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WESTMOUNT: A MUNICIPAL ILLUSTRATION

BY W. D. LIGHTHALL

The town of Westmount adjoins the upper levels of Montreal on the west, and forms a residential district with an area of about 905 acres or $1\frac{2}{5}$ square miles. It is practically the only suburb of Montreal with a mountain or hillside situation. The municipalities surrounding it, by way of contrast, are to all intents parts of the vast plain of the St. Lawrence valley. The growth of the principal English residential section of Montreal has also taken place in the direction of Westmount, and has contributed to render the town the favourite suburb for the English-speaking population. At the same time the extravagance which for some years distinguished the municipal government of Montreal drove many to seek relief outside from excessive taxation and other objectionable conditions within the city. Montreal, in fact, is encircled by a number of municipalities which have preferred to remain outside its sphere although their borders are contiguous with it, and their populations large. Among these suburban municipalities are the cities of St. Henri and Ste. Cunegonde, both immediately below Westmount, with populations of some 22,000 and 11,000 respectively.¹

The steady growth of taxable property and population in Westmount since its incorporation in 1890 is shown by the following statement:

<i>Year.</i>	<i>Assessed Value of Taxable Property.</i>	<i>Population.</i>	<i>Assessment per Head.</i>
1890	\$ 4,141,810	1,850	\$2,239
1893	5,716,835	3,033	1,884
1896	7,682,875	4,885	1,574
1899	9,968,310	7,716	1,291
1900	10,498,620	8,501	1,235
1901 (May)	11,527,300	9,256	1,246
1901 (December)	—————	About 10,000	—————

¹The population of Montreal's various suburbs is as follows: Verdun 2,000, St. Henri 21,299, Ste. Cunegonde 11,000, Town of St. Paul 1,850, Côte St. Luke 400, Côte des Neiges Town 1,185, Town of Outemont 1,200, Town of St. Louis 10,000, Town of DeLorimier 500, Villeray 300, Maisonneuve 4,000, Longue Pointe 1,400, Westmount now about 10,000; altogether about 65,000.

In course of time a very considerable population is inevitable. The rate of growth will undoubtedly rise with increased pressure from within Montreal. The high valuation per head will immediately strike the student of municipal affairs. As this assessment excludes an unusually large proportion of exempted property belonging to Roman Catholic bodies, it may be said that Westmount contains three or four times the property value per head of the average city of Canada.² This fact suggests the standing of the population, which is that of a class of people comfortably provided for.

The population has always been disposed to facilitate improvements. It has accordingly been much easier to secure good government here than in places where the forces making for advance have had to contend with masses with less education and less business experience. The people have elected to the council a succession of business men, and given them a free hand. As a result, the services of the municipality have been developed on sound general principles. One of the former mayors is the legislative councillor for the English district of Montreal, Victoria; another is the present member of the legislature for the west division of the city; a third is a former president of the Montreal Board of Trade; and a fourth, who has been for a number of years chairman of finance of the town, was long treasurer of the Montreal Board of Trade, is now its vice-president, and is the sole nominee for its next president.

The number in the council at present is eight, two representing each of the four wards. They are elected for two years, one councillor in each ward retiring annually. Down to 1894 there were three councillors for each ward. The reduction to two has facilitated the despatch of business, but has made affairs more open to accidents of absence on the part of the councillors.

Pure water was one of the first necessities of the town. In 1887 a private company was formed to furnish a supply. In March, 1891, this company was bought out by the present Montreal Water & Power Co., which supplies most of the municipalities encircling Montreal. The new company entered at once into a

²The *per caput* assessment of the cities of Ontario for 1897, according to the report of the Bureau of Industries, was \$559.

contract with the town under which it supplies water at 40 per cent. of the rates charged in Montreal. Certain additions however make the cost of water to the average house about 57 per cent. of that of the city of Montreal.³ This rate is not low; but the town site is high and far from the intake. The contract was the wisest the municipality could have negotiated at the time. All the streets are supplied with pipes and hydrants wherever required. The revenue of the company from the town amounts to about \$30,000. Filtration is now being studied.

