The Artistic Side of Chicago

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ONE who enters Chicago unacquainted with it, having no open sesame to its hospitable doors, knowing the city only by its streets, its hotels, and its theatres, is disturbed by an unpleasant emotion. If he comes from some well−regulated, cultivated, and placid town of the eastern part of this country, or from England or Germany, he feels shaken out of poise and peace by a tremendous discord. He sees a city ankle−deep in dirt, swathed in smoke, wild with noise, and frantic with the stress of life. He sees confusion rampant, and the fret and fume of the town rise and brood above it like hideous Afrits.

But as time goes on and even supposing the man continues to remain a stranger among the two millions of his fellow men who make up the city he experiences a change of sentiment. He ceases to be shocked, and becomes interested. It occurs to him that if commerce is ever epic, it is so here. He feels the beat of the city like the vibration of mighty drums, and the thing he thought a discord he discovers to be the rhythm of great movements. The drab sky, the dirty streets, the dusky air, the dark−clothed figures of the people, are all in harmony, and it seems dramatically fitting that a city in the throes of its toil should wear its working clothes. It is grimy with its labor, and breathless and noisy forging its Balmung with mighty shouts.

He who comes to Chicago to seek his fortune, possessing delicate traditions, having been brought up among persons of similar traditions, is confused and angered by the treatment he receives. He discovers that he must be successful if he would be noticed; that he must be in need if he would be helped. But if he makes his way in law−abiding, frugal, and lonely fashion, he will attract no attention. And first and last, in poverty and in riches, in sickness and in health, the town will roar at him; if he is afraid, it will roar twice as loud as it did before. Its furnaces and forges, its cable systems and syndicates, its slaughterhouses and wheatpits, its railroads and elevators, its greedy breadwinners and greedy millionaires, and the boats upon its filthy river will all roar. So, inevitably, at last, in a puny way, he will roar back. He will say Chicago has no peace, no leisure, no aspirations save those of a materialistic sort, no religion, no refinement. Sometimes, even after he has found he is mistaken in saying these things, he will go on saying them, because he cannot forgive Chicago for enticing him, with her commercial allurements, away from the home of his youth and the things to which he was born. He lays to her account all the pangs of homesickness which he suffers, and he misrepresents her, as it is the fate of new cities to be misrepresented.

There are thousands of well−born and well−trained men in Chicago, who, coming here from other places and leaving that which was most dear to them behind, have traveled from their offices to their homes and back again, dull as cow−herds that slouch along a worn path from barn to field. They know nothing of the city that may not be seen beside their daily paths or experienced in the routine of business. These men complain that Chicago means nothing to them but the dollar; and in their egotism they forget that they mean nothing more to Chicago. In fact, the artistic sense has always existed among us surreptitiously. For thirty years and more those who have been conscious of the inner spirit of the city have recognized an avid desire for intellectual and aesthetic phey mean nothing more to Chicago. In fact, the artistic sense has always existed among us surreptitiously. For thirty years and more those who have been conscious of the inner spirit of the city have recognized an avid desire for intellectual and aesthetic pleasures, in the indulgence of which the fierce labor and competition of the town might be forgotten. It was about thirty years ago that Chicago had her first distinguished painter; about that time a famous sculptor set up his work−shop here, and a number of young men met to read Dante in his native tongue;

then came the Browning class, the first to be organized in America; and then was organized a woman's club, the first of many, but remaining to this day one of the most aspiring of its kind.

These were the first visible signs of the desire for beauty and for mental recreation among the men and women of Chicago, — men and women engaged in the most amazing performance in the way of rapid city−building which the history of the world has ever known. It was inevitable that such a city should be essentially, even violently democratic, and that in the pursuit of beauty, as in all other things, equal opportunities should be offered to all. When parks were put in the plan of the city, they were put in for the poor people; when libraries were made, they were made free, and in at least one of these generous collections were provided books designed especially for workers in all manner of mechanism and handcraft. Of large libraries there are three. The public library has sub−stations in the suburbs and in remote parts of the city, that the expense of time and travel may be saved; for the city is of great extent. The other two libraries are the result of private munificence. Their almost inexhaustible resources are free as air, and every workman may avail himself of their privileges. The three libraries have wisely bought their books with reference one to the others, that the greatest variety of books possible might be obtained, and the convenience of students of all sorts thus be met.

