VALUE OF BEAUTY AS A MUNICIPAL ASSET IS PROVING A FACTOR IN THE ADVANCE OF CIVIC ART: BY CLINTON ROGERS WOODRUFF

We are taught in childhood that two and two invariably make four, and the practical man accepts it as an axiom. It has always seemed to me, however, that business is conducted on the principle that two and two must make more than four, if it is to be considered successful. Certainly Commodore Vanderbilt got out of his investments considerably more than the actual amount of money which he invested in labor and material. Certainly Baron de Hirsch reaped more than the actual amount he invested in his railroad enterprises. Certainly Mr. Rockefeller has demonstrated time and time again that two and two, his brains and his investments, can be made to yield infinitely more than four. Indeed the whole theory of modern fortunes is based upon the principle that two and two when properly added together represent a new figure vastly in excess of the old-fashioned four.

So in the realm of civic endeavor we are beginning to realize that the right sort of civic investments can be made to yield tremendously greater results if properly handled. The great group plan of Cleveland is estimated to represent an expenditure of about sixteen million six hundred thousand dollars; three million five hundred thousand dollars for the Post Office, four million dollars for the Court House, and two million six hundred thousand dollars for the City Hall; two million dollars for the library; four million five hundred thousand dollars for the Union Depot; and yet when completed it will represent a civic center worth many millions in excess of those just mentioned. Ruckstuhl, the sculptor, is authority for the statement that every dollar spent for civic beauty is a dollar soundly invested; that every dollar spent for civic beauty is a dollar so invested that it will yield increasing returns with each succeeding year.

When you come to think of it, people go to the beautiful places:—to Niagara, to the Yellowstone, to the Yosemite, to the Grand Canyon of Arizona,—to see the tremendous beauty, the awful sublimity of these places. It is their beauty that constitutes their chief asset. The railroads, the hotels, the places of business near where these great natural beauty spots are located recognize this fact and
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exploit them; oftentimes it is true for mean and selfish ends, but their action is evidence of the great value of beauty as an asset.

Paris affords the most striking illustration that beauty of municipal adornment pays, but we fail to realize the truth involved in this example. Not long since, however, a correspondent from Aiken, South Carolina, in writing to his home paper in Columbia, a neighboring city, declared "beauty is an asset and Aiken owes its supremacy to an appreciation of this fact."

While in a trolley car in Los Angeles a few months since I overheard two men, evidently real estate men, discussing the relative advantages of Broadway and Spring Street, and investments on these parallel thoroughfares. It was the judgment of both men that Broadway, being wider than Spring, was therefore a better street and that investments on it were more likely to yield larger results.

Every community wants more capital and more population. To secure these it advertises its merits, its advantages, its points of superiority. Those having charge of this advertising are beginning to appreciate that there is no advertisement so effective as civic beauty. Consequently we see more and more references to the civic beauty of communities. Indeed the cities of greatest beauty need less advertisement than do others.

Hotels and business houses, moreover, are beginning to appreciate the truth of this. J. M. Bowles in an article in a recent number of the "World's Work" related how a New York man had made two trips to Europe apparently for the sole purpose, as he put it, of spending large sums of money. His last trip occupied four months. He bought no less than fifty marble statues, antique and modern, one hundred and forty assorted bronzes, mostly from the famous Barbedienne, of Paris, a large number of paintings, remarque etchings and engravings, tapestries of historical interest, and so on through a long list of beautiful and artistic hangings and furnishings. This man was not a dealer, nor a rival of Pierpont Morgan, but the proprietor of a New York hotel. He had seen the way things had been going of late years, and he intended to avail himself of the advantages which beautiful surroundings, beautiful furnishings and artistic designs would yield.
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Not only do the hotels appreciate the aesthetic effect of artistic surroundings, but railroads, restaurants, factories, insurance companies, warehouses, manufacturers, are awakening to the fact that art is a stock asset for a business from a commercial point of view. Walk along the streets of New York and you will see building after building, either erected or in course of erection, a credit to the life of the city, to the business which it houses, and to the architect who conceived it. Some of the most notable structures of recent years have been those put up for life insurance companies, for the theatres, for the railroads. The improvements which the Pennsylvania Railroad is erecting in Washington will not only be commodious for the patrons of the road, but will constitute a part of the great civic plan of Burnham, Olmsted and their confreres.

One of the most important and valuable lots of ground in Philadelphia, in the very heart of the city, has been purchased by the Girard Trust Company, upon which it will erect a beautiful building designed solely for the use of the company. The new building when completed will be a distinct addition to the architectural civic beauty of the city. Do you imagine for a minute that the business men of a company acting as trustees for large interests would make so great an investment if it were not expected to be a paying one? Business concerns in these days of keen competition could not afford to make investments so great and expensive if they did not yield important results and benefits. The Girard Trust Company in Philadelphia, the Prudential Life Insurance Company, and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in New York, and other great trust and insurance companies, the Pennsylvania Railroad in Washington, the corporations all over that have been putting up new structures within the past five or ten years have borne tribute to the fact, to quote Mr. Bowles again, “that art is making its way in this country of ours, and the best of it is that it is coming naturally, unobtrusively, as an expression of a new spirit in modern business.”