In 1892 an important step was made by a loop-line extension of the Montreal Street Railway through the lower half of the town. The service at once stimulated local growth. The contract was for thirty years, co-terminous with that of Montreal and on much the same conditions. The fares are five cents or six tickets for 25 cents, 25 for \$1.00; and cheaper tickets 8 for 25 cents, good on week days between the hours of 6 and 8 a.m., 5 and 7 p.m. An unfortunate clause in the contract, which the council then considered itself forced to accept, practically gave the company the power to prevent any rival from laying a line in the upper half of the town while not compelling the company itself to build one there. The inconveniences resulting from this clause, however, are expected to be removed shortly by the building of a branch line now projected by the company. The contract provided for a five-minute service but the town reserved to itself the right to order a more frequent one. The service has in practice been better than contracted for.

The gas, electric and telephone companies of Montreal afford complete services in their lines to all parts of Westmount, and there are three postal deliveries per day. The street lighting is done by contract through open arc lights of nominal 2,000 candle power, costing \$90 per year. A five years' renewal contract has just come into force, at the end of which a municipal plant will probably be erected.⁴

³In Westmount, to a house paying \$250 a year rent, the cost of water is about \$13.50. This includes the proprietor's share of \$8,500 paid to the company by the municipality as hydrant rentals (\$50 per year on 170 hydrants).

⁴By way of contrast it may be mentioned that the price of Montreal's electric lighting under the old contract for that city, which has still two years to run, is \$118. The new contract is for five years at \$60. Both contracts are now averaged at \$88 for the next four years, \$60 for three years thereafter with

Important work has been done in providing the town with a well-considered and well-equipped system of roads. Almost the whole of the town is now opened up, the chief part of the streets being macadamized in a very perfect manner. Through the desire to keep the rate of taxation low, no asphalt or other expensive pavements have been laid, although these are being contemplated in some of the older completed sections. The splendid condition of the roads, due to an efficient Road Department, is constantly remarked upon, in comparison with the badly-kept streets of Montreal. The extent of streets is about twenty-two miles, of which eighteen and a half are macadam. The usual width of macadam is twenty-five to forty feet, the usual breadth of streets fifty to seventy-five feet, ordinarily sixty-six feet. The foot-pavements up to the present have been of wood, at the expense of the municipality; but although kept well repaired and renewed it is now conceded that wooden footways will have to be replaced, in the fully developed portions of the town, by granolithic or other pavement of a permanent character. Attention is paid to the laying of grass strips or boulevards for the better appearance of the streets. The annual expenditure on roads is about \$11,600.

One of the services most conspicuous in the Road Department is the snow-cleaning of the pavements. For this special work several pieces of machinery have been invented by Mr. G. A. Robertson, the Superintendent of Works. By means of these not only are the road beds kept beautifully ploughed but every footway is cleaned after a storm in time for business men to pass with comfort to their occupations and without special charge. This offers a great contrast to the inefficient system of private cleaning under the Montreal by-laws. The larger city is now copying the Westmount method successfully.

A system of building lines or restrictions compelling erection of houses at certain distances from the street will influence advantageously, as present results indicate, the future appearance of the town, and increase the value of its property. In the upper or hillside half, a by-law, passed upon authority of the

special conditions favouring monopoly; and as the contract permits the company to substitute alternating current, which is much cheaper, the price is really not a low one.

legislature, forbids the erection of rows of houses. This necessitates the building of villas detached or semi-detached. Another by-law regulates the space surrounding a building, to prevent the construction of closely-built flats and tenements.

The parks of Westmount cover twenty-six and a quarter acres. The principal park of sixteen acres lies in the centre of the town. It is pleasantly wooded with a portion of the original forest and is traversed by a picturesque glen. Here are built the library and public hall. There are three small parks on the east, west and front of the mountain, and one small square of about an acre midway between the principal park and the eastern boundary. But twenty-six acres and a quarter are recognized by experts and those interested in Westmount's future to be far too little. It is desirable that while spaces are open and prices of land reasonable the town should show its confidence in the future that awaits it by obtaining still ampler recreation grounds for its present and forthcoming population. The total cost of parks has been \$290,000, which represents a most satisfactory investment.

Besides the parks and play-grounds liberally laid out, a special municipal building called Victoria Hall was opened in 1899. It contains a beautiful public hall, a gymnasium, a drill hall, assembly rooms and other accommodation intended to supply as far as possible the equivalent of park advantages during the summer. Public skating-rinks and an open air bath in the glen are additional features. These measures have been successful in keeping the young people in good surroundings and away from questionable attractions. In this connection it may be stated that the town prohibits saloons entirely and no liquors are sold within its borders.