The democratic idea held in art as in other matters, and when, through the unselfish exertion of a number of very busy men and women, the Art Institute came into existence, it was made as nearly free as possible. There are over a thousand pupils in attendance now, some of whom are children of representative families, and some the Arabs of the street. There is a permanent exhibit of very good worth within the walls, and exhibits drawn from the cities of the Old World as well as the New are frequent. The instructors and lecturers are men and women of many schools. Some are conservative, with Old World traditions; some are newspaper artists, who work "for the God of Things as They Are;" some are former students of the Institute; others are foreigners, who lament the "atmosphere" of older cities. It is very pleasant to know that a number of these instructors have identified themselves for years past with movements intended to acquaint the towns lying beyond Chicago with pictures and artists.

The completion of the handsome Fine Arts Building has given those engaged in artistic pursuits a feeling of stability, and has led to increased sociability. There are painters and sculptors to be found on some floors; on other floors are musicians, teachers of dramatic art, collectors of gems and antique curios. Then there are clubs of one sort and another. The Chicago Woman's Club, which offers prizes to artists, looks after women in police stations, argues publicly with politicians from the mayor down, writes papers, and entertains royally on occasion. Also there is the Fortnightly, a woman's club, with a history and a rigidly limited membership. Near at hand the Caxton Club has its exquisite suite of rooms, in which it holds exhibitions of fine bindings, book plates, antique books, and illuminations. Here, too, is the Hundred and One Club, to which newspaper folk and other writers belong; and a very well−known club of rich young women, who for ten years have befriended the girls in the factories in ways both practical and sentimental, to the cementing of friendship between the fortunate and the unfortunate. Also there is the Little Room, which meets once a week, at the hour when it grows too dark to paint, at the studio of Mr. Ralph Clarkson, and finds comfort in a samovar and sociability. To be entitled to membership, one must have created something in the world of art. Writers, painters, sculptors, architects, and musicians belong, and even a reviewer or two who are said to have created a prejudice. But while achievement is the passport to the doors of the Little Room, once within all evidences of toil and talent must be hidden: the clay is covered, the easel draped, the desk closed, the piano locked; and hospitality rules.

The Arts and Crafts Society alone refuses to meet at this rendezvous, but for a time clanged its anvils and lit its braziers in the attic of the Woman's Temple, far above nervous neighbors. Now it meets at Hull House. This society is composed of men and women who turn the rooms under their mansard roofs into smithies, set up kilns in their furnace rooms, and fashion their own furniture. They aim to do original work or none at all, and their shaping and carving, their burning and beating of woods and metals, result in many articles which are beautiful and some which are unique. In addition to the work in silver and gold and bronze and wood, some hand−weaving has been done; for the members are lavish of experiments, of which, if the successes bring but little glory, the failures bring abundant merriment, and, fortunately, no one takes the pretty achievements too seriously.

Bookmaking in all its aspects has called out some pleasing endeavors. On its mechanical side it has been entered into with enthusiasm. Private printing has been undertaken with keen interest, and at several private presses reproductions of old books and delicate editions of new ones have been made by amateurs. A few ladies

have essayed the designing and binding of books: a representative of Hull House has recently returned from the Dove Bindery at London, after perfecting herself in this art, with the intention of making binding one of the industries of the manual workers at Hull House. Some attractive illumination in books has been shown in public lately, the work of a Chicago woman who has numerous disciples, and another woman has made the painting of stereopticon slides a fine art. One young man is winning approval as the illustrator of ecclesiastical books; two brothers, very young men, have brought a luxuriant fancy and a rare sense of color to use in the making of book covers, and another young man has gained for himself a national reputation in work along the same lines.

