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MECHANICAL PROGRESS—THE PAST AND PRESENT CONTRASTED*

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The purpose of this paper is to indicate something of the wonderful growth of our manufacturing industries in the last twenty years, and to call attention to the wide difference in systems, marking this from previous epochs; especially the introduction of the draughting room as one of, if not the chief factor in promoting this unparalleled growth of mechanic arts.

To show the invariable superiority of one method over all others for accomplishing a purpose, and to be able to prove by many notable examples the unquestionable value of such method, is to show, at once, the road by which the live men of to-day are winning a deserved success, and a very possible cause of partial failure to those who are yet unacquainted with the very radical change in the situation.

Nothing is truer to this century than the oft-heard phrase, "the world moves on."

Time was when men were satisfied with candle light.

The ship in which Columbus sailed was doubtless looked upon as a noble craft. Men, for centuries, plowed the earth with wooden plowshares, and the smith at his forge was the nobleman in mechanical skill.

Our century, with its myriad wheels of invention, looks back upon those times as upon a world in its infancy. It was in its infancy. Then men toiled as best they knew how; and with commendable zeal constructed the argosies that have floated humanity to the portals of a new age.

From those portals a new light is shining, with promise of untold wealth. The rapid accretion of knowledge in the scientific world has evolved principles that men knew nothing of, even a century ago; but which, being recognized and practically applied, are stimulating the great world of industries, abrogating the old and instituting revised methods, to such an extent that men have now grown perfectly familiar with the quotation that "things are not now

done as they used to be." How very true! Instead of a small wooden hull, drifting uncertainly upon an almost impassable sea, we have now the advantage of swift and massive "ocean greyhounds," whose grace and perfection tell of a new world of mechanic arts. The smith at his forge, toiling with scarce-required labor, to express in rude form the conceptions of his individual brain, has given place to our splendid machine shops and great foundries, equipped with "plant" that now makes easily possible what once had been more than a Utopian dream.

The secret of all this change, this wonderful accretion of the wealth of the world, is the genius of invention, controlled by scientific knowledge and wrought out by the subdivision of labor.

This means, when practically applied to our present subject: First, the conception, in one or more minds, of the elementary ideas of an invention. To embody this invention is the work, next, of the mechanical engineer, whose province it is to consider the various principles of construction that enter into the combination; to adjust the different parts to each other and to the whole, having regard to the required solidity, stability, flexibility, simplicity and economy, as well as the most approved or possible methods of casting, welding, finishing and joining those parts, considerations which may not only affect the ultimate practicability of the invention, but, according to the manner in which the subject is treated, will depend largely the grace, symmetry, and perfection of the machine.

The position of the mechanical engineer, in this early stage of the work, is as unique as it is important. He is like the doctor who is versed in the principles of medicine, but who, according to his appreciation of the conditions of the case, not less than the ingenuity of his resources, may often build up the patient speedily and lastingly, or only partially and imperfectly.

The physician of known ability is quite likely to be the cheapest in the end; so the timely employment of the engineer is almost certain to mean the best construction of the work proposed, in the shortest time, and with the most economy in ultimate cost.

From the hands of the engineer (who should follow up and superintend the subsequent construction) the plans and specifications go into those of the several workmen who are individually instructed, by the drawings, as to the proper way of working up their respective details. There is in this way no clashing

*Read at a Meeting of the Franklin Institute. From the *Journal*.