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Civic Beauty and Civic Duty.*

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[The author presents in fascinating form the argument for the beautification of our cities from the ethical and aesthetic viewpoint.—THE EDITOR.]

The answer that Pericles made to his critics and opponents when he was blamed for spending so much money in beautifying Athens has been repeated almost in his very words by every public-spirited ruler who has been similarly criticised from that day to this, and it is quite as true to-day as it was twenty-four centuries ago. Unfortunately, too, the necessity for making it arises just about as frequently, and the kind of opposition which Pericles encountered is as active and as determined as it was in his day. It is easy for us to see now that no better use was ever made of public money than was made of that which came in such a golden stream into the coffers of Athens as the head of the Ionic Confederation, and which Pericles spent with such a lavish hand with the single and openly-avowed purpose of making Athens the most beautiful city in the world. He claimed that the works in which this purpose was embodied would confer "eternal honor" upon the city, and that as long as she faithfully performed the duties which devolved upon her by virtue of her leadership among the Grecian commonwealths it was right and proper that she should employ the resources of her position in works that should fittingly signalize and adequately express the leadership which she had so honestly earned and which was so cheerfully accorded her.

It is worth while to pause occasionally in our headlong pursuit of the material and utilitarian aims by which the ideals of

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to-day are so largely dominated, and to consider what Pericles had in mind and, consequently what it means to care, and to care a great deal, for the mere beauty of things, especially public things, and to note and estimate the part which this regard has played, and must always play, in the life not only of individuals, but of entire communities.

We know now that Pericles was right. Athens has contributed in many ways to the kind of attainment which the world has agreed to hold in the highest honor, but nothing that she ever did has brought her more honor, or done more to assure her the proud position among the cities of the earth which for more than twenty centuries has been accorded her than the pure beauty of the things she built and made.

"Earth proudly wears the Parthenon
As the best gem upon her zone,"

and she not only wears this beauty with a kind of pride that is perhaps the only one that is altogether justifiable, she has learned to accept it as the proper, and to a certain extent necessary, expression of most desirable qualities, so that it is impossible to approve the expression without appreciating the quality. All our systems of aesthetics have this in common, that whatever else it is, or is not, beauty is mainly an outward and sensible manifestation of inward perfectness. And while the outward expression may not always argue a corresponding inward perfection, it is at least a reminder of it and a stimulus of effort toward it. We are slowly learning that instead of being an exceptional and exclusive thing, the passion for beauty is among the most fundamental and universal of human instincts, and that the cultivation and direction of this instinct is of the very first importance to the life and health not only of individuals but of communities, of cities and states and nations.

The joy and content of the workman and the devotion and loyalty of the citizen are inseparable from the kind of pride which noble achievement inspires and what is beauty but the simplest and most direct form in which such achievement expresses itself? There can hardly be a more mistaken public economy than that which leads through palpable neglect to inevitable shame. Real leaders have always understood this and

the example of Pericles at Athens is exceptional only in its brilliance. Augustus is remembered not because his armies were successful at Phillippi and at Actium, but because his boast that he found Rome brick and left it marble voiced a sentiment that commands admiring approval wherever society is organized and cities are built. Dante's heart was broken by his exile from Florence, but the burden of the plaint which he made was not so much regret for the loss of his home and family as grief for "the fairest and most renowned daughter of Rome," as he called the city of his birth, whose life he could no longer share. And so of any other city, ancient or modern, to which its inhabitants are genuinely attached; is it not its beauty that they think, and speak, of first? Did anyone ever know a citizen of Venice or of Paris, for example, to emigrate, except under compulsion, or to give any better reason for preferring to stay where he was than the pure beauty of the place itself?

We Americans have something to learn from the experience and example of older countries, and some sins, mainly of omission, to repent of and expiate, but there was never a better sign anywhere than the awakening to the sense of our shortcomings which animates so much present-day discussion, and the energy that is devoting itself, all around us, to the development of civic beauty as at once the expression and the inspiration of civic spirit.