As for the writers, there is among them at least one cunning master of style; there is another who faithfully depicts the lift of the city; and there are a number who interpret the life of the further West, — the West of "the open and the sky." It must be admitted that this concentration upon the West is a token of provincialism, — a provincialism different in its quality, however, from that which is noticeable among those who live in New York. At the metropolis, where artists and writers live in an atmosphere of appreciation, and feel that they are the children of her greatness, no burden of duty and no pressure of circumstance, save that of a personal nature, is laid upon them. But in Chicago one who writes feels impelled to explain the impulsive, terrible, exhaustless city to the world, and to account for it by calling attention to the forces which lie back of it. Hurrying with the never ebbing crowd along her streets, living the eager life with the others, amazed daily at the momentum of the place, seeing there is scarcely any people of the globe for which the town is not an asylum, one feels it a duty, almost a command, to put the thing down in words, and give the world an idea of the city's energy and achievement. It is this which has given some of the best known writers of the West the "sacramental view of literature," as one of them ironically expressed it. For Chicago has a passionate zest for life; it is arrogant, swaggering, half drunken with pride, puffed up at its benevolence, its large−mindedness, and its ingenuity; and it conceals, as a blustering young man will conceal a virtue or a tenderness, the nostalgia for beauty which yearns in its heart. True, it expressed it quite frankly once, in the World's Fair, but, as if ashamed of this confidence, it tore the buildings from their foundations, or gave to the flames, the winds, and the junk shop the manifestations of this "one hour of madness and of joy." When the betraying beauty was destroyed, and the people had got back to their toil and their common−placeness, they once more looked the world in the face like honest men.

We are all quite free to admit that the large and comprehensive novel of Chicago has not yet been written, and it may be that it is an impossibility, like the great American novel. Chicago is too diverse for any book to represent more than one phase of its life. Henry Fuller, Will Payne, and George Ade have already faithfully reproduced certain phases; and John McCutcheon, the newspaper artist, has been as true to facts with his pencil as they have been with their pens. Many have made Chicago the scene of their books, but they have not written subjectively, nor with a full understanding of the whims, the purposes, and the aspirations of the place; consequently, their novels, however readable, cannot be accepted by the city as being genuine biography. Some of these books, most to be commended for literary value and for general interest, reveal an almost puerile misunderstanding of Chicago, and must be accounted failures when looked upon as local histories. It may be the widespread conviction that the conditions of the West are peculiar, and the sturdy provincialism which goes with it, that is responsible for the good−fellowship among the art workers of Chicago. The jealousies which so frequently exist among groups of that sort have never lifted their evil heads here. Those who know the inner life of other and older towns say that nowhere else among art workers is there as much sociability and good feeling as in Chicago. The informal evenings, with their free bonhomie, their music, reading, and talk, reconcile many a stranger within the gates to his exile from home, and bind the colony more closely together.

But if Western artists and writers have a moral responsibility in regard to their section, what shall be said of the architects, of whom the city has an aspiring and picturesque company? That, in spite of the ugliness of Chicago, which is an admitted fact, they have one honest achievement to their credit. They have almost created that important form of construction, commercial architecture. The "sky scraper" of steel, glass, and terra cotta — a daring contrivance, and well suited to the place and its needs — has appeared here in its perfection. Perhaps the ideal office building of the country is the Marquette building, which is not merely adapted to all the demands of such a structure, but, furthermore, is ornamented consistently. The exploits of the distinguished Jesuit whose name the building bears are represented in mosaics and mural decorations about the rotunda; the wild animals of the territory which the traveler and priest explored are reproduced in the bold work of Kemeys, the animal sculptor, and the Indians among whom Marquette dwelt live again in O'Neill's famous medallions. As perfect in

its way is the wholesale house of Marshall Field. There are in the country few buildings of solid masonry more substantial, convenient, and effective than the Auditorium, with its hotel and vast audience chamber; and few edifices with a facade so calm and noble as that presented by the First Church of Christ, on Drexel Boulevard.

