

Decade of Civic Improvement

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A GREATER development of civic improvement has been witnessed by the last than any former decade, and a more marked advance than all the previous history of the United States can show.

At the beginning of this period the most significant expression of civic interest in cities was to be found in the first social settlements of New York and Chicago, in the beginning of the expansion of the public school system, in the first struggles to transplant the merit system from federal to municipal offices, in the preparation for the World's fair, in the isolated examples of village and town improvement, and in the development of municipal functions, such as street paving and lighting, as well as in the first attempts at administrative reform, which found expression subsequently in the metropolitan systems of Boston.

The evidences of the education of public opinion are to be found in such facts as these: The first American Improvement association was that founded at Stockbridge, Mass., in 1853, while the chief developments of village improvement have taken place in the last half-dozen years. The first public baths were established at Boston in 1866, but outside of Milwaukee, which established a natatorium in 1888, the general movement for public baths in this country dates from 1893. The initial proposal for a vacation school was made in Cambridge in 1872, but the first vacation school was established in 1896. The first playground was inaugurated by town vote in Brookline, Mass., in 1872, but the playground movement dates from the equipment of the Charlesbank of Boston in 1892.

In 1851 the first steps were taken in New York to establish Central park, but the chief park extensions of most American cities have been made in the last decade. The chief municipal gas and electric light plants in American cities have been inaugurated since 1893.

The movement for civic improvement may be said to have found a three-fold expression in, first, the new civic spirit; second, the training of the citizen, and third, the making of the city.

At the close of the ninth decade of the last century the new civic spirit was finding its chief expression in the adoption of certain important English social movements which had flourished for a number of years across the water, chief among which were social settlements, and university extension. The accumulation of wealth during the '90's, the development of popular education, and the increase of leisure gave an opportunity for the performance of public duties such as had not seemed to exist to the young American of the former generation, unfamiliar with the duties of citizenship and social service. The altruistic individual of the '90's naturally drifted into movements which had received the stamp of approval in the older country. These movements have grown stronger as the years have gone by, in spite of or because of the multiplication of other movements; but for a time they absorbed the energy of the lovers of their kind who were not attracted by the familiar charitable organizations or by politics. They gave an opportunity also for the expression of the American interest in private and voluntary organizations as distinguished from public work, which was supposed to involve the odium attached to the politician.

It was not long, however, before the contact with working people and the real facts of the life of the masses impressed upon the social servants the significance of public activities. There consequently followed important movements for democratic education and municipal reform, which now constitute the chief actors in the training of the citizen. The expansion of the school curriculum, the multiplication of faculties in the schoolhouse, the extension of education to adults and to people engaged in wage-earning occupations, are all comprehended within the decade just closing. Nature study, manual training, art in the public schools in decoration and instruction, gymnasiums, baths and playgrounds, vacation schools, free lectures; these are familiar terms, but they were virtually unknown in 1892.

Along with the development of democratic education there has taken place a most marvelous transformation in the conduct of municipal affairs. Corrupt as are the American cities of today in contrast with those of Great Britain, they would be scarcely recognized by the spoilsmen of the early nineties. The first conference for good city government was held in 1893, followed two years later by the organization of the National Municipal league. Subsequently there sprang into existence two organizations representing municipal officials. The legislature of New York granted to the metropolis the first elements of the merit system in 1894. Chicago introduced civil service reform in the spring of 1896. Many of the American cities now have police and fire departments strictly controlled by civil service regulations, and scores of them perform their work of street cleaning and scavenging, some of them even of street and sewer construction, by the employes of the city. The new civic spirit which first found expression, and happily continues to find expression, in the training of the citizen, finally promises to crown its activities by setting the citizens to work in the making of the city.

Here, again, the contributions of the last ten years are as notable as all those which have preceded. During that time the chief streets of most American cities have received their first good paving; street cleaning has been made possible as a result of the pioneer efforts of Colonel Waring in New York; telegraph and telephone wires no longer disfigure the main streets of New York, Chicago, San Francisco and a few other cities; the overhead trolley has been abolished in Manhattan and Washington; parks and boulevards have multiplied, as have beautiful public buildings, including public schools and libraries.

During the past decade, according to Mr. Herbert Putnam, "there have been erected or begun five library buildings costing over \$1,000,000 each, whose aggregate cost will have exceeded \$15,000,000 (library of congress, \$6,400,000; Boston, \$2,500,000; Chicago, \$2,000,000; New York, \$2,500,000; Columbia, \$1,250,000; Pittsburg, \$1,200,000), and various others, each of which will represent an expenditure of from \$100,000 to \$700,000 each, while buildings costing from \$5,000 to \$100,000 now dot the country." The decoration of public buildings on a scale comparable to European accomplishment has been successfully undertaken in the Boston public library, the library of congress, appellate court building in New York, Baltimore court house, Cincinnati city hall and elsewhere. Many other individual attempts at the improvement and beautifying of

towns and cities contribute to the greatest of recent civic achievements, the co-ordination of various efforts in a comprehensive plan for the improvement of modern communities.

