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A Local Historian's Reflections After Visiting Foreign Cities

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So many Rochesterians have visited Europe each summer during the last hundred years or so that any effort to extract a fresh inspiration from such a journey seems almost hopeless. Yet for a local historian, steeped in the rich but limited lore of one community, a foreign journey can be most illuminating, offering new and striking contrasts, suggesting new interpretations, and presenting new challenges. Such at least was my experience as I journeyed through seven European countries this past summer, measuring a score of cities against my image of Rochester. Of course a visitor to foreign cities can never know them as a native. He may photograph them, study their origins and their setting, but he can scarcely hope to probe their inner spirit. Yet, if he is as respectful as he would ask a stranger at his door to be, he may get a sense of their vitality, an awareness of their distinctive character. Thus in my case, while a journey of three months hardly qualifies me to pose as an authority on European cities, there may be some merit in recording the thoughts and speculations about Rochester which a visit to Europe inspired.

Our Perspectives Lengthen

It was I fear the proverbial busman's holiday. Everywhere I looked I saw something that reminded me of Rochester. Most of the cities, like Rochester, straddled rivers, but more of my reactions to their quays and boulevards later. All of them were of course much older than Rochester

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—so much older that I began to see Rochester as a young city and to speculate on what it will be like when it reaches the 500 year mark, or like Paris during my visit celebrates its 2000th birthday.

Perspective is important to the historian, and to the citizen, too. It makes a difference whether you regard a city or an institution as in a stage of youthful experimentation or as past its prime. Social organizations are not of course biological organisms, and the measurement of their age is not so simple as a count of their years, but if, as with human personality, relative youth or maturity is partly subjective, then a discovery that Rochester is a young city can have a tremendous importance to its citizens.

Our ideas of long established facts change, too, as we adjust our perspectives. Take for example, the coming of the first white visitor to the Genesee Country in 1616. Last spring, when I looked back to that early time from my desk in the Rochester Public Library, the explorations of Étienne Brûlé seemed far off, almost prehistoric. But this summer, when I learned on approaching the beautiful Pont Neuf Bridge in Paris that it had been built in the quarter century before 1616, the date of Étienne Brûlé's visit suddenly became more meaningful. Of course Paris was a city of substance and importance long before the French could send explorers and empire builders to America—we all know that—but it helps to see a bridge Champlain and Brûlé may have crossed before sailing to America. It adds something to your perspective to stand in the nave of Notre Dame and reflect that its impressive arches were old and some at least of its present stained glass windows were already there to inspire the Jesuits who came over in the early seventeenth century to establish missions in the Genesee country.

You marvel at many other things as you stroll respectfully through the cathedrals of England and the continent. The artistry, the humor, the patient craftsmanship of those humble workmen and long forgotten architects are of course inspiring, but more startling to the modern imagination is the realization that they were building not for the present, their present or ours, but for the future, for eternity. They were working slowly at something they would never see completed—not those at least who laid the foundations—but this circumstance seemed to consecrate rather than discourage their efforts. They had a faith which inspired them to cut each stone with loving care, to perform each day's task with devotion, knowing full well that the test of their work would come only in the eternity beyond them.

I am afraid we don't build that way in Rochester or in any other community today. We build for fifty or sixty years, perhaps a century, and we pride ourselves on our flexibility, our capacity to respond to change. We hesitate to determine the life patterns for our descendents 200 or 500 years hence—a modesty which springs perhaps from a prevailing doubt concerning the eternal character of the values we cherish. Yet the old cathedrals and other hoary remains we visit in Europe owe their fascination for us at least in part to the fact that they have survived not only over a span of centuries but also through many troubled times darker if possible than our own. They make us wonder whether anything we build will last so long; they challenge us to ask whether anything we have created is worthy of such survival.

We can of course press these speculations too far, and indeed in our skepticism we seem prone to conclude that what we build and do will have little importance a century or so hence. This is far from the fact in civic affairs at least, as a visit to European cities will fully demonstrate. Not even the violent bombing which several of these cities suffered in the last war has obliterated the street patterns and other fundamental characteristics which each has developed over the centuries. Moreover, the responses they are now making to this latest catastrophe will have a tremendous effect on their development for centuries to come.

Few cities display more strikingly than Paris the cumulative effects of conscious community planning. We all admire her magnificent vistas, the sweeping curves of her boulevards, the impressive extent of the Louvre, the Garden of the Tuileries and the Champs-Élysées, yet only the bold foresight of a succession of visionary city planners and princely builders achieved these triumphs, and they had to be won against the demands of a growing city for more building sites and in face of a tradition of congestion which still dominates and degrades much of this great city.

