

CITIES THAT MAKE GOOD

WILLIAM A. FEATHER

IT has been my observation that a city generally grows from within out. This is a clumsy but direct way of saying that the heads of most big industrial and commercial enterprises in a city are men who have grown up with the town.

For instance, why should Akron be the home of a half-dozen of the biggest rubber plants in the country? Is it not because the pioneers in the business happened to be Akron men who liked the town, and instead of hiking off to Cleveland to build a factory, they built one in Akron?

Again, why should Boston be the shoe center of the United States? This industry might better be located in a middle-western city, but it happened that a few of the first brainy shoe men liked Boston and decided to stay there. Dayton, the birthplace of John H. Patterson, is largely built up around the National Cash Register Company. Detroit is the hub of the automobile business for no particular reason except that the owners of most of the factories there called Detroit their home before they built automobiles. Pittsburgh is a great steel center, largely because many years ago its young men received training in the steel business and learned to like Pittsburgh.

It is the usual custom of chambers of commerce, boards of trade, commercial clubs, or whatever may be the names of those organizations that make it their business to boost a city, to devote most of their time to blowing horns in an attempt to interest outside capitalists in their community.

I am not certain that this is not largely misdirected energy. I have read of many of the prospectuses sent out by local boards of trade. They tell much about transportation facilities, water and fuel supplies, climate, factory, sites, growth of population.

Many hours of thought and lots of dollars are spent in these campaigns. Quite often public-spirited citizens raise a fund of a few hundred or thousand dollars and offer it to a

prospective capitalist as an inducement to him to select their city. Stock in a proposed enterprise is frequently liberally subscribed for by the townsmen, as an evidence of good-will. But what does all this amount to?

I am reminded of a story they tell in Kansas City where some of the leading citizens conceived the idea of building up the town by organizing a company with a capital of \$1,000,000 to be invested in the preferred stock of her smaller plants and to be held out as an inducement to others. About a third of the million had been subscribed when the committee called upon the late Col. W. R. Nelson, then owner and editor of the *Kansas City Star*. They expected a large subscription and also to secure the endorsement and co-operation of the *Star* in raising the balance. But Col. Nelson promptly declined to contribute to, or support the plan, saying that "whenever conditions for manufacturing are made right in Kansas City, factories cannot be kept away, and until conditions are right they ought to stay away."

Col. Nelson had in mind some of the factors of the "City That Makes Good," which I wish to bring before you.

In sizing up a town many questions must be asked, and I am going to suggest a few of them.

In the first place, what kind of schools have they? Are they well equipped, up-to-date? Are they training their boys and girls to become citizens that will do something for the town? Is there a university within their corporation limits or near, to which the more ambitious or more fortunate may go? Are the citizens enforcing the state law which prohibits children from working in factories until they are fourteen or sixteen, as the case may be?

What of the community's libraries? Do the books really circulate? Is the library a human institution where the ordinary person can go and feel at home, or is it a stuffy, overheated place, fit only for the aged, and people who wear whiskers and put cotton in their ears?

Is any encouragement given to the cultivation of a good musical taste? Is there a local orchestra, supported by the citizens. If a small town, is there a Chautauqua or a Lyceum

course? What of the theater? Is it possible for a good road company, playing good drama, to make expenses on a visit?

I have asked many questions, perhaps too many, but I can make my point better in that way.

Now let us consider the social activities of a community. Cleveland has a fine civic spirit. It has acquired hundreds and hundreds of acres of park land which it is helping the people to use. Years ago it burned the "Keep Off the Grass" signs. It has laid out baseball diamonds and tennis courts. Playgrounds for the children dot the city. They are directed by trained instructors, all of whom are graduates of a short course in playground work. The city controls its own bathing beaches and even its own refreshment stands. Sandwiches in the parks are sold for three cents. Even the dancing pavilions are managed by the city. The result not only is cheaper amusement but the best managed public dances you can find anywhere. Cleveland, like Chicago, just now is engaged in a fight to gain control of its water-front in order that the people may not be deprived of this heritage, and in this respect Cleveland is much better off than Chicago. The former city has the upper hand in the argument.

The policy of making community centers of the school-houses is spreading very rapidly through the progressive cities. Cities that are wide awake are holding free night classes. They are training immigrants in citizenship, establishing prison farms, injecting the golden rule policy into the police force, building free public hospitals for the sick, and enforcing a tenement code that prohibits the building of disease-breeding dungeons.

In the organization of their government these cities, too, are taking steps forward. They are centralizing responsibility, making provision for the initiative, referendum and recall, and, in other words, making the government direct and responsive. The newest thing is the development of that new profession—the city manager. This man under ideal conditions, trains for public service as a doctor trains for his profession. In him is largely the hope of efficiency in municipal administration.

Another characteristic of successful cities is that they have good public markets, places where the gardener and farmer can get together. In addition to getting better food products into the hands of the people, these public markets act as a food regulator for the merchants of the city who might be inclined to boost the cost of living higher than necessary. Wherever I go I notice that the growing cities have good public markets.

There is one more thing that a successful city must always try to do, and that is force the public utility corporations to give the maximum of service at the minimum of cost. I lived in Cleveland during the great fight which Tom Johnson made for three-cent street-car fare. I believe that fight, coupled with the many economic and humanitarian measures which Johnson introduced, did more to give Cleveland its 46 per cent. increase in the decade 1900 to 1910 than any other thing. Beside this sort of thing, the horn-tooting of chambers of commerce is a joke.

