

THE SOCIAL MEMORY¹

The social function of a society like that under whose auspices we meet this evening is coming to be more consciously defined. An organizing and directing purpose, a conviction of opportunity and obligation are as necessary in this as in other undertakings. The collecting of books and other records, the pursuit of genealogies, the gathering of personal reminiscences may easily become desultory and aimless unless all is done in accordance with a recognized duty, a well-considered program, and a consistent plan. Let us consider briefly the place and duty of an historical society in our social order.

We are tempted when we seek to give meaning to any kind of activity to resort to metaphor and analogy. Thus human speech is full of fossil poetry. The simile-making habits of mankind have dealt with societies and nations. Polybius asserted that a whole people passes from youth, through manhood, to old age and death. Hobbes saw in society a huge creature made up of a multitude of men. Spencer traced in minute detail the analogy between an animal body and the social organism. Washington has given us a mechanical figure. "A Federal Government," he said, "is the main-spring which keeps the clock of the States going." Of late, philosophers have pushed the likeness into the psychic field. Such phrases as "the public mind," "the popular will," suggest a parallel between society and personality. Thus a society becomes a vast ongoing common life with habits, memories, character, and purpose.

A state or nation, looked at in this way, has a tradition, a history which may be likened to the memory of the individual. Nor is the parallel wholly fanciful. A group of people is bound together by consciousness of a common past experience. Initiation is admission to a share in this memory. By ceremonials,

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festivals, celebration of anniversaries a society refreshes its recollection of the past and renews its loyalty, hope, and purpose. We shall for a little time seek suggestions from this likeness between national or state history and the personal memory.

Without memory there can be no personality; without history no real nation or state. The loss of individual memory is an actual destruction of the self. No event in personal life has meaning until it is explained by past experience. So it is with a society; only a knowledge of its history gives a clue to its character. The United States can have no real significance to a mind that knows naught of Washington, of Marshall, of Lincoln, and of the things for which they stand. Minnesota is to us only a name unless it conjures up a procession of red men, voyageurs, missionaries, pioneers of settlement, organizers of institutions, immigrants, leaders of men, gradually creating a commonwealth. We can not realize ourselves as a group unless, in imagination, we can picture the onward sweep of events, the pageant of the past which has made us what we are.

A vague or fallacious memory weakens personality and impairs efficiency. In the same way, if citizens have a fragmentary and false picture of their country's history, the nation will lack true unity and fail to respond wisely to new issues. A people and its leaders may be ignorant of the past or misinterpret it, and so lack stability and strength of group character. The misinterpretation of the past may lead to a dangerous self-satisfaction and an intolerable priggishness in an individual. So a people, by refusing to face frankly its mistakes, may suffer from arrogance and fall into a fool's paradise.

Memory fosters pride, which is a condition of achievement. The man who brings things to pass gains courage from the memory of his successes, just as he attains humility by frank recollection of his failures. Sound national or state pride is a spur to effort and a means of progress. It is well to distinguish between vanity and pride. The former is mere anxiety to win admiration; the latter springs from obligation to be true to

character, loyal to the past. Vain boasting is a different thing from self-reliant pride which stirs sentiment, releases power, and spurs to action. True state pride values the character, standards, ideals, solid achievements of its citizenship. State vanity is likely to think of numbers, natural resources, or spectacular and ephemeral notoriety. Vanity has a roving eye for the praise of others; pride looks within for purpose and courage.

Memory selects and preserves vivid and vital experiences; it forgets the trivial and unimportant. So the national history perpetuates essential things. Heroes in due time become types; their virtues are exalted; their weaknesses ignored. Governor Ramsey doubtless had his weaknesses and shortcomings, but his fearless stand for the conservation of school lands makes him an inspiring type of the citizen who has a keen sense of public interest and welfare as opposed to private selfishness and desire to exploit the common domain.

Memory is preserved and deepened by symbols, by repetitions, by conscious thought. A society that would perpetuate its history must be ever vigilant and resourceful. Flags, pictures, monuments play a vital part. Anniversaries, memorial days, festivals, historic pageants vivify the social memory. These celebrations must not be permitted to become mere unconscious routine; they must not degenerate into holidays for pleasure and recreation. Just as the individual can not safely allow his memory to grow dim, to lose its power over his imagination, its influence upon his character, so the nation or state can not with impunity neglect the means for keeping the sense of the past vivid in the minds of all its citizens.

