

THE PATHFINDERS.*

The custom of assembling once each year to commemorate the founding of our city is to be commended for at least one reason. The natural tendency of the practice is to direct our minds from our own personal and purely selfish affairs, and to induce us to contemplate our city from another view than merely the place where we live and have our being and hope to make our fortunes out of real estate.

From year to year as we gather upon this occasion it will be a favorite theme to dilate upon the wondrous growth and manifold changes that have been wrought in the half century since the founders first stepped upon the inhospitable shore at Alki Point. It will always be full of interest to contemplate how the passing years have put their mark upon the face of things; for surely nowhere has the hand of man wrought with such energy and effectiveness, and well may those whose enterprise and devotion has builded all this look with pride upon their work and lay the unction to their souls that never in all the history of the world's development has a congregation of men done more.

Where a half century ago those intrepid founders, gazing across the waters of Elliott Bay, saw naught but the tangled forest frowning down into the tide, their children view to-day structures builded after classic form, with fronts reared high into the sky as if in valorous endeavor to learn if there be a sun which shines above the mists of Puget Sound.

Where in those days the stranger, who struggled to these shores, found no warmer welcome than that accorded by the lurking savage who coveted his scalp, he is now received into the abiding place of luxury and wealth, and the gentle trafficker in real estate has fallen on his neck ere the city's gates have closed upon him.

And how all things have changed! About this time a half century ago (and that is but a brief time in the history of a commonwealth) the inhabitants upon Puget Sound were all absorbed in the project of securing funds for the building of a possible wagon road across the Cascades and thence to where it would intersect the emigrant road across the Rocky Mountains, it being hoped thus to divert the tide of immigration which had been up to that time tending down to the Willamette Valley. Now

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we can view almost without enthusiasm the spectacle of great transcontinental railroads making their way across the continent, and, indeed, we even find the leisure to invent obstacles against their entry into our city. It would be also fair to remark that as for the wagon roads, we have been content to let them remain in much the same condition they were fifty years ago.

In such a speedy and overwhelming way has this marvelous transformation been brought about that it is as difficult for us of the present day to imagine conditions then as it would have been for them to picture how these few years would transform the face of things.

But did I say that all was changed? We well remember how it is recorded that when the founders dragged themselves ashore on Alki Point, and looking across the bay beheld for the first time the site of the future city, the land and water were covered with a murky mist and steadily it rained. Thus they knew they had discovered Seattle.

But we shall have spent our time idly upon such an occasion as this if we do not find that lesson which it is meant the thoughtful one should learn from a view of our early history and the lives of those men who, leaving civilization and comfort behind, went out to seek a habitation within the trackless limits of an unknown land.

This city and state of ours are but in the building now, and that we may finally come into our own, men of strength, men of fortune, and above all men of faith, are just as necessary as they were upon the day the founders first undertook to penetrate the frowning wilderness that fringed the shores of Puget Sound.

If this city is to be builded to that point where it shall correspond to what we now hope, there must remain with us the builders, something of that spirit which mastered those who began the task and by their initiation made possible the work we now perform.

Call it what you will, call it the instinctive desire of man for exploration, call it the "wanderlust", if you will, that moved them, these men would never have sought these inhospitable shores and here remained to found a city and a state, if a sordid thought for their own welfare had been their only impulse. I am not idealist enough to believe that these men were actuated only by the grand idea of erecting an empire for those who came after to enjoy. Perhaps they were not even consciously moved by this idea, but that spirit nevertheless they had and it sufficed to make them heroes.

It was that spirit which armed a Stevens to go unattended through the wilderness that stretched from the Rocky Mountains to Puget Sound and by the force of will alone subdue a

devastating savagery that this fair land might be prepared for the abode of civilization and peace.

It was this heroic impulse that inspired a Bonneville to turn his back upon civilized man and setting his face toward a land as mysterious and unknown as the face of another sphere ride out to disclose a path where the myriad makers of an empire might later follow him.

It was this spirit which aroused a Marcus Whitman to set forth on horseback in the depth of a stinging winter to make the awful journey from Walla Walla to the Atlantic Coast. Riding eastward to where the Rocky Mountains cast up their icy wall to bar his path he turns along their front and rides and rides until he finds a pass he penetrates, for even mountains must fall down before the will of such a man; then onward undaunted and not faltering, for it is his task to warn the national authorities of the value of the empire report has told him they are minded to surrender to another flag. He stands before them at his journey's end, and with the fervor of a devoted soul crying not for himself, but for posterity, he pleads:

“Oh, sirs, out beyond and still beyond there is a land most fair and bounteous; there are verdure-covered hills that bloom in beauty everlasting and sleeping valleys which but wait the touch of man to yield God's choicest fruits; there are never ending plains that wave their golden grasses to a summer sky, and from out the swelling bosom of those plains majestic mountain peaks reach up their snow cheeks to meet the sun's caress, while from their sides, like Titanic tear drops, roll down gigantic rivers to the sea.”

We may not emulate the deeds of these men, for the day of such deeds is past, but we may achieve in some degree their spirit.

If in a city like this where material prosperity has reached such bounds, where industry is awakening with such amazing strength, and speculation assures such wondrous rewards, men should forget all else but individual profit and think only of their city and what it comprises as the theatre and opportunity for their own financial advancement, it would not be surprising; but a generation of men whose only thought is this have added little to the true advantage of a city.

Wealth may accumulate, men may rear monuments of stone and marble, luxury may come with its enervating train, yet that be wanting to make our city truly great.

It would be an error to discourage commercialism, for thus are laid the foundations of economic strength; it would be wrong to forbid that man should hearken to the proper dictates of self interest, for it is only thus that he protects himself and family,

but let us not forget if we would have a city which deserves the pride and devotion we desire to yield it, that by increasing values, by amassing wealth, or even reaching luxury, we have not yet attained true civil greatness.

Amongst us there must arise men—high-minded men—who alone can “constitute a state”, who with something of the zeal of the founders will lay out the path to civil virtue and advancement.

Spite the fact that there never was an age, and perhaps there never was a place, where there is more temptation to desert some of the higher ideals, nevertheless, I say only what I feel it is my right to say when I declare that in no community may we easier find the elements of a wholesome and magnificent citizenship.

As we learn to live “in scorn of miserable aims that end with self”, as we approach the spirit of those intrepid fathers who counted naught a sacrifice so that it made for human betterment, so shall we build a city which shall merit and be accorded of all men the title great.

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