It is one of those curious ironies of history that the medieval walls of Paris, like those of many other European cities, should have proved more valuable to the city at the time of their demolition than at any previous date. Only the wise decision to replace these outgrown battlements by boulevards saved Paris and many another city from self-strangulation. Medieval Paris would not have become modern Paris without its three widening circles of boulevards, nor Vienna, Vienna, without its inner and outer Ringstrasse.

Many European cities likewise took advantage of other opportunities for self beautification. The Garden of the Tuileries is the Third

Republic's replacement of a hated royal palace and grounds, while elsewhere throughout that ancient city, as well as other European capitals, the palaces and estates of an extinct royalty have become the galleries and gardens of democratic communities. Medieval cloisters have been converted into libraries and museums, ancient castles have been preserved as historic monuments, often becoming, as in Salzburg, the cherished crown of the modern city's life.

New Opportunities Emerge

To be sure Rochester, along with other American cities, has no fortifications to demolish, no royal palaces to appropriate. But essentially what these European cities have done was to replace their outmoded institutions with vital new ones. Certainly our more rapidly growing and changing communities have many opportunities of this sort.

Rochester, for example, has a couple of antiquated railroads whose services no longer equal their blighting effects. Both the Erie and the Lehigh Valley have in fact abandoned their passenger service, and the freight they carry does not justify the favored sites they occupy. The Pennsylvania Railroad's local service is equally moribund, and indeed the activity of all three roads would hardly tax the properties occupied by this last line. Of course the relocation of great public utilities is a long-term operation and one which we in America do not carry out arbitrarily or high handedly—as so many of the major reforms in European cities were achieved. But we must not forget that these utilities received their rights of way and other concessions as necessary aids to their performance of public services, and once the value of the latter has disappeared we must be alert to reclaim the public advantage. Long term plans should be prepared to insure the relocation of two at least of the above railroads and the removal of the coal yards and other unsightly intruders on the Genesee banks.

Too much can of course be made of the external beauty of river boulevards—they do not of themselves make a wholesome city, though the incentive they give to the rebuilding of adjacent tracts is obvious. We will turn to some of the other matters in a moment, but it is impossible to visit European cities without marvelling at the success with which they have beautified their river and lake fronts. A stroll along the quays of Paris, a drive up the north bank of the Thames from Blackfriars Bridge west, a restful pause at one of the open cafés along the lake front in Geneva or Zurich, a boat trip through the canals of

Amsterdam, a sight of the river fronts in most of the other cities I visited is enough to turn a Rochesterian green with envy.

Yet the historian can find a ray of hope for Rochester in the records of these achievements. They were not in any case the gift of a benign providence. The rivers and lakes were natural enough, but men chose these spots as urban sites less because of their beauty than for commercial and other practical reasons, just as in the case of Rochester. Moreover, centuries rolled by in every instance before local residents began to think of their rivers and lakes as objects of beauty. Indeed most of the fine boulevards and quays are works of the last two hundred years or less, and in some of these cities the work of reclaiming the river front is still pressing forward, aided as in London by the late bombing operations. Let us hope that Rochester does not wait until its second millenium, or until foreign bombers clear the way, to restore the natural beauty of its river banks and the spectacular setting of its main falls and gorge.

I cannot pass on from a discussion of the river fronts of European cities without a word about Florence. Less has been done there than in my other cities toward the restoration of the river's natural banks, though driveways skirt the narrow embankments on both sides of the Arno as it flows through the city. The chief scenic glory here was of course the architecture of the six principal bridges, most notable of all the famous Ponte Vecchio. No Rochesterian can view that lovely old fourteenth century bridge without thinking of our own Main Street Bridge. We can't match it in architectural symmetry, in historic atmosphere or charm, but we do come closer to it than any other bridge I have seen. Shouldn't we, however, keep the total effect somewhat in mind as we repair damaged sections from time to time, and can't we some day open an arched vista up the river from the center of this bridge and thus bring an awareness of the river's presence back to busy Main Street. Incidentally the Florentines, who lost all their other lovely bridges during the war, are patiently rebuilding them as works of art, determined to make them worthy of the noble traditions of that great Renaissance community. Florence may not know where its political allegiance lies today, with the East or West, but it harbors no doubts as to the eternal values of art and sound construction.

The Flower City Challenged

Before we consider European cities as art centers—as works of art in a few cases—I would like to say something more about their respect

for nature. Nothing in Europe astonished me so much as the flowers of London. Flower pots and flower boxes decorated almost every window ledge in that vast city. This is of course an exaggeration, but one I generously make after two weeks of busy sight-seeing when I seldom found myself out of view of scores of gaily decorated windows and balconies. Even the second story ledge that shades the window displays around one of the largest department stores in London was lined with blooming geraniums, thousands of them stretching around at least three sides of an entire city block. As a representative of the Flower City I had to travel around bareheaded in London! The flower displays elsewhere in England (notably at the approaches to the railroad stations, both large and small), and in Switzerland and Austria as well, were remarkable, but no where so astonishing as in London. You may think that displays of flower pots and window boxes are scarcely worthy of mention as high points in Europe's urban life, yet these relatively insignificant objects, each the cherished pride of individual residents, not only add gay colors to otherwise drab scenes but help as well to manifest and maintain the good spirits of a hard-pressed populace.