The homes of Chicago, to be sure, can−not be said to have any typical or general style, unless it be the hideous fashion which puts up a front of stone twenty−five feet wide, and confesses to the fraud with two hundred feet of common brick wall on the other three sides, broken with fire escapes and rear porches. Were the city more closely built, these crimes against sincerity might be partly concealed; but there is still space, — space which, like the marshes of Glynn, is all revealing. Even the lavish homes on the boulevards, luxurious as they are, are lacking in harmonious effect. Money has been almost recklessly spent upon them, and there they stand in bewildering diversity, imitating all manner of things, from Florentine palaces to castellated feudal strongholds, and reaching for miles along the drives of the three divisions of the city and far out into the country. A horse would be wearied to travel from the old Cyrus McCormick mansion to the end of the Lake Shore residences, as they reach beyond Lincoln Park and follow the Sheridan Road through an unbroken line of smart suburbs. There are, besides, miles upon miles, compact and commonplace, of the homes of workingmen, and it is in these grim and unlovely stretches that the architecture of the city takes on its most offensive aspect. To the children of these localities who can know little or nothing of beauty, to the women who work there and seldom go far from their own neighborhood, the city, it seems, must become monstrous.

It is to such people, whose toil and intelligence have made Chicago what it is, that those who have a message of beauty hold the heaviest responsibility. And there are many who have not been oblivious of this fact. In the midst of the crowded communities of toilers there are eleven or twelve settlements where the higher studies, the languages, the arts, and the crafts are taught to a greater or less extent. Many are denominational, one is Jewish, some are non−sectarian, and the most influential, Hull House, is without religious prejudice or limitation. For it is like charity, that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. The wisdom and patience of Jane Addams guide its work, but it takes the cošperation of many to bring about the results which are now discernible. Year by year, many of the most cultivated young men and women in the city add their energy to this stream of light and beauty, so that it may truthfully be said that no child need hunger for knowledge, no one with a desire for art in any direction need let his talent die for want of opportunity to develop it.

It is often said that Chicago is a cruel city. If it is so, it is obviously without intention. The clangor and bluster incidental to its toil are enough to affright the stoutest heart, if there be no money in the purse and no home at the end of the journey. But it is a tender−hearted city, after all; and when it has beaten the life out of man or woman with its million iron hoofs, it is very sorry, and weeps from its innumerable eyes, and tries passionately to make up for it in deeds of benevolence. This may not seem, on the face of it, to have anything to do with a sense of beauty, but it has. The noisy and swaggering town has a heart that yearns for beauty, and that desires the comfort of all men. This is a part of her youth, of her democracy and her honesty. There are some hard task−masters within her limits, as there must indubitably be in a town where syndicates abound and corporations have their way; but public sentiment still holds up an ideal, and if by chance the wheels of greed and selfishness bespatter it, it is gilded anew, and once more lifted up that the people may see it.

The building of Chicago has been a much more difficult thing than those who traverse its streets to−day can appreciate; for it rests on a sandy slough, where the lake once rocked; its buildings are erected on piles, its streets have been elevated, and miles upon miles of its substructure are composed of practically solid masonry. Hundreds of acres have been filched from the lake, which, jealous of the theft, batters at the sea wall and undermines the esplanades. But in spite of all this, boulevards skirt the lake, intersect the city, and pass about it in a vernal belt from park to park. There are certainly six of the greater parks, yearly increasing in beauty as trees and shrubbery grow, and many smaller breathing places. The city council has recently authorized the purchase of playgrounds for the children. These places of peace and arboreal beauty offer pleasant paths to the hurried and worried folk of the town, and for a time, at least, give a sense of leisure and freedom from care. Here, in summer time, there are open−air concerts, some of them paid for by the park commissioners, and some by private citizens. A few citizens make up the annual deficit attending the season of the Chicago orchestra, of which Theodore Thomas is the leader; at these concerts the most impecunious music lover may listen to the best music in the world interpreted by a gifted leader and an enthusiastic orchestra.

But these indications of a growing devotion to that which warms the heart with beauty and with joy are not the

measurement of aspiration. They do not tell of that eager interest in art among the youth of the city, which a few years ago, if it existed at all, did not find expression. Nor do they reveal the intense earnestness of artists and writers in this part of the world, — artists and writers whose earnestness may defeat itself, but who surely blaze the path for others who shall do better than they. Nor can they reveal the mood of society, which, though it is not artistic, is inclined to look generously upon art, and humorously at itself.

