

The City Beautiful

By Charles Mulford Robinson, Author of
"The Improvement of Towns and Cities"

THE CITY BEAUTIFUL" as a phrase expresses an ideal held by many people. By many more it is misunderstood, and although the phrase is making conquests and by increasing numbers is used understandingly, a great multitude utter it vaguely, using it at all only because affectionately drawn to the indistinct vision which it suggests. In "The Voyage of Life" there is pictured in the distance, dimmed to mortal eyes by the fallen veil of death, a gleaming glorious cluster of spires and domes. A great light marks the Celestial City's site. So, to designate a hope, a dream all uncertain now but to be realized later, is the phrase "City Beautiful" most frequently used.

Those who use it most exactly, having certain results in mind, find the phrase one illy chosen with which to achieve things in a busy and practical world. But they have this to admit: it is popular. It has somehow seized on the imagination of men. It puts into a convenient term that dream that made the ancient conception of heaven a city, that was the inspiration of Babylon, of Alexandria and Athens, that barbaric Nero tried to realize, that the Irish Gaelic poets sang of, that found believers in the merchant princes of the Renaissance, and that faded not from view in the gloom of the middle ages. Today it wakes again with undiminished vigor.

Admitting, then, the popularity of the term in spite of its vagueness, there is need not that it be set aside but that it be made more definite, accurate and exact.

In the City Beautiful, as properly understood, beauty in the sense of loveliness is not the first thought. The beauty referred to is the beauty of fitness, of perfect adaptation to purpose. If we ask, for instance, for a beautiful street, the question will at once arise as to the kind of a street in mind, the purposes to which it is to be put, the nature and volume of the travel upon it, and the character of the buildings at its

edge. For we are not merely to put "beauty" on the street; we are to fit the thoroughfare beautifully to its end. In the making beautiful of a city such problems as this are met with repeatedly for the city is the most complex of organisms. We have to consider its many functions and how it may best be fitted in its various parts for their performance, and only when we have finished that shall we behold rising before us the City Beautiful.

To be sure, we shall not attain perfection in our adaptation to purpose until to the strictly utilitarian there have been given the lines of grace and beauty, for as long as a utility is ugly there is room for improvement. But first, in city building, the beautiful thing must have a use. So the thoroughfare is primarily, and must be always principally, a way of going, but it has not reached the height of its development when with its good pavement it is merely an easy way of going. It must be also a pleasant one. This is the thought that gives distinctness and definiteness to the idea of "the City Beautiful," and that saves the ideal from the charge of impracticality.

Applying this standard, there is explained at once the breadth and complexity of the City Beautiful vision. To this person it means parks, to that one playgrounds, to another sculpture and fountains, to a fourth splendid thoroughfares and noble architecture. The test is the city's need, for completeness, of each of these elements and then the possibility of making each of them contribute to civic beauty or splendor. Does a city better serve any of its complex functions because it has parks or public buildings? If so, these have a use, and as utilities we are only demanding that they be given their natural and appropriate development when we would make them beautiful. We are not making the extravagant demands of a mere aesthete but are better fitting them to serve their urban purpose, and

thus are better fitting the whole city to its work. We are really "improving" the city.

There remains a point for consideration. Is this highest development of the city's various functions worth while? Granted that as long as there is not beauty there is incompleteness, is any special harm done by the incompleteness provided that the purpose of the utility still is moderately well served? An argument might be based on the existence of beauty through all the world—from smallest flower to widest landscape—of a beauty that, as far as we know, can be appreciated only by man and that must, therefore, have been stamped on creation for his enjoyment and profit. For then the beauty required of the town, where men are huddled together, would be only the natural and logical extension of its existence in nature. Considered thus, we would not dare to deny it to the town. But the argument can be brought down to a more practical basis:

In all cities there is a large number of persons whom poverty restricts to a narrow existence and mean surroundings. They cannot travel, and they possess in their own right little or nothing that is beautiful. Yet in many of these cases the artistic sense is naturally pronounced, so that the hunger for beauty is keen; in all there is a potential capacity more or less consciously recognized for its enjoyment. These people cannot of themselves possess lovely gardens, beautiful paintings and sculpture, feel music's inspiration in their own homes, or retire for prayer to aesthetically satisfying private chapels. Whatever beauty they have must be held in common ownership with others. The parks of the city are their gardens, and to many are their one introduction to nature. Their only paintings are in the public art gallery, their only statues in the street; the public churches are their visible evidence of religion's love and pride, and their music is the music of the town. The artistic wealth

of a community, therefore, is not merely the wealth of its better classes, is not only for the satisfaction of the demands of culture and education, nor is it designed for the special enjoyment of those who have beauty about them at home, and are able to travel in search of it; it is, far more particularly, the blessed possession of the poor; the acquirement of beautiful objects by those who otherwise would lack them; it is the making possible and opening up of a larger, fuller and richer life for the city's multitudes.