Another and closely related feature of urban life in Europe is the allotment system. Practically every city and town boasts of its allotments—its open fields of good fertile land set aside for truck gardening and leased in small patches to interested families. You see them as you approach the cities along either railroads or highways, most of them equipped with small tool sheds and all revealing the devoted efforts of their proprietors. The contribution to the economy made by hundreds of thousands of small gardens must be tremendous, but the wholesome outlet they provide for the leisure of pent-up urbanites is much more valuable.

Of course the chief natural glory of London is not the window boxes or even the Thames embankments, but the small squares and parks that spring up to meet you at almost every turn. Here is a prime example of how a large city has made the best of its opportunities, buying up the rights to private parks and gardens and opening them to the free use of the public. Fortunately the Englishman's traditional love for a garden has over the centuries dotted London, particularly in its older sections, with innumerable shady squares and parks. Moreover the courtyards behind the solid rows of houses which line practically all the streets have in many cases been preserved as private or neighborhood gardens, while in all the better sections small gardens border the sidewalks in front as well.

More than any of the other large cities I know, London has preserved its contacts with the earth as a source of living and growing trees and plants. It has a pleasant neighborly quality, an affinity with nature, that you do not find in New York or Paris or most other large cities. We of course have our trees and lawns and gardens in Rochester, as do most medium-sized American cities, but I fear we do not fully appreciate our blessing in this respect. Certainly we have all too recklessly stripped the trees from some of our principal streets in the past, and although we have some excellent parks on the outskirts, the two or three tiny plots of sod still uncovered in our central district are sad substitutes for the Berkeley squares of London.

To be sure the creation of such breathing spaces in a city already built up without them is far different from the preservation of fortunate survivals from an earlier and happier time. But if Rochester is a young city, as I have suggested, if it has a future full of possibilities, then we don't need to dismiss this deficiency as the lost opportunity of our predecessors. Downtown property commands a high premium, we say, and we point to the values along Main Street, especially those stretches covered by a few of our taller buildings. Unfortunately, if we stroll a few hundred yards off to the right or left we come to a wasteland of parking lots and mid-nineteenth century derelicts many of which haven't paid an honest dollar in two decades. No one will deny that vast areas in our central business district are ripe for reconstruction, at least for demolition. The difficulty is that the wide selection of potential sites threatens any builder with bankruptcy unless his venture is big enough to start a new trend in his direction. Clinton Avenue has shown a slight revival, and Main Street, east of East, but long stretches of good commercial frontage are stagnating—a glut on the market.

Our Imagination is Stirred

This situation presents the city with a marvelous opportunity to reshuffle the downtown street pattern and carve out a number of spacious parking plazas plus two or three genuine park sites. The properties facing these open spaces would immediately attract worthy buildings and usher in a new era of commercial growth in Rochester. Any Doubting Thomas should study the effect wrought in one bombed area of Dusseldorf where a large new plaza has been laid out, prompting the rapid reconstruction of fine buildings on all sides, while a few blocks away owners have scarcely bothered to wall up the doors and windows

of their bombed out properties. Similarly in Stuttgart, an enlargement of the old public market area and the creation of a new if small park triangle near-by have spurred the rapid rebuilding of one part of the business district and with a style and flourish that promise to make this one of the most modern cities in Europe in another decade or so. The fact that these seriously crippled cities can afford to take good property off the assessment rolls makes one wonder whether it is not more accurate to say that they cannot afford not to take some property off the assessment rolls in order to enhance the value of the rest. Certainly the abundance of "non productive" squares and gardens in the heart of all but two of the twenty cities I visited seems to support this conclusion, for those two exceptions, Sheffield and Venice, were the most wretched cities I found.

The opportunity which thus challenges us to reconstruct our central business district is a result in part of the wide concentration of America's retail trade into large department stores. Most of the small retail establishments, which once lined practically all streets in the central district, have been driven out of business by the large stores with their many departments and vast floor space. At the same time a dozen modern skyscrapers have siphoned off the prosperous tenants who once occupied the second or third story offices of the moderate-sized business blocks, thus depriving them of their last source of revenue. Few European cities have yet faced the blighting effects of such developments, for small specialized stores are still the rule rather than the exception there, and skyscrapers seldom break the skyline, though the reconstruction programs in many cities threaten a revolution here. The American pattern has its conveniences for the shopper as well as the office worker, and we will probably never be able to restore the prosperity of the great majority of our small business blocks. Their number will be drastically reduced in time, and the only question is whether the weeding out will be harmonized with area replanning. Only one city in Europe, Rotterdam, has seized the opportunity to rebuild its central business district along strictly modern lines. Time did not permit a stop in Rotterdam, but as we sped through on the train we could see the frames of some of her new and tall office buildings and vast department stores already going up. Generous open spaces surround each structure, some designated for broad streets and parking plazas, some for trees and flowers, for the bold planners of this city are firmly determined to make it the most modern and beautiful city in the world.

