

**THE GROWTH OF CITIES: A  
DISCOURSE DELIVERED BEFORE  
THE NEW YORK GEOGRAPHICAL  
SOCIETY, ON THE EVENING OF  
MARCH 15TH, 1855**

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The Growth of Cities: A Discourse Delivered Before the New York Geographical Society, on the evening of March 15th, 1855 by Henry P. Tappan

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**HENRY P. TAPPAN**

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A  
DISCOURSE

*Delivered*  
DELIVERED BEFORE THE NEW YORK GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY,  
ON THE EVENING OF MARCH 16th, 1855.

BY

HENRY P. TAPPAN, D.D., LL.D.

CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN.

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*An Abstract from the Minutes of the American Geographical  
and Statistical Society.*

Meeting on Thursday evening, March 15th, 1865.

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"The Society adjourned to the small Chapel, where Chancellor Lewis Tappan, of the Michigan University, read a paper on *the Growth of Cities*, etc.

"After Mr. Tappan had finished his lecture, several gentlemen expressed their approbation of the principles developed in so masterly a manner, and suggested the expediency of publishing this paper for the benefit of a larger circle of our fellow-citizens. On motion of the Hon. Alexander W. Bradford, the thanks of the Society were voted to Mr. Tappan, and Charles King, LL.D., was authorized to make the necessary arrangements for printing said paper as a Pamphlet."

ARCHIBALD RUSSELL, *Recording Secretary.*



## THE GROWTH OF CITIES.

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CITIES had their origin in the necessity of a common defence. Hence the first cities were fortresses; and where the face of the country admitted of it, were built on hills or amid rocky fastnesses. Petra was built amid impregnable rocks. Rome was built on seven hills. The old cities of Etruscan origin are scattered on a chain of hills; there the inhabitants are still congregated, while the pastures, the fields of corn, and the vines fill the plains below. Where the country presented only a continuous plain, and there were no hills and rocks to be found, cities were located on the banks of large rivers, whose waters were diverted into moats around the walls. Babylon stood on the banks of the Euphrates, Nineveh on the banks of the Tigris, and Paris on an island in the Seine.

The place of strength next became the seat of empire,—the residence of kings,—and collected about it regal dignity and magnificence. So Petra became a gem of beauty among the rocks,—the glory of Arabia; Babylon and Nineveh the vast palaces of kings; and Rome, upon the seven hills, the Capital and Mistress of the world.

Sometimes, like Alexandria, St. Petersburg, Berlin, and Washington, cities have been founded as Capitals.

But other necessities arose—the necessities of Commerce; and Commerce sought for itself the centres of trade, and facilities of transportation. Thus Tyre, and Sidon, and Carthage, and Athens sprang up on the Mediterranean; Venice upon islands in the Adriatic; Byzantium on the Bosphorus; London on the Thames; and Palmyra on the grand route by which Caravans passed from the rising to the setting sun.

In the feudal times, when the Barons built upon the hills,

or perched upon pinnacled rocks, not cities, but their solitary towers, to overawe the weak, and to plunder industry, then enterprising men congregated in cities in the midst of fertile districts to profit the world, while they enriched themselves, by the manufacture of useful fabrics. Their main employment lay amid the arts of industry, while at the same time they were, by compulsion, soldiers. One hand rested upon the loom or the anvil, while the other wielded sword and spear. With them it was not work and play, but work and battle. And thus arose the free cities of Germany and the low countries.

The cultivation of literature and science, and the diffusion of knowledge have, by their necessities, also, caused cities to spring up.

The cultivation of literature and science requires a concentration of means and efforts. Learned men and libraries cannot be carried to the door of every individual. Learned men require to be associated that they may act upon each other for their common advancement in knowledge and culture, and that they may unite their labors for scientific discovery, for literary production, and for the education of youth. Books scattered here and there are like a scattered capital; when collected in a large library, they are like a concentrated capital. Thus great Universities come into being, and a nation becomes supplied with scientific men and authors.

Universities have generally been located in cities already existing, but they have collected cities around them whenever they have been planted in the solitude. Thus a ford for oxen over the Isis, and a bridge over the sluggish Cam, near which great Universities grew up, have lost their importance, while they have given their names to the large, populous, and beautiful cities of Oxford and Cambridge.

Religion as well as learning has given birth to cities; Jerusalem, Delphi, and Heliopolis, the sacred seats of old religions, gained their wealth and splendor from this source.

Such, in brief, are the causes and occasions which have given rise to cities. But their history shows us that they have seldom preserved their simple original character; and we shall see, in the progress of this discussion, that their full development requires more elements than the one immediate-



ly connected with their origin. It is true; indeed, that one element naturally grows out of another; and yet, there are influences which are hostile to this natural development, or which, at least, may give a disastrous predominance to some over others.

In the growth of cities the fortress became a royal residence. But, where the court was, there would be splendor, elegance, and refinement carried out, to the utmost idea of civilization which had as yet obtained. Hence, naturally, the royal city, where the monarch seized this idea, and felt its genial impulse, became the seat of learning and the arts.

