

NOW IS TIME FOR HOUSTON TO PLAN GREAT, BEAUTIFUL CITY

Frank A. Parsons Speaking on Art, Praised Rice Institute and South End Junior High School.

"Now is the 'nick of time' for Houston to begin along broad, and far-sighted lines to lay out her foundation as a future great and beautiful city.

"It seems to me that there never was chosen a better opportunity for any city than the present is for you to do great things for yourselves.

"The entire Nation is looking for a great seaport in the South and conditions are in readiness to make Houston a garden spot of ports."

President Frank A. Parsons of the New York School of Arts, in an address at noon Monday before the Houston Chamber of Commerce and Houston Art League, heaped words of encouragement on those who entertain large plans and expectations for this city. He said, in addition to practically the words quoted in the first three paragraphs above, that there are a dozen causes that will make of Houston the first port in importance on the Mexican Gulf and the greatest point of distribution for the entire Middle West.

"The Rice Institute," he said, "is among the most beautiful buildings in America and will be a magnificent nucleus for a great and beautiful center of art, culture and learning as well as commercial greatness.

You have already, in the Rice Hotel, the best hotel in the country. For its size, at least, I am sure there is no other hotel that comes up to it on this continent. The reason is that it is what it was built for—a hotel." He praised the completeness of the building on the interior and the adaptation of its various facilities and conveniences to hotel use in this latitude.

Praise South End School.

"If all your future public schools are built so admirably and planned so well as the South End High School, the future generations of this city will have nothing to desire in the point of school buildings. The Rusk School is as perfect, practically, as could be desired as far as it goes."

Mr. Parsons was particularly complimentary in criticizing the location of the South End High School, describing it as superb.

"There is such a thing as a good thing being out of place. It would have been very easy for those building the South

End High School to have placed it in a much more objectionable position of the grounds it occupies than they did."

The lecture was delivered in the banquet hall at the Rice Hotel, where were gathered about 75 persons, including members of the Chamber of Commerce and members of the Houston Art League. President E. B. Glimmer of the Chamber of Commerce presided. Mrs. Gentry Waldo, president of the Art League, and other officers of both organizations occupied positions of honor near Dr. Parsons.

The theme of Dr. Parsons was "The Commercial Value of Art to a City." In his application of his subject to Houston he urged the necessity of the Chamber of Commerce and business interests working hand in hand with the members of the Art League.

"Art leagues," he said, "are usually composed of women who have more aesthetic aspirations than they have financial means, business influence and training in affairs to attain."

He endorsed the proposition to build a boulevard from the center of the city to the Rice Institute as possibly one of the most important moves in the way of city planning that Houston could make at present. He cited the mistakes that have been made by Chicago, St. Louis, New York and other large cities and suggested that Houston has an ideal opportunity to profit by those costly and regrettable mistakes.

Comparatively Easy Now.

"Four hundred years from now, and for that matter 100 years from now, it will be impossible for you to build the boulevard. At present it would be comparatively an easy and simple matter.

People have borrowed money, issued bonds and resorted to many sorts and degrees of methods to obtain things of less and less lasting importance.

"As a Nation we are trying to work out a culture commensurate with our money. Other people judge us by our art—that is, by what we do and the manner in which we express our sense of fitness and taste. The first thing that a city should attend to in planning for its future is making its municipal layout."

A large part of Dr. Parsons' talk was an exposition of the nature of art. In defining art he emphasized its relation to commerce, life and daily affairs and attributed to art a direct and calculable commercial value to the city and to the individuals.

"The Rice Institute would not be so great nor attract the same interest and patronage were it housed in a railroad depot. On the other hand a railroad depot should look like a railroad depot; a hotel should look like a hotel and an apartment house should look like and be an apartment house.

"Art is good taste. It is the sense of fitness. There is no art criterion, but that of harmony in things, harmony in materials and right understanding of the relations of form, color and other elements of materials.

"Good taste is simply and solely a sense of fitness. It is something that any one can acquire."

The difference between ornamentation and decoration was drawn along a clear line of cleavage. Ornamentation, he said, exists for itself. Decoration exists for the sake of the thing it decorates. Ornamentation was disapproved in dress, architecture and elsewhere.

"Wear useless and tasteless ornaments on your apparel today and the same bad taste will appear in the architecture of the next generation." Some very severe criticism was dealt to inappropriate styles of dress that Dr. Parsons said he saw on the streets of Houston and particularly while he was visiting the market building.

Influence in Schools.

On the theory that women have crystallized their ideas by the age of 25 and men attain maturity of ideas within 10 years later, he stated that the public schools could exert a wonderful influence—so much so that it is within the power of a city school superintendent, if properly equipped, to change the ideas and aesthetic tastes of a city within one generation. The school boy, he said, has an almost abnormally large influence upon his parents and usually is able to obtain from them exactly what he demands. By influencing the pupils properly the school teachers could quickly influence the entire city.

Dr. Parsons began his lecture by briefly calling attention to the close relationship between the histories of Nations and their art. The art of a Nation is the record of the Nation's history and vice versa a Nation's history is written in its art, he said.

"We know the thoughts of the Greeks

by the buildings and works of art they left. The Greeks stood pre-eminently on the platform that 'beauty is life,' and their efforts to make things beautiful resulted in an art that has influenced every period worth while.

"The Gothic church and the Gothic cathedral are the products of a people who thought of writing their religious beliefs and ideals in stone, glass and tapestries.

"Whatever we leave when we go is our art. The real expression of a man is his art and the real expression of a city is its art."

Art in Advertising.

Advertising, as a department of present day commercial activity, was paid the compliment of being given important consideration in Dr. Parsons' address. He stated that commercial advertising is destined to become one of the most important fields of endeavor, and he lamented the fact that many advertising men today appear to believe that the principle function of advertising is to attract attention. Loud colors, large lettering and unaesthetic bill board effects, he said, are not only to be deplored from the point of view of civic beauty, but are wasteful forms of advertising.

"We advertise what we have to sell, and in order to sell we must please as well as otherwise interest our would-be purchasers. An advertisement needs to be large enough only to be read. It does not need to be further away than arm's length. The public does not need to be slapped in the face with an advertisement any more than one needs to be slapped in the face literally to have one's attention attracted."