The public health is a remarkable item. The death rate for 1901 is 10.5 per thousand; in 1900 it was 10.7.⁵ These figures are all the more surprising when it is considered that the population is practically an urban one and the proportion of young children, judging from the school returns, large. The scavenging is well and promptly attended to, and the spring cleaning

⁵For Ontario and Quebec, by way of contrast, the death rates for 1900 were respectively 12.6 and 19.92, for Montreal 23.04, city of Quebec 23.40, St. Henri 30.4, Ste. Cunegonde 23, Toronto 17.5.

usually takes place about a month earlier than in Montreal. Incineration has been fully discussed. It was tried by contract for six months, but for the present proved too expensive to be continued. A contagious diseases hospital has been decided upon and plans have been considered which are intended to go into operation next summer.

The intellectual recreation of the people has not been overlooked. A beautiful public library was opened in 1899 in the park, the first municipal public library in the province of Quebec. Its reading rooms are public, but the borrowing of books is restricted to families of certified taxpayers. The number of books now amounts to about 3,050, the certified readers about 2,100. The library appropriation this year is \$1,800. The cost of the building was provided for in an unusual way: the money is the deposit forfeited by a projected gas company that undertook great things for the town but afterwards amalgamated with the Montreal Gas Company before fulfilling its obligations. The library may therefore be said to be a windfall to the town and a monument to the prudence of the council of that year.

A word as to the financial administration. The financial department was reorganized in January, 1894. It has been the general aim to keep the taxes at not more than half those of the city of Montreal. But it should further be borne in mind that the rate of valuation in Westmount is only about two-thirds of that of Montreal; consequently the ordinary tax rate is really only about one-third. The treatment of special taxes for drainage and street improvements is different in the two places and makes an apparent difference in the tax bills. In Montreal the special taxes are exacted in a lump sum in cash, with sometimes disastrous results to the proprietor. In Westmount the specials are extended over long periods, the original cost being advanced for proprietors out of bonds of the town.⁶ Personally I consider the periods much too long. They result to a large degree in assisting speculators rather than proprietors. The worst feature is the swelling of the debt by the advances, and the tendency of spec-

⁶In Montreal the tax rate is one per cent. on full selling value, schools $2\frac{1}{2}$ mills; in Ste. Cunegonde one per cent. on very high valuation—higher than selling value. This does not include school rate and drains which are payable in full in cash. In St. Henri the rate is the same as in Ste. Cunegonde. In Westmount it is $6\frac{1}{2}$ mills on a two-thirds average valuation.

ulators to throw upon their purchasers the burden of the specials, and also to undertake the opening up of too much new property on the strength of costly improvements.

The cost of sewers is charged to fronting proprietors. Payments are spread over forty years at the rate of $4\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. for interest and 1 per cent. for sinking fund. The town's share for the cross-section of sewers and roads, and exemptions in front of lanes and public property, is levied upon the whole town in forty annual payments at the same rates. Another forty-year tax is for general purposes, $3\frac{1}{2}$ mills on land values. The cost of macadamizing streets is charged to fronting proprietors covering a term of fourteen annual payments, being at the rate of $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. sinking fund. Proprietors, however, have the option at any time of commuting the capital cost of street sewers and macadamizing of roads. The school rate is $3\frac{1}{4}$ mills. The borrowing power is 15 per cent., or about \$1,600,000; the gross liabilities are about \$1,300,000, of which about one-half (\$640,000) has been advanced for proprietors and is thus not properly an indebtedness of the town. The real indebtedness is therefore about \$660,000, nearly \$300,000 of which has been for parks, the remainder for public works and buildings. The ordinary revenue at $6\frac{1}{2}$ mills is about \$70,000.⁷

The police and fire forces, which are combined, consist of ten men. The scavenging department is under the same head and employs five men.

The people of the town, as well as the council, have watched jealously their rights as a municipality, for in some respects Westmount has been the centre of opposition to encroaching corporations. Last spring a considerable agitation originated here and succeeded in arousing the attention of the people of Montreal and other municipalities against the excessive privileges of the Montreal Light, Heat & Power Co. This company

⁷The receipts and expenditures for the year ending October 31st, 1901, are :

Receipts.	Expenditures.
Ordinary Revenue.....\$69,831.98	Administration Acct.....\$66,379.53
Special Assessments... 51,048.35	Interest on Debentures..... 44,985.00
Sundries..... 1,568.12	Roads..... 12,454.86
Interest Account..... 809.42	Drainage..... 5,909.39
	Sundries..... 3,536.56

