

Your City--An Interesting Study

(Read by Benj. C. Sheldon before Chautauqua Round Table, Tuesday, July 11.)

The city of Ashland has recently taken a step in civic improvement which will have a large influence on the city's future and probably determines the role which she will assume in the sisterhood of Oregon cities. I refer to this splendid park and mineral spring development.

The recent dedication of this enterprise suggests that it might be profitable for the people of the city to give careful thought to what the step really means. The successful business man finds it necessary from time to time to make a survey of the conditions bearing on his business—the sources of supplies, market conditions, labor problems, etc. What is true of a business concern is equally true of a city, for a city is simply a corporation in which the people living under the complex conditions of a congested community are the shareholders, organized for the business of providing a mutual protection and welfare.

Study Your City.

So a city should take stock of its natural advantages and disadvantages—try to make the most of each—to consider along what lines city building can best be directed—what are the shortcomings and how they can be remedied—all to the end that the people may contribute in the largest way toward building that city which its natural advantages, the civic accomplishments to date, and the people's needs indicate as its logical and highest future.

A real study of this question is a matter of months and even years. So a discussion limited in time as that of this afternoon must be, cannot be expected to do more than suggest lines of thought. But if that may be done, perhaps this hour will have been well spent.

Let us first call to mind the fact that the people now living here have it within their power to make the city's future. The energy and public spirit of these people will determine what the city will be a generation hence; and the city thus planned and built will react on the people, helping or hindering their happiness, health and general social and cultural development. It is the law of environment which at all times has powerfully influenced the welfare of the human race.

A City's Individuality.

Then let us remember that no one wants to live in a city that is an uninteresting, monotonous place in which to exist. Like people, cities have individuality—character. That individuality is oftentimes determined by the people, especially if largely of foreign birth, but quite as often by the natural location and surroundings which caused the growth of a city at that place. Thus New York, Boston, New Orleans and San Francisco necessarily became commercial centers; Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Birmingham and Minneapolis became manufacturing cities; and Denver, Butte and Spokane are mining centers.

But aside from business considerations, a city is interesting and attractive as it has or has not that something out of the ordinary which gives it a distinctive individuality. The visitor to Rome brings away a lasting memory of ruins that speak eloquently of a civilization that is past; Naples has Vesuvius; Edinburgh is crowded up round a high rock on which stands an old castle; in Boston one is impressed by the quaint nooks along the crooked streets; and the old graveyards; Washington has its fine avenues radiating from the national capitol; Kansas City, its handsome parks and limestone boulevards; Minneapolis, its chain of lakes bordered with parkways.

What of Ashland?

Now what has Ashland? Only a moment's thought presents the inevitable answer, its unsurpassed geographical location. The city was started here because of the fact that the road from California found at the foot of the Siskiyou this charming mountain stream with its abundant supply of the best of waters. No factor has been more important to its growth than the wonderful climate and beautiful setting. Stretching along an easy slope at the foot of a majestic mountain range, with this beautiful canyon and stream bisecting that slope, with a climate that cannot be excelled on the American continent if in the world, having as its front yard one of the most fertile and charming valleys anywhere to be found—who can doubt that this city owes its present as well as its future to the bountiful endowments of old Mother Nature?

A Home City.

If this be the fact, and no one will deny it, the city's future lies in a development that makes the most of these advantages. Coupling with this the further fact that the nature of the surrounding country almost precludes the possibility of Ashland's ever becoming a manufacturing or commercial city, it should be apparent that here is a natural city of homes; a city whose ideal should be a fine place in which to live; a city of schools; a city of culture; a city of bountiful living; a city whose people will always show that love of nature and the beautiful which living under naturally beautiful surroundings inspire.

I offer this opinion in the hope that you, into whose lives and those of your children and children's children the effects of a city well planned and built shall so largely enter, may study the matter and let the future development of the city be grounded in an understanding of its possibilities and the natural road to them.

But no mere location, no matter how favored, can alone make a city what it should be. The human element is important. A city must be planned and built as well as founded. A city's natural endowments is one consideration, that one which points out a logical path. If my suggestion be found well based, it follows that the people of this city can, to their best advantage, strive for the things that make for the more abundant home and community life, rather than the mere size and financial strength that comes with commercial and business development.

Lessons From Other Cities.

Now, then, can a fine city be built on this splendid beginning?