Three months in Europe hardly qualified me for the task of re-planning Rochester, but it was quite long enough to recall to mind some of the plans for Rochester that are already on our shelves. I couldn't help but think how logical and necessary many of them are. Take our station plaza, for example, at least a dozen plans have been drafted for it during the past three decades, each of which proposed great improvements over its present situation. Perhaps we don't travel by train any more and seldom get down to see that huddle of buildings across from the New York Central Station. But the memory of it certainly was painful as I looked out upon the station plazas of most of the cities I visited. Stuttgart deserves mention here again, also Zurich, and two or three of the stations in London and Paris. Munich is doing a job of station reconstruction which already gives promise of impressive results, while the new central station in Rome has been widely and justly acclaimed. The sad part about our station is that it is a fairly good structure architecturally, and adequate to our needs—more than can be said for many of our buildings—but we have so little opportunity or occasion to look at it that we think of it as a typical part of the run-down area in which it stands. A real plaza in front, bordered on the one side by the post office and extending across Cumberland Street to provide a park setting for the new Y.W. would add several million dollars to the traveler's evaluation of Rochester—and stimulate at the same time some worthy reconstruction in this long neglected area. Incidentally while some of the projects I have so lightly tossed out may have to wait a few decades, this is one we should be able to accomplish in the 1950's as we press forward with the construction of the inner traffic loop.

Rochester is Favored

Perhaps you are wondering why I ever bothered to come back to Rochester, why in other words I don't move over and write the history of one Europe's wonderful cities. Several of them would make fascinating subjects, but I assure you I am glad for many reasons to be back in Rochester. Some of my reasons will come out as I proceed, but I will venture the generalization here that few if any of the cities I visited present opportunities for domestic felicity such as Rochester provides to the great majority of its residents.

Zurich is perhaps an exception—one of the richest cities per capita in the world, with all of its citizens sharing its blessings as far as I could determine. A careful search revealed no slums and few houses

you would not gladly rent or buy and live in with comfort and pleasure. But despite its spectacular setting and the interesting harmony it has achieved between its medieval and modern sections, Zurich is for some reason known as a dull and complacent city, and certainly a removal to Switzerland in our day would be a flight from the world of the mid-twentieth century—a step I hope to defer for at least a decade or so.

Except for Zurich and possibly Geneva, all the cities on my list face housing and reconstruction problems that make Rochester's needs and difficulties appear insignificant. I hesitate after a visit of two days to describe Venice as one vast slum, for the drab squalor of its residential quarters is relieved along the Grand Canal and around the Lagoon by the decaying splendor of innumerable palaces and many churches, dating in some instances as far back as the twelfth century, while the indescribable beauty of St. Mark's Square helps to contribute to the fantastic gaiety of the populace. Two days in Paris would have left a better impression than two weeks, which gave me an opportunity to discover how much like a vast stone bastille this beautiful city is, with all the sounds of its furious activity reverberating through the palatial cell blocks that line its alleyways and house its residents. No wonder they erupt on every possible occasion to surge along the boulevards in what appears to be utter confusion and abandon. The city's unrivalled art collections and spectacular vistas overwhelm all visitors, compelling them to seek refreshment at her delightful sidewalk cafés and incomparable restaurants, while entertainment for every taste is easily at hand. But would a permanent resident find these continually satisfying? Millions have, to be sure, fallen in love with Paris over the centuries, but some have more recently developed an existentialist philosophy to help make life in Paris palatable. Perhaps two months or two years would enable me, too, to fall in love with Paris, but even then one would have to retain a lover's critical insensibilities to live with her.

Nineteenth Century Housing Explored

I need not castigate each of my twenty cities in order to prove a preference for Rochester, but one or two general criticisms may be mentioned because they have escaped the attention of many tourists. It is hardly necessary to remark that most European cities contain many more historic and beautiful buildings, more fascinating architectural vistas, than American cities can boast. Certainly Rochester's business streets appear drab and uninspiring next to many I strolled through in Europe

