

The Bulletin



CHILDREN'S GARDENS

APRIL 1910.

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The Bulletin

Vol. III.

ROCHESTER, N. Y., APRIL, 1910.

No. 9.

VACANT LOT GARDENING

While vacant lot gardening is comparatively a new line of work yet during the fifteen years that it has been carried on in this country, it has shown that it plays a very important part in the betterment of the community in which it is operated and has proven that it is a much better method of benefiting those who are in need of mental, physical or material improvement than the dispersing of charity, as it is generally understood.

It was in the year 1894 in the City of Detroit, that vacant lot gardening received its start in this country by the efforts of the late Hon. Hazen S. Pingree, then Mayor of that city. At that time the country was passing through one of those periods of industrial depression, when thousands of the workers were idle and thousands were experiencing the lower depths of poverty. The regularly established organizations for giving relief were taxed to the utmost and many new efforts were being made to relieve the great distress, but they were all insufficient to meet the pressing needs. It was in this crisis that Mayor Pingree suggested that the idle land of Detroit be thrown open to the needy families in order that they might produce food for themselves thereon. It was decided to try the plan and that year some 430 acres were put under cultivation. Crops, consisting mainly of potatoes amounting to \$12,000.00 were raised by 975 families. The cost to the city was about \$3,600.00, thus the value of the crops amounted to \$10,000.00 more than the expenditure. This amount was produced by the hands of the needy ones from land in the city which had been going to waste.

The work was successfully carried on in Detroit during the next few years, with increasing numbers and benefits. Other cities followed, by establishing gardens on idle land, with successful results. In 1897 a committee was formed in Philadelphia to try the work. A few gardens were operated in that city with encouraging results, but by the close of that year the industries of the country had become more prosperous and large numbers of those who had been idle and in want were returning to work in their former or new occupations. In view of these conditions, the question was raised as to whether the work should be carried on any further, but in Philadelphia, it was decided to place the work on a more permanent basis. The committee in charge realized that at all times, in our large cities, there were a large number of people, who, from some mental, physical or other cause, were in need of aid or some opportunity for improvement beyond what their present condition afforded. They also found that the utilization of idle land was a very inexpensive method of offering additional opportunity to such people and was productive of very large results in the way of material, physical and mental benefits. The promoters of the work in Philadelphia were the late James T. Shinn, Joseph Fels, Dr. Thomas S. K. Morton and others, including R. F. Powell, who had been selected to superintend the work and who later brought the work into such prominence. A permanent organization was formed, known as The Philadelphia Vacant Lot

Cultivation Association. Since then, this association has carried on the work with increasing effectiveness.

The work is operated upon a well organized system, capable of being increased or decreased as the conditions of the community may require.

The work in Philadelphia has attracted wide attention in other localities and has inspired the organizing of similar work on permanent lines in a number of places both in this country and abroad. Among some of the places which have recently taken up the work after becoming familiar with Philadelphia's success, are Buffalo, Rochester, New York, Chicago, Ill., Bridgeport, Conn., Worcester, Mass., Reading and Coatesville, Penna., Long, England, and Belfast, Ireland. There are also prospects of starting the work in many other localities, even as far distant as South Africa.

Experience has shown many advantages in vacant lot garden work which are not found in any other known method tried for the purpose of uplifting the living conditions of people, especially among the poorer numbers. This work produces



VACANT LOT CULTIVATION
IN ROCHESTER

larger results for the amount it costs to operate it than any other line of work for social improvement, for the reason that the two main elements in the production of the results are found in the idle land, which for the present is going to waste, but which when turned into vacant lot gardens afford a great natural source of supply; and in the labor of the workers themselves, which labor would also be going to waste at these particular times or probably, in many cases, directed in lines where it would not only be wasted, but would also lead to bad habits and crime. Some of the families produce as high as \$200.00 on a quarter of an acre.

Another very practical point is that vacant lot gardening can be indulged in by nearly all classes of people. He or she must be very weak physically or mentally indeed, who cannot take up vacant lot gardening (starting in a small way, if necessary). Men as old as 86, women over 70, cripples, intemperate and other diseased patients have worked gardens successfully under my notice and many have been wonderfully benefitted both materially and physically, and I can hardly recall an in-

stance where some improvement was not apparent. The very aged persons do not find it hard to do the work, as they take their own time to it and can rest whenever they feel fatigued. The interest they take in their little work of actually producing for themselves at an age when they are supposed to be past their usefulness, creates a youthful and cheerful condition of mind, which helps to keep them healthy, as does also their leisurely work in the glorious fresh air.