Once more we go back to the date 1893 for the first of these great accomplishments, the Chicago World's fair. For the first time in the history of universal exposition, a comprehensive plan for buildings and grounds on a single scale was projected and happily accomplished by the co-operative effort of the chief architects, landscape architects and sculptors of America. The contrast between the White City of Chicago and the black city of Chicago was no greater than that between the old conception of the city beautiful and the new.

Coincident with this great architectural triumph was the establishment of the metropolitan park system of Boston, the most notable municipal undertaking in the history of American cities. Within eight years what was the dream of one man was more than realized for the benefit of more than a million people. The metropolitan park system of Boston, comprising playgrounds, city parks, rural parks, including forest, hills, river banks and seashore reservations, is only a part of the great co-operative scheme of metropolitan Boston. The district within eleven miles of the state house in Boston united in four great metropolitan commissions for the mutual advantage of all the communities in the provision of water, the disposition of sewage and for rapid transit and recreation. The administrative problems have not yet been entirely solved, but the conception of a comprehensive plan has received an emphasis even beyond that of the Chicago White City.

Most recently this idea has had confirmation in what are known as the "Harrisburg Plan" and the "Improvement of Washington." The Harrisburg League for Municipal Improvement projected a plan for the employment of expert advice with regard to the city's water supply, the sewerage system, parks, boulevards, playgrounds and street paving. The society provided the funds, amounting to over \$10,000, for the employment of these experts and the conduct of the campaign, which resulted in the election of worthy officials and the passage of a referendum vote authorizing the issue of over \$1,000,000 in bonds. The "Harrisburg Plan" is a model of scientific method and enthusiastic citizenship, but it has a worthy rival as a spectacular accomplishment in the improvement plans of Washington. The significant plan of L'Enfant, approved by George Washington, is responsible for the capital city being one of the most beautiful cities in the world, but the failure to take advantage of all the elements of that plan, or to be consistent with its beginnings, makes necessary the commission of today. L'Enfant's plan, in brief, took into consideration the topography and the supposed necessity of a water approach to the city, and then located the streets on the plan of two sets of wheel spokes laid on a gridiron, with the capitol as one hub and the president's house as the other.

Along the axes of these two buildings was projected a park to be connected directly by a broad street, Pennsylvania avenue. The other public buildings were also to be grouped appropriately.

Even the fundamental features of this scheme have not been held sacred by their

builders. The vista of the White House along Pennsylvania avenue has been obscured by the Treasury and State department buildings; curious and unsightly edifices have been erected along the Mall; the Washington monument, which should have stood at the junction of the axes of the two main buildings, occupies a site unpardonable in its isolation, 100 feet south of the axis of the capitol and several hundred feet east of the axis of the White House; the Pennsylvania railway has been allowed to cross the Mall at grade; and to mention but one other incongruity, last, but not least, the library of congress has been so located that its dome diverts attention from the all-important majesty of the capitol.

The recommendation of the American Institute of Architects, on the occasion of the centennial celebration of the establishment of the government at Washington, will fire the enthusiasm of all who read them. The subject has since been exhaustively studied by the new commission. They point out possibilities still latent in Washington, and that influence which their realization would have on the other cities of the country is immeasurable. The construction of the Houses of Parliament in London on the Gothic model, though not an unqualified success, was the most important architectural event of the nineteenth century in Great Britain, and was led to the revival of the minor arts as well. Even greater service will be rendered to the cities of the United States when the noble plan of L'Enfant, projected at the beginning of the last century, shall be reincorporated in the best expression of the new century, happily now assured by the appointment of the present excellent commission, Messrs. Daniel H. Burnham, Charles F. McKim, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and Augustus St. Caudens. The proposed improvements of the lake front in Cleveland and Chicago, the boulevard scheme for St. Louis, the conception of a park system taking in the lakes about St. Paul and Minneapolis, all testify to the growing appreciation of comprehensive schemes for improvement. The same tendencies are in evidence in the plans for rural improvement such as those of the Massachusetts trustees of public reservations, the Essex county (N. J.) park commission, the state control of the Palisades, the national parks in Wyoming, Colorado, California, Minnesota, Wisconsin and elsewhere.

The beginning of the new century finds ideals and concrete accomplishments so far advanced that for the first time the public is ready for a national organization to represent and co-operate these interests. Such an organization as the American League for Civic Improvement would have been sadly premature in 1893. It is hardly appreciated even in 1902, but the friendly response from every state in the union and from Canada, from city, town, village and rural district, from men, women and children, from public officials and private citizens, from practical workers, writers and teachers, points clearly to the necessity of a unification of improvement forces. A decade of civic progress has brought us to the point where no city should be content with anything less than a comprehensive plan incorporating the best accomplishments of the last ten years, by applying to local necessities and natural advantages, experience gathered from the great field of civic improvement.

Chicago, Ill.