Poverty were robbed of some of its curse could the lowliest resident boast from his heart that he was a citizen of no mean city. The poorer taxpayers of Paris, it has been said, are so proud of their city's beauty that they would rather have cut from the annual budget those items which stand for expenses that are elsewhere called necessary than those which add to its beauty. With the corresponding classes in any city the most popular thing that a municipal administration can do with sanity is to make striking additions to the visible glory, beauty and wealth of the incorporated community.

Out of such additions as these there is also a gain distinctly civic in influence. Not only does beauty in the town, considered from the spiritual side alone, enrich the life of the poor and widen the life of the toilers, it not only invitingly lays bare new realms of aspiration, thought and sentiment, and so becomes an educational influence which in one way and another can be readily turned to definite ends. It creates civic pride. And that is an asset as precious to a city as its patriotism to a nation. A municipality whose residents are genuinely proud of it is strong also in industry and commerce, as well as politically, for it has the best possible advertisement—the praise of its residents. That is one reason, aside from the attraction of visitors, that urban beauty pays.

Rochester, N. Y.

Experiences of a Street Car Conductor

A STREET CAR conductor rubs elbows with more people probably than any man in the community and necessarily has a variety of experiences with all classes and conditions of men and women. An observant member of the "fare, please," fraternity gives the following sketch of life on the rear platform in the New York Independent:

Working on the back platform of a street car is generally the best resort of a man who has lost everything but industry. I do not say this to belittle conductors or motormen. I consider it high praise. What I mean is that I know of no form of labor, however difficult, that is harder than working on a street car. Many men who fail in business, cannot make ends meet in their profession, or lose clerical positions, say "No, thank you," when they are offered positions on the cars. They would sooner beg, steal or live off their friends. You may rest assured that the conductor or motorman, whatever his faults, is not afraid of hard work. It must not be assumed that it is easy to secure employment on the cars. In the last few years there has been a slight improvement in the hours and a slight increase in the pay, and there are hundreds waiting for men to die or resign. Some of them do one or the other, after a while; and now and then—but rarely, though—some man is discharged. In my time, and since the introduction of the trolley in Chicago, where I first went on the cars, there has been a distinct improvement in the class of men who seek the work. And yet the business is not made up wholly of Chesterfields and college professors. It could not be.

Sarcasm? Not at all. Let me illustrate. When I had been railroading a week I had, one night, a very crowded car. A crowd of men and women blocked up the back platform. I called:

"Move up front; there's plenty of room up front."

But they stood there and never moved an inch. I had actually to push them up front. I had been working over ten hours and was not feeling any too well, and I did not use very choice language. When the crowd thinned out and we were near the depot, a man with a high silk hat and a fur lined overcoat came out and lectured me. He said I was rude and he had a notion to report me. He told me I should treat each passenger as if he were my guest, and as if I were anxious he should go away pleased. I was angry and retorted:

"Do you suppose if I could talk and act like that I would be working for \$2.10 a day during a blizzard?"

That was enough. He did not say any more; but he reported me, and I did not have a chance to resign.

I could not secure the transfer to another line. Finally I left Chicago, with permission to use the company as reference.

I went to Pittsburg, where I obtained work easily. It paid 24 cents an hour for a day of ten hours, the best wages paid street car men in the United States. I

remained in Pittsburg for a year and liked the place.

I do not want you to suppose that I had a sinecure merely because I was satisfied with my position.

A conductor on a trolley car can scarcely call his soul his own. This may sound strange to the casual observer, who regards the conductor as a petty tyrant, lording it over his poor passengers. As a matter of fact, he is subject to the whims of the most insignificant person who enters his car. Any one can report him for incivility, or—worse—lie about him, and he has a black mark put down against his name at the office. Then there is that awful book of rules and regulations. Every man employed by the company has to have one, and every man has to learn the regulations by heart. He soon discovers that there is a fine and a threat of dismissal for nearly everything under the sun—except breathing. He finds minute directions telling how he is to act and talk in every possible emergency.

He has to be most careful in case of accidents, whether they are serious or trivial. If John Smith sprains his foot in alighting from the car the conductor must interview John Smith, and, if possible, examine his ankle; and he must secure the names and addresses of five or six persons who saw John Smith sprain his ankle. Of course, that is reasonable enough; but the same thing cannot be said of some of the other rules. For instance, if a reckless driver comes along and runs the pole of his wagon into my car, breaking a window, I am compelled to pay for that window. Then again, if Brown's wagon scratches some of the paint off the side of the car I am compelled to make that good or lose my position.

A conductor's lot is never entirely a happy one. During the summer he risks his life every time he goes to collect fares along the edge of the footboard on either side of the car. He is liable to collide with a brick pile or a lime kiln at any time; and when it occurs, he is either killed or laid up for repairs. In the winter time he is on the back platform, half frozen. It is only fair to say that the inclosures around the platform of the cars of today are a great protection during inclement weather. I do not believe the companies deserve any particular credit; it took a special act of legislature to make them do it. Then a man never knows when he is going to get a meal. He jumps up before daylight in the morning, gulps down a hurried breakfast, and hurries to the depot to take out his car. He cannot afford to be a minute late. That would be a mortal sin, not to be forgiven. Patti could disappoint an audience, but a car conductor must never fail to be on time for the public. When the dinner hour arrives a small boy who lives in the neighborhood of the conductor's home, or some member of his family, hails the car and passes up the dinner pail. He cannot eat the dinner until he reaches the depot, and by the time he reaches the depot the food is cold. When he is through for the day he hurries home for supper. He is no sooner through than he has to go to bed,

so that he will not oversleep himself the next morning. It is not a bed of roses.

