

The Vancouver Art League and The School of Arts and Crafts

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In the opinion of some able thinkers the generation of youth blossoming into manhood just before the outbreak of the Great War contained an altogether unusual number of individuals of the brightest promise, men destined, it seemed, to lead in a great forward movement that would add its cubit to the stature of modern civilization. Of this noble band a shattered remnant alone survives. Of the host of others the white crosses row on row along our far-flung battle line all too vividly tell the tale.

The golden promise has been blighted, but all is not lost, and it remains for those who survive to take up the task we fondly hoped would be undertaken by abler hands than ours. We may perhaps see, when clearness of vision is again vouchsafed as after the rolling away of the smoke of battle, that something, something worth while, has been achieved.

To link up the meeting of artists, educationists and other leading men and women of Vancouver, held in the Board of Trade rooms on Friday, September 24, 1920, with a great world movement may seem the hallucination of a visionary, but many who attended it, and experienced its inspiration, felt that history was being made, and that from this small beginning might come results at once momentous and far-reaching. The immediate outcome of the meeting was the formation of a provincial Art League and the taking of steps to establish a School of Arts and Crafts in the city of Vancouver.

For a number of years we have enjoyed the art display at the autumn exhibition, and also the exhibit held a little later in the art rooms of the Vancouver School Board building. The success of these has no doubt had much to do with the determination to take a long step forward, and establish a school where all of artistic taste and promise may enjoy the opportunity of developing their powers under the teaching and inspiration of competent masters.

Another factor in the movement must not be lost sight of. The Vancouver primary and high schools have been fortunate in the degree of attention given to drawing and brush work under the supervision of the talented art directors appointed by the board of trustees, and the hearty, even enthusiastic, co-operation of a devoted band of teachers. From time to time at the closing exercises of the schools, and at the annual exhibition at Hastings Park, we have seen products of the classroom that could not be surpassed by similar work in any other city in Canada. And the work of the day schools in this department has been ably supplemented by that of the night schools operated by the same board of school trustees.

Few children are potential artists, and our educational authorities were actuated by no such conception when the subject of drawing was added to the school curriculum. But drawing and brush work educate the hand, giving it steadiness and deftness, qualities of the utmost value in many a vocation in life; educate also the eye, training it as an instrument of correct observation; and, above all, educate the mind and heart through the hand and eye. These things being so, it is apparent that the placing of such a subject on the school curriculum is amply justified for the sake of every boy and girl.

But amongst the large number of pupils graduated annually from our public and high schools there are an appreciable number who have shown that they possess marked talent in drawing. Many of these would be glad to continue their study along this line year after year if they could attend evening classes taught by able instructors whose fee would not be prohibitive. Such classes might also be expected to

discover at rare intervals students possessed of more than talent,—gifted with genius itself. Genius may well be called a miraculous gift. Yet it may lie dormant if nothing happens to call it into active life. One of our foremost Canadian landscape painters was at the age of twenty a laborer in a brick yard. At that age his genius put forth its first belated blossoms through the inspiration and help of a kindly schoolmaster who had some little facility in the use of the pencil.

Not a few of the teachers for a school of art could be found at our own doors. Others might readily be induced to make their homes in a city surrounded by some of the greatest sources of inspiration to lovers of beauty. In addition to these we might sometimes enlist the services of eminent artists of other lands. From time to time persons of this class may be visiting Vancouver or passing through it, and it might often be possible to induce such to give short courses at moderate cost.

The benefit of artistic training would not be the selfish possession of the artists alone. The result of such training would be a contribution of the greatest worth to the whole community. To raise the standard of taste comes next in value only to the raising of the standard in morals. And morality and art should never be divorced; indeed the highest art is indissolubly wedded to conduct. It is impossible to elevate the standard of taste among any body of people without at the same time awakening in some of them at least, a passion for noble living.

But a School of Art should appeal to many who profess to

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