Colonial Failures of Great Britain

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E NGLAND is generally heralded and regarded as a capable colonizing nation, but nevertheless a few countries over which the Union Jack floats are bankrupt and miserable. They are colonial failures, almost as bad as any for which Spain was responsible. They are the poor relations in an exceptionally wealthy and prosperous family. And, like other poor relations, they are always waiting to be helped instead of helping themselves.

England's worst colony is undoubtedly British Honduras, situated at America's very doors. It is a slice of Central America, with a fine seaboard, fringing a large and wealthy country. It is not utilized by Great Britain and has no regular communication with the mother country. Its only connection with the outside world is by an occasional banana steamer from New Orleans or a leaky logwood schooner infested with cockroaches.

The colonists are a community of hermits so far as the great world is concerned. They have no cable communication with any part of the globe and they generally hear of a great event about six months after it has happened.

They celebrated King Edward's coronation on the day originally appointed for it and did not hear of his illness until weeks later. When at last the king was crowned his loyal subjects in British Honduras were holding intercession services to pray for his recovery. Probably they are now rejoicing over the close of the Boer war, and in a month or two they will be exciting themselves over the Venezuelan blockade. "I suppose," said a merchant of Belize,

the only town in the colony, when he visited Jamaica not long ago, "that nobody in England knows anything of England's only colony in Central America—except, possibly, a few stamp collectors and clerks in the Colonial office. It is just as well they don't, for we are no credit to them. British Honduras is a disgrace to the country which owns it.

"There are about 30,000 of us there, mostly black, and our principal pleasure in life is to dodge work. It is easy to do that in a tropical country, where nourishing fruits and vegetables grow almost without cultivation.

"A West Indian bishop once asked his laziest parishioner: 'Sam, how on earth do you manage to pass time?' Sam grinned and answered: 'I don't pass time, massa, I sit in de shade an' let time pass me.' That is exactly our temperament.

"Down in British Honduras the man who has a job is an object of pity. The rest of us sit around on soap boxes in our yam patches and cocoanut walks watching him with sympathetic wonder.

"Sometimes, if we feel exceptionally energetic, we stroll down to the slimy creeks near the town and throw stones at the alligators. We haven't energy enough to stalk them and shoot them, even though they do carry off a black pick rummy now and then.

"As you may imagine, we are not a very prosperous people. An leather and industry have languished to the extent that it is incompatible with the climate, and that is very low, indeed, in a country which is as fertile as any part of the tropics. Sugar is cultivated to a small extent, but the principal industry is cutting and exporting logwood and mahogany, which are hewn in

the mountain forests and floated down to the seaports by the rivers.

"There is a small trade with the United States in bananas and coconuts. We might have made a big business of it, but we were too lazy. Americans had to come down to cut the fruit as well as buy it.

"Beyond the timber cutting, which is mainly the work of the Indians in the forests, there is no business doing, although the country has great latent resources and the land is very rich.

"We just sit down and vegetate. Our town, Belize, is about as lively as a mausoleum. There are no railways, no roads, no street cars, no telephones, no telegraphs and no good roads. And, stranger still, nobody seems to want them.

"Although the area of the country is only about 7,500 square miles, a large part of it is absolutely unexplored. No white man's foot has ever trodden many of our forests and mountains. No white man's canoe has ever penetrated the upper reaches of some of our rivers. There are not many unknown regions of the earth nowadays, and it is strange that one of them should be situated in an English colony only a few hundred miles from the United States.

"Some time ago a young American came down from New York and organized an expedition to explore part of the interior. His energy disturbed everybody, and we regarded him as a madman for working so hard. If we had had a hundred sayors we should probably have clipped him inside.

"There is hardly any capital in the colony, and the labor is unemployed of its own free choice. There are thousands of acres of fertile land which can be taken up

for nothing, or, at most, for a few shillings an acre, if they happen to be near a seaport. The soil is adapted for the raising of all kinds of tropical products, and there is an excellent market—the United States—at our very doors. But the colony does not progress; it does not even live—it rots! British Honduras is a colonial failure if ever there was one.

"England is forever struggling to gain new possessions in China or Africa, even at the risk of war. It is strange that she does not make the best of the colonies which she already possesses. Here is a fine, undeveloped estate in Central America which she has allowed to go to rack and ruin without lifting a finger. Of course, it may be said, that the colonists have themselves to blame. That is true, but why doesn't England take some energetic steps to improve the colony, open up means of transportation and bring in a better breed of colonists? She is disgraced by the fact that one of her colonies is in a more backward state than any of its Latin-American neighbors."

Several of England's West Indian islands are also in a deplorable state. Only three of them—Jamaica, Trinidad and Grenada—can be called fairly prosperous. These beautiful and fertile gems of the Caribbean were won for Great Britain by the genius of her greatest admirals and the pluck of her best sailors, but they have been allowed to go to rot through misgovernment and negligence.

As the natural result, there is a party in almost every one of these islands which clamors for annexation to the United States.

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