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MUSEUMS OF ART AND THEIR
INFLUENCES.

BY EDWARD S. MORSE.

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MUSEUMS OF ART AND THEIR INFLUENCES.¹

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FULLY appreciating the honor of addressing this distinguished society, and eager to take advantage of so propitious a moment to say a word in behalf of the Museum of Fine Arts, I nevertheless feel a reluctance to offer my views at a time when only experts, either as teachers or connoisseurs, should be heard. Let me say at the outset that nothing indicates more surely the intellectual growth of the nation than the custom of late years—which, I am happy to observe, is rapidly growing in all the large cities—of bodies of men uniting for a good feast, and superadding to this enjoyment a discussion of some vital question of politics, or matters pertaining to social development. You have but recently discussed the question of public parks, and now the recent opening of the new galleries of the Museum of Fine Arts is seized upon by you as a topic for presentation.

That a body of keen and sagacious business men should select for the evening's consideration an institution whose returns are presumably wholly intellectual, rather than some great enterprise which promises immediate dividends of the usual kind, is a matter for congratulation.

The business men of this city have always given the

¹ Address before the Beacon Society, Boston.

heartiest encouragement and help to its various educational and scientific institutions. The arguments for their establishment and support are, however, so palpable that but little credit should be accorded were it not that in certain communities elsewhere, a civic pride, unaccompanied by knowledge or appreciation, has induced only a reluctant and half-hearted help to similar undertakings. In Boston, however, the Museum of Fine Arts, the Society of Natural History, the Institute of Technology, the perennial blessings flowing from the Lowell Institute, the gift of a single Bostonian, and, just at her borders, the great university with its special departments, the Astronomical Observatory, the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, the Arnold Arboretum and many others, all testify to the whole-souled and liberal culture of the community ; and now, through the same liberality, there has been added, to what already constituted a very respectable museum of art, a series of spacious halls and galleries at an expense of a third of a million dollars.

We might consider the benefits arising from this great expenditure of money from a number of standpoints ; the intellectual enjoyment to be derived from an examination of the Museum's treasures ; the lessons to be learned in the development of art as illustrated by the superb collection of casts ; the suggestive ideas arising from a contemplation of the shattered column of Bubastis, as old as the world was formerly supposed to be, the information to be gained by an examination of the grace, subtlety and refinement embodied in the metal, lacquer, ivory and textile fabrics of a people we had once been taught to regard as barbarous. Let us, however, consider the aid extended to the Museum of Fine Arts from the grossest material standpoint. Does it pay ? It is clearly obvious that this society in its former consideration of public parks believes

that whatever renders this city attractive with its gardens and its galleries not only holds as citizens many who might otherwise go elsewhere, but stands as an inviting allurements to the thousands who are yearly attracted to its borders. It is possible that the city of Paris, which brings to its citizens millions of dollars yearly through the attraction of its great galleries and parks, may be the example sought. To your credit be it said, however, that primarily it is the pleasure and comfort to be derived from institutions of this nature that have led to the generous support which has made such beneficent undertakings possible.

Regarding the Museum of Art from an economical side, it can be clearly demonstrated that it tends to the material gain of the community. The immediate gain comes from the throng of strangers who are drawn to the city by the attractions afforded by the Museum of Art and kindred institutions. The practical Englishman condoles himself when contemplating the enormous grants made by government to the National Gallery, the South Kensington and the British museums, by realizing the benefits accruing from this source alone.

In an article in the Nineteenth Century Magazine for January, entitled "Ten Years of British Art," the author, in referring to the National Gallery and the great additions made to it within recent years, says: "The collection, from being one of only second-rate importance, has now taken a front rank, and even the most business-like citizen must admit that its cost is more than recouped by the money which is expended in the metropolis by the many foreigners now attracted hither by its growing notoriety."

In a more indirect way, but equally certain, the existence of a museum of art tends to the material prosperity of a community in which it exists. It has often been pointed

out that a manufactured article has three elements of value—its utility, its durability and its beauty. The first two elements come about whenever the need of an object arises, combined with honest manufacture; the third element can be acquired only by the study of what constitutes good taste, and the school for good taste is to be found in a museum of art wherein is exhibited the art handwork of all peoples and of all times, where the student may learn the harmony of color, the beauty of form and the appropriateness of decorative design, where, in short, a comparison may be made between what is good and what is essentially vulgar. It was formerly believed that schools of design filled all the requirements needed for completing the education of professional designers. England's experience, however, has shown that the maintaining of schools of design, unsupported by adequate art collections for reference and study, would not suffice to improve the artistic quality of her manufactures, and the best authorities in that country confessed that the world's fair in 1851 was an overpowering answer to those who maintained that schools of art were sufficient.

