HOW A FLORIDA TOWN IS WORKING FOR A CITY BEAUTIFUL

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A good many years ago, when I was a very little girl, with a very big imagination, I used to entertain my younger brothers and sisters with marvelous stories of things I was just on the eve of doing. The tales would get bigger and more wondrous, as my small auditors became more and more impressed, and I would plume myself for still further flights, when all at once my practical minded mother would bring me to earth with a bang by saying, “It is better to speak of a very small thing actually accomplished than to be forever expatiating on things you are going to do, that may never come to pass.”

I find myself reminded of this, as I undertake to tell the State Horticultural Society how one Florida town has set about getting more improvements in the way of ornamental planting in its gardens. Our plan is as yet but little more than a plan. It remains to be seen just what its results will be, but it is in the hope that it may present some suggestive thought to other communities that I have consented to set it forth for your consideration.

To begin with, we are working directly through a City Beautiful Committee, which of course is a part of our Woman’s Club. We thus have the hearty support of one hundred and fifty women. This means a great deal in the way of publicity where publicity is most desired, and it means also that no sectarian interest will hinder, no spirit of contention nor rivalry scatter our fire. Before we made any plans at all, we read up everything we could find on the City Beautiful. The campaigns successfully carried out in Birmingham, Alabama, and in Toledo, Ohio, presented many available ideas, and from the latter place we obtained some most inspirational literature. The work there was instituted and carried out under the auspices of the Toledo Museum of Art, in connection with the People’s Saving Association, and it was more comprehensive in its scope than any other campaign of which we found data. The Curator of the Museum seems most happy to pass on any information he has, and has shown a real interest in our small venture. After reading all we could find, we first made a survey of our town—its assets and its possibilities. We have not the natural beauties of some Florida cities—no surrounding woodland of tropical beauty, no picturesque effects of little silver lake, or gentle slope of hills. We have the most wonderful possibilities in our lake front, but they are only possibilities as yet, for the fine bulkhead which is in process of construction will enzone a shore line which has been denuded of nearly all its palms, and now presents an unsightly string of rather discreditable wooden buildings. We have no large estates in our vicinity, so we have not their stimulating effect of beautiful parks and
landscape gardening, and our chief disadvantage lies in the smallness of our city lots, with their houses pushed as close to the street as can be. These are our troubles, but as the old lady said when everything else was gone, we have something to be thankful for. This old lady was asked what her particular blessing was, and she replied that she was so glad that since she had only two teeth left, those two hit! We are in some better plight, for we have splendidly paved streets, most excellent sidewalks with broad parkways, and in addition we have five beautifully located squares set aside for public parks. With all of this substantial foundation, we feel sure that the esthetic side will manifest itself eventually, and it is in just this faith that we have begun our work. Our first effort was to get the grounds about our really handsome building at the depot, put in some sort of shape, and to have an avenue of palms set along the street leading back from the railroad to the center of town. We formed a very clear idea of what we wanted and asked for it. Our ideas were accepted pleasantly, but the railroad authorities and the city council told us times were too hard last fall for them to take action at once. All of us had become inured to this sad story from our own men-folks—hard times, and harder coming—but still we lived and had things pretty comfortable about us, so we are keeping hopeful, and not too insistent, for it is our policy not to be fussy nor officious. A few days ago two members of our city council assured us that we should have our avenue this fall, and the depot improvements will surely follow that. If we couldn't get our big ambition, however, we knew there were always smaller things to accomplish, so instead of nagging at those in authority, we turned our attention to the individual work which must always underlie any civic effort. The ball was set to rolling by the bright youngsters of the Junior Civic League. When it came time to plant nasturtiums and sweet peas, we bought seeds in quantity, weighed them up into ten-cent packages, and sent the children out peddling. A plant prize was given those who made sales to the most houses. We worded it this way, as our object was to get as many gardens planted as we could. It was not a nuisance to people to have the children come to them—many wanted the seed anyway, and others were glad to know just when it was time to plant. In addition to the seed, some of the girls took with them marked catalogues from one of our Florida florists, and received orders for roses and shrubbery.