Memory can not serve the future until imagination has translated the past into new ideals and purposes. Historical conditions never repeat themselves. Every new situation is in some sense unique. Old heroism has to be translated into new courage. The valor of war must be turned into the virtues of peace. War is drastic. It rushes on to climax and decision.

It has moments of great achievement. It culminates in victory or defeat.

The new civic heroism works under other conditions. These too often seem commonplace. They make little appeal to the romantic imagination. There is doubtless some likeness between the battle of arms and the struggle for safer sanitary conditions, better housing, and the protection of women and children, for public recreation, for political reform, for justice, tolerance, and good will. It requires, however, a resourceful imagination to hold this likeness steadily before the mind and to turn fancy into conduct. Yet the past must be pressed into the service of the present and the future. We hope to escape the woe of war, but we ought not to want to shirk the discipline and sacrifice which war requires. As we read the past, we must be convinced that it is our duty to discover and practice what James called "the moral equivalent of war."

Memory is a deposit of countless details, a few of them salient and conspicuous, but most of them merged into general impressions and lost sight of as separate items. Thus the social memory exalts a few famous individuals, but at the same time it carries on a mass of personal influences, potent though anonymous. It is a noble service to contribute inspiring ideas and deeds which live in the national memory. Few, if any of us, can hope to have our names carried down by the traditions of the community. Our influence must be merged in the vast ongoing common life.

But I fear that you grow weary of an analogy which may be easily pressed too far. This play of the imagination may, however, make a little more clear these truths: The social tradition is a vital factor of collective life; agencies for keeping this memory accurate, vivid, and widely diffused in public consciousness must be maintained; an historical society gets its meaning and has its task defined in relation to this social function. The work of such an association must be directed toward supplying the data from which careful historical scholarship can derive trustworthy conclusions, and also toward impressing

the popular imagination with the true significance of the past, a lively sense of the evolution of the state as a social unity.

Certain obvious limitations suggest themselves in connection with a state historical society. Minnesota, for example, is not a self-sufficient community, set off from the social fabric of which it forms a part. Our state lines are, in a sense, artificial and arbitrary limits for administrative convenience. Commerce, industry, intercourse, common interests largely ignore these boundaries. Minnesota, from one point of view, seems more a center of a great northwestern province than a distinguishable commonwealth. Furthermore, the Northwest is only a part of the Mississippi Valley; that, in turn, a constituent area of the United States. The nation is commonly deemed the true unit. Local loyalty is, nevertheless, the school of larger patriotism. The life of a politically organized commonwealth does separate itself to a degree from the surrounding area and become a center of memory and purpose for its citizens. The Minnesota Historical Society has, therefore, a specific opportunity and a definite duty.

The function of gathering data for the use of historical scholarship is so well recognized as to require only brief notice at this time. The state archives are so fundamental in this field that it seems expedient and wise to put these in the custody of the historical society. In the filing of newspapers this association has done notable and essential work. The press of a people, when this press is carefully interpreted by experienced scholars, is an invaluable source of information. Pamphlets, posters, broadsheets, announcements of all kinds are worth preserving. Illustrations, maps, graphic material of many sorts yield indispensable aid. The collecting of printed volumes, reports, biographies, family histories, and the like is an obvious duty. To gather, in manuscript form, from the memories of early settlers a mass of personal experience which each year grows less available, is one of the things that should not be neglected. The discovery and classification of old letters, business documents, old ledgers, etc., is very important. In short,

the society, in fulfilling its function as an agency of the social memory, should examine, sift, and preserve all available records of every phase of life in Minnesota and in the adjacent area which forms a part of the larger society to which Minnesota essentially belongs. All of these things your society is already doing or planning to undertake. You need no exhortation. It is to be hoped that ample funds will be at your disposal. Much of the work can be done now very economically; some of it, if too long postponed, can never be accomplished at all.