this summer. But it does not take much effort to find streets, mile after dreary mile of them, which make you long to be back in Rochester. And sadly enough for the Europeans, this holds true more generally for their residential streets which stretch out endlessly beyond the central and fascinating cores of these old cities. Drab and monotonous they lead inevitably into existing or impending slums. You soon learn on inquiry that they are the product of the nineteenth century, more precisely the years 1825-1925, the century whose lost art was architecture.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the nineteenth century was the century when most houses were built for profit—quick profits if possible. The architect's job was to build them cheaply and/or make them superficially attractive to buyers. In America, even in Rochester, we had our jerry-built tenements, our rows of flimsy and identical houses or cottages and our gaudy monstrosities. But in Rochester most of the first have long since been demolished and most of the houses and cottages at least possess some yard space and offer remodeling opportunities. In European cities, where practically all building was of brick or stone or stucco, economy was achieved by a reduction in room size and lot area, with the result that countless miles of mean little row houses ring the older and more gracious central districts of most of the cities I visited. London's Berkeley squares and garden courts peter out as one travels into the architectural wastes that house the majority of its citizens. A two penny bouquet of cut flowers brought back from a downtown flower market is the only taste of nature many of these dwellings know. Nineteenth century Sheffield is far worse, worse even than Pittsburgh, and extensive areas in Rome, Florence, and Vienna, even Munich, struck me as almost as depressing. Many other cities in Europe and America are reputed to be even more horrible, for the sad fact is that it was in the nineteenth century that the greatest surge of urban expansion occurred.

Attempted Remedies Described

Fortunately many of the cities of Europe, particularly the English and German cities, are doing something about this problem. Indeed one of the most impressive facts about Europe today is the extent to which it is engaged in transforming its old historic cities into modern communities. Perhaps, of the work I saw, that in Sheffield was most striking because the problem there is so appalling. After an hour or two in the grimy, smoke-filled, industrial valley that comprises the old city, a tram ride out to one of the hilltop housing estates brought an almost indescribable relief. These public and cooperative projects, which date

back in some cases to the 1920's, already house a fifth of the city's population, and similar projects scheduled to go up in the next decade or so will rehouse another two or three fifths—all, in other words, except the fortunate few who already occupy well constructed private homes in the only decent residential district which the old city possessed. Moreover the housing estates have not only the pure air and spectacular views of their hilltop sites, but ample ground space as well for flower gardens in front and vegetable gardens in back of each home unit. The two story row houses, terraces as they are now called, are in fact community homes whose residents vie with each other to produce the most attractive floral beds, the first peas and the largest cabbages.

If the architects of the last century generally gave more attention to the superficial embellishment of buildings than to the design of wholesome interior and exterior living arrangements, evidence of a new and more imaginative spirit is beginning to appear in the London area. One City of Westminster project, for example, is comprised of a vast colony of nine-story apartment houses (themselves a novelty in London) in strikingly modern design and grouped in a spacious setting overlooking the Thames. Several model new towns are in process of construction around London, some like Harlow and Crawley a good distance out in order to help decentralize the population. Others like Lansbury are building in bombed-out urban areas, offering a new and more airy community pattern to the residents of the surrounding slums. Not only are front and back yard gardens provided for in Lansbury, but landscaped playgrounds with shaded areas for park benches, a shopping court adjoining an arcaded community center, three churches, two in modern style, and, believe it or not, three pubs.

Several of the continental cities I visited were likewise busy in this field. Amsterdam has perhaps done more than any of the others, starting in a big way some twenty or so years ago and pressing ahead, except during the war years, with projects which would now easily house all the residents of Rochester. The comforts they provide would not match our average, and we would feel constrained in their solid blocks of apartments, generally four stories high, but the construction is substantial and attractive and the open spaces behind and at near-by small parks, or bordering the canals which even penetrate into these modern areas, make this newer Amsterdam a more congenial adjunct to old Amsterdam in the center than is the nineteenth century layer that separates the two. Similarly the new construction—since the 1920's—in Vienna, Munich, Stuttgart and Rome, even in Salzburg and other small

cities, provides a much happier residential environment than that which dates from the previous century. Most of the new urban housing has been erected by municipal or cooperative agencies, and whether or not you approve of such socialistic enterprise, the European cities seem dependent on it to rebuild their bombed homes and to replace their worst slums.

Attractive as much of this newer construction is, it has nevertheless its limitations. As a framework for living, little of it matches the free-standing homes in private yards which line most of Rochester's modest streets and fill its better neighborhoods. To be sure, even American cities have found it impossible, or at least economically infeasible, to replace slum areas with separate private homes, and we would do well to study the newer neighborhood patterns evolving in Europe as possible guides for our slum clearance programs. Moreover, the newer neighborhood patterns evolving at Crawley and Lansbury, which are related to those of Radburn and Baldwin Hills Village in America, merit consideration by the promoters of our suburban tracts.