The children, even as young as four and five years, join playfully with their parents in producing the crops, which the whole family are later to enjoy. Many an honest, humble working man's family would find their condition sinking farther and farther into poverty, if he did not have his garden to help out in addition to his daily work. Many such families, who do not have gardens, are going from this condition of bad to worse, especially in the last ten years, when our mercantile agencies have proved to us that living expenses have increased 60 per cent. However, with the aid of one-sixth or one-quarter of an acre of land, fertilized and cultivated, by the members of the family, large and small, the humble household can receive a large supply of food, which would take considerable of their money if it had to be bought, and can generally have some surplus of fresh vegetables to dispose of at good prices thus bringing in a little extra cash in addition, which often means that the little home can improve instead of deteriorating.

Vacant lot gardening affords a training in our country's greatest industry and has inspired many a dweller of crowded city streets to move countryward when an opportunity offers. Alas, such opportunities are far too few in these days. I would not insinuate that to educate in agricultural lines would now be sufficient to place at work on the land the numbers which should be there for the future good and prosperity of our people, for I fully realize that our present economic conditions very materially prevent large numbers of our people, especially those who are most in need of so doing, from getting "back to the land," but if we could instill into a large number of the rising generation an appreciation of the great value of rural life, they would quite likely see to it that the obstacles, which prevented them from receiving its great benefits, would be removed.

In every city there are needy people. They may be mentally or physically deficient, aged, widows, orphans or possibly ordinary workmen with families dependent upon them who on account of their small income and heavy expense of the necessities of life find themselves in a condition in which their humble home cannot be maintained in proper living conditions. To neglect any of these classes, not excepting the latter is to permit the breeding of a sort spot in our community from which springs crime and disease.

In every city there are tracts of unused land held as investments. Until this land is needed for other purposes, it is a natural opportunity for the needy ones to improve their condition by their own efforts without the evil effects of pauperizing them.

The Bulletin

ROCHESTER, N. Y.

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Editorial

With this issue we close Volume three of the Bulletin and also bring to a close our official connection with the Baden Street Social Settlement. The Directors of the Settlement, in the hope that the Bulletin may fill a wider field and be more useful to the city, have released it from their control to the Editors.

In the future the scope of the Bulletin will include all the Social, Civic and Industrial welfare of this city. We shall endeavor to print, each month, articles upon current and important themes by those of our city best able to contribute them.

As our subscription price is so small—only twenty-five cents a year—we hope that all our old subscribers will feel that they cannot afford to be without this medium in the interests of a better Rochester. We have under consideration a plan whereby the Bulletin will be the organ of all the Social, Industrial and Civic Improvement activities of this city, in which it may become, in a humble way, the "Survey" of Rochester, but of this and other things, there will be more said in our next issue. This next issue will in all probability be in September, when with new strength and purpose we hope to publish a paper worthy of your support.

To those of our readers whose subscription has not yet run out we would say that we will fulfill our obligations by sending you the new paper free of charge for a year.

The tenement house section of the new building code is rightly attracting much attention in this city. Rochester's ordinance will be the strictest in the country, being even an advance upon the New York law. It is natural to ask however, how long it will be the strictest. It is not so far in advance of the New York law that any day some other city will be able to do much better than Rochester. It seems to us a shame that the law is going to recognize tenements at all of the inhumane kind. While the law may not be able to prohibit the building of tenements, surely it could so rule their erection that their construction could be made to conform with humane living conditions! If we are to have a tenement law, why can we not have one that shall make the very word tenement sound homelike? There are features in the Rochester law, which are yet degrading—however much in advance they are of other cities. For example, a yard can be twelve feet square, and into this the children of eight families in the tenement can be turned to play. Is this not one of the best ways to turn the little ones wild? Rochester would honor herself more in the eyes of America, if she encouraged the erection of cheap cottage homes on the outskirts of our city, with one or two cent car fares every morning and evening back and forth. It seems to us much more

economical to foster some such proposals, than to erect even model tenements in our congested districts, which in time can hardly help becoming breeding places for tuberculosis and other diseases, producing unhealthy children, and adding to the burden of crime. We hope that the people of Rochester will attend the hearings of this commission, for the sake of our city of homes.