Being a single man, I was not affected by the loss of home life. I boarded with a conductor's family, and the sacrifices he had to make were really disheartening. He hardly knew his own children, and certainly did not have a chance to enjoy the society of his wife. She was a tidy, good-natured woman, who knew how to cook and take care of a house. Her husband earned on an average \$48 a month, and \$12 was paid out in rent for a comfortable two-story house, that had a neat bathroom and some other modern conveniences. He kept \$5 a month for his tobacco, shaving and other personal expenses. To my way of thinking it was quite moderate. With the remainder, amounting to \$31, she kept the table, clothed the children and provided for her own wants. The \$4 a week board I paid her should be added to the total income. I cannot see, for the life of me, how she ever made any money on me; the table she set was enough to eat up the whole \$4. She was a natural manager, and with habits of economy was able to do these wonders. That family lived happily and was able to keep out of debt. I do not pretend to say that the family of every railroad man can live so well on the same amount of money. So much depends on the wife. If a man is fortunate enough to marry an industrious and economical woman, she can make ends meet, no matter how much he makes, providing, of course, he works regularly and turns the money over to her at the end of each week.

Just when I thought Pittsburg was going to be my home I lost my position. One day two drunken men boarded my car. They began to sing and soon became profane and abusive. I went inside and quietly asked them to stop. They did stop for a minute, and then became worse than before. Several of the male passengers began to offer hints for my benefit.

"If the conductor knew his business," one remarked, "he would throw these fellows off the car."

"Yes," said another. "But did you ever meet a conductor that had the courage to do his duty?"

This decided me. I went up to the nearest drunken tough—for that is what the man was inside the clothes—and said:

"If you don't quit your abusive talk you'll have to get off this car."

"I dare you to put me off," he retorted, with a leer and a fresh flow of profanity.

I pulled the bell rope, stopped the car, took my man by the back of the neck, and threw him into the street. The women passengers shrieked; the men, sitting as still as Chinese idols, never offered to help me. Tough number two came at me. In self-defense I had to fight. When I got through with him he was a sorry vision. I tore his clothes, blacked one of his eyes and bloodied his nose. He hammered me pretty hard, too. They had plenty of money, for they hailed a cab and drove off.

When we reached the depot the superintendent was standing there, evidently waiting for me. By his side was the man

I had thrown from the car. He looked at me with one-eyed haughtiness and, turning to the superintendent, pointed his finger, saying:

"That's the man."

The superintendent regarded me quizzically, saying, in angry tones, but with a half smile, lifting the corners of his mouth:

"You are discharged. Take your badge into the office."

"But, I cried, 'can't I tell my side of the story?'"

"There's only one side to this story," he replied, grimly.

"Why?" I asked, with open mouthed wonder. "Because I licked that dirty blackguard!"

"No," he said, lowering his voice; "because the man you licked is the son of one of our directors."

That night I met a man who had two passes east, and we resolved to try our chances in Philadelphia. We got positions at once, only to find out that a strike was going on. I did not like the idea of working as a "scab," but I could not afford to throw up my place. The strike lasted seven days. For two days I did not do a thing, and the other five days I made one trip a day, surrounded by four big policemen and dodging now and then a rotten potato, decayed eggs and an occasional brick, heaved into the back platform by the sympathetic friends of the strikers. I received \$2 a day and the assurance of being retained, no matter how the strike ended. The papers said those seven days were a reign of terror; I could not see it in that light. It took nerve to work—that was all. No one was killed; possibly three or four men received scalp wounds from missiles thrown by boys.

The men went back with the assurance that their condition would be bettered. It was not bettered immediately, but it has been since. The pay and the hours are now better than were asked for when that strike was ordered, six years ago. The pay is 20 cents an hour, for a day of from ten to eleven hours. Incidentally, the municipality has exacted good terms from the corporation. The street car companies were given the right to use the trolley system on condition that they would pave and keep forever in repair the streets on which their cars are run. This, I venture to say, has made Philadelphia the best paved city in the union.

Every conductor there is subject to petty annoyances, both from the passengers and the subordinate officials of the company. A rule prohibits us from entering into disputes with passengers, and yet there are times when the observance of the rule is out of the question. A man comes to you five minutes after he has paid his fare and says the change is 10 or 15 cents short. On two occasions, when I felt morally certain that I was right, I gave up the additional money rather than provoke a quarrel and be reported for incivility. A count of my money on those nights proved that I was in the right.

Perhaps the hardest feature of a conductor's life is the "swing" system. By this arrangement, although a man may only

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