

POSTERS IN SHANGHAI.

Feb. 28.

THERE is not, as a rule, much space for discussion about the natural beauties or otherwise of the Shanghai **landscape**. Where variety of colour and of form are equally lacking, most persons will agree that the outlook is likely to be dull and uninspiring. There are days, no doubt, when the countryside possesses a certain peculiar charm. But where this is not largely subjective to the spectator, a question of associations unlikely to be shared by others, it is usually due to some trick of lighting; the prevailing flatness of the scene and the want of trees militate against intrinsic beauty. A few wealthy men, endowed with a taste for **landscape** gardening, have contrived to make themselves veritable oases of loveliness. But these are not for the general public; and while an immense amount of admirable work has been done in our newest parks, these are still few and far between. More and more in the West, the educative value of well designed and artistic surroundings is being recognized by municipal authorities. What we see in our daily walks between home and office has an influence upon what we think and do which may easily be undervalued: and while the really beautiful cities of the world are still comparatively few in number, there is usually some pleasant spot within easy reach for recreation and refreshment on holidays. Thus, in Shanghai, where we cannot command either hills or forest glades or murmuring streams except at the cost of a considerable expedition, there is surely the greater need of paying attention to the things that we can control.

Now, in respect of town-planning, as it is being tried for instance in outlying districts of London, it is obviously impossible to do more than is being done already. The oft-lamented shortsightedness of our forefathers has bound us in narrow streets; and the high price of land arising from the strict limitation of our borders makes the business of widening a slow and expensive one. But there appears no reason why something might not be done to improve the appearance of some of our streets or at any rate to protect them from abuse.

To many of our readers it must have occurred that there is a tremendous field for improvement in respect of the advertisement **posters** of Shanghai. Where so much that belongs to the amenities of life has been imported from the West, it is strange indeed that no business firm has yet, so far as we are aware, seen the usefulness of bringing in some of the really beautiful designs which are found on the hoardings of London and Paris. A few years ago a spasmodic attempt at reform was made in this direction, and one firm advertised its wares with a really charming picture of a junk against a background of sunset. For the most part, the crude attempts of native artists would appear to satisfy all requirements; and in all the prominent parts of the Settlement we get surely the most extraordinary collection of glaring colour and uncouth travesty of the human form divine that one might wish to avoid. Indeed, from the business point of view alone, it might be thought that such posters were calculated to do more harm than good. For as one passes them day by day, until each successive series of monstrosities is etched into the brain by relentless iteration, the prevailing thought is likely to be that never at least will one be persuaded to buy the thing that pushes its merits upon one in such a guise.

If this point of view does not appeal to the persons most concerned, it remains that some action ought to be taken by the municipal authorities. Unfortunately the Council of the International Settlement at least—in the French Concession, we believe, things are different—is powerless in this respect. When Land Regulations and Bye-laws were drafted, it would appear that **posters** did not exist, at least in Shanghai. In respect of drain-pipes, gas-pipes, water-spouts, excavations, white-wash and ruinous buildings the Council's authority is absolute. But while there is thus abundant provision for the health of the body, there is little or no means of regulating the healthiness of the mind. Where obnoxious **posters** are attached to permanent buildings, the Council might conceivably "get at" the offenders by assessing the house on a footing of what it earns. But this is a clumsy device and leaves, unprovided for, the question of temporary

hoardings. What is really wanted is a new bye-law. In order to get this, a special meeting of ratepayers is required, at which there must be a quorum, or three-fourths of those entitled to vote. The special meeting might easily be managed in connexion with the forthcoming Ratepayers' Meeting, as has been done in bygone years. When the ordinary business is finished, the meeting theoretically adjourns, and at once proceeds to the special meeting. All that is necessary then is the quorum. There is reason to believe that if ratepayers showed themselves interested in the matter, the Council would be very willing to draft and submit a new bye-law in the sense desired. The whole affair could be settled in ten minutes. The advantage to be derived from it would last as long as Shanghai is a city.