Contrasts in Urban Transit

If European cities seem at times more advanced than Rochester and other American cities, they seem in other respects much more retarded. They are, for example, still in the bicycle and tram age—perhaps a blessing in disguise, I am not sure. Their trams are, as a result, often much better than our trolleys and buses, and the service is more frequent and much cheaper. The double deck buses of London and many parts of England are likewise surprisingly numerous and efficient. The fact is that in European cities, Paris and London excepted, almost the only competition the public buses and trams meet is from the bicycle. Of course in flat cities such as Amsterdam, where the cyclists number into the hundred thousand, they can be a formidable rival, but the relative absence of cars has so far saved many European cities from the traffic snarls that trouble us everywhere in America.

We have progressed (?) a decade or two beyond them in this respect, both in experience with the problem and in attempts to cope with it. One hesitates to imagine what will happen to the quaint old historic streets in the congested cores of European cities when the number of private cars begins to mount. Even Paris with its wide boulevards will hardly give range to more than double its present number of cars, (they are already appropriating the spacious walks of the Champs-Élysées for parking purposes!) and one trembles at the prospect of an increase in

the accident ratio there. In fact, one additional horn, one additional maniac shooting at you as you try to dash across a boulevard, would almost rule Paris off the middle-aged tourist's list. New York City of course faces a much graver situation, as do a score or more of America's leading cities. Rochester likewise has similar problems—bottlenecks in rush hours, parking difficulties at all times, traffic casualties and the generally blighting effects of nonsegregated heavy traffic on adjacent commercial and residential property. We have these problems but we are more aware of them than Europe is, and if we make some progress towards their solution, as we seem destined to do in the next decade or so, we will win just that much more of a lead over European cities in this respect. Here in Rochester, however, we might emulate the Flower City on the Arno and see to it that the inner and outer traffic loops and the thruway connections we are about to build are artistically landscaped—fitted, in other words, to harmonize with our own best traditions.

Foreign Art Shrines

Needless to say European cities have been much more conscious than their American counterparts of art and history. Their great age has endowed them with a profusion of historic relics, works of art and other cultural remains. Practically every city I visited had its art gallery, its scientific or historical museum, and in many cases there were several of each, some of them most impressive in character. The galleries and museums of Paris, London, Rome, Florence, Venice, Amsterdam, Vienna and Munich require no praise here, save perhaps a confession of the unexpected thrills they give a first visitor to Europe. More surprising were the galleries and museums encountered in Geneva and Salzburg, to mention two moderate-sized cities which in America would be content with a museum room in the public library.

Moreover the rich heritage of art in the major galleries is but a small part of Europe's great wealth in this field. Art stores and artist colonies cluster together in many cities, and art exhibits in open air markets are not infrequent—Geneva had one in a downtown square, so did Munich and several others. Historic monuments and creative sculpture, the products of many centuries, abound, and Rochesterians will rejoice on visiting Stuttgart to see a bronze statue of their old friend Mercury still occupying a respectful place on the skyline. Indeed art is in evidence on all sides, in the form of gargoyles, wall paintings, carved doors and

pediments, not to mention cathedrals and other great structures, or perhaps merely in the mass and arrangement of the buildings. Some of the older cities appear in their medieval or Renaissance portions to be works of art themselves, Salzburg for example, and Heidelberg, and Zurich, and of course Florence. Yet curiously enough it was on the approach to Florence that I saw more numerous and more blatant advertising posters than anywhere else in Europe.

Curious also is the fact that European cities are less well equipped with libraries than are American cities. The great capitals have national libraries, to be sure, great book depositories open to scholars and other professional groups, but practically inaccessible to the average reader. The public municipal libraries, which exist in most cities, sometimes by virtue of a gift from Andrew Carnegie, are seldom as large or as well stocked or staffed as in comparable American communities. On the other hand, the number of book stores is legion, offering both new and second-hand books, books on art, on science, books in several languages. Apparently the market is a good one and perhaps we should agree that the accumulation of a private library is as worthy a form of individualism as the ownership of a private car.

If the social ownership of books is less prevalent in Europe than in America, it is an exception to the rule. Certainly European cities are better patrons of the arts, contributing from municipal funds for the support of theaters and concert halls as well as art galleries and museums. You can't dismiss this as merely subsidized art, for it has a very strong hold on the people. I won't undertake to compare the Salzburg Music Festival with the musical programs, even of Rochester, for Salzburg is a sort of summer camp for Vienna, still the world's capital in this art, but neither Vienna nor Salzburg expect their musical programs fully to support themselves. The fact is that these arts are recognized as essential parts of the general culture, so essential that when private fees do not prove adequate, the city or state picks up the check.

Public enterprise has taken the initiative here, just as it has in the case of public health, the provision of public transit, public light and power, even as noted above public housing. Forty years ago when a party of Rochesterians headed by Rabbi Landsberg visited Dusseldorf, the vigor of its municipal enterprise was hailed as a model for Rochester. We have in fact established many public institutions since then—a library, a museum, a gallery, and recently a housing project, but if we do not wish to follow Dusseldorf, a city of approximately our size and age, in its many other experiments with socialism, we do want at least to

make certain that our public and private enterprise, when combined, fully equal the public efforts of comparable European cities.