"We have made our money in pigs," once said a young gentleman who was then president of the Art Institute, "but is that any reason why we should not spend it in pictures?"

The artistic sense of Chicago partakes of the spirit of the town, in that it persists in spite of all contumely. It is the fashion to depreciate it, to laugh at all pretensions to achievement on any save commercial lines, and to berate the city generally whenever it is mentioned. To all this Chicago turns a broad, good−humored smile, and tramps on through her mud, indifferent and besmeared. She has no time to pause; she is too busy and absorbed even to clean her streets; that which would be a disgrace to another city is only an incident with her. She is so confident of her destiny that she takes no note of mistakes, is not irritated at her failures nor depressed at her shortcomings. On the contrary, she is amused at herself, — at her exaggerations, her absurdities. But she knows, after all, that she is not understood. She knows that deep in her heart is an ideal, and it is the knowledge of this ideal which is responsible for the excessive civic pride noticeable in those who live within her limits. It is the belief in this ideal which inspires confidence in her ultimate artistic expression.

To an artist, one of the charms of the West is that it has been only partly exploited. Yet when Kipling remarked in Captains Courageous, that the story of the New West was yet to be written, it was peculiarly irritating, especially to those of us who believed that at least one man knew the West, and had told the tale of it in simple stories which stuck to the imagination and the memory like burs. But whether or not Kipling's observation be true of the wider West, it is certainly true of Chicago. The city awaits her artistic creator. She may think she exists in literature; but if she does, it is only in a form at once evanescent and tentative. No one has yet risen to rescue her from oblivion and give her immortality through art. Therefore, the most encouraging thing about the newly developed aestheticism of Chicago is the opportunity for virile and original work which lies at hand. The city seems to cry out to the workers with the pencil and the pen: "See what stories I offer you, what contrasts, what tragedies! See the mingling of strange peoples, the mob of wild faces from less fortunate lands, the old stories that are written on these faces, and the new stories on the faces of those born with old ideas to new conditions! Here is material for painter and poet, philosopher and novelist!" In one neighborhood the people read Yiddish, have a system of commerce all their own and a Sinaitic law. You may see the old men sitting at noonday, silent, for worship, in a bare room above a fruit store. They do not hear the roar of the city, for they are absorbed in thought, though tumult and squalor are all about them. In another part of town there is a neighborhood composed almost exclusively of Poles, and you may catch a glimpse of a little bride, all in white, tripping down the murky street, with the wedding party capering at her heels. If you turn into the district by the rolling mills, gigantic men will reply to your questions in English which is yet not English, giving you big mouthfuls of dialect. And here in a little neighborhood apart are Icelanders, — Icelanders who have not forgotten the sagas, and who, when they are homesick, summon up visions of fishermen's huts on wild fire−fashioned rock. Of Swedes, too, there is a mighty number, and of the Germans more than all. But the story of the American is greatest, for it is his land and his day, and he is drunk with his own achievements. He plays at the game of commerce, and is satisfied; for losing or winning does not so much matter to him as that he have the chance of the game.

These are among the aspects of Chicago which wait to be set down. They are understood by the people who meet and laugh together in hours after work, but whether they will be reproduced or not is left on the knees of the gods.

There seems to be no reason, however, the opportunity for training being free, the material for work being at hand, and the talent for work being manifest, why brave things in artistic achievement should not be done in Chicago within the next few years.

It is true, there are those who think that art, like the cyclone, has its paths, and that Chicago is far removed from the worn thoroughfare which the Muses tread; they expect us to be content with ugliness and non−expression, and to treat any creative ideas that come to us as the pretty princes in the Tower were treated. But this would be too callous by far; it would be too cynical; nay, it would be too humble. It is our fortune not to be callous, or cynical, or humble. The dreams and effervescence of youth are still ours. We still hope to embody

these visions and excitations in palpable beauty. It does not even matter to us if the rest of the world is amused at our declaration of principles, our confession of artistic faith; for we are elate with the reckless confidence of those who have not yet had a chance to fail.