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From The Hilltop

A COLUMN OF VIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS

(By F. J. Picking)

Remember that special letter you
sat down to write not so long ago?

You knew what you wanted to say
but, oh, how hard it was to get going.
After the first few words, however,
your ideas started to crystallize and
after that it wasn't such hard sled-
ding.

Believe it or not, many and many
a writer with years of experience has
found himself in the same predicament.
That first sheet of copy paper
in the typewriter is apt to retain its
virgin freshness for a long time.

This writer might just as well con-
fess right at the beginning that he
has been suffering the pangs of liter-
ary child-birth for the last hour or
so. Invited by Editor J. E. Smith,
M.P., of the Liberal to contribute a
weekly column to the paper, he has
been wondering where to start.

"Don't put J. V. McAree of the
Globe and Mail out of business," said
Editor Smith, with his tongue in his
cheek. Not much fear of displacing
the famous "J.V." from his high
place in Canadian journalism. But,
week by week, this columnist will
endeavour to review the local scene
with, at times, a venture into wider
fields.

So, with that introductory bow to
our readers, we go on to the job.

Wherever you may be going you
have to start from home. And, in
the case of this first column, espe-
cially at the start of a new year,
"home" seems a particularly appro-
priate subject.

In this case the word home is used
in its broad sense, to include Rich-
mond Hill and its environs.
"The old order changeth, yielding
place to new," said Tennyson in one
of his most famous poems.

And in very few places is the old
order changing as rapidly as it is in
this district north of Toronto — this
district which we call "home."

Strangely enough, there appears to
be a general unawareness of the mag-
nitude of the change and of its im-
plications. "There's quite a lot of
building going on," is a common ob-
servation. "Good building lots are
becoming hard to get," a man will
tell you. "Did you see the big fig-
ures for building permits in North
York last year?" another will ask.
But by and large the questions and
comments are casual and bear little
indication of any study of cause and
effect.

The cause is not hard to find. Un-
less they dump a lot more tin cans
and garbage in the harbour Toronto
isn't going to go much further south
until they start putting the buildings
on stilts. East and west, the big city
seems to have reached reasonable lim-
its in its expansion. Only the north
— the long neglected north — is left
and today that north is coming into
its own.

What is the effect? Let's answer
that by stating that this writer told
a group of scoffing friends a couple
of years ago that it was only a matter
of a short time before the city crept
up to Richmond Hill. "Not in your
lifetime," they said. Yet today they
can stand on the very spot where
they did their doubting and, a short
distance north of the Hill, a few
yards from Yonge Street count five
new houses almost within the prover-
bial stone's throw.

All through the district the same
situation exists. The casual, unob-
servant traveller up Yonge Street
notes some changes. Sure, quite a
few new houses have gone up along
the Street. True, stores in Thorn-
hill, Richmond Hill, have had their
faces lifted. Ask him about Willow-
dale, Lansing, and he will tell you
"Oh, yes, you should see the way new
buildings are going up along there."
But, with his foot hard down on the
accelerator, he fails to take time to
notice the building going on along
our side roads. Joined with him are
more than a few of our own citizens
who do not see what is going on un-
der their own eyes.

In plain words, something big is
happening. An enormous transition
is taking place. Country is giving
way to city, rapidly, inexorably. Like
it or not, the big city is spilling over
and, in the way of all big cities, is
finding living space outside its limits
for its inhabitants.

The signs are there for those who
will read them. Building activities,
traffic, business growth, all add their
evidence. Sure, there's what is known
as the "five o'clock rush" in the city.
But how many people will believe
that it exists right in our own com-
munity, that the waves of rush hour
traffic roll right into our own area?
Stand on Yonge Street, north or
south of Richmond Hill, before and
after city business hours, and watch
the increased density of traffic if you
need the answer. It isn't incidental
traffic at all, but the mass movement
of those who, working in the city, are
today in rapidly increasing numbers,
making their homes in this area.

Where population goes, there busi-
ness follows. Take chain stores, for
example. They are not in the habit
of making too many costly mistakes
in locations. When you see — as

you can today — big signs in vacant
fields on Avenue Road, Bathurst and
other streets announcing the future
construction of large stores your bet
that population is spreading in this
direction is backed by the opinion of
experts.

Drive out of Toronto at night. As
you reach the crest of the slope down
into Thornhill look over the valley.
See the hundreds on hundreds of
twinkling lights filling the space
where, as this writer remembers it
three decades ago, only the occasional
house stood.

Yes, the indications are there for
those who will see. Whether the
change is desirable or not is an open
question. That it brings new prob-
lems is unquestionable. But that it
is inevitable is plain for those who
read the signs which today are so ob-
vious.

To some the transition spells op-
portunity — to some regret over the
passing of the "good old days." Will
a lovely countryside — one of the
most beautiful pieces of rural Ontar-
io — suffer as a city creeps into its
fields and byways? Will the busi-
ness opportunities and growth of man-
made values compensate for the loss
of natural values? Those are ques-
tions which only time can answer.

Whatever those answers may be
one fact is certain — and that is that
new problems and responsibilities
face our local governing bodies. Take
roads alone. It is no secret — and
this is not written in a sense of un-
due criticism — that our local roads
have in the past lacked much in the
way of attention and repair. Even
under yesterday's conditions they
compared unfavourably with many
districts in Ontario. For tomorrow's
needs they are entirely inadequate.

Danger spots exist by the dozen and
it is remarkable that so far there
have not been, especially to the north
of the Hill, more serious and fatal
accidents. As a matter of fact it is
to be wondered at that residents of
some areas have suffered as patiently
as they have for so long. Their in-
direct taxation, in the way of spoiled
and damaged produce and vehicles,
has been high. A rapidly growing
district demands, above all things,
good roads and it seems that one of
the major responsibilities for our local
governments in this new order of
things is the provision and mainte-
nance of such.

Can't you hear the cry: "Oh, but
that means increasing our taxes."
And the next one: "We came out of
the city to get away from high taxes
and now we're going to face them in
the country."
It doesn't necessarily follow that
taxes need be inordinately increased.
The fact remains that if we are to
have good roads and other necessary
local improvements they must be
paid for. But, on the other hand, the
growth of population with its con-
sequent distribution of the financial
load among that many more taxpay-
ers should in itself, at least for a
long time to come, militate against
a heavily increased taxation rate. Un-
questionably certain recent local mun-
icipal election results were definitely
affected by the resentment of tax-
payers over bad roads.

Be that as it may, the fact remains
that our local situation is one which
commands interest. 'Tis dramatic
to read in the daily papers about the
growth of a new town near the min-
eral deposits of Great Bear Lake —
the upspringing of another live com-
munity at the site of a power pro-
ject — the coming into being of an-
other Yellowknife in a newly discov-
ered mining area. Here at our own
door the same thing is happening.
Perhaps not so spectacularly but just
as inevitably the onward march of a
great and growing country is bring-
ing to these towns, villages and town-
ships of ours the bricks and mortar
of the big cities and the problems of
those whose welfare as our citizens
is all-important.

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