Mr. Thomas Adams, dealing with the present scope for practical work in improving civic conditions. Mr. Adams pointed out that between 1901 and 1911 there were created in four of the nine provinces of the Dominion an average of over 100 entirely new towns, thus illustrating the necessity for the foundations of a healthy civic structure. Concerning the scope for immediate action the paper dealt as follows:

**Municipal Government and Finance and Unemployment.**—The greatest need in connection with these matters is that a department of municipal affairs or a Local Government Board should be created in each province. That need arises from the fact that we require more uniformity in regard to measures which are necessary to secure (1) real and effective economies in the conduct of municipal business, (2) lower rates of interest on municipal borrowing, (3) greater efficiency in carrying out public undertakings, (4) proper auditing of municipal accounts, (5) prevention of fire and a consequent reduction in the cost of fire insurance, (6) proper control of labor difficulties during periods of slackness in employment with the least harmful results to the citizens affected during such periods, (7) enforcement of sanitary provisions, (8) avoidance of recurring mistakes in administration due to isolated local action, (9) reduction in cost of local improvement without lowering of standards of construction, (10) unifying the methods of valuing land for assessment, and other matters. We cannot overcome the defects of human nature in the personnel of councils, commissions or other bodies by legislation, but we can reduce the opportunities for bad management by setting up the right kind of machinery. At present we have a system of municipal government which is inherently bad because it lacks uniformity on the one hand and elasticity on the other hand, and to go on tinkering with it is to waste time and effort. We need a constructive policy which has for its final aim the substitution of a new system for that now in force. We need not begin by destruction or radical reform of our existing local government institutions, but we should aim at ultimately securing a final readjustment of our system so that it will attain even higher standards than those of the

Mother Country where democratic local government is comparatively successful. As a beginning, we should recognize the need for apportionment of responsibility between the province and the local government unit—be it city, town or rural municipality—and make the first step in reform the setting up of a provincial department, with a cabinet minister at its head to give exclusive attention to affairs of local government. There are the beginnings of such a department in Alberta and Saskatchewan, but even in these provinces the question of giving them enlarged powers and wider scope requires consideration.

One of the most serious causes of bad sanitation is the absence of effective control over new developments just outside the boundaries of cities—in rural municipalities—and until we have a uniform sanitary standard for all urban growth whether within the city or just over its borders we will continue to have unhealthy conditions. With regard to the question of the fixing of values of land for purposes of assessment we have a position at present in many cities which contains all the elements of ultimate financial disaster unless we make an early attempt to regulate it. Bondholders frequently apply to government departments for statistics to enable them to judge of the soundness of investments in city bonds and they show a nervousness and lack of confidence in making these investments which is caused by our careless methods and is not justified by any lack of real stability in our institutions. That there is need for some stocktaking and re-appraisal of values is indicated by the fact that in more than one province we have an average assessment value per capita of nearly \$1,800, as against about \$550 in other provinces. In the largest cities and towns of Scotland the capital value of the assessed valuation is only \$520 per capita, notwithstanding that vacant land is all assessed at agricultural rates, and every street along which buildings are erected has been constructed according to the best modern standards. An owner of land and improvements in a Scottish town can raise about four-fifths of this assessed valuation on mortgage, and the reader is asked to compare that with the proportion that could be raised of the assessed valuation of land in some of our cities.

The second suggestion under the head of municipal government is that we should ask the census department of the government to take up the question of municipal statistics. We have no satisfactory system of collecting statistics regarding municipal undertakings and finance. We collect many statistics without any apparent object in view, some of little real value because they are incomplete, and others useless because the reason for collecting them has ceased to exist. With our growing towns and steadily increasing municipal expenditure we urgently need a collection of municipal and vital statistics prepared with certain definite objects in view and we should draw the attention of the Dominion Government to this need and appoint a committee of expert municipal men to confer and make recommendations to the department concerned. Here the need for co-operation is between the (1) federal government, (2) the province, and (3) the city or town.

**Town Planning, Housing and Public Health.**—In regard to town planning, we have the excellent example of Nova Scotia, which has created a precedent for effective legislation dealing with this subject. The Commission of Conservation has issued a draft Act, which has been circulated among members of this conference. This draft slightly enlarges on the Nova Scotia Act, but does not differ from it in any of its material sense. Its purpose is to secure the proper regulation and control of the use and development of land for all kinds of building purposes; the term "town planning" very imperfectly indicates the