As a result of this plan, our town is now farly ablaze with nasturtiums and there is a stronger if invisible effect in that we have planted the garden spirit in the thought of our little girls who are proud to feel they had a part in the work. Along in the winter, after a great deal of thought and discussion on the part of the committee we worked out more definite plans suited to our own especial needs. Briefly, these include semi-annual garden and lawn contests and flower shows with good prizes. We first set about getting our cash for prizes. Never insistent, the committee presented their ambition for the town's great attractiveness to men of known public spirit. The
idea appealed at once and in only one instance were they met by anything else than cordial support. Within a week sufficient money was subscribed to finance the undertaking, besides the gardening implements offered as prizes by merchants, and plants promised by various florists. This done, we districted the town, asked a few other interested women to help us, and equipped with the marked catalogues again, we made a thorough house to house canvass, taking orders for ornamentals, which we promised to deliver free of express. This idea originated from Mrs. McAdow's plea in the Florida Grower for a palm and a poinsettia in every Florida garden, but we had so far to go in our work, that we enlarged the request to include hibiscus, and vines of Bougainvillea and Pyrostegia Venusta. In Daytona the Bougainvillea is surpassingly lovely, and no one who has ever seen the Pyrostegia wreathing the trees in Winter Park and Maitland with its flaming blossoms, needed any urging. We were quite successful sending several different orders to a northern florist as well as to our Florida friends, and when one considers the fact that no single order exceeded six dollars, while there were many of ten, twenty-five and fifty cents, it is plain enough that the planting was done in very, very many gardens. We had lots of fun taking the orders, we became much better acquainted with our own town, and townswomen, and as they gave us their little orders, we made them feel that they were actually a part of our City Beautiful plan. I think, if we were to stop work right now, and never do another thing, we still for years to come would be visibly reminded that we had tried, for our plants were nearly every one of permanent value that will grow handsomer from year to year. Within a few weeks, probably about the tenth of May, we will hold our first public event. This we have planned directly in connection with the Civic Committee of the Woman's Club, and it will include three days of strong civic appeal. The first of these will be a general clean-up day, in which we will have the active co-operation of the City Sanitary Department. It is our idea to see for one time, our town in its Sunday clothes, gardens and parks in apple-pie order, alleys above reproach, and private grounds all swept and garnished. The second will be the day of inspection, by a committee of gentlemen from out of town, a thorough survey being made of the six districts into which we have divided the city. In each district a prize will be awarded for the most attractive garden, with especial reference to the spring blossoming plants it shows, and another will be given for the finest display of veranda plants, this to include boxes as well as potted specimens. The third day, we will have our first semi-annual exhibition of potted plants and cut flowers, in some prominent place down town, and on this occasion the prize lists for the previous day will be made public. As our one idea just now is to stimulate the garden spirit, all our prizes in the spring show will be of plant specimens and summer bulbs, and we expect to have our lovely premiums in a show window on our principal street for several days before the event. This by way of advertising and attracting exhibits, in addition
to the slide we will run in the moving picture show, and the constant previous reference in the columns of our local paper. We will not trust to these agencies alone for publicity, however, but about ten days beforehand we will make another personal canvass in the interest of our Civic Three Days. Next November we will have worked out another plan for awarding the cash we have for prizes, and this will probably be a good deal more ambitious, as we want to offer prizes for beautifying church and school grounds, and the parkways about stores and other public buildings. We wish also to work out some scheme to encourage the householders in blocks to cooperative planting—no fences, and a certain uniformity of effect that will mitigate in some measure the smallness of space between houses and streets.

One rather important requisite of a campaign of this kind is to have some one who has time and ability to answer a thousand questions about planting. Seedling time here is all topsy turvy to so many of the people who have come from the North, and while we can have all the flowers any heart could desire, there are some that it is useless for us to try to grow, and it is always discouraging to one who endeavours to have some New England favorite in her garden, see it pine and dwindle in Florida soil.

Our little plan is now before you, just as it has evolved itself from time to time to fit our own particular circumstances. It has proceeded from a sincere desire to help in making Florida as beautiful as any state in the Union, and there is no reason why this should not come to pass. We have the soil, and the climate, and certainly as up-and-doing a people as any one could desire.

Sometimes, when we look at our handsome depot building surrounded by unkept squares, at our parks still far from developed, and the school grounds bare and scrubby, we are tempted to sigh that it is a long, long way to Tipperary. When we remember however, that more than half the joy of life lies in planning, and in working up to certain great objective points, we count ourselves happy in being thus in at the start. Those people who plant gardens, and who help others to plant them, are the ones to become permanent citizens in a town, and who develop civic loyalty—a great asset in these days of shifting populations, so here's to a Florida made up of those who have learned for themselves the little rhyme:

"The heart of a rose for sweetness,
The song of a bird for mirth,
I am nearer God's heart in my garden,
Than anywhere else on earth."