

For underneath its odorous light
 His heart was warm, his soul was strong;
 He kept his love of Country bright,
 And sung her sweetest song!

Therefore her sons have gathered here
 To honor him, as few before,
 And blazon on his hundredth year
 The fame of Thomas Moore!

AMERICAN MUSEUMS OF ART.

It is not my purpose in this paper to refer in detail to the numerous museums now in more or less successful operation in this country, some of them, like the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and others, exercising a powerful influence upon the knowledge and taste of the public, many others doing good preliminary work in art education. My desire is chiefly to suggest how many smaller cities and towns may found museums of great practical value and comparatively small cost, each of which shall become a popular educator, the center of a beneficent and widespread interest.

First of all, the builders of museums should provide accommodations to correspond with their quality. It is not a question of a night's entertainment for a passing traveler, for whose delectation we spend vast sums in rearing inflammable palaces, gorgeous with upholstery and overflowing with a riotous luxury, but of the permanent safe-keeping of our immortals. A museum should therefore be constructed, primarily, to insure safety and good exhibition; secondly, to be of itself an exponent and lesson of the fine arts to whose service it is dedicated. The shell or skeleton of the edifice, suited to its predestined contents, can be built at a moderate cost, while its outward garb and architectural decoration may be rightly left for future generations to complete. It is a serious mistake to exhaust the liberality of the first donors on the outside of an incompleting building with but little provided for its interior; for it operates as a wet blanket on the nascent enthusiasm for art to find instead of a museum amply filled as far as it goes with valuable objects, an ambitious, spasmodic architectural effort,

open to criticism, and too heavily weighted with debt or cost of completion to give much hope for a long time of being able efficiently to fulfill the purposes for which it is intended. Much better it would be to follow the example of the trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of New York and secure a complete series of special art-objects, even if exhibited for a time in temporary quarters, than to erect a costly fragment of an edifice doomed to remain for an indefinite period a standing apology for the poverty within.

A museum, however, once started on any scale, invites gifts. Every contribution becomes a challenge for another, so that giving to a popular institution grows contagious. The giver of a valuable object rightly is proud to see his name recorded in companionship with that of its author, sharing in the beneficence of genius, by making it literally the common property of mankind. In the late exhibition of mediæval art held at Lucca, Italy, premiums were awarded to the owners and preservers of valuable works; a novel feature, but not without reason as stimulating their conservative appreciation. Probably there is not a large-minded traveler but is ambitious to carry back to his own country examples of those arts which most distinguish the foreign from his native land and give it special renown. He would be spurred to greater liberality in knowing that there is a museum ready for his acquisitions where at his option they can be deposited in sympathetic companionship with their fellows, each gift assuming greater importance as it becomes a valued link in the chain of a great artistic whole.

A modern museum aims to present an

entire epitome of the art-phase of human life. Hence every object, even of homeliest use, in which exists complete or partial idealism, either as pure creative or representative art, simple ornamentation or elaborate decoration, finds its proper place in it. The war-clubs, *tapas* and gourds of the Polynesian are no longer rude curiosities, but instructive specimens in their ornamental designs, of the innate tendency of the so-called savage to bestow his first thought and most patient labor on gratifying his eye rather than pampering his body. The passion for art, both in the untutored and the highest cultivated mind, alike dominates the physical appetites, because in one form or other it is the type or symbol of an ideal perfection for which, in some fashion or other, every soul thirsts. Only two things ever get the better of it, and then but momentarily, viz: religious fanaticism, viewing every æsthetic longing as a snare of Satan, and the equally stupid conclusion that whatever does not absolutely minister to physical wants is unnecessary and useless.

A great museum should be organized on a scale that shall provide for the systematic collection and appropriate exhibition of every nation's art, little as well as great, chronologically arranged, and divided into its diverse departments and schools; and yet massed so as to present an effective, æsthetic whole, emphasized by giving masterpieces the places of honor, while the grouping of the collection shall be such as to facilitate study and comparison. This is not an easy task, for it implies the services of a corps of immaculate experts in all branches of art, not easily to be gotten together in the largest capitals of Europe. In time, however, a museum educates its own officials, if they are faithful to their duties. Meanwhile, a general acquaintance with art-history, aided by special technical knowledge, combined with a nice discrimination in arranging objects harmoniously together with a main eye to æsthetic effect and artistic law, is indispensable to preserve such an institution from becoming a wearisome, ill-sorted, incongruous heap of miscellaneous objects, to their common detriment and confusion; while their best care and preservation needs varied professional acquirements, equal to a royal college of physicians and surgeons.