These utility fights have been made in other cities besides Cleveland; for instance, in Detroit and Toledo where Pingres and Golden Rule Jones fought, respectively. Cleveland is now engaged in a fight for three-cent electric light. The private corporation, against which a municipal plant is competing, has not yet reduced its rates to householders, but it has reduced its power rates tremendously. When you are talking cities to a manufacturer the fact that you can quote him low power rates will have more effect than the visit of a delegation of good fellows. Therefore, I would recommend to chambers of commerce who are anxious to see their cities grow that they support the people in their fight to regulate the street car, water, gas, electricity, telephone service, etc.

My last point, I think, is the most important of all.

The city that wants to make good must relieve business and the home of unjust taxation and place the burden upon the land.

Every business man will tell you *it is the overhead charges that are eating the heart out of profits to-day. Business is suffering from steadily increasing overhead charges.*

*Materials cost more, labor costs more. The purchasing power of the people is declining. The results are strikes, no dividends, overproduction.**

This overhead charge is little understood by the people, but they feel it oppressing them without knowing what it is. Overhead cost affects everybody—the laborer, the capitalist, the preacher, the lawyer, the doctor. It enters all vocations and all businesses. *When a man finds he cannot make a living and get ahead in one city, he pulls up stakes and gets out.* That's where Cleveland's low cost of amusement, its free parks, municipal dance halls, three cent light and car fare, are tremendous advantages. They swing the balance in her favor. Her working people stay with her, and so do the factories.

But out in St. Louis there is a different story. There the manufacturers must fight a continually shifting population. This is said to be due very largely to her antiquated tax laws. Missouri throws the greatest tax burden on the home. The home pays for opening, grading, curbing and sidewalking the streets; it bears the greater part of the burden for sewers, for parks and boulevards, for the extension of water mains, for water for fire fighting and flushing streets and sewers. The general property tax, although assessed against the merchant is by him shifted onto the home. Downtown property, thus being freed from these tax burdens, is much in demand and rents soar skywards and finally alight on the home.

Taxes are one big item in the overhead charges a community must pay. Then there is one other overhead or underfoot charge—the greatest of all. I refer to the interest on land values, that is, rent. Cities are inclined to boast of the high prices their downtown properties bring. The high land values are of course a reflection of the city's growth and prosperity. But when I hear a city boast of its high land values I think of a man who boasted to me that he owed \$200,000. Did you ever stop to think *that high land values*

* This fact also holds good of the public utility. Prior to 1914, the country was dotted with public utilities that had gone bankrupt from just this cause; so that too much regulation is as great a damage as none.

mean the same thing as indebtedness? Before you can do business on the earth, you've got to pay the interest on these land values in the form of rent, just as the man who has borrowed capital must pay the interest on his loan before he can draw out his profits.

Now, the average land value per capita in cities is \$1,000. Statistics show that the ownership of this land is constantly concentrating into fewer and fewer hands. Five per cent. of the people own most of our urban land values. The annual interest charge on this value is five per cent., which is paid to these few landowners before a wheel of industry is turned or a single laborer is fed. This annual drain is what decreases the fund that might be used to pay higher wages and better dividends, thus increasing the purchasing power of the consumers.

At present the employer strives to meet this situation by the installation of labor-saving machinery and increased human efficiency. But his victory is very short-lived. He soon finds that these advantages are capitalized by the landlord.

That is the reason I should have begun with this phase of the question, instead of discussing better schools, better recreational facilities, cheaper transportation, public markets and so on. These things are all necessary, but they should be preceded by tax reform; otherwise the benefits which flow from them will be capitalized by the landlords. That is what happened in Cleveland where they have had three-cent fare for about six years. Shortly after this went into effect, rents were advanced and land values soared, especially in outlying districts where it was thought the poorer people who had been confined to the slums would go. The same thing happened when three-cent light was obtained. Only a certain section of the city was given this light. It, therefore, became a talking point in renting and selling property in this section and higher prices were asked.

Therefore, I would advise the city that wants to grow, that wants to make good, to begin NOW to reform its tax laws, if it can do so itself, and if it has not the authority, to ask its state legislators for permission.

THE TURMOIL OF EXISTENCE

MARTHA E. BYRNES

PERHAPS the contrast between what I had observed on my prolonged trip through the East and Middle West and the observations given to us in such unique form by old "Elia," which had filled my after-dinner hour, roused the train of thought: howbeit, I found myself soliloquizing upon the, to me, menace of our age. It amused me to wonder what "Elia" would find to write about were he alive and visiting America today. I pictured the quaint character prowling about the cities and by-ways in search of the old and beautiful and odd—though I am afraid the dear man would not be permitted to prowl in his old customary manner, but in this progressive age and city would be docketed "suspicious character." It occurred to me, though, that were he still observing humanity from around the corner of his screen, we might be treated (would we appreciate the treat?) to a few remarks on that very subject of my soliloquy—*the discontent and almost universal unrest of youth in this country today.*

There seems to me little difference in cities—which is not surprising, since there is little difference in people. One large city resembles another and is the prototype of the small town in, at least, conditions of life and method of existence of its people.

It is not so much the fanatical pursuit of the *joys of life* which appals me, but the absolute unconsciousness of and utter inability to conceive of the *joy of living*. That phrase has no place in the scheme of things in this day in America; *the turmoil of existence* might well be substituted.

How many of our young folks today are capable of realizing that one of the joys of life is the quiet enjoyment of a fine friendship. How many of them would believe that were no other pleasure obtainable, granted this one, there could still be the keenest joy in living. Mere conversation between sympathetic persons, even though diverse in their opinions,