The short article by one of our contributors on the dumps of Rochester had already gone to press, when announcement was made that Commissioner Elwood hoped that by means of a bond issue the necessary funds for an incinerator would be found. The matter is one of such vital interest to the well being of this city that we have allowed the article to remain unchanged.

Much as we may desire a little land and a living, often as we may advocate the exodus of city dwellers to the country, necessary as it may be for the families of men to return to the soil every third generation, there is no doubt that the city has come to stay. Our problem is to bring the country to the city, to put a garden patch where there is now a backyard, a park where there is now a waste, a field of vegetables where there is now a vacant lot, a home for a song bird where now the scavenger dog roams.

It is to be hoped that the National Civic League for the Protection of Immigrants will soon be able to establish an office here. The new work that Miss Cross has undertaken should lead to this wider field. Within the last year and a half 2,161 immigrant women and girls have disappeared en route for Chicago from the different ports of entry. While a large number of these are undoubtedly safe with other friends, it is not easy to feel so of all. For example, two Polish girls booked from New York to Chicago failed to arrive. Inquiring from others who came on the same boat, it was discovered by an agent of the League that they had gone with a man from Rochester, who claimed to be looking out for them. It is found that the male immigrant suffers in one of three ways: he is overcharged for the service rendered, the work is not as reported in character, permanency or remuneration, and he fails to get the work, or the work lasts only a few days, leaving him at an enormous distance from the city market. It is surely to our interest to make America more friendly than this is to the stranger.

We echo the call from one of our evening papers that the streets of Rochester should be cleaned during the night. Through the business sections of the city the germ laden dust is made to rise not only by the traffic but by the cleaners during the day for hundreds to breathe, and while the city cares for tubercular patients with one hand, it is providing them with the other. The rule in many European cities and in some American cities is to have all the business streets clean before five o'clock in the morning, and a little thought on the part of our city authorities might soon give this necessary reform to Rochester.

THE WELFARE OF THE CITY

At 129 Frank Street, Miss Florence Cross is establishing a Bureau of Information and Protection for the Immigrant. The effort is an experiment, but the need is a very real one.

Nearly all the city reform movements in the West began through City Lunch Clubs. Rochester has had an inspiring club of this kind at the Powers Hotel for nearly a year, and now the women of Rochester have formed one for themselves at the Whitcomb House.

The purchaser of the Pinnacle Hill, Mr. T. A. Y. Hodgson, of Hazard, Pa., recently visited Mayor Edgerton, according to *The Pinnacle*, to discover if this city would protect his property rights in the event of disturbance when he begins to level the hill to the ground this spring!

The Front Street Playground is open again, enough money having been contributed to maintain it till July. Then the funds must again be raised if the little ones of that crowded district are to enjoy its freedom for the rest of the season.

The war on tuberculosis has been very ardent of late. Not only have our newspapers printed little "Tuberculosis Talk-lets," by various members of our medical fraternity, but our factories have provided audiences for more detailed expositions of the great white plague. According to the recent Albany Conference there is to be in this state "no uncare-for tuberculosis in 1915."

The National Conference of City Planning and Congestion will hold its next conference in Rochester, beginning May 2, and lasting over three days. The general subjects chosen are: The Problem of Congestion, Its Causes and some Solutions; The Movement of Passengers and Freight in Its Relation to City Planning; Street System Problems; and finally, Consideration of the Legal and Administrative Problems Involved in City Planning. The meetings are open to all.

DO WHAT FOR ROCHESTER?

1. Have all vacant lots and land held for speculation, under cultivation this spring.
2. Install a Refuse Disposal Plant, that rubbish and rottenness, filth and flies may no longer afflict us.
3. A law regulating or abolishing the uglification of our city by bill boards.
4. A move on the part of all storekeepers against the exposure of food to our germ and dirt laden air.
5. An individual loyalty to the Public Health Association in its effort to care for and abolish tuberculosis.
6. A protest from all citizens against the sewage of our city being turned into our lake.
7. A protest from all citizens against tenements being recognized in the law of our city.
8. A definite interest and support of present city schemes to provide good and cheap housing for the poor.
9. Add your influence to one more attempt to save the Pinnacle Hill
10. Begin to do all now, and think of something else.



