

MUSEUMS AS PLACES OF POPULAR
CULTURE.

A CONFERENCE on this important subject took place at Mannheim, Germany, on September 21 and 22, having been convened by the Centralstelle für Arbeiter-Wohlfahrtseinrichtungen, an organization for social work that has its headquarters in Berlin. The meetings were held in the Aula of the city Realgymnasium, under the presidency of Dr. Schenkel, minister of the interior for Baden, and were attended by about two hundred people interested in this social question, of whom over fifty were practical museum officials, from all parts of Germany, with half a dozen from Switzerland, Austria and England. A philosophically ordered program had been drawn up some time beforehand, and was carried out with very slight modification. We take the following from a special report in the *Museums Journal*. The meeting on each day lasted from 9:30 A.M. till 4:30 P.M., with an hour's interval for lunch. Opportunities for social intercourse were abundant—at lunch, dinner and in the evenings; the museums and similar institutions of Mannheim and Heidelberg were thrown open to members, many of whom also visited the museums of Darmstadt, Mainz, Worms and other neighboring towns. Free seats were reserved for members at a special performance of 'The Merchant of Venice,' to which work-people were admitted for 40 pf.

The object of the conference was to discuss in what ways museums could bring themselves into touch with the working classes. The subject was introduced by Dr. Lichtwark, of Hamburg, who pointed out that modern museums differed from universities and academies in being open free to all classes; nevertheless, the very small proportion that the number of their visitors bore to that of the inhabitants showed that they needed to be made still

more popular. Universal rules could not be laid down, but he foresaw a great revolution in the equipment and methods of museums, which would have to be brought into relation with men's daily life. The gradual change in the nature of museums was then traced by Dr. Jessen, of Berlin, who dealt with museums of fine and applied art, and by Dr. Lampert, of Stuttgart, who spoke of natural history museums. There followed what professed to be accounts of actual attempts made by various museums to render their treasures more useful to a wide public; but these tended to become simple descriptions of the museums. One gathered, however, that the Bremen city museum depended more on labels than on guide-books, that visits to it were obligatory on the school children, who afterwards were made to write essays on what they had seen, and that a reading-room and lecture-hall were connected with the museum. Dr. Lehmann explained how the exhibits of the Altona museum were devised so as to force their meaning on the dullest spectator, *e. g.*, two cases of the same assemblage of animals, one in summer, the other in winter; the popularity of the recently installed fishery exhibit showed how crowds could easily be interested in what really came home to them. A somewhat similar museum at Celle was described by Dr. Bomann. Professor Andreae advocated the use of photographs and their constant change, as at the Roemer Museum, Hildesheim; he thought that small museums should be many-sided. The description of the geological room at the Berlin museum, admirably arranged by Dr. Jaekel, showed that it was intended for students rather than the great public. Mr. Osthaus believed that a joy in art should and could be brought to the working classes, but the Folkwang Museum aimed at this by first influencing manufacturers and leaders of work through the exhibition

of the best art, and chiefly living modern art, in the most beautiful manner. Better to create art to-day than to be learned in the art of the past. Thus could art be pressed into the service of all. On behalf of Dr. A. B. Meyer, Dr. Wandollek described the efforts of the American museums in this direction, especially as regards children. The similar efforts of the school-museum at Hannover were detailed by Dr. Wehrhahn, who said that the small people found his simple rooms more attractive than the large museum palaces. An account of the Ruskin Museum in Sheffield had been distributed to members, and Mr. Gill Parker confined himself to showing a large series of lantern slides illustrating the activities of that institution. In the discussion on the above papers, Dr. Leisching, of Vienna, said that the Austrian government had established a circulating museum department, which sent art collections to towns that had no permanent museum, and arranged for lectures on these exhibitions by teachers at the high schools. Scepticism as to the value and possibility of the whole movement was manifest in the discursive speech of Dr. Lessing (Berlin), who maintained that the public as a whole, from the man in the street up to 'his Excellence'—and higher still, had not and could not be given a feeling for art, which term, however, seemed in the speaker's mind to signify chiefly ancient art and the old masters. A museum guide to art should be modeled on Huxley's 'Crayfish.' Dr. Pauli, of Bremen, was astonished to hear such retrograde views. No museum supposed that it could turn a road mender into a connoisseur on a Sunday morning, but it might be proud to have inspired only one or two per cent. of its visitors. The upper classes felt themselves above instruction, but working people were far more susceptible, and

it was from them that future creative artists were to be expected.

