PUTTING YOUR CIVIC HOUSE IN ORDER:
HOW THE YOUNG MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY HELP: BY MARY RICHARDS GRAY

The desire for beauty, health, order is inherent in mankind, is among the deepest and most powerful forces in life. Man’s first consciousness of these desires is operative only within the narrow confines of his own personality. Then, as he grows wiser, he wishes beauty, health and happiness for his family, then for his neighbor, his city, country, until finally he is eager for the joy and the advancement of the whole world. He no longer thinks that his interests are confined only within himself, he knows that the boundary of his life extends until it touches the uttermost ends of the world. He feels that his home is the world, not just merely the corner lot in a small town upon which he has built a house. He understands that as he makes his own lot more beautiful he has increased the beauty of the world, that every improvement he makes in his own house is made for his community as well, that it is virtually impossible for him to work for himself alone, that he rises or falls with his neighbors, with his countrymen.

This larger, pleasanter, truer outlook on life has recently been reached in most interesting manner by the citizens, old and young, of Los Angeles through a widespread civic housekeeping siege. Even the children now understand that as they clean up their small corner of their yard and make flowers to blossom where weeds once bristled, they help clean up the city and become true gardeners. If every child in a town and every town in the country followed the Los Angeles
PUTTING YOUR CIVIC HOUSE IN ORDER

plan of campaign for a more beautiful and healthful city America would be the beauty spot of the world.

The putting in order of Los Angeles' civic house began when in nineteen hundred and fifteen the cordial invitation went out to the whole world to visit California. A committee was formed whose duties were to superintend garden planning. They knew that their city had a wonderful location in the midst of a fertile plain extending from the mountains to the sea; that nestled in the foothills and scattered along the dunes to the sea were many small municipalities connected with hundreds of miles of good roads, winding in and out between waving fields of grain, truck gardens, orchards of citrus fruits, walnuts, plums, peaches and figs; that its schools were unexcelled and that the interest of the people in agriculture was intense, yet that unsightly waste places and a woeful lack of finish and uniformity marred this natural beauty and showed that the best possible use was not being made by man of the lavish gifts of Nature. How to awaken people to a greater appreciation of the beauty running riot all about them, how to arouse them from an easy tolerance of unkempt surroundings, how to interest them in creating a more perfect city was a problem to be met.

After much debating the committee decided to link extensive civic improvement work with regular school instruction in agriculture for the reason that more people could be reached through their children in the schools than in any other way, and conduct a garden contest on as large a scale as possible. This general idea expanded into final form, resulted in the division of city and county schools, women’s clubs, and municipalities into six classes with an offer of cash prizes contributed by public minded citizens and placed at the disposal of the committee.

ONCE the project was settled upon the matter was turned over to sub-committees and the schools. Seven landscape gardeners were secured and the Department of Agriculture of the public schools was increased by assigning fifty-five teachers to part time work to assist the twenty-two regular teachers of gardening. A new feature—that of supervised home gardens—was added. This arrangement gave children not under school garden instruction an equal chance with those who were.

The committee furnished the rules, prepared and supplied manuals, gave score cards, lists of plants, planting calendars, cultural directions, etc., helped with the planning of all gardens, handled and furnished plants and seeds for a nominal price, took charge of all records, did the supervising, scoring, judging and distributing of

284
PRIZE WINNING SCHOOL GARDEN planted by students of the Laurel School, Los Angeles, showing the little gardeners at work and deep in a discussion of crop reports.
CIRCULAR ARBOR surrounded by a school garden planted and tended by the pupils of a Los Angeles school: This is a pleasantly practical new form of the old game of Ring a Round a Rosy: These little gardeners also won a prize.
BEAUTY CREATED IN A VACANT LOT
by four little girls who are growing wise in the practical lore of making flowers bloom where weeds once flourished: Their efforts won a prize in the Los Angeles campaign for civic beauty.
HOME GARDEN IN THE CROWDED PART of Los Angeles city showing flowers blooming where once tin cans obstructed the ground: Roses cover an unsightly shed and clove pinks line the walks.
PUTTING YOUR CIVIC HOUSE IN ORDER

all moneys. "Continuation" teachers managed the home gardens after school hours. Their schedule called for visits to six different gardens daily between the hours of three and five. At each they gathered in as many children, parents and neighbors as possible, discussed problems, advised, instructed and worked up enthusiasm. They reported these home projects, their reports being supplemented by those of the supervisors of the department as well as of the committee. The score card used shows a clever method of bringing in many interests. Here is a copy of it:

One, photographs sent to the office; two, plans, diaries, drawings sent to the office; three, effort, general interest, intelligence shown by pupils in their work; four, neatness and freedom from weeds; five, general beauty and harmony; six, thriftiness, quality and utility; seven, growing condition of soil, irrigation and cultivation, one hundred points each; eight, results obtained in the garden, environment and improvement considered; nine, general beauty, neatness, quality, and the whole premises surrounding the home, one hundred and fifty points each—total one thousand points.