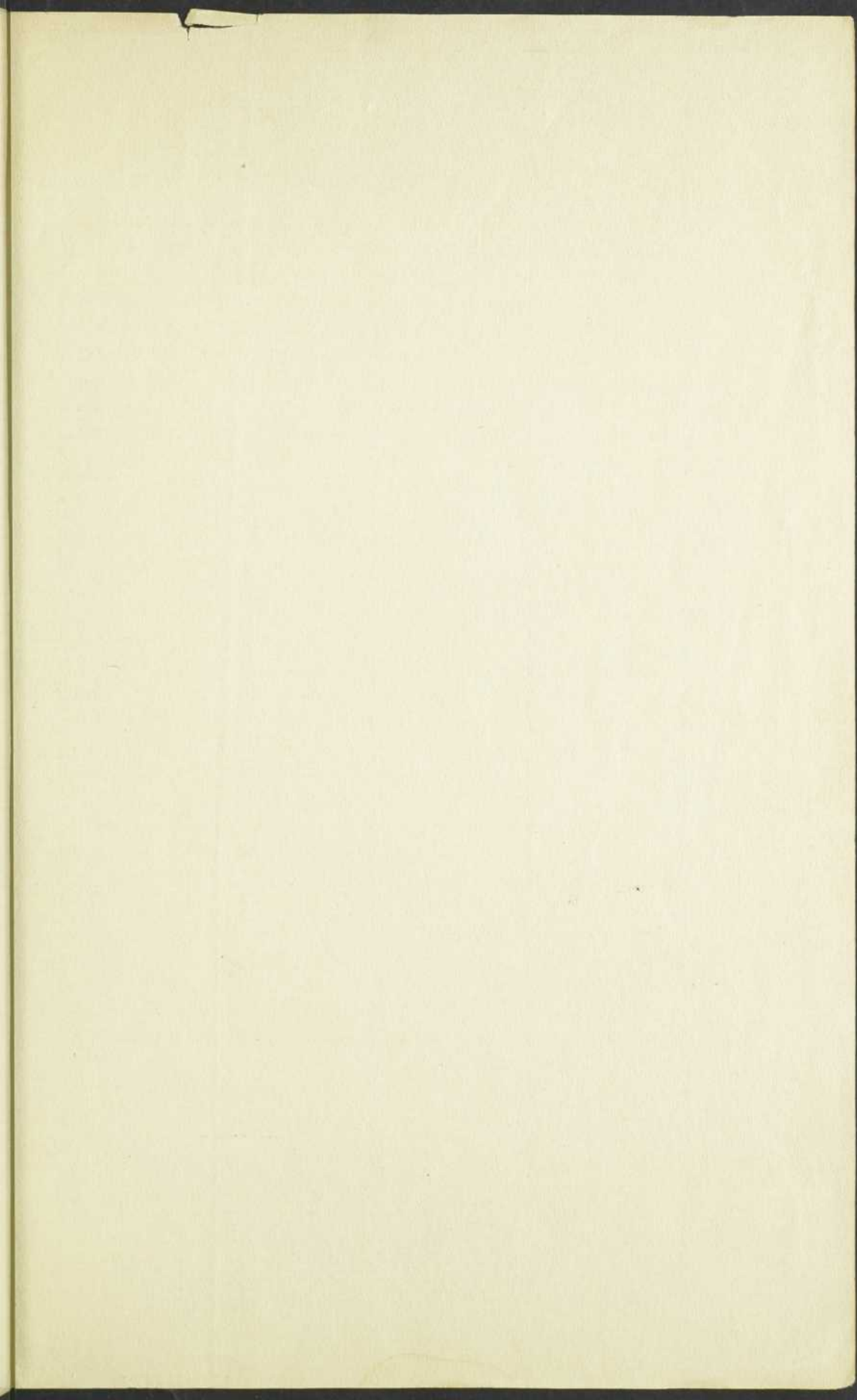
A portion of Roads and Drainage expenditures are on capital account. The School Commissioners now collect their $3\frac{1}{2}$ mills separately.

