

## SOME PROBLEMS OF MUSEUM DEVELOPMENT

IT has sometimes been said that the ideal museum should contain everything. This is impractical even if it is not a fallacy to start with. Attempts have been made to classify museums into Museums of Art and Museums of Science, but these definitions break down under the complex conditions that govern their growth. Even in the modern picture gallery, some measure of scientific intelligence must be applied to make the collection illustrate the history of painting.

Apart from the Picture Gallery stands the Arts Museum, and apart from both stands the Natural History Museum. Efforts that have been made to combine all three have failed for very practical reasons, and there is no reason at all why they should be combined.

Even within these several fields it is necessary in actual practice to effect further specialization and restriction. In the Arts Museum, for instance, which aims to illustrate the history of all the arts, it is found necessary to confine the collections to the closed or closing episodes in that history and to exclude the modern products that supply the markets of the world at the present day.

As a matter of fact, very few museums would fit entirely into any rigid system of classification. Each one has its scope determined by arbitrary choice or the conditions of foundation or some set of fortuitous circumstances peculiar to its own experience. It does not matter much, so long as the scope is definite and so long as it establishes the identity of the museum with reference to its chosen field of labor.

One of the first essentials of successful museum administration is the necessity for a clearly defined field, within which the museum confines its operations and develops its legitimate activities. The result of this principle is to give direction to its efforts, coördinate its forces and crystallize its collections around a central idea. The boundaries thus prescribed, when once they have been drawn, may not be crossed without the risk of disorganization. It becomes a duty of each museum, therefore, in order to preserve its identity, to rigor-

ously reject all collections, no matter how excellent or desirable they may be in their places, which do not belong within its own legitimate field of endeavor.

The University Museum, recognizing this necessity, has established the identity of its interests. Its business is to illustrate by its exhibits the great truths in the History of the Arts. Its ultimate purpose is to give a practical demonstration of the Arts and of their place in the History of Mankind. Since that part has been nothing less than to furnish the framework of the structure called civilization, the message thus conveyed and the knowledge thus imparted are fundamental needs of practical education and a necessary basis for the further progress of civilization itself. How to make that message clear and certain of appeal and how to make that knowledge general are problems that the leading museums are called upon to solve.

In order to be in a position to meet these issues a museum must not only be able to procure collections, but it must know how to develop its collections for the practical purposes of education; it must not only be able to install its exhibits in a building adequate to their proper display, but it must spread a knowledge of these exhibits and their uses abroad among the people. Again, it is not sufficient that a museum should care for its collections and maintain them at the highest point of efficiency as a means to an end; it must nourish these collections into life and promote their growth by adding to them continuously and unremittingly. A museum that does all these things is a healthy museum; unless it is capable of doing all these things, although it may possess priceless treasures, it is a dead museum.

Another duty which pertains to a museum of the arts is to provide a standard by which people who enjoy the means of possessing beautiful things may be guided in their efforts to decorate their homes or to assemble collections. Private collections sometimes become public property through the museums and it is a duty of these museums to promote good taste and proper standards in the formation of such collections and to decline to receive them when they fall short of these standards. For the attainment of this purpose, it is a vital necessity for each museum in assembling its collections to reject all objects that do not rise to a well-defined standard of excellence. With this end in view each museum must define its standards, and, once defined, these standards should be defended without compromise against all assaults.

When a museum has reached that stage of its growth where these principles are recognized in its regular activities, it is in a position to meet an issue of paramount importance and to face one of the most serious problems with which each museum has to deal in the exercise of its educational function. Upon the solution of that problem the measure of its usefulness in the community will largely depend. It is very doubtful whether any existing museum is yet sufficiently far advanced to have met this issue with a clear appreciation or with an entirely hopeful outlook. Certainly none has yet found a complete solution of the problem which is involved.

One of the great needs of all museums of the arts is to give color to their exhibits and to disclose the living thought that abides in all the works of man. One of our most important tasks is to impart to our exhibition halls an atmosphere in which the visitor may feel the warmth of human associations and in which he is carried in a sympathetic mood from one living impression to another.

The great defect from which the modern museum is still suffering, marring its work and hampering its usefulness, lies in its apparent inability to provide this atmosphere. With few exceptions its halls are depressing to the spirit and mortifying to the flesh. Its exhibits, though made up of precious things, are too often inert and barren. Frequently one would suppose that the purpose of such collections is to call attention to the poverty of man's achievement and to emphasize the futility of human endeavor. On the other hand, that the reformation that this condition calls for is already under way and that museum directors are seeking a solution of the problem, is shown by the improved conditions that are now to be found in some of the more recent installations.

In its later constructive activity and in the plans that have been laid down for its further expansion, the University Museum has taken a step in advance, a step that contemplates a new and consistent scheme for giving life and character to its exhibits and surrounding them with an atmosphere through which the visitor may receive from these works of human hands the message and the inspiration which it is their mission to impart.

The first decided step in this new movement was taken when all of the cases and their exhibits were removed from the room at the right of the head of the stairs. Here an opportunity presented itself a few years ago of demonstrating the meaning and the value of good

installation, and when the new exhibits were installed in that room they furnished such a demonstration.

No really adequate opportunity presented itself, however, for an ideal installation until the new wing was finished at the end of 1915. The Charles Custis Harrison Hall furnished a noble opportunity for an ideal display with its artistic setting, its appropriate atmosphere and its harmonious composition.

It should be borne in mind that in working out the plans for the building of this very excellent hall we had in view the general character and composition of the display which was afterwards installed. The success of this installation is due first to the architecture of the hall itself, second to the division of the floor space by simple and inexpensive structures appropriate to the units of exhibition, and third to the ample space and the harmonious arrangement which attend the exhibition itself. The net result is a unique and a happy demonstration of the value of a carefully conceived constructive process which combines good architecture, well-balanced installation and a proper atmosphere.

To say that the exhibition in Harrison Hall leaves nothing to be desired would not be altogether true, but such defects as are to be found in it are the result of conditions which could not be controlled. These defects have nothing to do with the contents of the hall nor to the quantity of light, but to the direction of the light, and this in turn is due to the orientation of the building, which faces the north.

Since the illumination of the hall is therefore directed towards the entrance, the visitor faces the light on entering the hall and faces the illuminated side of things when he is looking towards the entrance from the interior. Important objects which under reversed lighting conditions would be placed in central positions facing the entrance are necessarily placed facing in the opposite direction and the central space is occupied by things that can be lighted from above and that do not obstruct the impressive view that can be obtained of the exhibit opposite the entrance. In the installation in Harrison Hall, as well as in its architecture, some very interesting problems have been approached in a way that gives encouraging results. Other problems equally important remain to be worked out in the further development of the building plan and of the exhibits.