“Pray, Sir Mercury, why ridest thou in so fine a chariot when thy winged sandals will save both thy time and thy birds too?” “It is to show,” quoth the god, “an example to mortals, who in their daily affairs ought not to forget that their business may sometimes best be served by beauty.” This is a very old, indeed it is almost a classic illustration, but one the truth of which we ought to bear
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constantly in mind, and it is a cause for congratulation that the business men of the present era are appreciating it to an extent little dreamed of a few years ago.

THE average man will concede that a beautiful city is an attractive one and brings people to it with their contribution of labor and money and help, but to have a beautiful city we must have beautiful units. You cannot put together a few eyesores and get a beauty spot. What is it that attracts the people in the business part of San Francisco? It is the harmony and beauty of its business streets so that the sum total of the impression made upon a stranger passing through them for the first time is altogether a pleasant and a satisfactory one. It is due to the fact that the component buildings are carefully designed and well constructed, and it lies within the power of organizations like builders’ exchanges, to add mightily to the substantial assets of a community by constantly impressing the fact upon all with whom they have to deal that an artistic structure costs very little more than an inartistic one and yields results far out of proportion to the original cost.

To refer again to Mr. Bowles’ article:—“Business Buildings made Beautiful,” he points out how concerns that are interested in increasing their business and extending it in every way, are utilizing beautiful and artistic surroundings and decorations as a means to this end. If such a policy pays in the city of New York, where business competition is as keen as anywhere on this continent, it will pay in every other community in this land. The Hausmannizing of Paris during the Second Empire was one of the most successful investments in civic effort ever made by a government.

Paris constitutes the greatest storehouse of civic experience in the world. It has clearly demonstrated that when a city wishes to clean out a certain quarter and increase the value of the real estate in that section, it can produce the quickest and most effective results by proceeding to make a small square and putting into it flower gardens and a fountain and a statue or two appropriately fitted to the environment. Usually as a result of such a process the whole quarter becomes transformed; old houses are supplemented by new and more beautiful ones; the whole population changes in character. Moreover, viewing the matter from the purely business point of view, the
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taxable value of the real estate increases, and the increase of taxes in a short time pays for the land expropriated for the park, and for the fountain and the statue.

IT is a rather interesting historical fact which we sometimes overlook that when art was at its highest tide the artists’ best patrons were great corporations, the syndicates of that time. For some reason art was allowed to decline, and the divorce between art and business became complete. It looks as if the opening decades of the twentieth century would be marked by the reuniting of these two natural allies. The developments in New York certainly point in that direction. Likewise, the civic undertaking in Washington. All the great cities of the country are planning vast improvements, involving the establishment of great civic centers, the remodeling of their whole municipal plan on artistic lines. As competition and rivalry between great communities increase their desire to improve, their surroundings should increase in arithmetical progression.

Not long since this country was visited by an Educational Commission, one of the members of which spoke of our artistic poverty in the designing of American household articles and manufactures generally. Such a criticism a number of years ago might have been well founded, but as the “Architects and Builders Magazine” pointed out, there has been a very remarkable movement in the direction of improved artistic design and decoration of housefurnishings to be seen everywhere from New York to San Francisco. Never before has there been so sharp a competition among manufacturers to invite trade by improving their products in regard to durability and beauty of design, and this competition has compelled the employment of a high order of artistic and expert skill. The great steel and iron workers have discovered the necessity of securing art as an ally, and the same lesson has been learned by cabinet makers, furniture manufacturers, manufacturers of silk, rugs, carpet, textiles, books, and an infinite variety of arts. Craftsmanship and art have been linked together and the closer and more general their union becomes the more rapid will be the advance in artistic excellence which has become so great a distinction of French manufacturers.

So we see the movement for artistic development manifesting itself within and without the house in large and small degree. It
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is altogether hopeful because the business man has given his attention to it. For after all the business man is the practical man, the man of greatest influence in the community. Concerned as he is with providing for the wants of mankind, concerned as he is with money making in all its various phases, he is looked up to even by those who are most apt to belittle the power and value of money. So if the business man takes hold of a great movement and gives it his backing, his support, his influence, it is of distinct significance. It means that art and craftsmanship, that art and business, have united hands for an upward movement all along the line. With art reinforcing business and business reinforcing art, with building constructors and all their allies contributing to municipal art, the day of the City Beautiful is not far distant, and it is an auspicious augury that a great organization like the Builders’ Exchange of Cleveland is lending its influence to higher ideals in constructive municipal art.

VALUES OF LIFE AMONG WAGE-EARNERS

"THE more intimately one comes into the home circle of the independent wage-earners the more clearly does the disadvantage of wealth stand revealed. Life must be lived so simply, the interests of life are so evident, that the value of words decreases; action expresses the heart perfectly. The very services the children render each other train them for the family life they will establish. The baby tended by an older brother or sister learns to depend on them for care, and that dependence in turn draws out a love and responsibility that could not have birth under any other conditions. The child who finds that in pain, weariness, suffering, a father and a mother alone share its care; the elder children who see how naturally sacrifices are made for them, how little the father and mother value themselves, their ease, even their comfort, learn to value the love in the home and depend on it, give love to it, that money to buy service would bar out."

—Lillian W. Betts.