THE FUNCTIONS OF THE MODERN MUSEUM.*

IN its original significance the name MUSEUM was descriptive of the uses to which the place so named was appropriated. In the classic world a museum was a home of the Muses; and since the Nine Maidens presided over the different branches of knowledge, the place thus appropriated was one dedicated to learning and to the cultivation of the arts.

The great Museum erected in Alexandria by Ptolemy Philadelphus during the third century B. C. was the most notable example. Besides its great collections, and its botanical and zoological gardens, it was provided with lecture rooms and equipped with quarters for the professors. It was in fact a monumental example of the ancient Greek method of teaching, in which observation lay at the basis of intellectual training and the mind was kept open to every new experience. Its function was the same as that of our universities, but modern educational methods are so far divergent from those approved by the ancient Greeks that to-day the university and the museum are rarely brought into close relationship, and when this end has been attained, as at the University of Pennsylvania, the name University Museum, descriptive of this advanced type of institution, involves no duplication of language. Independent as their development has been, the fact that museums are sometimes found to-day in connection with universities is an indication that our educational habits are beginning to approach those of the ancient Greeks, and that at the same time the museum as a modern institution is taking on something of the character of its classical prototype. So long has it suffered from associations of a different kind, that one is tempted to say that the Muses, having been driven from the seats of learning for unconventional conduct, took refuge in the variety show and the music hall; but in order to mark the very depths to which the unfortunate maidens declined, one must refer to certain collections that were held in high esteem and displayed with much learned circumstance at no very distant date in the old-fashioned museums. The exhibits in these places of public edification commonly included a series of objects which began with a flint arrowhead and ended with a petrified toadstool and which, if the museum were *very* fortunate, was likely to embrace also the foot of a mummy and the horn of a unicorn. Some readers may recall having seen in a museum that until recently was one of the educational exhibits of a famous eastern city, a fine collection of savage weapons from the South Seas displayed together with an ostrich egg and a stuffed mermaid. Doctor David Murray's excellent work, *Museums, Their History and Uses*, a book to which I feel myself greatly indebted, presents some very entertaining matter relative to the collections in the old museums. Nevertheless, in spite of many defects, these older museums have done a good service to mankind by keeping alive the habit of collecting and thereby preserving many objects of priceless historical worth, which would otherwise have been lost.

Dr. Johnson's definition of a museum as "a repository of learned curiosities" is sufficiently significant of indiscriminate methods and museless collections.

Many instances might be cited from the literature of the day to show that the conception of a modern museum that figures in the public mind and for that matter in the minds of many of the most intelligent,

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needs to be readjusted in order to make it conform to the altogether new conditions that have been created by the application of scientific methods to the building of museums. The Johnsonian definition has done service too long. I have recently read an article in a contemporary review in which the University Museum is perversely described as "a noted repository of valuable curios." Thus do the popular beliefs of to-day often preserve the outworn ideas of yesterday.

Among the innovate functions of the modern museum, one of the largest and most useful is expressed in the position which it has come to occupy in relation to public education in the larger cities of the country. Following the development of the public library, this more modern institution owes its rapid rise in the educational world to the late recognition of a need which neither the library nor the public school has been able to supply. In the training of the young the most important thing is observation, a faculty which the schoolroom, so long as it relies upon its traditional methods, is imperfectly qualified to train. Accustomed to accept the spoken truth and to revere the printed word, the children of the schoolroom, relying upon the observations of others, are not taught to make use of their own eyes. It is true that in trying to overcome this disability, experienced educators are in the habit of bringing into the classroom specimens to illustrate the teaching of natural history. The classroom which is provided with a natural history cabinet is an appeal to the training of the observation. It is impossible, however, to turn the classroom into a museum, and experience shows that the collections which adequately illustrate the natural sciences or human history require for their proper preservation, their scientific classification and logical display, a large amount of space as well as a special equipment and such peculiar facilities generally as only the modern museum can provide.

Accurate observation is essential not only to all strictly scientific occupations, but to success in any walk of life, and though the fact has not yet received its due consideration in modern educational systems, its recognition is becoming more assured. One of the most significant signs of this improved condition is to be found in the practice that obtains in some of the larger cities of the country, where the museum, with its assembled collections illustrating many branches of knowledge, and with its extensive apparatus for classification and methodical arrangement, is not only providing a most effective instrument for the education and elevation of the general public, but is working hand in hand with the public schools of which, in this respect, it is the complement. Teachers conduct their classes through the exhibition halls, explaining the objects to which their lessons have reference, and the pupils, using their own eyes, learn to recognize independently differences and resemblances between objects in a series and between different series of objects. The task of the schoolroom thus becomes a natural and therefore an agreeable exercise of the growing faculties, leading the child unconsciously through its own observation to independent habits of thought.

Like the pupil in the public or private school, where the older traditions survive, the reader in the public library has recourse to the observations of others and even with the aid of such abundant illustration as modern books afford, does not see things for himself, and consequently whatever profit he may derive from his reading, he is not in the way of becoming self-reliant.