The formidable requirements as to funds and organization of a first-class museum need not at all hinder the establishment of lesser ones suited to the wants and resources of small cities. No country can

expect to maintain many of the former, but the latter are within the means of moderate-sized towns, or even villages. They would also form useful auxiliaries to the large museums, by cultivating and spreading artistic feeling to the remotest parts of the country, and thus preparing the community at large for their better support and appreciation. As almost every town now has its town-hall or public library, or is contemplating its erection, there would be no special extra expense in devoting one or more rooms in either building to the reception of gifts of art or such pictorial commissions as may be executed of local interest, illustrating the patriotism and renown of its citizens. In mediæval times, churches, town-halls, and private dwellings, too, were liberally adorned after this fashion. The topics of sculpture and painting, notably the former, were, however, taken more from religious than civil or domestic sources. Art speedily became the universal language of joy and good-will, softening the asperities and enmities of a cruel, self-seeking age, just as, more than a thousand years before, it had performed the like service for the classical peoples. If the great American nature be destined, as it would seem to be by the logic of events, to follow in the same track, it must begin its career by inoculating its citizens with a love of art guided by the fruits and experiences of its predecessors in this path of civilization, and fostered by commissions for the adornment in sculpture and painting of buildings of architectural pretensions and public uses, taking the themes from the purest and noblest sources of their own feelings and convictions. And if we are to arrive at the ultimate goal of a great national art, we must foster it as it comes, in full conviction that it will gradually exalt itself to its highest functions by ascending, step by step, from its lowest. Each town, therefore, can do good service primarily to itself, and, secondarily, to the nation, by beginning a museum of art, even in a small way, free to all, and recording the virtues and deeds of its best citizens in hues and shapes that shall most forcibly and agreeably incite the disposition to emulate them.

The Winn Library of Woburn, Massachusetts, is a practical illustration of a right example in this direction. The ample bequest of Mr. Winn provides for a museum of art, on a modest scale, in connection with the books. Besides a legacy of pictures, from which the trustees can, if desirable, select the best and dispose of the others, a portion of

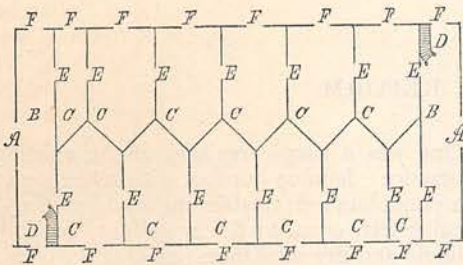
the income from the general fund can be devoted to the acquisition of works of art most likely to be of interest and service to the town.

Economy in building, while rightly adapting the means at disposal to the desired end, becomes an important consideration in all similar enterprises. With this in view, I venture to submit a rude design, which, for a small museum, yields the most wall-space, best light, and complete security on a given area, combined with simplicity of form of edifice and convenient division into necessary rooms for the proper isolation of different qualities and epochs of art. The

minor objects, could be well arranged in such rooms, for side-lights often suit them as well or better than any other. At one end or both there could be a gallery the entire width of the building, suitable for busts, engravings, photographs, drawings, etc., and communicating with the double series of rooms between those destined for the chief objects. When funds admit of it, a second story, lighted from the top, should be added, divided into a few large halls or left in one, as required, for the hanging of larger pictures in general, or to give more space below to the other contents and uses of the museum. Staircases leading from either end gallery would give easy access to the greater halls, which being lighted from above could be of regular shape. If the irregularity of those below be an objectionable feature as to general symmetry, the compensation would be found in increased wall surface and better light at the extreme ends for the objects there shown.

A building, of this simple, economical, constructive plan could be erected in sections, and as needed indefinitely extended in parallelograms forming hollow squares, or court-yards between them, useful for massive objects, as more room was needed inside for the more fragile works. All wall partitions should be fire-proof, and to economize space, as thin as the requisite strength will admit. As a sufficient protection against fire, these partitions and the doors might be lined with one-eighth inch thick asbestos mill-board. This substance possesses special advantages as a background for pictures and other works of art. Even if soaked with kerosene it will not burn, and it is virtually indestructible in any common flame. Being an atmospheric non-conductor it serves to keep a room warmer in winter and cooler in summer, thus helping equalize the temperature, an important object in a museum. As it is a purely mineral substance, it does not harbor insects or generate noxious odors. Its natural color is a soft, neutral tint, very favorable in itself for art-objects; but it can be colored with warm tints if required. An absorbent and not a reflector of light, as are most wall-papers, it does not fatigue the eye or dazzle it by contrast with the object placed against it. Supplementary to museums on this scale, there might be formed art-clubs to aid in their general management and purpose, with committees to take charge of special departments.