A ROCHESTER DUMP

THE EVIL OF THE DUMP

It is a matter of sincere and sorrowful regret to every informed, right-minded citizen of Rochester that the Board of Estimate and the Common Council have not made provision for a refuse disposal plant in the estimate for the year's expenses.

The Commissioner of Public Works in a published report to the Mayor declared that the present method in use in Rochester of dumping the refuse of the city upon vacant land was wasteful, unscientific and unsanitary. In that opinion every right-minded citizen will agree. It is incomprehensible to the outsider that the Board of Estimate and the Common Council should have so utterly ignored the report of the Commissioner. In his message of a year ago the Mayor called attention to the urgent need of such a disposal plant. This year he says nothing about it. What powers hold in abeyance so proper a provision for the well being of the city? Is it that Rochester is too poor to provide for its own decency and healthfulness? It had better leave much else undone and do this needful thing. It will cost about seventy thousand dollars to install a proper refuse disposal plant. Can it be that Rochester cannot find so small a sum for so necessary a purpose?

Their attention has been called to this matter in a way that they cannot ignore. The Health Department inspected the foul dump on Hudson Avenue, pronounced it a nuisance and issued an order for its abatement. The Commissioner of Public Safety had his attention called to the danger of fire arising from the condition of that dump and promised to give it his immediate care. The Common Council was petitioned and its attention called to the fact. Yet in the face of all this, the dumping is to go on in the future as it has in the past. The land of Rochester is to be defiled with the filthy infected outpouring of every garret, cellar and kitchen in the city. The poorer citizens of the city are to have their homes made unsightly and unsanitary by these rubbish heaps. They are to be in the future, as they have been in the past, breeding places for flies that

invade the houses and defile the food of the people. We hope that the explanation of this negligence on the part of the city administration is really equal to this most serious condition, and that some means may be taken soon to alter it. The city cannot afford to be so filthy and such a menace to the health and safety of its people.

SCHOOL GARDENS OF PHILADELPHIA

In Philadelphia we divide our school garden work into five phases; the supplying of schools with nature material, kindergarten gardens, home gardens, improvement of school yards and school gardens proper.

The supplying of the schools with nature material is one of the means of connecting schools and the school gardens. Postals are sent out which read thus: "Principals desiring specimens of seeds, plants, flowers and vegetables for drawing, for nature study and for kindergarten work should apply to the principal of the nearest school garden, who will fill orders according to the service and supply of the gardens. Requests must be sent in at least two days in advance, stating the number and kind of specimens desired, and the grades in which the materials are to be used. Principals should name a choice of specimens, that others may be substituted in case of shortage. Teachers are always welcome to visit the gardens and secure specimens for themselves."

It would usually be impossible for any fresh material to ever reach some of the class rooms in the crowded sections of the city, for the hours of the teachers are so long that by the time school is over it is too late for them to reach the country. The flowers, leaves and fruit go into the class rooms from the gardens and each child has his own specimen from which to draw. When in the language or geography work the lesson is on cotton, flax, hemp, or peanuts, there is the entire plant fresh from the garden.

The little kindergarteners string our seeds and arrange them in borders; the high school students use our flowers in the botanical laboratory; the Normal school girls observe in our gardens, so we thus directly correlate with every grade in our public school system from the kindergarten to the senior class of the Normal school. In this way this season we supplied 937 classes. A few of the definite results of this work may be seen in our exhibit.

Kindergarten gardens are a new phase of our work this year. Early in the Spring, return postals were sent to each kindergarten teacher in the city, asking her if there were a few feet of unpaved space in the schoolyard and if so, would she undertake making a garden, under the supervision of and with the aid of the

school gardening department. When the replies came in, some of the teachers who had not an inch of ground, wished to know how permission could be secured to take up bricks or break asphalt. As the idea to have these gardens came very late, we did not accomplish all that we wished, but we did succeed in opening twenty-nine gardens, for the little kindergarten children and those gardens varied in size 2x10 to 4x50 ft. As far as possible, the planting was arranged so that by June each child in the kindergarten proudly carried home a few radishes raised from seed which he himself had planted.