The task of popularizing the social memory requires the coöperation of many agencies: the family, the school, the library, the press, public ceremonies, anniversaries, pageants, the museum. It is not the aim of this paper to propose a definite division of labor among these agencies. In all cases the historical society ought to be a fundamental reliance. We may well consider, however, certain undertakings which are essential to the success of a plan for impressing the imagination of young and old with a vivid sense of the past in its various aspects—industrial, educational, political, social—a kind of mental panorama or pageant.

Of late two inventions have added enormously to the recording resources of mankind. Photographs and reproductions of all kinds, printed music, stereopticon slides are familiar enough as library and museum material. The moving picture, the phonograph, and the piano player have opened up fascinating vistas for historical collections. The hard rubber record, or at least the original mold from which it is cast, ought to insure, under safe conditions of storage, practical indestructibility. The perforated record rolls are not important. Printed music can easily be reproduced. The endurance of the gelatin film for moving pictures has yet to be tested over a long period, but, if necessary, devices for transferring originals to glass and using these prints for reproducing future copies, ought to be easily worked out. Records, both auditory and visual, are now being regularly made and stored by scientific societies and museums. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, for

example, has made a large number of records of Indian speech, songs, dances, and other ceremonials. The voices of noted men and women are being recorded and preserved. How much it would mean to us if we had moving pictures taken by Hennepin, Radisson, Du Lhut, Carver, Pike, Leavenworth, and Cass, of what they saw in Minnesota, and could listen to the voices of these men describing the scenes depicted. It is obviously necessary to recognize these new devices for recording scenes and sounds, and to adopt a well-thought-out, systematic policy with respect to the making and filing of the records. Public ceremonies of many kinds, important events, prominent personalities, the introduction of new industrial processes, activities which are disappearing—all form subject matter for record. It would seem to be the duty of the state historical society to assume the task of enriching and strengthening the social memory by the use of these new recording agencies.

There is another important device for preserving the social tradition, namely the historical museum. Wealth of material representing centuries of development has created in Europe many institutions of this character. The National Museum of Zurich is a notable example of collection, classification, and exhibition. The life of Switzerland is portrayed from the times of the lake dwellers up to the present day. By reproductions, models, actual originals, all arranged in an evolutionary series, a remarkable effect is produced. Weapons, tools and utensils, furniture, textiles, house interiors, costumes, armor, horse trappings, sledges, carts, carriages, art products in enormous variety, are so grouped that the visitor passes from period to period, gaining a vivid idea of the life of the Swiss people. It is easy to understand why classes from the schools not only of Zurich but of all German Switzerland spend much time with their teachers in the halls and suites of rooms in the Landes Museum, this marvelously illustrated textbook of Swiss history.

There are many other museums of the same general character. The Bavarian National Museum in Munich, the Germanic National Museum in Nuremberg, the Historical Museum

in Berlin, the Willet-Holthuysen Museum in Amsterdam, the Maison Cluny in Paris, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London are well-known examples of notable historic collections. The Musée Carnavalet of Paris is the finest civic museum in existence. Many continental and English towns and cities maintain museums of local civic history. Scandinavia has made suggestive contributions to the museum idea. The Danish National Museum in Copenhagen is of the more conventional type, but in both Christiania and Stockholm a distinctive feature has been added. The National Museum of Christiania has an open-air annex in which are to be found original old buildings and reproductions of characteristic Norwegian structures of historic interest. There is also a collection of agricultural implements. Stockholm has attained distinction for several of its institutions. The Northern Museum is one of the city's greatest achievements. This remarkable collection of ornaments, implements, furniture, and costumes owes its origin to the imagination and untiring zeal of one man, Dr. Arthur Hazelius, who foresaw that the older objects would be superseded by modern products, and rescued a great number of articles which otherwise would have disappeared. Thanks to Dr. Hazelius no country can equal Sweden in presenting a picture of early and medieval culture. An open-air annex of seventy acres, known as Skansen, illustrates the national history and ethnography of Sweden. All the flora and most of the fauna are to be found here. One may visit a Lap village, a cottage of the sixteenth century, a Swedish coal mine, a charcoal-burners' camp, a medieval farm and dairy, and old churches. In an hour's walk the visitor passes through centuries and touches every quarter of the land. On Sundays and holidays all the attendants appear in costumes which represent all parts of Sweden. For Skansen, too, we are indebted to the tireless Dr. Hazelius.