If investments in art do not, like other



PLAN OF DIVISIONS OF THE FIRST STORY OF A MUSEUM BUILDING TO ECONOMIZE WALL-SPACE AND SECURE THE BEST SIDE-LIGHT.

A. Main entrances. B. End galleries. C. Series of rooms for paintings, sculpture and other objects of art. D. Staircases to second story, containing large galleries lighted from above. E. Passages draped with curtains. F. Side windows to be glazed with ground glass.

architect is left to make its proportions harmonious and to expend, internally or externally on decoration, little or much, as circumstances shall warrant. In any case, plain, solid masonry, with fire-proof cement floors, arched or not, are indispensable. Let us suppose a certain town has acquired several hundred paintings of various periods, as many sculptures and casts, and a fair collection of the minor arts, such as bronzes, faience, pottery, glass, tapestries, ancient furniture, etc., and wishes suitably yet cheaply to accumulate them to good advantage for public study and enjoyment. For this purpose, an oblong building, shaped after the accompanying plan, having a basement for necessary offices and studies, with the first story divided into a series of rooms of irregular dimensions, according to the nature of the contents, opening into each other and all having the same shape, would give the greatest possible wall-space for side-lights from spacious windows, with least obscurity from shadows or direct front lights. Paintings and sculpture, as well as

enterprises, directly beget reproductive material capital and increase in corresponding ratio the moneyed wealth of the country, they do so indirectly by their influence on every industry to which beauty lends additional value. Besides this advantage, there is another collateral one of equal consideration: These museums attract myriads of visitors of the best classes, whose necessary disbursements largely enrich the community which founds them, and become a prolific incentive to new business enterprises and industries.

Since the opening of the South Kensington Museum, about twenty years since, up to October 20, 1877, it has received 16,698,008 visitors, a large number of whom were non-residents of London. Yet these indirect material benefits, vast as they be, are but secondary. The chief gain comes from the effect on *mind*. Museums stimulate the intellectual capital of a country to active reproduction in numberless ways that affect profoundly the character and welfare of the people.

THE METRIC REFORM.

A REVOLUTION in the humble matter of weighing and measuring, which affects every man, woman, and child in the United States, is now making quiet progress. We are entering upon the transition stage, for we have in partial use two discordant sets of weights and measures. One is the medley inherited from Great Britain and used here from the beginning of our national existence; the other is the metric system, the gift of Continental Europe, predestined, from the time when our Constitution was adopted, ultimately to supplant its rival.

The First Congress passed a vote, 15th January, 1790, calling upon the Secretary of State for a "plan or plans for establishing uniformity in the currency, weights and measures of the United States." In his very able report in reply, dated 4th July, 1790, Thomas Jefferson said: "The experiment made by Congress in the year 1786, by declaring that there should be one money of account and payment through the United States, and that its parts and multiples should be in a decimal ratio, has obtained such general approbation both at home and abroad, that nothing seems wanting but the actual coinage to banish the discordant pounds, shillings, pence, and farthings of the different states, and to establish in their stead the new denominations." He proposed two plans for weights and measures.

One was a simple revision of the existing practice: defining our foot with reference to a pendulum rod; establishing a bushel of $1\frac{1}{4}$ cubic feet, equal to 8 new gallons, for both liquid and dry substances; making the ounce the weight of $\frac{1}{7000}$ of a cubic foot of water, and abolishing the troy ounce and pound and the avoirdupois drachm. The other scheme was a purely decimal system, to be founded on a unit of length equal to $\frac{1}{10}$ of a cylindrical iron rod oscillating in seconds. The cube of this length was to be the "meter" or unit of capacity, and the weight of water it would hold was to be the new ounce, equal to the weight of the silver dollar. Neither of these alternative suggestions produced any practical effects.

A very similar proposition, made at the same time by Talleyrand in the French Constituent Assembly, resulted in the metric system. A decree of 8th May, 1790, sanctioned by Louis XVI., 22d August, requested the king to write to His Britannic Majesty asking the British Parliament to concur with the French Assembly in fixing an invariable standard based upon pendulum experiments, to be conducted by the *savants* of both countries. Great Britain did not join in the movement, but several other nations did take part in the slightly different scheme which was actually adopted. A system of the simplest kind was prepared for the com-