In some cases where there was no space in the schoolyard, a nearby neighbor offered a piece of ground. In the Fall when these little ones returned, the tiny gardens were abloom with red and yellow flowers, the very kinds needed for their Fall work. In this way, many unsightly spots in school yards were transformed into gardens.

In these days, we hear so much about uniting the home and the school, and nothing will more effectively do this than the home garden. This year, we have systematically taken up a home gardening campaign.

The children were given government seeds, and those donated by some interested friends. They were told how to prepare the soil, to plan the garden, to plant it. In every way, we endeavored to encourage them to begin a garden. In the tenement districts where there was not an inch of soil, they were told to paint soap boxes; 1793 gardens have been made this year by the children and 893 were systematically visited by the two garden teachers, each one being visited from two to four times. In former years, the children were told to begin these gardens, but no attempt was made to supervise them, and from our experience this year, I firmly believe that the usefulness of these home gardens is increased ninety per cent. by personal visits of a teacher. Although we feared the parents might consider the visits an intrusion, we find that both children and mothers seem to consider it an honor to them and often in the very poorest homes the teacher was asked to stop for a cup of tea.

An accurate condition of these gardens is kept by a fixed form of card. Let me tell you about a few gardens which represent general conditions. The other day, I went to visit a large school garden and a little girl ran up to me and asked me to visit her home garden. I found back of an alley, a small house of four rooms in which two large families were living. In vain, did I look for a bit of ground. On a tiny flat at the back of the house, we came to this little garden. Jennie had no watering can, so after carrying water from the yard to the second floor she poured it on her garden from a pitcher. The force of the water washed the seeds to the sur-

face, so she invented another plan; she hammered holes with a rusty nail in an old tin can, and then with the second can, poured the water through these holes.

In another instance, the ground had never been broken, it was just hard yellow clay sixteen by twelve feet, over which endless numbers of people had walked. A girl of thirteen tried to spade it, but the spade could not break more than half an inch of soil; after making a canvass of the neighborhood, she borrowed an axe and with no outside aid, picked that entire yard. Then in a baby coach, for twelve squares, she carried sod, which she had cut herself and sodded the yard. The two fences, she covered with vines, and on the two sides made flower borders. In the center she made a circular bed. This little yard is a paradise. When the garden teacher visited this home and praised the garden, the mother said, "Oh, she wastes too much time on it; she could be making seventy-five cents dishwashing in this time."

But it is not only in the poor homes that we encourage gardening. In many of the middle class homes there are yards but no gardens and it takes hard and careful work to convert a yard into a garden. Boys and girls in these homes who beautify their yards receive just as much encouragement and systematic help as do the children of the slums.

Another phase of the work which we have begun but which we wish to extend, is the improvement of school yards. As far as our funds have permitted, we have placed bulbs and perennials. Much can be done in this way to improve the unsightly surroundings of our schools.

And now for the school gardens proper of which we had eight. Any lot which is within four blocks of a public school, and of which we can secure the use, we take. The first thing, of course, to be done is to clean it of rubbish and then after the Vacant Lot Cultivation Association of Philadelphia has plowed and harrowed it for us, we lay it out. In measuring it out, come practical arithmetic for the boys and girls. A garden is divided into plots, class, individual and experimental. The class plot belongs to the class as a unit. The children of the Kindergarten and primary grades who are too young to intelligently do much garden work, hold this plot collectively. In the Spring and Fall, the class comes to the garden during school hours and receives a lesson in nature study and then does the actual work, planting the tiny seeds, hoeing the ground, and carefully watching the plants. When, at last, the crop matures it is divided among the little ones. This grade teacher comes with the class but the garden teacher conducts the lesson in the garden. When the class returns to the schoolroom, the teacher, if she is interested, then correlates her regular work with the garden work.

The individual plots belong to the large children, whose ages are from nine to sixteen years. In school months, they come to the garden after school hours, but in the summer months they come for two hours three days a week. Each child has a plot eight by ten feet, which is entirely his own. The owner does all the work connected with his own plot, making the paths and the furrows, planting the seeds, thinning, hoeing, weeding, transplanting and finally reaping the reward of his labors in the finest beets and radishes he ever ate. Everything which the plot produces belongs to its owners, and after crops begin to mature, the children trudge home with baskets of beets, parsley, tomatoes, lettuce, peas, peppers and carrots. In gardens where three or four were from one family, enough produce came on their plot to supply with vegetables with the exception of potatoes all summer.

