

# NOTE ON THE OBJECTS OF THE TORONTO GUILD OF CIVIC ART AND ON THE EXHIBITION OF PRINTS OF MURAL PAINTINGS.

By PROF. MAYOR.

THE Toronto Guild of Civic Art has been founded upon the model of similar associations in New York and elsewhere. Its two chief purposes are, first, to promote and encourage the production of works of art intended for the embellishment of the city or for its public buildings; and, second, to provide an organization for a discriminating selection of these.

Encouragement of art has come to assume considerable promi-



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nence among the functions of the modern municipality. Few cities, indeed, are without a memorial of some important figure or event in national or civic history which is also intended to be an object of interest from the point of view of art. The selection of these memorials has, however, not always been happy, and thus they are often lacking in artistic interest. No doubt the most impartial and expert of experts may make a blunder, but the impartial expert has had, as a rule, little to do with the selection of designs for public memorials in the modern city, whether in Europe or America.

Yet, especially during the past few years, public taste has been greatly educated. This has been accomplished in the first place by the increased number of persons who have received in some degree artistic training, and in the second place by the extension of appreciation produced by the knowledge of artistic movements to be derived from magazines and from exhibitions of pictures. This extension of appreciation is also, no doubt, aided by travel, although in art as otherwise the extent of a traveller's excursions depends upon the extent of his resources.

The effect of all this upon the selection of public monuments has not been fully felt because, with respectful acknowledgment of his many valuable qualities, the civic ruler is not in general elected on account of his capacity to estimate the relative merits of designs in painting, sculpture or the like, but on other grounds, and thus the selection of designs has been done everywhere, more or less, by haphazard. Even Paris is studded with gigantic and costly blunders, the result of unintelligent and misdirected national and municipal encouragement of art.

The Guild of Civic Art, while not arrogating to itself the position of a Court of Art, does attempt to provide the machinery by means of which, as occasion arises, a consultative committee might be formed which would aid the public authorities in arriving at a decision upon designs which may be submitted to them. The Guild also may be able from time to time to suggest the adoption of measures for the beautification of the city or of its buildings.

Thus, under as competent guidance as in each case it may be found possible to procure, the Guild might expect to be led to choose those designs which might most appropriately and worthily be carried out for the enrichment of the city, and thus be enabled to render an important service to the civic authorities and to the citizens.

Such service can be effectively rendered by the Guild only if it is strongly supported by public opinion and by public confidence. Its membership is open to all who have an interest in art and who are anxious to extend and to render more intelligent the knowledge of it. While the membership is thus open, the Executive Committee of the Guild is composed partly of artists and partly of laymen.

Among the methods of embellishing public buildings by way, on the one hand, of expressing public magnificence, and on the other of stimulating the appreciation of art, mural painting has, during the past few years, taken perhaps the most prominent place. In Paris, the government, the university, the municipality and other public authorities have recently given to the Pantheon, to the New Sorbonne, and to other public buildings, mural paintings which have been epoch making in the history of art. The elementary schools in Paris have even been enriched with works of the same kind. In Edinburgh for some years a similar movement has been going on, by means of which, for example, University Hall and St. Mary's Song School have been endowed with notable decorations by Scottish artists. More recently the fashion has crossed the Atlantic, and the Public Library at Boston, the Congressional Library at Washington, the Walker Art Building at Bowdoin College, the Astoria, Manhattan and Plaza Hotels in New York, as well as several banks and private houses, have been decorated with mural paintings by French and American artists.

The exhibition of the Copley Prints now being held in the rooms of the Ontario Society of Artists, has been promoted with the object of indicating how other cities have encouraged art by acquiring for their public places great mural decorations which may afford their citizens free enjoyment for some generations to come. The exhibition also discloses how the intelligently directed efforts of a few public bodies in the United States have called into existence a school of decorative painting, and have given at once opportunity and fame to a number of artists whose works must otherwise have been seen by the public only at infrequent intervals in exhibitions.

A most conspicuous advantage possessed by mural painting is to be found in the necessary condition of the work. If it is not actually produced in the place which it is to occupy, as is the case with fresco, it must at least be produced for the place. The decoration to be successful must meet the conditions of lighting, etc., which the position of it affords. It ought, therefore, always to be seen to advantage, unlike a picture which, tossed about from one wall to another, or from one gallery to another, probably is never seen in the position which the artist intended it should occupy.

This condition of placing leads to the observation that mural painting is not to be looked upon as a mere embellishment of a



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building; but ought rather to be regarded as an integral part of it, designed as a portion of its architectural detail and as necessary as any other portion to make the building a unity. This, of course, is another way of saying that art is not a mere addition to life, but a part of it, and that the intelligent cultivation of it is as necessary as the intelligent cultivation of any other function of individual or social well-being.

A nation or a city loses much in possible vitality which does not cherish its artists and encourage them by discriminating appreciation and appropriate opportunity.

A specific lesson may, perhaps, be drawn from a chapter of civic history elsewhere. About ten years ago, the city of Glasgow built a municipal palace by the side of which our own civic build-