Officially the Los Angeles City and County Improvement Contest began with Planting Day in September, nineteen hundred and fourteen. However, in the city during the fall and winter of nineteen hundred and thirteen and fourteen the schools had organized the Garden Soldier Movement for the purpose of getting children interested in home gardening, and had done much work rooting rose slips for school and home gardens. One nursery alone had furnished one hundred thousand choice potted roses for home use that were sold through the schools for a nominal price. In the county schools in some places the organization of school gardens antedated the work in the city. In both city and county the curricula called for regular instruction in agriculture. After Planting Day came Clean-up Day on December thirty-first with the slogan, "Start nineteen hundred and fifteen right!"

One hundred and twenty city and two hundred and sixty-eight county schools with approximately one hundred thousand pupils, fifteen thousand home gardeners, twenty-four women's clubs, and seven or eight municipalities entered the contest. Soon it was found impractical to put on a large enough supervising force to manage home gardening in the country, consequently between six and seven thousand contestants withdrew, only eight thousand three hundred and eighty-eight remaining in until the close. Many schools and many homes that did not directly enter the contest nevertheless enthusiastically entered into the spirit of the civic reform and helped in a practical way to create a well ordered and beautiful city, one in which they could take a personal and just pride.
FROM all classes of people there came an immediate and gratifying response. Everybody understood what was being attempted because the newspapers gave their support by devoting much space to the subject. Every one became interested in growing things. Fathers and mothers worked with the children in the effort to make the home more beautiful. For the sake of the children, disorderly backyards, unsightly hencoops, sagging fences came down and new buildings, fences, pergolas, arbors, cement curbs and walks appeared in their places. Everybody encouraged the owners of vacant property to take care of it; everybody dropped seeds in waste places in an effort to cover unsightly places with a growth of some sort. With interest roused the leaders had little difficulty in furthering the movement for beauty, though it took an enormous amount of energy and enthusiasm to keep the contest going for a whole year. It is estimated that at least two hundred thousand dollars were expended on small improvements. Seedsmen say they never had such a volume of business and that in the city alone two hundred and eleven thousand people had gardens. Directly or indirectly every one was affected. Through all the contest stress was laid upon the fact that the contestants were not competing against each other, but striving to attain their ideals of home or civic beauty. The nineteen hundred and fifteen committee justified their expenditure of about thirty-six thousand dollars by giving to their work as permanent a character as possible.

The first big general result of the civic improvement contest is a lovely city, in the midst of a garden stretching from the mountains to the sea, with beautiful school grounds, attractive club houses, neat, trim, well-kept homes with lawns, vegetable and flower gardens, clean vacant lots, and flowers, wild and cultivated, everywhere in greatest profusion. But of even greater value than these physical things are the effects upon the individuals who wrought the change—the teachers, children and parents—and the community at large.

To the teachers the contest gave an opportunity for carrying gardening instruction into the homes in districts where school gardens have not as yet been organized, as well as for putting into immediate practice the lessons given as part of school routine. Moreover, it proved a way of solving, in part at least, the educational problem of directing children to educate themselves.

The children's part in making Los Angeles more beautiful was a business experience as well as a sane, healthful and inexpensive means of recreation. In any number of cases the parents, merely to emphasize the idea of business, bought produce from their children, while in other cases the neighbors, friends and local shop-
PUTTING YOUR CIVIC HOUSE IN ORDER

keepers took surplus stock. One ten-year-old boy put in an acre of garden truck on vacant lots, hired boys to help him and marketed the produce, realizing well on his venture.

It developed respect for property and civic responsibility: a most unexpected exemplification of this came one day when the writer took three “bad boys,” aged respectively nine, ten and eleven, to a picnic. The way led through a part of the city in which there are beautiful gardens and parkways. Not a flower did the boys pick, not a blade of grass did they trample down. While walking along they discussed plants and plant culture after the fashion of old farmers, naming incidentally perhaps two dozen trees, shrubs and flowers. Accidentally one boy struck his foot against some lovely purple iris, half uprooting it. He turned, put the plant in place, pinched the soil up well around it and ran on as if it were nothing at all.

In tilling the soil many a child “found himself.” In one school there was an Italian boy who just naturally could not help fighting. Though punished, he had a fight almost daily. All of a sudden he got interested in the work in agriculture and asked for a garden of his own. All the good land having been apportioned he was given part of a dump heap in a mean corner of a vacant lot just being put under cultivation. After a little the principal missed him—or rather missed reports of fights on the playground—and looked around for him. To his surprise he found him with a wheel-barrow laboriously hauling soil and fertilizer to his forlorn corner patch. Toni turned “good” and through interest in gardening got interested in other phases of school work. With him, as with all children, mastery of the soil proved mastery of self.

THE movement showed parents how the work of children can be made the means of contributing to the family income, thus making it possible for them to stay in school longer. In one district two inexperienced young boys in their very first garden venture raised so much produce that they supplied the table for a family of seven for a whole year and had a good deal to sell besides. It proved the practical value of instruction in agriculture, brought about a better appreciation of it and incidentally of all school work. It gave children an absorbing home interest and created in them a desire for a beautiful home.

For the larger family, the community, the gardening contest proved the dominant factor in city improvement work of the year. To be sure, the community went ahead with the regular improve-

(Continued on page 323.)