Professor Ware, in reply to questions put to him by the Massachusetts state superintendent for instruction, in reference to the importance of drawing in the public schools, had occasion, among other things, to say that "at the universal exhibition of 1851 England found herself, by general consent, almost at the bottom of the list, among all the countries of the world, in respect of her art manufactures; only the United States among the great nations stood below her. The first result of this discovery was the establishment of schools of art in every large town. At the Paris exhibition, in 1867, England stood the foremost, and in some branches of manufacture distanced the most artistic nations. It was the schools of art and the great collection

of works of industrial art at the South Kensington Museum that accomplished this result. The United States still held her place at the foot of the column."

Professor Bail of New Haven said "the whole nation is deploring the lack of good ornamental designers. We are becoming tired of sending so many millions to Europe for articles that we might produce cheaper at home if we had skilful designers. This branch of industry affects articles for the homeliest use."

These views were expressed nearly twenty years ago, and since that time we have had our world's fair with an awakening which marks an epoch in our history.

The phenomenal strides we have made in art manufactures since that event are a promise of what may yet be attained. The marked improvements in the artistic qualities of our manufactured articles have been made chiefly in the more costly ware. Tiffany, Collamore and others provide artistic objects for the wealthy, and when one sees their work in jewelry, silver chalices, and the like, he recalls their prototypes in the gold etruscan ornaments and rare old vases at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In the beautiful Art Museum at Hamburg, stored as it is with the richest treasures in metal and textile work, I could not help admiring the sagacity of the director in allowing space for several large cases filled with the exquisite basket work of the Japanese.

The improvements in the artistic work of our manufacturers are to be seen in costly furniture, costly table ware, precious jewelry and the like. This is all good and in the right direction, but the thousand and one things that come in use in various ways among the masses have as yet to feel the touch of this magic quality. The cast iron stove carbuncled with colored glass, cheap architectural jewelry with designs that may be seen on the headboard of a bed-

stead or the façade of a town hall, the clumsy and thick-edged teacup, unrelieved by a single decoration, and perhaps no worse for the lack of it; kerosene lamps, coal-hods, tableware and a host of objects that will readily come to your mind,— these are the kinds of things to be improved, and with them the taste of the masses who, uninformed in such matters, encourage their production.

To-day, France stands above all nations in the production of beautiful objects. Owing to the sagacity of the great Napoleon, an edict was proclaimed which commanded that drawing should be taught in all the schools of the empire, and this law was happily supplemented by a number of provincial museums coming into existence at the same time—museums filled with the choicest pictures. As to how or where these collections were obtained, it would perhaps be impertinent to inquire. Suffice it to say the edict commanding drawing on the one hand, supplemented by the national and provincial museums on the other, brought about a condition of things that made France the master nation in the refinement and artistic quality of her manufactures. Following this came a material prosperity, which can only be appreciated by contemplating the enormous drain which has been made upon her within the last thirty-five years, without apparently diminishing her resources. The wars with Russia, Austria and Mexico, followed by the German war, accompanied by a wanton annihilation of millions by her own people, with an enormous indemnity paid to the victors, would have ruined most nations. As if this were not enough to test her unbounded resources, her colonial exploits in Madagascar, Cochin-China, Anam and Gaboon Congo, with equally disastrous attempts at home to join the great oceans and corner the world's copper, would seem to prove it. With this bewildering history, France

invites the nations to an exposition of such grandeur and lavish extravagance that it may be said, without fear of contradiction, that all the world's fairs combined were surpassed in this great achievement.

This is a digression, but it is important when an attempt is made to grasp an idea of the wealth that flows into France from its art products, and into its great metropolis because of its art attractions. In this connection I cannot forbear mentioning the pitiable display our country made at this great gathering of nations. The exhibition was such as to show the absolute poverty of our country in productions of beauty and decoration. With the exception of the Rookwood pottery, Low's art tiles, the works of Tiffany, Collamore, Gorham Manufacturing Company, Prang and a few others, there were hardly any wares worthy of notice in those features which add so much to the selling quality of the object. Towers of canned corn and soap boxes, shocking travesties of Washington constructed out of plug tobacco, impossible engines, railroad and all, made of cigarettes, and pyramids of canned tomatoes were conspicuous features in our exhibit, and tubs, brooms and kettles, which with other nations found shelter under canvas coverings out of doors, with us were accorded great space in the main halls.

With the recollections of a month's constant study of that great triumph, I tremble in contemplating the result of our country's effort at a world's exposition. Handicapped as we have been by the iniquitous tax imposed on every object that counts for the intellectual and artistic growth of the country, with heavy duties, in the interest of protection, imposed on unique art objects whose fabricator's grandchildren are now dead, and, as a result, no graceful objects and beautiful pictures among the people to educate that taste which enables them to judge between

the good and the bad, what wonder is it that Mr. Elliot, in his work on pottery and porcelain, commenting on the American pottery exhibit at the Centennial, was forced to say, in regard to the bulk of it, that it was useful, strong, clumsy, cheap and detestable? And he asks, with cheap clays, cheap fuel, cheap food, may we not begin to supply ourselves, if not some of the rest of the world, with the finest production of the potter's wheel? Since these words were written, great progress has been made in a few instances in the artistic quality of fictile ware, but here again the products are not within the means of the poorer classes, for these have yet to be made, and the vital importance of filling this barren field is clearly shown in a report of the United States Potters' Association in reference to a proposed pottery exhibition in Philadelphia this fall. From this report I quote the following:

"If nations consider the incorporation of the art quality into the manufactures of their peoples of such importance, should not we, who depend upon this honorable industry for a livelihood, and look to it for a competency, do all in our power as individuals, firms or corporations, to put as much of that quality as possible into the particular articles we produce? Our art publications, our magazines, with their marvellous illustrations, are doing much to uplift the masses, but many of our people do not come under their influence, cannot afford to buy them, yet they must have a cup to drink from, a jug to hold their water. By giving them these articles, beautiful in form and decoration, simple and inexpensive though they be, we can do much to train the eye, and thus reach the minds and hearts of men and women, and so be a blessing to our country."

As a proof of the scarcity of native pottery, I invite you to visit the great dealers in this city, where for three hundred

days in the year a most marvellous display of pottery is made free to all. Inquire for American productions—you may succeed in finding them; I did not. You will find Haviland, Sevres, Dresden, Worcester, Doulton, and other French, German and English wares, for which we send abroad millions every year, and this in the face of the fact that our country possesses inexhaustible quarries of kaolins and clays, and artists and decorators ready for the work. If you do find American wares, they will probably be found packed in baskets ready for some great junketing clambake.

After these digressions let us return to our subject as an important factor in any effort to improve the art quality of our manufactures. The conclusions of the British royal commissioners on technical instruction will be of interest here. Referring to the art museums of Sheffield, Derby, York and elsewhere, they say "we are of the opinion that the connection between these museums and the local schools of art should be of the most intimate character. Indeed, in this respect, much may be learned from foreign countries, where many such museums exist and exert great influence on manufactures."

I. E. Clarke, in his report on "Education in the Industrial and Fine Arts in the United States," U. S. Bureau of Education, apropos of the same subject, well says that "from being largely an agricultural community the people of the United States must of necessity, with accelerated strides, become more and more manufacturers. To be successful it is clear that our manufacturers must become more and more artistic, must put more of the art quality into their work, for the United States pays millions every year to the superior artists and artisans of other countries. In the artistic development of our industrial resources, as in the experience of other nations will be found the sur-

est solution of our material welfare, on it depends the prosperity, perhaps the life of the republic." Dissenting entirely from the idea that the republic is in the faintest danger from this cause, his ominous words have a startling significance as regards New England, for have we not seen wrested from us great industries in the coarser materials, such as iron, and perhaps in the near future, the new South may, in a peaceful way, quiet our looms? We have left to us, however, the wide field of industries requiring art and refinement in manufacture. By the establishment of a liberally endowed museum of art filled with the most diversified material for the student, we may be enabled to do for our country what France does for the world, and possibly be her competitor also.

In a hasty glance at the list of manufactures in the Boston Directory, I counted sixty-four different industries, embracing hundreds of firms and individuals, who might, and in many who do, avail themselves of the advantages offered by the Museum of Fine Arts. The influence of this institution should be felt throughout New England, for it is the only one within her borders. For years I have been familiar with its growth and progress, and have often seen students not belonging to the art classes of the museum diligently engaged in sketching details of objects in the cases, patiently copying a motive from some textile fabric or quaint design from old German iron-work. Knowing that the trustees of the museum gave free passes to all the students attending the Lowell free school of design, a special inquiry was made among these students as to how far they use the treasures of the museum in their work. The answer of fifty-four of the most prominent designers, with one exception, admitted that the museum was a very great help to them, and this one confessed that he had visited the museum several times. All had re-

ceived ideas from the various collections, and some had copied directly. A further inquiry showed that while, a few years ago, French and German designers were almost exclusively employed in our print works and other factories of a similar nature, now these are being rapidly replaced by our own countrymen.

In this plea for the widest and most generous support of the Museum of Fine Arts—the pride of Boston and of New England—I am speaking of an institution organized and supported mainly by a few men of wealth and culture, and this support means the contribution of many hundreds of thousands of dollars. As Agassiz said in regard to his great museum at Cambridge, the dividends to the investors, at least, are wholly intellectual. The sheer admission on Saturday and Sunday is a free gift to the community, and the pittance charged on the other days will hardly pay to clean out the dirt tracked in on the free days.

If time permitted, and I felt competent for the task, it would be interesting to follow out the work being accomplished by the Museum for the higher art education of the people. At all times have been seen in the galleries young men and women, under skilful instructors, sketching from the antique, and many have gone out over the country as teachers of art, as designers for our sumptuous magazines and illustrated publications, as artists and sculptors. But I am warned that too much time has been taken to demonstrate matters which must have been plainly evident to you all. In closing, let me earnestly enlist your sympathies and generous support for the Museum, and all kindred institutions that make for the intellectual wealth of the nation and for the glory of this illustrious city.

