



CHAPTER XVI

THE CITY BEAUTIFUL

ONE of the most significant evidences of the gain we are making appears in the beautification of our cities. This interest is general. In Washington, New York, Boston, Cleveland, San Francisco, and Chicago public and private movements have been organized for the unified treatment of the city's architecture, while hundreds of other communities are aiming to make their cities more presentable through parks, cleaner streets and higher ideas of municipal art.

This indicates that the public is learning to act in an organized way. Heretofore we have lacked a city sense. In consequence, collective action has been impossible. It also indicates a new attitude towards the city, a belief in its life, outward form and appearance, its architectural expression, its parks, schools, and playgrounds. A determination has come to make the city a more beautiful as well as a more wholesome place of living. All this is foreign to the business man's ideal of merely getting his money's worth out of government. The belief in the city as a home, as an object of public-spirited endeavor, has superseded the

earlier commercial ideals that characterized our thought.

The great cities of every age have probably passed through a similar evolution. First business, commerce, and wealth, then culture, beauty, and civic activity. It was so with Athens, which became great as a commercial centre before it was adorned by the hands of Pericles and Phidias. Rome became mistress of the Mediterranean before she enriched her streets and public places with the spoils of foreign conquest. The mediæval Italian cities of Florence, Venice, and Milan were the creations of organized democracy, as well as the centres of the world's trade with the East. In these cities it was freedom that gave birth to a local patriotism that inspired democracy to its highest achievements in the realm of art, literature, and architecture. And it is probable that, next to religion, democracy and the sense of a free city have been the greatest inspirations to art in the history of mankind.

In later centuries, the capital cities in France and Germany were embellished with splendid palaces, spacious gardens, museums, wide streets, cathedrals, art galleries, sculpture at the hands of their rulers. In Germany, every kingdom, petty principality, or dukedom had its *Hauptstadt*. Vienna, Berlin, Dresden, Munich, Frankfort, Düsseldorf, and other cities have been adorned by princes

who viewed these cities as a part of their personal domain. In later years this expenditure has proven a source of continued wealth. Travellers from America alone spend millions of dollars a year in Europe in travel, in resident study, and in other ways. This in itself is a dividend upon the original investment. Even from a commercial point of view it justifies the prescience of the city's makers.

England alone is an exception to Europe in this regard. Her attention to the beautiful has been confined to the country estate. Neither London nor the provincial cities have ever projected works of the magnificent sort that are found on the Continent. Only in very recent years has the London County Council, the most democratic of England's legislative bodies, undertaken the beautification of the city and the development of a sense of the beautiful.

The splendid projects now on foot in America are an evidence that modern democracy is not satisfied with the commonplace. Just as the monumental cathedrals which everywhere dot Europe are the expression of the ideals and aspirations of mankind, so in America, democracy is coming to demand and appreciate fitting monuments for the realization of its life, and splendid parks and structures as the embodiment of its ideals. The twentieth century offers high promise of the

ultimate possibilities of democracy in generous expenditure for public purposes.

The superb plan for the carrying out of the original design of L'Enfant in the beautification of Washington has been received with enthusiastic approval by the entire country. In 1901 the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia appointed an expert committee composed of Daniel H. Burnham, Frederic Law Olmstead, Jr., Charles F. McKim, and Augustus St. Gaudens to prepare a comprehensive plan for the development of the city. The report of the commission provides for a systematic treatment of the region lying between Pennsylvania Avenue and the Potomac River on a scale of magnificence comparable only to the splendid expenditures of Louis XIV. or of Napoleon III. These plans provide for a mall one-sixth of a mile wide and extending from the Capitol to the Potomac, with Washington's Monument as the centre of the axis. On either side of this broad parkway are located sites for public structures, to be uniform in their architectural detail and devoted to the departments of the government, while along the river front wide esplanades and spacious embankments with gymnasiums, waterways, and sculpture, complete the nation's playground.

In the City of New York plans have been suggested for the erection of a splendid group of buildings about City Hall Park, with railway and

bridge terminal facilities and provisions for all of the city's official departments. Similar plans are also under consideration in San Francisco.

Probably no other city in America has projected as well as assured the carrying out of the systematic beautification of the city on so splendid a scale as has the city of Cleveland. This is the more remarkable inasmuch as no American city, with the possible exception of Chicago, is so essentially democratic in its instincts. Nowhere have the movements centring about municipal ownership, taxation, and the great industrial issues found more ready response at the hands of the voters than in this great industrial centre on the southern shore of Lake Erie. Cleveland is a commercial city *par excellence*. It has been termed the Sheffield of America. It is a centre second only to Pittsburg in the iron, steel, coal, and coke trade. One-third of its population is foreign-born. But despite this fact, as well as the newness of its life, it has shown a willingness to expend many millions of dollars in the development of the artistic side of its existence.

The city is fortunate in the fact that all its public buildings are to be constructed at the same time. A uniform plan of procedure was thus possible. The Federal Building, County Courthouse, City Hall, and Public Library, as well as several other semi-public structures, are all to be built.

