

# A Builder

Francis H. Balcolm

**N**EARLY TWENTY-FOUR HUNDRED years ago Phidias supervised the construction of one of the most remarkable buildings of all time. Today, on the Acropolis at Athens, not much remains of that noted temple of Athena, but even the strength of the architectural design and the strength of the superb marble from Mount Pentelicus failed to withstand the onslaught of the centuries with their ruthless men. The Parthenon—"the noblest triumph of Grecian architecture"—finally became a thing of the past, and one can view only the ruins today. We desire to construct an edifice which our posterity can inherit with gratitude, and the building blocks of religious life, of intellectual life, of political life, and of economic life are to be used in the foundation. Are those materials strong enough to equal or to surpass the marble used by Phidias, or will they have even a shorter life? I believe the words written by Mr. Thoreau almost a century ago are still true today. He wrote, "Our sills are rotten."

Prior to the era of the Renaissance, man existed under wretched conditions, for he was persecuted by the nobles and by the officials of his state; he worked for a mere pittance; he was burdened by the Roman Church, and the yoke of restrictions choked the very life from him. The parish priests and those in the higher offices were too busy maintaining the records of the property and the income of the Church to bother with the serfs and the freemen. No aid was forthcoming; a change was needed. When the Renaissance dawned, a religious revolt was in the making, and soon the universal Church was divested of its supreme power. From that era, through the commercial revolution, the industrial revolution, and the political revolution, to this day, man has continuously modified his religion; hundreds of denominations have arisen to satisfy his whimsical desires, and the followers of each sect believe that they support the only infallible and legitimate church. Perhaps one is the right church, but as long as more than one man exists, more than one concept will result. Because of these conceptions, the many denominations have arisen, and the struggle for supremacy between the churches has destroyed the essence of the original teachings. The acquisition of a great number of names on the rolls seems to be the primary objective; providing men spiritual consolation and guiding them to salvation has become secondary. This building block is rather porous and may not last eternally.

Released from the restrictions of the Roman Church, the scholars of the Renaissance revived the Greek and Roman classics, and in a comparatively short time, they launched a change which was as uncontrollable as a small boat lashed by a tempest. The secrets of

medicine, chemistry, physics, the natural sciences, mathematics, and astronomy were revealed to the world. With this knowledge, progress could have no bounds. Years marched by, but intellectual achievements remained in the hands of a few wealthy or fortunate scholars. A man could expect to live longer with the aid of medicine; he could expect to use power tools and machines; he could expect better food, clothing, and shelter; but he could not expect to acquire much knowledge of science, literature, or art. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Napoleon created a public school system in France: the public elementary schools, the secondary institutions, the vocational schools, and the University of France constitute the genesis of our modern public school system. Today we can reap the benefits of education, but the harvest is often scant, for we have failed to enrich and to cultivate adequately. The means to aid men have now been turned into the means to destroy men. Each day we read about atom bombs and hydrogen bombs—destroyers of man and his world. Howard Mumford Jones says, "War, technology in preparation for war, and nationalism—these are, then, three great forces warping the healthy development of education in what we quaintly call the civilized world." This stone has some faults which will probably fill with moisture; freezing will crack it.

After man escaped from the control of the church and began to think and to reason for himself, he found that he was shackled by another bond—politics. This was not the two-party politics which we know today, but was a feudal system with a king, some lords, many vassals, and innumerable freemen, serfs, and slaves. Great oppression was the lifelong fate of the freemen and especially of the serfs and the slaves who made up the greater portion of the population. As a result of learning, evolution took place in politics; national states came into being; sovereign states followed; absolute monarchies evolved next; republics finally made their appearance. Nearly every country in the world progressed and became a republic, but since that time degenerative evolution has taken place in some, and they are now ruled by absolute monarchs—expressed by action if not by title. A republic, or democracy, is a government in which the supreme power is retained by the people and exercised either directly or indirectly. Switzerland developed a democratic government without an equal; the people exercise their power directly; they take an active part in the operation of an efficient state; they are interested, and they learn about the politics and the office seekers. In our nation and in many other nations, political interests mean party interests. Government dictated by a political party can result and has resulted in a deteriorated state which is readily usurped by someone desiring to become an absolute monarch—a dictator. Our government does not have the interest nor the support of its people who prefer to permit incompetent politicians to direct the destiny of the nation while they—the good citizens—sit on the side lines and criticize and condemn

but refuse to administer the remedy. This stone has no place in the memorial we are constructing for our posterity.

With the coming of the era known as the commercial revolution, many changes in the economic life of man took place. The Dutch were the first people to discover that taking gold from another man's pocket was much easier than taking it from the earth. As a result, they developed one of the largest merchant marines the world has ever known. These ships traversed the globe in search of necessities and luxuries which could be exchanged for gold; this is the same system used for exploiting our fellow men today. During every wakeful hour, man drives his brain to the breaking point in order to formulate new methods for obtaining the gold of others. No longer is his business enterprise a means of producing necessities for others and a living for himself; it is a means for fattening his deity—gold. Today man sacrifices his religion; he wastes his education; he toys with the future of his nation—all for the love of material wealth. This large block of stone has been marred almost beyond repair, and a great amount of cutting and polishing will have to be done before we can consider it for use in our great structure.

As we inspect the material we have available and separate the desirable from the undesirable, we find that we have no corner stone nor any other desirable stones. Only by careful selection, delicate cutting, and fine polishing can we hope to obtain material to build an edifice for our posterity. We will have to work diligently if we are to build an eternal life. Are you a competent builder?

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## Give Thanks for Thoreau

Joyce Barnard

**I**N LIFE WITHOUT PRINCIPLE Henry David Thoreau makes the following statement: "Do not hire a man who does your work for money, but him who does it for love of it." Thoreau feels that a working man's aim should not be to make a living or hold a good job, but rather to perform well a certain task. He also states that all roads to money lead downward and that the worker who gets nothing but money from his job cheats both himself and his employer.

Thoreau's statements are indeed impressive and thought-provoking. Such lofty ideals should be given considerable thought by every young person seeking a place for himself in the world. To the modern youth, these ideals may seem completely impractical and even a little queer. As a person, Thoreau was unconventional and individualistic. One student even expressed the opinion that he was a hermit, a misfit and a failure.