How soon will Minnesota discover a man or group of men with the vision and zeal of this Swedish museum-maker? It is none too soon to plan for a Minnesota state historical museum

of the European type. A mere miscellaneous collection of curios and souvenirs will not do. Fancy the fate of a library that trusted to haphazard begging or to desultory, planless buying of books. Imagine the calamity of following a similar policy for a gallery of art. An historical museum must work out a general plan of periods, of types of material, of the classification and arrangement of objects, and then actively proceed to carry out its policy. This work can not be begun in Minnesota too soon. Objects can be had now which in a few years will be lost. An immediate canvass of the state would yield rich returns. Citizens would gladly give significant things if they could be assured that these articles would be preserved.

A complete historical museum for Minnesota would include the ethnology of the region. The Smithsonian Institution and the Field Columbian Museum have shown what can be done with lay figures, costumes, implements, etc., in depicting striking scenes of Indian life. The French explorations afford another topic for graphic representation. Domestic architecture would play an interesting part. Log cabins, sod houses, settlers' shanties, early cottages, etc., with their furniture and equipment, would form a significant section. Models would be used chiefly, but suites of interiors could be arranged as in the best European museums. Costume collections would prove extremely instructive. Nor need one go for the eccentric in this field to a remote past. The "bustles" of the eighties and the balloon sleeves of the nineties would seem sufficiently grotesque to give the costume section an air of antiquity.

Transportation is always an important fundamental social function. A collection of vehicles in models or originals, Indian tepee poles dragging behind a pony, snowshoes, sledges, stone boats, Red River carts, Concord stages, early locomotives, primitive city horse cars, would be as fascinating as the corresponding series of birch-bark canoes, dugouts, bateaux, flat-boats, canal boats, and perhaps a stateroom and pilot house, taken from an old-time Mississippi steamer. Weapons of the chase, traps, hunting and fishing scenes would play a char-

acteristic part in the attempt to depict Minnesota life. A collection of agricultural implements from the earliest and most primitive of Indian times to recent days would be an essential feature of the industrial section. The development of lumbering, milling, brick-making, textiles, and other forms of production would be set forth. The evolution of the schoolhouse and its equipment of furniture, books, and apparatus would be material for representation.

Our museum might possibly contain divisions in which the chief elements of immigration could be represented. It would probably be wiser, however, to distribute the objects brought from foreign lands, and have such articles appear under their respective classifications. The lace-making industry of New Ulm, for example, would be classified under household industries rather than in a German division. This would be more in harmony with our American ideals and would more truly symbolize the merging into Minnesota life of many different elements from many different sources.

This brief sketch of a possible state historical museum has not dealt with the question of division of labor and administrative responsibility. A number of interests would be directly involved. The department of anthropology of the University of Minnesota would be anxious to have direct relation to the ethnological section; the college of agriculture to the collection of farming implements. The lumber and milling interests would want to have a part in the exhibits concerned with their industries. Questions of unification, location, responsibility, leadership would arise. It is to be hoped that the sole determining factor would be the best interests of the state as a whole, for in order to be completely successful the museum ought to be a Minnesota state museum.

How far-reaching the influence of such a museum might be made! Not only would thousands of citizens resort to the museum itself, but by photographs, slides, illustrated catalogues, special bulletins, traveling loan collections sent to schools, the museum would be taken to the people. An open-air annex—

possibly on the state fair grounds—might be established, and models, reproductions, and actual buildings of historic interest assembled there, as has been done so successfully in Christiania and Stockholm.

The Minnesota Historical Society, by virtue of its own history and its place in the state, is the natural leader in a movement for a state historical museum. The coöperation of many agencies will be necessary. The formulation of a plan, the imagination, the enthusiasm, the persistence to execute it, should come from that organization in Minnesota to which is intrusted the task of helping to keep the social memory accurate and vivid, a guide and inspiration to the people of the commonwealth. For without memory there can be no personality, without an ever-alert sense of the past and its significance, a people can not maintain its solidarity and translate the experiences of yesterday into the purposes of to-morrow.

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