

(February 9th, 1912.)

Civic Improvement and Beautification.

By MR. GEORGE RETTIG.*

AT a special luncheon of the Canadian Club, held on Feb. 9th, Mr. George Rettig said:

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Canadian Club,— When three societies like the Canadian Club, the Toronto Horticultural Society and the Civil Guild, are all interested in accomplishing one object, some good results must surely be obtained. The Slogan, "Beautify Toronto," gave me a false impression. I find that you already have a beautiful city and are merely attempting to make it still more so. All of my time this evening might be used in telling you of what a good impression Toronto has made upon me, but that is not what you want. I must say, though, that your street lighting system is wonderful. But not until all the tall poles have been removed from the streets will the lamps show to the best advantage. Cleveland is not going to be held up to you as a model to-night, but both cities are so similarly situated that what has been done there may be of interest to you.

The serious work of beautifying Cleveland started about seventeen years ago when a non-political Park Commission was appointed, who wisely engaged a landscape architect from Boston to make a report and a general plan for a park system to encircle the city. Seven years later, through the efforts of politicians who hated to see such a large organization outside of politics, the Commission was declared illegal and went out of existence, but not until so much good work had been done that our present system was well established. It added 1,275 acres of park land, mostly improved, to the 225 acres existing in 1894. During the eleven years following that time only about 355 acres have been added, and not very much work of a good nature has been done.

A park engineer, trained in the work, had charge of the improvements, but he was let go with the Commission. Since that time no engineer has had charge of this work who has had any previous park training. Under the old

* Mr. George Rettig is well known as a landscape architect in the United States, and has initiated and carried out some excellent plans for the improvement of the park and street systems of Cleveland, Ohio.

Commission, bridges were designed by one of the best architects in Cleveland, and they are works of art, but some of the later designs, made by men unsuited to the work, are far from good. Natural beauty has been destroyed by engineers who are not artists, and results in general have been so unsatisfactory that the very best men have lost interest and confidence and have withheld further financial aid. Mr. J. D. Rockefeller gave one million dollars and was prepared to do a great deal more, but he has refused any further donations. Every two years an election for Mayor is held and every employee, from the park laborer to the highest official, is quite sure that if the party in power is defeated he will lose his position. No work can be planned for the future, as there is so little assurance that the one designing it will carry the work to completion. Another man may not approve of the work and may start all over again.

In the year 1900, Mr. J. H. McBride, President of the Park Commission, conceived the idea of grouping our proposed municipal and county buildings with a new Union Station on our lake front. While making the drawings, I could not help feeling that it was too great an undertaking to be ever fulfilled, as the proposed site was expensive city property, in some cases occupied by tall buildings. The Chamber of Commerce approved the design and started an agitation which resulted in a "Board of Supervising Architects" being employed to supervise the work. Messrs. Carrere and Brunner, of New York, and Mr. Burnham, of Chicago, men who had studied these problems, were selected. They have greatly enlarged the original plan. Two of the buildings are now occupied and the foundation of a third one has been laid. Almost all the land required for the complete plan has been purchased. The total cost is to be about \$20,000,000.

The Chamber of Commerce Group Plan Committee, which worked to obtain these results, has now been changed to a "Committee on Municipal Art and Architecture," and is composed of members in the architectural, engineering, legal and medical professions, together with a sculptor and some of the leading merchants and manufacturers. I have also the honor of being a member of this committee. Through the courtesy of the City Government, plans of proposed buildings and other improvements undertaken by the city are submitted to the committee for approval, with the result that considerable improvement has been obtained in several designs.

The start made on our Group Plan has awakened an interest in a general scheme for improving the entire city. The Mayor last year appointed a City Planning Commission composed of business and professional men, but they had no funds at their disposal and no legal power and have as yet done no actual work. I do not know whether the newly elected Mayor will continue this committee or not.

At a joint meeting of the City Planning Commission, the Committee on Art and Architecture and the City Hall Commission, held to discuss this subject, I recommended that the engineering department of the city make a survey of actual conditions in Cleveland, showing districts which required attention for sanitary, transportation, and other reasons, and including all information which would be desirable to produce a basis to work from, instead of accepting a proposition by an expert to furnish a bird's-eye view of a general plan of beautification at a cost of \$30,000. After the survey had been made, a local man could work out several schemes in a general way with the help of committees interested in the work. He should be a man with ideas of his own, who could grasp the thoughts of others and work them up in presentable shape. After all this had been done, the very best talent obtainable should be called in to make the final plan, and this seems to me to be a good plan to recommend to Toronto.

The first consideration should, of course, be health, obtained by not allowing congestion or unsanitary districts, (if there are any), to remain, and by providing adequate transportation facilities for the workers in your mercantile and manufacturing districts, so that they may reach desirable residence localities cheaply and quickly. A system of diagonal streets is needed, but your Civic Guild has already considered that.

It seems to me that the local business men are the ones best able to judge what streets need widening and where traffic congestion must be relieved. They can lay the foundation of a plan which must require an expert to perfect. The plan should provide not only for existing conditions, but also for the needs of a city of a million.

All this can be done now better than when your city was laid out, as at that time no one could foretell the direction of growth of the various industries. They have now become so well established that growth can be controlled. When Cleveland started seriously to consider a general plan for beautification, I visited, at my own expense, a great many

foreign cities, in England, France and Germany, and also Vienna, to fit myself to understand the problems better.

Germany, where I remained the longest time, has been obliged to do more of this work than some other countries because of its extremely narrow streets. I could speak the language and had letters to officials, thereby procuring much valuable information. One city, Strassburg, through an arrangement with a land company, was tearing down buildings for an improvement which would cost \$3,000,000 but would not cost the citizens one cent, as the company which took over the land paid for the improvement out of the profits which would be obtained from the sale of the remaining property. The prices the company would charge were restricted.

The limited time at my disposal prevents my speaking of other important questions connected with this subject, such as your water front and proposed boulevard along the valleys of the Humber and the Don, where nature has been so very kind to you, and the playgrounds, which should be within easy reach of every child in the city. Instructors to teach them how to play. The boy who has always been out for himself finds that he becomes one of a team who must work together, that others are relying on him to do his part for the general good, and that some questions must be decided by an umpire. This must help him to understand the question of good citizenship when he grows older.

Greater toilet facilities for men and women should be provided. Physicians all agree that lack of these when necessary is liable to cause disease besides discomfort. But the great question is, will it pay? The great cities which have done such work are doing more. Hundreds of millions of dollars are said to be spent in Paris each year by American visitors. The park system of Cleveland, which has cost, including maintenance and interest, less than \$9,000,000, is estimated by real estate men to be worth not less than \$22,000,000, and by some as high as \$50,000,000. The value of the pleasure and health derived from our park systems cannot be estimated, neither can the increase in value of the surrounding property.

I sincerely hope that your efforts will result in keeping Toronto in the front with the other beautiful cities now engaged in work of a similar nature. Assuring you that any further information you may desire, either by mail or otherwise, will be gladly furnished, if possible, I will close and say "Thank you" to all of the gentlemen who have been so kind to me during my stay here.