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Instead of a notice being printed on the wrapper, announcing that a subscription is about to end, the time of expiration is now denoted in the printed address each week, so that the subscriber may see when the period for which he has prepaid is about to expire.

FOR POSTERITY—A SUGGESTION.

The Irish gentleman who declined to aid an enterprise for the benefit of posterity, remarking that posterity had never done anything for him, was, after all the sport made of him, no unfair representative of the bulk of mankind. There is talk enough about doing great things for the advantage of future ages, but the real motive is apt to be something very different. To perpetuate their own name or fame, men or nations often set up lasting monuments, and sometimes unintentionally convey thereby to after times a few more or less instructive indications of the artistic or industrial skill of their day and generation. To further their own immediate ends, or to secure some benefit to their immediate descendants, men frequently undertake great material enterprises, and sometimes the work so done remains for ages the source of perennial good. But very rarely, if ever, can it be said that any work of man was undertaken solely, or even chiefly, for the benefit of posterity—more rarely still, for remote posterity.

Hence it happens that we owe far more to accident, to fire, rapine, volcanic outbursts, and the protecting care of desolation, for the knowledge we have of times long past, than to any intentional legacies of art or learning left us by the men of those times. The lost and abandoned tools, weapons, and ornaments of the stone age are all that we have to tell us of the childhood of humanity. Had no fiery disasters ever overtaken the pile-dwellers of the Swiss lakes, we should probably have never heard of such a people.

To the mud and ashes of Vesuvius, rather than to the historians of the Roman Empire, we owe the best of our knowledge of how Roman cities looked and Roman citizens lived eighteen hundred years ago. In the fragments of a terra cotta library, buried in the ruins of a royal palace, we find almost our only records of the arts and sciences of ancient Assyria. Under the ash heaps of a forgotten age, in Cyprus, Cesnola finds the only known vestiges of a primitive civilization, reaching far back into the domain of mythology. Thanks to the destroyers of Troy and Mycenæ, and the protective care of temporary oblivion, Schliemann is now able to verify tradition and lay before an astonished and delighted world numerous precious relics of heroic ages hitherto remembered only in song.

Who can estimate the value of these and similar findings to us—the value of the revelations they bring of man's condition in those remote ages? Who can say how many or how few the ages will be ere the time comes when the antiquaries of the future will be rejoicing over equally fragmentary vestiges of the doings and possessions of our day?

On the other hand, who can estimate the value of the knowledge lost beyond hope of recovery, or the checks to human progress experienced, in the repeated wiping out, so to speak, of the higher races and the civilizations they embodied? And who can say that similar disasters may not come again and again to humanity?

Suppose a pestilence peculiarly fatal to the white race should fall upon the world to-day, crippling, perhaps exterminating, the now dominant civilized nations; how long would the material elements of our science and art or general culture remain with power to enlighten the barbarous tribes that would inherit the earth? Human progress has more than once been set back for centuries by such natural or unnatural causes, leaving the sites of once splendid civilizations to be overrun with barbaric hordes knowing nothing of the better times that went before.

Suppose, again, that, by one of those geologic changes so numerous in the history of our unstable globe, the existing continents should sink a thousand feet. Every center of modern civilization would be submerged. The great social and political organizations of humanity would be broken up, and in the wreck of nations that would ensue very little of the glory and culture of the race could survive. The earth is dotted with vestiges of lost and forgotten empires. Can we reasonably assume, in the face of such facts, that the nations of to-day are immortal?

The question is: Shall we continue to trust to chance, as all other civilizations have, for the preservation of the conquests we have made among the forces and secrets of nature; or shall we do something positive for posterity, and leave the ages to come some certain and abiding legacy of our treasures of art and learning?

It may be that human progress will go on and on to the end of time without a break; that in the course of centuries mankind will surpass us in civilization, knowledge and power, as much as we surpass the earliest and rudest men we have yet found traces of: maybe infinitely more.

In such a case, what would not the scholars of, say the year 5000 A.D., or any other future age, be willing to give for a comprehensive picture of humanity as it exists to-day—for a reasonably complete library of our literature, science,

and art? We may safely assume that nothing of the sort will be possible if matters are left to take their natural course. By that time every structure, every machine, every book, every work of art, now in use or stored away in our libraries and galleries of art, will have disappeared, a prey to time, the elements, or the more destructive violence of man.