This plot is often the only thing in the world which belongs exclusively to the child, for in the poor districts, even his clothes are held in partnership with his brother. The plot gives the boy the feeling of a landed proprietor. A boy in one of our gardens comes from a home where there is one of the largest and most beautiful private gardens in West Philadelphia. I questioned him for his reason in coming to the school gardens when there was so much ground at home. His answer was, "That's ours, this is mine." The little plot eight by ten belonging to him gave him much more feeling of individual ownership than the large garden at home. This tiny piece of property teaches independence and self-reliance, each child being dependent upon himself in a garden for the results of his labors. He knows how he feels if anyone infringes on his property and he refrains from touching another's. Besides these plots which are held by individuals, there are also experimental plots; in some of these the plants are arranged in groups according to families; in others, plants unsuitable for growth in the individual plots on account of size, such as wheat, rye, oats, barley, and unfamiliar plants as peanuts, hemp, cotton, and flax are grown.

Now let us spend a summer's day in the garden. The class comes into the arbor and receives its nature study lesson, and these lessons follow a regular course, and are based on plant life, injurious and beneficial insects, and elementary agriculture. These lessons are full of life and spirit. Each child takes an active part in the simple experiments, and is taught to observe, to watch what in natural sequence must happen. Each child goes to his plot and does the work. After the work on his own plot is finished, all must help with the borders, sample plots and general work. And as Dr. Brumbaugh, Supt., of the Philadelphia schools recently said: "One of the most important things to teach the future citizens of a democracy is co-operation, not competition."

The arbor must sometimes be mended; ditches must be made, trellises are very necessary, baskets of flowers must be arranged for the poor sick children in the hospitals. But at last all the day's work is over and it is time to go home with crops. All rubbish has been placed in the paths and by a rapid raking drill all this is cleared away and collected.

Gardens appeal to the big as well as to the little. A boy of eighteen in the senior year of the High School who has held his plot for the last five years, was one of our best enthusiastic workers.

We have also a garden connected with the school for incorrigible and feeble-minded boys. In this garden was a boy who was an incorrigible truant,—the boy was clever when in school, but that was very seldom. Every inducement which his teacher knew was used to attract him to school, but all was useless. Even truant officers failed to keep Andrew in school. Then a garden was connected with the school. The first day, Andrew, from the other side of the fence, watched us make paths and scoffed at the boys; the second day, he volunteered "to help on the job," the next day he was there and for six months the garden was open, and Andrew never was absent a single day and whenever he could, he stayed overtime,—so thus, the garden proved a cure for the truancy of the fifteen year old boy.

At the end of each season, comes harvest home; on this day the children are the hosts, their parents and friends the guests and it's a very jolly time.

After seeing now, what school gardens mean, it is unnecessary to show their physical, economic, aesthetic, educational and ethical value and as a last word, this little fellow would like to say with Dr. Eliot of Harvard, "There is no more efficient agency for the attainment of high ideals in education than school garden work."

The officers of the Social Settlement for the current year are as follows:

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A Rochester Prayer



FOR all the love and virtue in the homes of our city, for the green of our parks and the flowers within them, for the trees along our streets and the bird-songs above them, for the banks and waterfalls of our lovely Genesee, we lift our hearts. For the loyalty and friendliness of our people, for the helpfulness and guidance of our good, the spirit of wakefulness and eager aspiration of all, we render hearty thanks, but for our vision of the Rochester that is to be, we are thankful most of all.

May there be a growing righteousness in the administration of all our affairs, a growing honesty in all our commercial relations, a growing desire in the minds of all that justice and equal opportunity shall be the portion of all our citizens. Let our hands be merciful to all who wrong us, our purpose earnest against all wrong. Let the spirit of our comradeship be widened and deepened that together we may labor for justice, prosperity and beauty in our midst.

Bless the boys and girls of Rochester that disciplined and undisheartened, healthily and merrily they may lay in store the power that shall one day lift our city to the democracy of our vision. Amen.

E. A. R.