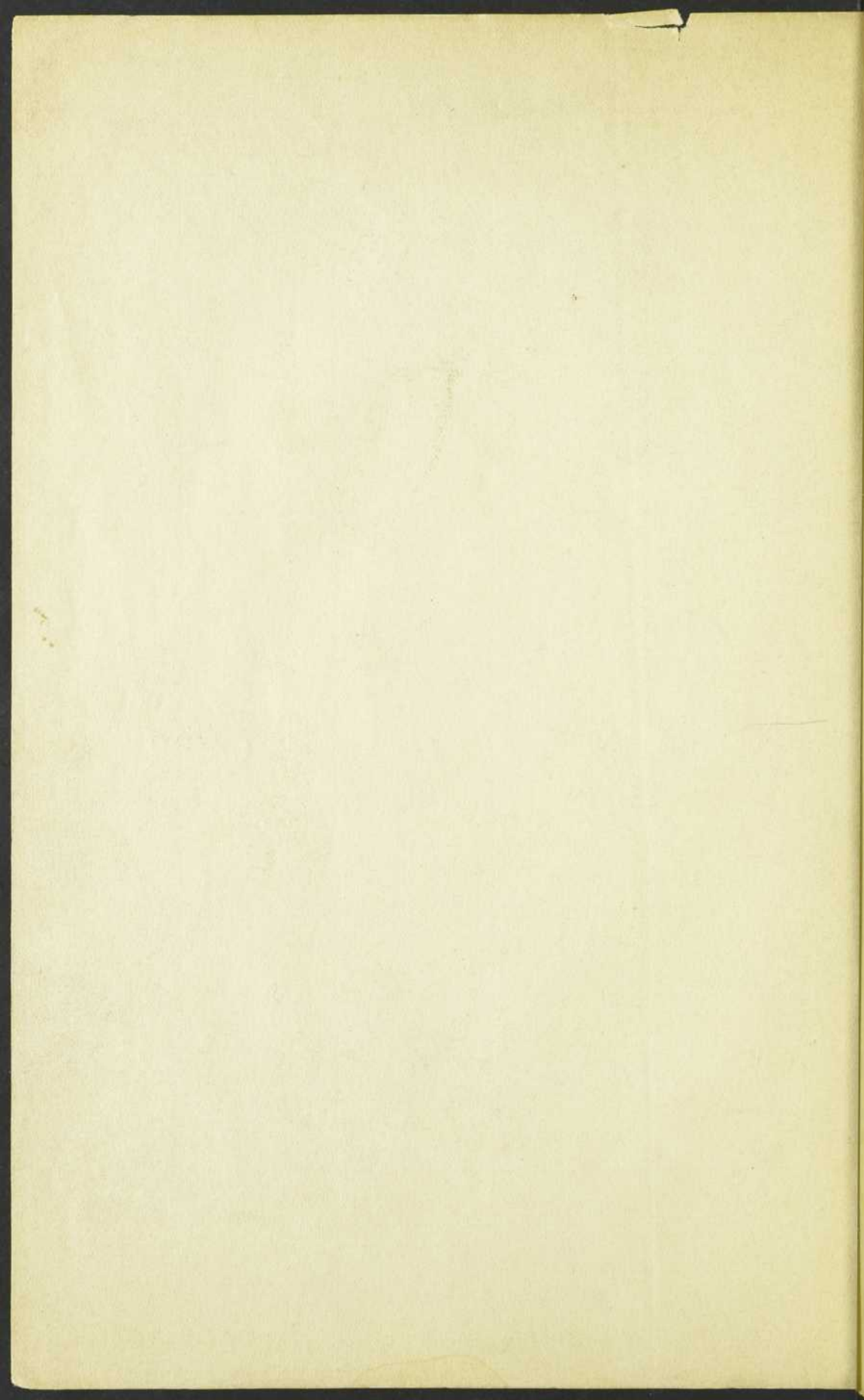
SAMUEL SULLIVAN

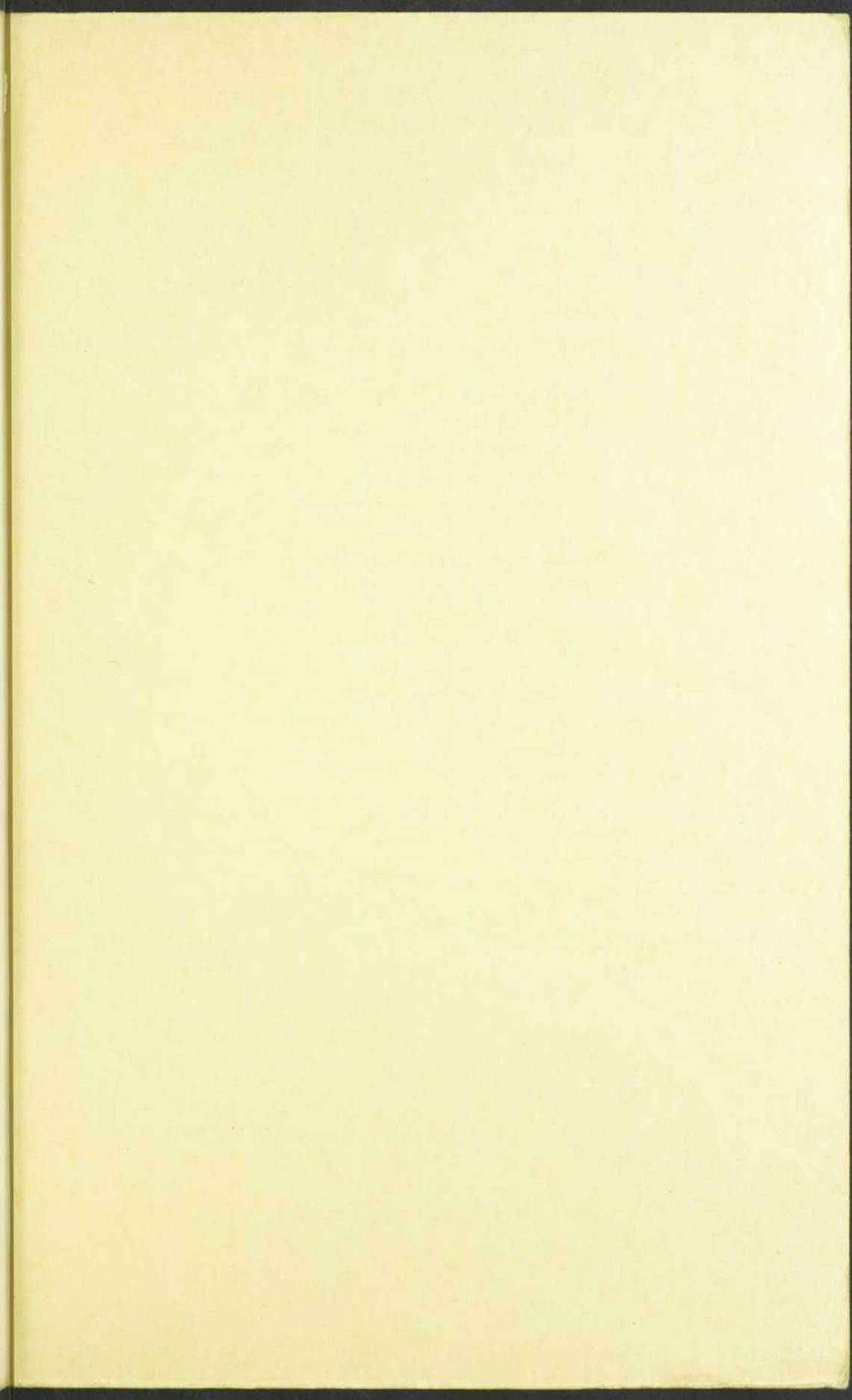
obtained the passage of a bill through the provincial legislature handing over to it, without consent of the municipalities concerned, the most extreme rights of erecting poles and laying conduits *in all the streets of all the municipalities within one hundred miles radius of the city of Montreal*. Westmount, by vigorous action, though too late to prevent the signing of the bill, obtained a formal promise from the Premier to repeal it at the forthcoming meeting of the legislature, and has received ample assurance of support from other municipalities in the demand which will then be made for the fulfilment of that promise. Nor will the people rest until this and similar encroachments upon their rights as citizens have been done away with. They feel that in this matter they are fighting the battle of citizens for the whole Dominion. It was with this battle in mind that the present mayor proposed to his friend, the mayor of Toronto, the forming of the Union of Canadian Municipalities, to which that gentleman, whose sympathies were already aroused on somewhat analogous lines, so cordially responded in the convention convened by him in Toronto in August, 1901. Another question which has sometimes been raised in Westmount is the fear that the legislature may unite the town with Montreal. But he would be a rash politician who would venture to obliterate the liberties of a British city against its will.

Many improvements are contemplated in the immediate future of the city, as it is now about to be called. With its shrewd and well-disposed population and reliable officials it may be expected to continue in the future the progress which it has made up to the present. It has been frequently called a "model town"; but that term can only be relative. The use of such a phrase will but lead the true friend of its administration to look more critically at its imperfections with a view to its improvement. If Westmount deserves praise, so do many other well-governed towns throughout the Dominion, each possessing advantages from which all the rest can learn something.

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