On the other hand, it may be that, through repeated disasters of one sort or another, mankind, three thousand years hence, will have lost all the knowledge men ever possessed, and be slowly struggling upward for the hundredth time from inherited barbarism. In such a case, what enormous benefits might not accrue to man from a fortunate opening up of the wealth of knowledge we possess!

In any supposable case between these extremes of progress or degradation, a legacy of art and learning, such as we might easily set apart for remote posterity, would certainly be acceptable, perhaps extremely useful. Besides, it might be possible for us to set such a worthy example to those who shall come after us that, come what might, humanity would never be left absolutely void of the means of instruction, nor any worthy human achievement be absolutely lost or forgotten. The experience of these later years has demonstrated the value of such legacies even when unintentional, unselected, and wretchedly fragmentary. It has made clear also how a legacy deliberately made may be indefinitely preserved.

Roughly outlined, the carrying out of such a truly philanthropic enterprise would involve nothing more difficult than—

First. The construction of a practically indestructible treasure chamber in some secure place; and

Second. The preparation of a library well calculated to withstand the corroding tooth of time.

Two kinds of structures would meet the first demand—massive pyramids of covered earth or of solid masonry, or chambers hewn from the heart of some granitic hill. In low latitudes, where glacial action is not to be feared, the pyramidal form might be preferable: in more northern regions the rock-cut chamber would probably be at once cheaper and more durable. In either case, an elevated site should be chosen as a safeguard against submergence.

To secure the permanence of the records would be more difficult. Ordinary books and papers would clearly be unsuitable for long keeping; though for comparatively limited periods they might answer if securely packed in airtight waterproof cases. Nothing liable to spontaneous decay should be admitted. Stereotype plates of metal would be even more open to objection than printed sheets. The noble metals would be too costly, the baser would corrode; and with either the value of the plates as metal would be a standing danger to the deposit. The material basis of the library must be, as nearly as possible, worthless for other uses (to insure them against the natural greed of man), yet such as will hold the records sharply and faithfully under all circumstances. The terra cotta tablets of ancient Assyria are instructive in this connection. Possibly plates of artificial stone, or sheets of a papier-maché-like preparation of asbestos, might be less bulky and equally durable.

Having determined this point, and dug from the solid rock a chamber for the reception of our legacy, the next step would be the selection of its contents. Obviously the books to be preserved should embrace first of all lexicons and grammars of every known form of speech, since it is impossible to tell which of the dialects of to-day will be the parents of the dominant tongue of any distant future time; while we may be practically certain that some one or more of the languages of to-day will furnish a key to any language that men will ever use. Next in order would come encyclopædias, the most comprehensive and complete that there might be room for. The sacred books of all nations might come next; then the works of the great poets, historians and novelists; after them, the best obtainable records of art, science, the various industries, and so on, with specimens of the best and most typical of our works of art, manufacture, and the like.

The spaces between the various articles should be filled in with some insoluble and neutral substance, to prevent corrosion, or the infiltration of water and consequent damage to the plates. Then, the entrance to the chamber being securely sealed, permanent records should be made in many places and in various ways, setting forth the purpose of the deposit, its exact location, and the nature of its contents. Among such records not the least valuable would be deeply cut polyglot inscriptions on natural cliffs in different parts of the world, observation having shown that such records may remain to challenge human curiosity for ages after all other records of their time have disappeared.

Even a single deposit of this sort might prove of enormous value to the race at some critical period of its history. But the probability is that the good work would not end with one deposit. From age to age this and other nations might repeat the experiment, commemorating in this way important epochs in their history. The fashion once set might easily become a permanent feature of all great national celebrations. The cost would be comparatively small: a penny contribution from each of the visitors to the Philadelphia Exhibition, for example, would have been quite sufficient to provide for a memorial of our first Centennial year that would have carried an imperishable picture of the civilization of the day to the end of—our first millennium, at least; and we may safely infer that, whatever may be the condition of the world at that not very remote epoch, a memorial of that sort would be something worth having.

As we have intimated, the custom might easily become