The ruins of Babylon are shapeless mounds, but history has not left us without records of its palaces and hanging gardens, its treasures, its beautiful arts, and the learning of its Magi.

Nineveh, in our times, has been exhumed, and reveals to the astonished eye the indisputable remains of royal magnificence, and of a sculpture which, belonging to the same type with the Egyptian, may claim to vie with it as representing that stage of the art, when boldness of design and elaborate finish formed the chief characteristics; and Grecian elegance and grace had not yet appeared.

The massive ruins of Egypt still remain. The Pyramids, the Tombs, the exiled obelisks, the mutilated Sphinx, Thebes and Karnak, attest the power, the splendor, the art, the gorgeous forms of life of those ancient dynasties.

The ancient fortress of Romulus and Remus, afterwards the imperial city of the Cæsars, in its Coliseum, its triumphal arches, its ruined palaces and temples, and the exhumed treasures of art which crowd the Vatican, calls up a vision of imperial greatness, power, and magnificence, and of the development of the arts, which the imagination might ambitiously claim as its own, did not the stupendous and beautiful ruins furnish *data* which make the vision only a just historical conception. The little island, La Cité, in the Seine, first selected as a secure position, is now only the centre of the vast capital of the Bourbons and the Napoleons, where the brilliancy and gaiety of the Court, and the displays of the great mart of fashion, are eclipsed by the substantial glory of art and learning.

Of the capitals which have been founded, perhaps none

has retained the original character more exclusively than St. Petersburg, which may still be said to be divided between the court and the army. On the other hand, Alexandria, which at first supplanted Tyre as the mistress of commerce, became also a famous seat of learning; Berlin stands now unrivalled for its institutions of learning and the arts; and Washington is receiving a new character from the presence of the Smithsonian Institution.

The sacerdotal cities have always been the seats of learning and the arts. The merit of being learned men cannot be denied to the priesthood; and the temples of the deities, with their adornments, have always claimed the highest efforts of the arts. The temple of Zion, and the wisdom and magnificence of Solomon, made the Holy City the glory of the East. Delphi, called by the Greeks the "Navel of the Earth," incalculably enriched by offerings made at the shrine of the oracle, and with its temples, and statues, its gay religious rites, and all its advantages of situation and natural beauty, became the embodiment of a dream of luxury and elegance. Heliopolis, the city of the sun, now known as Balbec, in its still perfect and marvellous columns, and the broken masses which strew the ground, reads to us a history of architectural beauty, and of cultivated life, which makes the traveller wonder at the surrounding desert. And Rome, for centuries a sacerdotal city, with its glorious temple of St. Peter, with its three hundred churches, and its palaces filled with frescoes, statues, and paintings, attests the power of the religious element in the growth of cities.

But whatever be the other elements of growth, there are two which must always be present more or less, and these are manufactures and commerce. They, of course, must always exist to a sufficient extent to bring in, or to create, and to distribute whatever is necessary to meet the wants of the inhabitants. But they do not exist to a sufficient extent if they do not afford full employment to the laboring classes. The offerings at the shrines, as in Delphi, the plunder of provinces, as in ancient Rome, and the visits of Pilgrims, as in Rome of the Middle Ages, may supplant the necessity of industry; but this always inevitably leads to a luxurious and besotted or to a seditious populace. Whatever be the predominant character of the city, it cannot be a city of a health-

ful character and of enduring prosperity, without flourishing manufactures and commerce. One of these two may, indeed, predominate over the other, while they necessarily beget each other; and so we have strictly commercial cities, and others strictly manufacturing. The principle is, that, to be virtuous, men must have work; and commerce and manufactures, comprising of course the mechanic arts, are the natural forms of industry in cities.

The development of commercial cities into higher forms of life, is a remarkable fact in their history. The wealth of Athens, unquestionably, arose from its commerce; and yet, when we think of Athenian life, its commerce seldom comes into view; but our minds are filled with the glories of the Acropolis; with the philosophic musings of the grove of Academus, and the names of Socrates and Plato; with the eloquence of Pericles and Demosthenes; with the heroism of Miltiades and Themistocles; with the theatre, where the tragedies of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, were represented; and with the character of that wonderful people who, from morn to eve, could listen to matchless oratory and poetry, and judge with critical skill of the proprieties of sentiment and language.

Thus, too, Byzantium upon the Bosphorus grew into Constantinople, the magnificent capital of the Eastern Empire, filled with men of learning, and all the adornments of the arts; Venice upon the Adriatic, at one time the great commercial emporium of the world, became a city of palaces, where merchant-princes were the patrons of scholars and artists; Florence, upon the banks of the Arno, became the home of the Muses, and is still, when its other titles of honor have departed, one great Museum of painting and sculpture, where deities "breathe in stone," or look out with eyes of life from the canvas; Genoa, upon the Mediterranean, grew another Venice, if Venice were not only another Genoa; Antwerp, upon the Scheldt—the home of Rubens—mingled with its commercial records a history of genius; the beautiful Naples, upon that wizard bay, whose summer gales breathe from ancient shores, has become the treasure-house of ancient and modern art; and Holland, the most intensely industrial and commercial of all the countries of the Earth, has filled her cities with institutions of learning, and