In some respects we are more socially minded and less individualistic than the Europeans. Our voluntary clubs and societies, with their many organizational and functional activities, absorb a considerable portion of our leisure. In European cities it is the state or the municipality that acts, all the individual needs do is conform to its rule and participate as taxpayer and consumer in its functions. The European thus often prides himself on his individual freedom, regarding the American as a group man, whereas we think of ourselves as free men cooperating voluntarily in numerous enterprises, and of the European as the regimented man.

Perhaps as sharp a contrast as any appears in our respective methods of handling welfare problems. In Rochester, where numerous social agencies care in some measure for every sort of human problem that arises in a large city, we support these variously organized efforts in considerable part through community wide, voluntary contributions. In European cities, similar problems, if handled at all, are for the most part public responsibilities, though a few anciently endowed charitable institutions and the missions or other foundations of various churches still carry on. Yet the initiative widely assumed by private groups and organized societies in this and other fields in Rochester and in many other American cities, is seldom evident in European cities. Indeed we have in America a multitude of private and semi-public organizations—clubs, societies, unions, chambers of commerce and the like—which stand between the individual and his government representing his interests, sometimes protecting him from exploitation, and in many diverse ways performing functions that have in Europe been absorbed by the state.

Yet if Europeans differ from us in their approach to the problems of human freedom and human welfare, their devotion to these goals is none-the-less evident. Their newspapers do not compare with ours in size or in the coverage they give to community affairs, but in number and in the sharpness with which they debate issues they far surpass our offerings. Residents of most of the cities I visited had a wider selection of local newspapers to choose from than Rochester affords, and, partly because of the small size of the papers, the practice of buying two or more at a time seemed fairly prevalent, indicating a wide familiarity with many points of view. Their intellectuals cite these and other contrasts in support of their doubts as to the freedom of our press, and indeed, whether justified by the facts or not, their skepticism concerning some

of our other freedoms is an honest one. They are obviously thinking here of freedom as a state of being, not only untrammelled by government control, but also uninhibited by the total social and economic order. It is not our laws that they indict so much as our extra-legal practices—our monopoly controls, our wide spread discrimination against Negroes and Asiatics, our attempts to throttle unpopular points of view. It is easy to confront these critics with frailties of their own, but it is better to recognize that we are all working toward a difficult ideal and that none of us has a monopoly on virtue.

A typical expression of the devotion of European peoples to these basic principles of Western civilization appears in the large number of monuments they have erected to the great reformers. Geneva's memorial to the Reformation, with sculptured figures of Knox, Calvin, Luther and Roger Williams among others, is only the most impressive, for most of the cities I visited have statues to their local heroes in the struggle for religious or political freedom, educational or social advance, and artistic achievement. Indeed the average European on visiting Rochester would be surprised, I suspect, at the lack of similar memorials here. We do, of course, have statues to Frederick Douglass, Edward Mott Moore and one or two others, but when will we do justice in this respect to Susan B. Anthony, to mention only one.

Perhaps we are right in our preference for practical monuments. The Susan B. Anthony House may be the best tribute to our great suffragist, and certainly George Eastman's monuments are all about us. But if our parks and plazas are to be denied such embellishments, we might at least introduce a feature prevalent throughout Europe which does fit well into our traditions. Certainly a city as justly proud of its water system as is Rochester might appropriately install a number of graceful fountains. One should go in the tiny park we will one day have at the foot of East Avenue, near where the Liberty Pole once stood; another will be needed in the new plaza in front of the Central Station, and still others in the parks facing or flanking the Public Library and the Memorial Auditorium. While we are dreaming we may as well locate a flower market at the base of the fountain at Main and East.

Individuality is Worth Cultivating

Travelers returning from abroad have often amused their friends by listing, somewhat as I have been doing, customs they would like to import. In fact the American scene has been greatly altered in the past by just such borrowings. The result has sometimes been wholesome and

sometimes freakish, but generally the foreign institution or strange custom has quickly disappeared unless it happened to fit the local pattern. Fountains will fit nicely in Rochester, when we clear a few suitable sites for them. But it is important to keep the objective of consistent individuality in mind, for certainly that is one of the most striking aspects of the European cities I visited—not one of them looks like the rest. Amsterdam is not the Dutch Venice, as it has sometimes mistakenly been called, nor Vienna the Austrian Paris, nor Heidelberg the Oxford of Germany. Each has its own individuality which contributes much to its charm.