It is encouraging, too, to remember, in spite of so much prevalent misconception on this point, how popular and democratic the most conspicuous movements in the direction of civic embellishment have always been. From Pericles' time to our own, the most beautiful cities have either been free and independent republics or municipalities, or else they were communities whose taste, rather than that of the nominal ruler, determined the treatment which the city received. Probably few monarchs ever cared less either for art or for the people that Louis Napoleon, but he knew how important to his peace of mind it was that Paris should be pleased, and he knew how to please her. As a matter of fact it makes very little difference whether monarchs or burghers rule the cities in name, The cities themselves reflect and express, always and everywhere, only too true sometimes, the temper and the tastes of those whom they shelter.

It is delightful to find this popular responsibility accepted and the popular will expressed as frankly and unequivocally as it was stated in the decree by which the City Council of Florence authorized, in 1298, the reconstruction of the Cathedral "in a style of magnificance which neither the industry nor power of man can surpass, that it may harmonize with the opinion of many wise persons in this city and state, who think that this commune should not engage in any enterprise, unless its intention be to make the result correspond with that noblest sort of heart which is composed of the united will of many citizens," but ordinances of city councils do not often copy this admirable model very closely and the demand of the councillors of the modern city that the best art attainable shall be applied to the service of the public is sometimes, it is true, not so much stated as left to be inferred, but times have changes and councillors have changed with them.

All the great work of the Cathedral builders seems to have been done in much the same spirit as that which the Florentine burghers expressed so well. Probably without exception the splendid structures of the Gothic period are to be regarded as representing not so much the ascendancy of the church as the pride of the town in its principal building. This is not the place to trace the reasons for the changes in both religious and civic ideals that have resulted in the decline of the cathedral-building fervor and the diversion into other channels of the energy that was once so largely monopolized by the church; but whether expressed in terms of ecclesiastical magnificence or stately structures of any other kind, the popular purpose and the civic pride which really good public art for the most part represents must not be forgotten.

Let us consider some of the things which share with the church the service which the civic spirit creates, and first the streets. The narrow paths which ran between the rows of huts which served as dwellings for the Greeks, and the dark and crooked alleys in which the cathedral builders lived would not be tolerated a moment in any modern city, but we must not only have streets, we must have open spaces, plazas, playgrounds and parks. It is all very recent, the thought of pleasure-grounds and breathing-places for the use of everybody (the public park, as we know it, hardly existed before 1850), but the

demand for them is very real now. And so of all appliances for transportation and education and justice and all manner of utilities on which the health, comfort and well-being of the inhabitants depend. They played a very small part in the thought of our immediate ancestors compared with the attention which they receive to-day. The duties which they represent are not to be evaded, the only question regarding them relates to the spirit in which they are to be accepted and administered. The great city accepts the duties promptly and treats them not as tasks but as opportunities, but the mean-spirited ones meet them grudgingly as things to be shirked and neglected wherever this is possible. Now, a certain dignity and beauty are inseparable from an adequate and satisfactory administration of these responsibilities. The lessons that are of most abiding value and the memories which are best worth preserving are precisely those which cannot do without the setting which art alone can supply. As the civic spirit develops it learns that the search and service of beauty which we call art is far enough from anything like luxury or indulgence, but that, on the contrary, it stands for, and is the chief reminder and inspirer of, all that is serious and elevated in the life of the community.

REINFORCED concrete is the coming material in modern construction. According to some authorities, it is one of the monumental blunders of this mechanical age that the arches of the New York subway should be made of steel rather than of reinforced concrete.

CHEMICALLY pure iron, produced by electrolysis, has recently been made by Prof. C. F. Burgess, of the University of Wisconsin. The metal is said to be free from all foreign contamination, with the exception of a little hydrogen.

THE composition of the Welsbach mantle has much to do with the effective temperatures in and about the burning zone of gas. The maximum, according to V. Lewes, is reached with 99.9 per cent. thorium oxide, and 0.1 per cent. cerium oxide.