The only suggestions I feel competent to offer is in calling attention to some of the lessons taught by other cities. And they are abundant, for there is a new civic spirit abroad among our cities that is the most promising sign of the times—especially so since it is attacking the one point where American governmental effort seems to have been a failure.

Ambassador Bryce pointed out in his admirable, "The American Commonwealth," that in our city government was our one conspicuous failure. But a powerful movement is under swing that promises to wipe out this stigma; a movement based on a new and proper conception of the functions of a city's government. It is to look into this movement, consider some of its lessons and how they may be applicable to your city, that I wish to call your attention this afternoon.

Noting first that American cities in their typical failure as governmental entities are radically different from European cities, we find the cause in the fact that there grew up a custom, in the granting of city charters by legislative enactment, of grafting on cities a form of government copied from the national constitution and totally unfit for the purposes of a city. It has taken years of constant failure and struggle to bring this error home to the thinking Americans, but a fine beginning has been made in the spread of the Home Rule idea. Oregon has adopted such an amendment to its constitution.

In America the idea has prevailed that a city must do only those things specifically authorized in its charter, while in Europe a city is supposed to do anything it may think best for the public welfare. Over there was recognized the fact that the members of a community could and should do for themselves collectively what few could attain individually. Thus developed the excellent civic spirit of European cities.

First, then, realize that the people of Ashland can do for their city and people anything which they believe for their welfare. The fact that some other city does or does not do this or that concerns you only so far as it offers a lesson from which you may learn to your profit.

City Survey

Next, we note from this new civic movement the value of a systematic study of one's city. "Know your city," might be an apt motto for the whole splendid movement. The important part played by what is known as the "city" or "social survey," makes it almost typical of the movement. The wonderful success of the movement can be placed to the fact that it is based on a thorough understanding of facts before the initiation of plans of action.

These surveys have considered such subjects as:

1. The city's location, topography of city and suburbs; water supply; drainage; railroad or water shipping facilities.
2. The city's business situation, nearness of competing towns and nature of trade territory; how same may be developed; freight rates, etc.; fuel or power supply.
3. The city's population, how many foreigners; their standard of living; how public happiness can best be served.
3. The city's government; city finances, sufficiency and economy of public services and utilities; jails, hospitals, courts, etc.
5. The city's institutions, schools, churches, theatres, public halls, parks and playgrounds, clubs, libraries, lodges, museums, bands and other musical organizations, charitable activities and need for same.

From such a survey a vast amount of helpful suggestions comes for the

betterment of the city along most any line. And especially does it point out wherein the city can find its real individuality, the kind of a city it can become and which it is by nature and the needs of its people, called upon to be.

City Planning

A striking outgrowth of these surveys has been the city planning movement. City planning is the opposite to city drifting. It has especially to do with the material growth of the city, its street arrangement, building regulations and physical plants for public functions. It recognizes that growth, to be beneficial, should be along well planned lines and that waste and disorder surely follow the lack of a plan. A sensible city plan produces economy, efficiency and harmony.

There is not a city in America, nor with few exceptions, in the world, that does not show the tremendous waste in capital, human effort and human happiness due to a misdirected growth. Like Topsy "they just grew." It is to try to remedy for the future this failure of the past, that the city plan has sprung into prominence.

A frequent error conceives city planning as dealing only with the aesthetic side of city life. Far from it. It enters directly and primarily into business considerations and problems. Men of large ability and superior training are devoting themselves professionally to this new science.

I doubt if there is a person in this audience who fully appreciates the extent of this city planning movement and its marvelous growth during the past few years. Even at the danger of being tiresome, I want to mention some of the facts which indicate its importance.

Extent of Movement

More than 40 cities in the United States have already appointed City Planning Commissions the purpose of each of which is to have a comprehensive plan drawn by expert civic architects along which it is proposed to force the future growth of the city. Many other cities have had such a plan devised for them but not yet officially adopted.

In every state of the Union at least one city, and in many states, a large number of cities have entered upon campaigns for bringing into effect such a plan.

In three states, laws have been passed authorizing cities to appoint

such City Planning Commissions. In other states such as our own, the Home Rule provision in state constitutions makes such a specific law unnecessary.

Three of the largest universities have adopted courses in city planning.

The Commission of Conservation of Canada, (which would be more accurately named, The Commission on General Welfare), has adopted as one of its main lines of effort a spreading of the city plan idea. Some of the records of the Dominion have taken up the matter by special legislation.