We need not conclude that all borrowings are therefore false and unsound. Where after all did the designs of the Doge's Palace and Saint Mark's Cathedral come from—certainly not from Italian sources. The same Byzantine influence penetrated in different ways and with different effects into Austria, as the Salzburg skyline reveals. And what was the Renaissance in Florence and elsewhere but a creative revival of old Greek forms, and why is it that we delight in the preservation even in such a setting of a Gothic cathedral! The fact is that all of these cities have borrowed much from their predecessors and more from each other. Apparently the only requirement is that this borrowing be done with a creative rather than a servile spirit. Yet that requirement is an important one and should be kept in mind as we prepare designs for our new buildings, especially those of a public character which may now reasonably be expected to stand a few centuries rather than a few decades as in the past.

Perhaps with a dash of imagination we could safely adapt several other European institutions to the Rochester scene. We will never be able to duplicate the cafés of Paris and other continental cities, delightful as they appear in their setting. We are too busy for such frivolity, we think, though in fact we have our own forms of relaxation. The French café, like the English pub and our own corner bar, is the poor man's club, but it has a much wider patronage and a gayer atmosphere than either of its rivals. It would have little chance of developing on crowded Main Street or on other traffic arteries in our shopping district.

Among the several foreign customs and peculiar institutions that struck me as worthy of importation, I will mention first the English custom of queuing up for buses and all other occasions. Queues might not work as well on Main Street as they do all over London, but the system has a dignity, a democracy and an efficiency that wins admiration. The outdoor telephone booths which one finds in most European cities,

the cylindrical bill boards of Paris, and the graceful balconies which supply a breath of air and extra space to the newer apartments going up all over Europe—an adaptation of the Alpine cottage balcony to modern construction—all deserve our study. The public comfort stations of Paris should be considerably improved before we import them, but we do need something in this department, and perhaps when we get our inner loop and other improvements in the central street pattern, we can have a few major bus terminals, equipped with waiting rooms, information booths and some of the other conveniences so frequently provided at tram and bus stations in Europe.

A final feature of most European cities which all visitors have no doubt appreciated is the profusion of city maps on the walls of railroad and tram stations as well as in hotel lobbies and other public places. These useful maps, sometimes decorated with sketches of the principal buildings, supply at least an outline of the local street pattern and indicate the course of transit routes, the location of parks and other points of interest—a convenience to residents as well as strangers. Neither our official city maps, nor the outline maps distributed by some of our more enterprising advertisers, begin to equal the services performed by these wall and folding maps which can usually be purchased at reasonable prices at any magazine counter. Available also in most European cities are convenient guide books, pamphlets illustrated with photographs of historic sites and containing useful directions with generally an historic summary of the city's past. In the major cities these can be had in several languages—ten of the fifteen continental cities I visited had guide books in English, and incidentally the same ten had organized city tours in which the guides spoke English exclusively or together with two or three other languages.

Again I am not proposing that we duplicate these provisions in all details. We could hardly keep a tourist bureau busy in Rochester, but we could profit, or should I say benefit, by the preparation of a more attractive tourist map, copies of which might be placed on display under glass at the central station, at the main library, and in the lobbies of our hotels and other public buildings. Indeed, instead of trying to write a guide to our future city planners, your City Historian might get back to his last and bring out a suitable guide book to Rochester as it is and as it was.

However in a very real sense these reflections about Rochester and her European antecedents are very much in the community's tradition, very much a part of its history. Not only have we sprung in large part

from the countries I visited, but our memories of their patterns and customs have also been refreshed constantly both by the arrival of more recent newcomers from abroad and by the return of those who, like myself, have gone over for a summer's visit or longer. Some have reached Rochester laden with art treasures for our homes and galleries; others have written articles, even books, describing their reactions. In fact several—doing just what I have attempted to do—have listed the achievements of various European cities which we might profitably study.

If I have also taken the liberty here and there to indicate how we might apply some of Europe's lessons to Rochester, that likewise is in line with our traditions. Not only did Rabbi Landsberg cite the achievements of Dusseldorf four decades ago, but George Dietrich as vice president of the Chamber of Commerce in 1909 made a special trip to Europe in search of new ideas for Rochester. Moreover it is interesting to note that all of the ideas and plans my trip to Europe has suggested are old and familiar. All the proposals—for river boulevards, for a station plaza, for an East Avenue fountain, for downtown breathing spaces—have been made before, dozens of times. Indeed, practically all of these proposals were incorporated in a speech before the Rochester Historical Society in January, 1908, by Charles Mulford Robinson, our pioneer city planner. They have reappeared again and again in the reports of his successors, and may be found in the preliminary statement of the newly formed Citizen's Council for a Better Rochester. The only justification for repeating them here is the discovery I noted at the beginning of these remarks, that Rochester is a young city. We don't need to dismiss all of these rosy dreams of our yesterday simply because we didn't accomplish them yesterday. We are but a youthful member of a great community of cities, and it is hardly surprising that a visit to several of our older urban associates should suggest, just as a study of our own history recalls, some of our unfinished tasks.