Under ordinary circumstances and with the subterranean political and commercial forces at work in a city, isolated construction would doubtless have been the result. But public-spirited men have brought about a harmony of action among the many political agencies which had to be satisfied, and achieved a result not far from ideal in its possibilities. Through the aid of state legislation a Board of Supervising Architects was appointed, endowed with a final veto upon the location, plans, and style of architecture of all the public buildings. Despite some local jealousies, the city called to its aid Daniel H. Burnham, of Chicago, the supervising architect of the Chicago Exposition; John M. Carrere, supervising architect of the Pan-American Exposition of Buffalo, and Arnold W. Brunner, of New York, the architect of the new Federal Building in Cleveland. The members of this commission were employed by the city at generous salaries and given absolute freedom in the working out of a ground plan for the arrangement and development of the scheme. The commission is also entrusted with the problem of improving the public square, the approaches to the sites of the public buildings, and the development of the lake front.

This is the most significant forward step taken in America in the matter of municipal art. It is comparable to the designs of Napoleon III., who

remade Paris, with the aid of Baron Haussmann, or to the prescience of Jefferson, who called a distinguished architect to the aid of the new government in the laying out of the national capital on its present scale.

The commission thus appointed was at work for more than two years, and has presented the results of its labors in a completed plan for the arrangement of the public buildings. The design has met with such enthusiastic approval that its consummation is now assured. The total expenditure involved approximates \$14,000,000 for public purposes, with from three to five millions more for a terminal railway station, music-hall, museum, and the like. It involves the clearing of a large area of land lying between the business portion of the city and Lake Erie, and the utilization of this space as a site for the public buildings, parkage, a splendid mall, and the development of a lake-front park sixty acres in extent into a splendid terminal railway station, which is to be the gateway to the city.

Even more widespread is the movement for out-of-door parks. In respect to this development the city of Boston is easily first. Her park area exceeds fifteen thousand acres and represents an expenditure of over \$33,000,000 in the metropolitan and local districts and an annual charge for maintenance of \$521,000. The system is more than a

local one, being comprehensively designed for the city of Boston and the thirty-eight other communities combined into an administrative district by act of the state. The system extends far out into the country and is connected together by boulevards and driveways, while a broad expanse of ocean beach has been secured for an ocean parkway.

New York is also turning its attention to the development of a comprehensive playground for the greater city. The famous Riverside Drive is being extended to the north, where it connects by broad boulevards with the Bronx and other park systems. In Brooklyn, Bay Ridge Parkway and Ocean Parkway are broad stretches of open parkage, the latter being five miles in length and connecting Prospect Park with Coney Island. It is also proposed to secure an expansive ocean frontage at Rockaway Beach as a seaside park.

Across the Hudson, the great Essex County Park system of over three thousand acres has been developed for the Oranges and Newark, while the Palisades are being acquired through the inter-state action of New York and New Jersey. In the West, Kansas City has recently worked out a splendid plan of parks, while Chicago has considered a scheme for the reclamation of the city's water front and the construction of a broad breakwater parkway some distance out in the lake and

connecting Jackson Park with the centre of the city. In Philadelphia, two millions of dollars have been appropriated for the bringing of Fairmount Park up to the centre of the city by a diagonal boulevard, while Cleveland has laid out a series of parks extending completely around the city and connected by boulevards, both extremities of the system resting upon the lake front. In time it is proposed to connect these lake parks by a boulevard system extending across the centre of the city, and connecting with the public buildings.

Similar activities are slowly transforming the city from within. The unsightly poles which have obstructed our streets are gradually disappearing, and the telegraph, telephone, and lighting wires are being sunk into conduits. Already this has been brought about in New York, Washington, Baltimore, and Cleveland. The planting, care, and preservation of trees are gradually being assumed by the city, while the nondescript gas and electric-light poles are being replaced by artistically designed iron posts, such as are found in New York City.

A similar change has come over school architecture and interior decoration. Police and fire station houses, branch libraries, and other public buildings are being designed with an eye to beauty as well as to utility. Grade crossings are being abolished by the depression or elevation of the

tracks, and the abatement of the smoke nuisance has already made much headway in a number of cities. In Boston, New York, Chicago, Pittsburg, Buffalo, and Cleveland art galleries, museums, and similar structures for educational purposes are being erected as the result of private benefaction or public expenditure.

All these exhibits of public spirit indicate a new point of view. The city has already assumed a new character. It has inspired philanthropic gifts, which have heretofore gone to charity, education, and the like, and diverted them to municipal uses. The city is coming to mean something to the citizen; it is coming to mean much to the voter. For in the ordinary course of development, the sense of art, of beauty, of coördinated parks and architecture would be the last sense to be developed. Historically it has been the final expression of a city sense. It involves and implies a love and affectionate interest in the city, and a conception of its unity and purpose.

Nothing is more convincing of the substantial municipal uplift which has taken place in America, or of the ultimate power of democracy to interest itself in public affairs, than the recent awakening of interest in art and public beauty and a willingness to make such sacrifices as may be necessary to bring their realization about.