The program of the second day, dealing as it did with limited questions of practical importance, gave rise to a more lively discussion. Dr. Lichtwark voiced those complaints about the architecture of museums with which we are familiar, objecting, among other things, to the corridor-like arrangement of rooms *en suite*, to the waste of space and money on a huge stair-hall, and especially to the domination of a whole museum by the architect's conception of his façade. As a small museum in which the architect and decorator had solved their special problem in a satisfactory manner, he instanced the Thorwaldsen Museum in Copenhagen. For appealing to the people of a large city, a number of small museums were better adapted than one large central museum. Dr. Jessen, emphasizing the point that museums should be built for the objects placed in them, maintained that the buildings should not be erected until a large amount of material had been collected, since not till then could one see precisely what was wanted. Professor Grosse, director of the art museum at Freiburg i. B. pointed out very clearly that one should not confuse the scientific study of art with the faculty of appreciating beautiful works of art, which latter was the need of the lay public. The collections for these two purposes should be separated. He, therefore, advocated the setting apart for the public of certain rooms, in which carefully selected objects should be displayed according to esthetic principles, abundance of space being allowed to each object, especially to the smaller ones. Different classes of objects should be intermingled, and the exhibits should be changed at intervals. Dr. Grosse was warmly applauded and his ideas were supported by several subsequent speakers, for instance, Dr. Schmid, of the Bavarian

National Museum, who also urged the value of small local museums for the encouragement of an art connected with the life of the people. Dr. Lehmann held that, so far as the public was concerned, the same principles were applicable to natural history museums. These ideas also found expression in a careful essay by Dr. Kautsch (Halle a. S.) on guides to, and lectures in, art-museums. The aim of these should be not to give a watered-down history of art, but to teach people to see; not to instil theories, but to evoke a conception of form; to create artists and artistic craftsmen, not to stifle the artistic faculty under the weight of learning that oppressed our so-called cultured classes. Professor Fraas, of Stuttgart, speaking of similar methods in natural history museums, gave the good advice that illustrations should be not pictures of specimens in the collection, but explanatory diagrams. His other remarks were much to the point, but the gist of them is familiar to our readers. In a detailed paper on temporary exhibitions in museums, Dr. Deneken, of Crefeld, inveighed against the superfluity of the usual class of exhibition, especially of art exhibitions, which had done the greatest harm to the development of art and were opposed to its true aims. Especially harmful were the permanent exhibitions of societies, with their commercial standpoint. For an exhibition to be useful, it should have a leading idea rigidly carried out; thus esthetic pleasure could carry with it artistic instruction. Even when the museum relied on its own resources there should be a selection of exhibited material on these lines and a constant change so as to keep up the public interest. This change would be helped by loan exhibitions, but here too the most careful selection must be enforced.

A speech from the minister of the interior and a vote of thanks to the town of Mannheim brought the proceedings to a

close, and it only remains for us to mention an exhibition of various museum objects and methods that had been arranged, along with a collection of literature bearing on the subject.

In estimating the value of this congress, one must not look for immediate results in the rush of working folk to museums. Museums, as they now exist, are not suited to this new part they have to play. Fresh museums must be built, old ones adapted where possible, and, above all, new men to direct them must be trained. Any doubt as to the trend of events would have been dispelled by attendance at this congress; in such controversy as there was, the younger men were all on one side, and it is their views that are endorsed by the able critic of the *Kölnische Zeitung* (September 27). From a social point of view the outlook is encouraging, and the Berlin headquarters for the betterment of the workers may be congratulated. And as for museum men themselves, let us note that this is the first public conference of museum officials as such that has been held in Germany, probably on the continent. But, the first though it be, we find a remarkably large attendance, and including men of the highest official standing, while the whole is patronized by the government, presided over by a minister, and, last but not least, fully noticed in the press. Seeing how overdone with congresses they are in Germany, this bears witness to the skill with which the meeting was engineered. Whether it will give rise to further reunions, arranged by the museum officials themselves, remains to be seen; but this at least has been a gain, that it has brought together the mutually indifferent, not to say intolerant, science men and art men, and has shown them that they form allied branches of a great profession, working for one noble cause, and aiming at the same lofty mark.