St. Louis held, in April 1915, a "Future St. Louis" exhibit, under the auspices of its City Planning Commission.

New York will, this fall, open a training school for city planning and community center workers.

Governor Walsh of Massachusetts called a state conference of members of city planning boards, held in Boston last December.

A state meeting of the Commercial and Civic clubs of Texas has started a campaign for the adoption of city plans by Texas cities, bringing in trained specialists from New York to tour the state and lecture on the subject.

In February last Sacramento as a result of a campaign conducted for three years by a committee of 150 of its leading business men, adopted a city plan devised for it by an expert from Boston.

A Metropolitan City Planning exhibit was held in Boston with an attendance of over 50,000. November 14 was made City Planning Sunday with meetings in churches in furtherance of the idea, just as Temperance Sundays have been held over the country in the cause of Prohibition.

The British government is planning a new capitol for Australia to be situated 70 miles inland in New South Wales. The first move was to call for competitive designs for a city plan, which will be adopted before the turning of a sod. They plan to make this one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

Street Plans

The great waste in capital and land due to a hit and miss system of platting with no general street plan makes this consideration a most important phase of city planning.

The three street plans now in use are, the checkerboard or right angle plan, the diagonal plan, and the ring or concentric plan. An ideal arrangement would be a combination of these. The checkerboard is the plan most common in American cities. It wastes much land and compels the going round two sides of a right angle to get from one point to another not on the same street.

Washington, our most beautiful city, is the best example in America of the diagonal plan. Indianapolis is a fair example. This plan is an advance over the checkerboard and contributes to an economic handling of urban traffic.

The circle plan had its beginning in those European cities formerly surrounded by a walled fortification which in later days was razed and on its site a fine boulevard built. Vienna is perhaps the best example, whose Ring Strasse is one of the finest streets in the world.

Money Saved

By far the most important feature of this street plan phase of city planning is the economic, the strictly dollar and cent value of having a city on right lines. Whole districts have been razed in Paris, London, Rome and a score of smaller cities to give room for new streets and plazas, or to serve as arteries for vastly increased traffic. The improvements along this line in Paris under Louis Napoleon cost \$265,000,000.

An engineer estimated that the cost of certain improvements made in San Francisco was \$26,000,000 in excess of what it would have been had the city been planned to conform to topography.

A competent real estate man in a smaller California city figured what would have been the value of the lots of the city had it developed along the line of a city plan then under discussion, and found that the assessed valuation of the city would have been 45 per cent greater had the



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plan being adopted in the city's early days.

But to cap these examples is the fact that foreign cities have a custom of raising money for public purposes by putting through a piece of improvement and then selling some of the city-owned lands in that vicinity for enough to pay for the improvement and a good round sum besides.

Public Buildings

It should be apparent that in the building of a city, the location and architecture of public buildings should receive careful attention. These buildings serve a two-fold purpose—the economical transaction of public business and the architectural adornment of the city. Every city is popularly judged by its buildings. They are the outward manifestations of the character of its people.

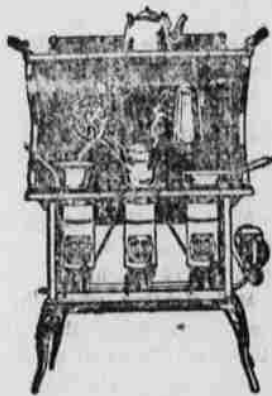
In the Middle Ages the church was the dominant building of a city, showing the preeminence of the religious idea in the minds of the people. In Rome the Forum was the center and typifies our heritage from that civilization of the Roman law. High above Athens stood the Acropolis which artistic shrine still tells of the glory of Grecian art. In Genoa, Florence and Venice the great palaces of merchant princes and the fine example of the art of the Italian Renaissance of which these merchants were the patrons, gives evidence of the salient mercantile life of that day. So in public buildings is written the history of each succeeding generation.

In American public architecture we are, happily, passing to a place where good breeding is reflected in edifices of simpler and more stately design.

The grouping of public buildings is important. A fine example of what I mean is in the new civic center plan adopted by Cleveland. A library, city hall, courthouse, post office and Chamber of Commerce are to be built. A group plan has been adopted and a site selected along the lake front which will allow the docks and railroad station to become a part of the general plan, promises to make one of the finest gateways and civic centers in America if not in the world.

Good paving is manifestly a sine

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