In higher educational work, like that of the University, the function of the mu-

seum is not only to provide collections for the purposes of illustration but more especially to supply the materials for research. It is true that the classes in every department of a university that commands the advantages of a museum, are afforded opportunities which could not otherwise be had, for illustrating subjects appropriate to its regular curriculum. The collections that represent the various races of men, or the several types of human culture, and those that set forth the different stages in the development of the arts, bear the same relation to the teaching of human history as do the pictures in a gallery to the teaching of art or the subjects in a dissecting room to the teaching of anatomy. The modern museum, however, does more than this, for it is in itself an institution of learning, combining the more passive functions of preservation and the elucidation of knowledge by the display of relative objects, with the more active functions of original research and the dissemination of truth by lectures and by the publication of reports. In addition to its collections, assembled with reference to its adopted plan, it is provided with laboratories, a library and a specially trained staff. It is a modern scientific workshop where the assembled collections furnish the raw material for the constructive work of the specialist.

The relation of the museum to primary and secondary education or to special research, important though it is, is not by any means the relation of greatest service or of greatest value to the community. The majority of visitors to a museum do not come in classes but as individuals, and whereas thousands come under the direction of their teachers or guides, tens of thousands come independently, guided by the informing influence of their own tastes and interests; each one receiving pleasure and profit in proportion to his initial capacity and according to his individual habits of thought. The Museum, in other words, provides for every member of the community without regard to age, station or special training, liberal and altogether exceptional opportunities for self-instruction on a great variety of subjects that are closely related to the welfare and intelligence of the individual and of the community. In addition to this it provides for all alike, entertainment of the highest and most wholesome character.

Many persons visit the Museum as students in search of special information, but the majority come for pleasure or recreation or simply to satisfy a natural curiosity. The motives, therefore, which lead most visitors to enter a museum are precisely those which induce others to travel. It has long since been observed that travel is the best method of education, and the reason for this lies in the fact that travel tends to cultivate those habits of observation which, as already pointed out, lie at the root of all sound educational methods.

It must be granted, however, that in any modern city such as Philadelphia, the number of people who possess the means to travel is small in comparison to the number to whom this privilege is denied. To the great majority, who do not travel, the collections in a museum, assembled with care and arranged with order and method, convey a much more vivid and lasting impression of foreign peoples, their native arts and modes of life, than a whole library of illustrated books. In a well stocked museum, methodically arranged, the untravelled multitude may freely enjoy those observations upon foreign peoples and unfamiliar traits of culture which the few may attain by travel.

On the other hand, any one contemplating a journey beyond the boundaries of his own kindred and community, may by a visit to a museum, more readily than in

any other way, equip himself with a just fore-knowledge of the kind of people he is going to meet. Indeed, as customs change and the spread of civilization and modern ideas reduce all surviving races of men to a uniform level of culture, the novel and delightful impressions associated with the earlier days of travel and exploration can be achieved only by an excursion in a museum.

Each museum must have its special character to govern its operations and define the scope of its interests. At the University of Pennsylvania where, during the last twenty years, steps have been taken for providing in this community all those advantages which belong to a public museum, and which in other cities have been granted by the municipality, plans are being gradually developed for building up a series of collections that will, in their full development, illustrate the history of mankind. These collections, although they are the property of the University and maintained by private contributions, without expense to the city, afford the public all the advantages of a municipal institution such as the great museums in New York. They are free to the public, and with the power for primary education that is developed in them by trained specialists they are at the service of the public schools.

The principal function of the modern museum, then, is to promote the increase of knowledge and the cultivation of taste. It has become from every point of view a necessary instrument in modern education. How this condition is going to be met is a matter of the gravest importance to which the public welfare directs immediate attention. The work that the University Museum, in common with other institutions of its kind, aims to accomplish in building up collections to illustrate the course of human history, must be done now or not at all. The materials of archæological research, the witnesses to the history of antiquity are fast being appropriated by the museums of the world, and the time has come when a reasonably equal distribution of this common inheritance of the race is demanded by the educational necessities of the age in which we live and of the generations to come. The objects that illustrate the evolution of the arts and the industries, the growth of culture and the progress of civilization are becoming rarer every day. Many a clue to the history of our race will be lost with the passing of the native cultures of the more primitive populations of the world. Their methods of travel and transportation on land and sea, their implements and weapons, the objects connected with their religious and ceremonial life, their dress and decorative art, their very myths and legends, in short all that is left of their device and all that remains of their message to the world must be gathered now or lost forever. To save these human documents for the uses of science and of posterity is a service which the present generation owes to the human race and the instrument by which this service must be done is the modern museum.

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EGYPTIAN SECTION.

PHILAE, THE FORSAKEN.

THE modern books of travel in Egypt never fail to praise the beauty of Philae. The nineteenth century traveller on the Nile found in this green islet, set like an antique gem in the midst of the rude waters of the first cataract, a charm on which his memory seemed especially to linger, and which called forth many a tribute of admiration even from those whose interest in the pyramids was expressed in meters and from those who stood without emotion in the hall of Karnak.