

CHANCE FAVORS
THE PREPARED MIND

by

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“Never get into biography, it throws too harsh a light on the prevalence of lunacy,” says James Thurber. With respect, I disagree. History offers nothing more fascinating than the study of a person’s progress through daily events, each ordinary in itself, to an achievement memorable enough to merit recall decades or centuries later. What strikes one repeatedly is that the final accomplishment is the result of interaction between a person in some way of exceptional capacity and external events which are unforeseen and unforeseeable. There is an aphorism of Pasteur, “All great discoveries are the result of chance but chance favors the prepared mind.” If the word *discoveries* is changed to *achievements*, the statement embraces all human accomplishment with fewer exceptions than there are to most generalizations. Let us examine a specific instance of this phenomenon.

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On August third, 1803, a seventh son was born to William and Anne Paxton in Milton Bryant, Bedfordshire, a hamlet of thatched and gabled cottages set in green fields and noble trees. The boy they named Joseph was destined for a harsher childhood than even that expected among small farmers' families in early nineteenth century England. The father died when Joseph was a small boy and his mother, too poor to raise so large a family, put him to be brought up by an elder brother. Here conditions were so severe that in later life he rarely spoke of them willingly but on one occasion he said to his daughter, "You never know how much nourishment there is in a turnip until you have had to live on it." Poverty combined with sternness amounting to cruelty in the household led Joseph to run away. His wanderings led him to Essex, where a Quaker named Ford befriended him. In those days, an ambitious lad without education or patron could find few avenues of advancement except as a gardener and he may have been encouraged by his Quaker friend, as among Quakers of the time gardens were not only a passion but also had a religious significance, as they regarded plant life as a manifestation of God's nature.

Somehow or other he was back in Bedfordshire by 1818, when he was 15, working as a garden boy at Battlesden Park. There he stayed two years, then went to Woodhall and at 19 was back once more at

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Battlesden Park. But he was ambitious beyond these jobs and the great city of London drew him like a magnet. The Horticultural Society (now the Royal Horticultural Society) had recently started Chiswick Gardens, with their new opportunities for study and advancement. To this institution Joseph was admitted in 1823, carefully adding two years to his real age of 20 as he did so. Promotion quickly followed to the responsible position of foreman. So far, the story could be that of hundreds of small farmers' sons, but now Chance seized this young man and changed his life for the first, but by no means for the last time, by bringing him and the sixth Duke of Devonshire together — the small farmer's son and the most noble of the English nobility, the master of Chatsworth, the greatest of great houses.

Since this meeting is so crucial to our story, it is well to view it in the words of Paxton's distinguished granddaughter, Violet Markham:

The chance that two circles so remote should ever touch was of all hazards the greatest, let alone that having touched, one orbit should revolve round the other for the rest of their joint lives. . . . Yet Fate had written in her book that no two men should be bound together by ties of affection more intimate than those that were to unite the Duke of Devonshire and his gardener. . . .

Before the advent of Paxton the Duke was no gardener, as his own account of Chatsworth

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proves. But he came in touch, so to speak, by accident with horticulture. Lady Charlotte Boyle had brought to the Cavendishes by marriage the beautiful house at Chiswick which was the Duke's favourite residence — one he preferred, indeed, to the historic mansion in Piccadilly.

A gate divided the Duke's garden from the grounds of the Horticultural Society. It was a pleasant stroll on a fine day from one to the other. Though not at that time an enthusiast, he found much to interest him in the Society's plants and flowers, for new varieties were very fashionable and the curious were interested in such things.

During his strolls his attention was drawn to a short, pleasant-looking young man who often opened the gate for him. This, he was told, was the gardener in charge, primarily of creepers and new plants. Something about the young man's appearance and his general air of alertness struck the Duke. He talked to him frequently, and found his intelligence quite out of the ordinary. So much so, that when the post of head gardener at Chatsworth fell vacant in the spring of 1826, the Duke came to a sudden and, in the circumstances, very surprising decision. He proposed to put a lad of twenty-three, earning as many shillings per week as he had years over his head, in charge of the Chatsworth Gardens.

Consider the multiplication of chances — that the Horticultural Society had established its garden at Chiswick, that Paxton had chosen this garden for further training, that Lady Boyle had married into

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the Duke's family, that the Duke did not much care for his great mansion in central London, that he used one particular gate on his walks. Lack of any one would have broken the chain. But the quickness in mastering the science and art of horticulture, the pleasant personality and ready conversation — these belong to the prepared mind.

The appointment was made on May 7, 1826. Two days later the Duke left for a diplomatic mission to Russia as the British representative to the coronation of Emperor Nicholas I. But Paxton, without losing a moment, set off for Derbyshire by coach.

He arrived at Chatsworth at 4:30 a.m. At once he explored the grounds and clambered over a wall to inspect the kitchen garden, finishing by 6 a.m., when he set the men to work and had the waterworks turned on. All this before time for breakfast with the housekeeper, Mrs. Gregory. It was an eventful meal, for Chance was again in full cry. By chance, Mrs. Gregory had as her guest her niece, Sarah Bown. Let the granddaughter tell what happened:

Fate met Paxton on the threshold of Chatsworth with a double shot in her locker. On the day of entering his new employer's service, he also met his future wife — the woman whose influence was to be paramount in his life. For thirty-two years he was to be swayed like a planet revolving round two stars. For each of these persons, his master and his wife, he had unbounded affection

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and loyalty. He was able to combine the utmost devotion for the Duke with devotion no less great for the woman he had married. If he owed to the Duke the opportunities of which he made full use, I have no hesitation in saying that without Sarah Bown, the housekeeper's niece, with whom he fell in love at breakfast the first morning, the world would never have heard his name.

Not in the least overwhelmed by his double good fortune, Paxton at once put his uncontrollable energy to work in clearing up and improving the neglected — perhaps unloved — gardens of Chatsworth. Results came quickly. When the Duke returned from his diplomatic mission in Russia on December 9, exactly seven months later, he wrote in his diary, "Arrived at Chatsworth de gioia, I am enchanted with the progress. My new gardener, too, Paxton has made a great change."

That Paxton was a skillful gardener had already been demonstrated at Chiswick, but Chatsworth gave him his first opportunity to organize, inspire and direct the huge work force so great a house had at its command. In October, 1832, Princess Victoria, then in her fourteenth year, and her mother, the Duchess of Kent, with the inevitable Sir John Conroy, paid a visit to Chatsworth. To entertain the Heiress Presumptive, Paxton arranged the expected illuminations and other festivities in the garden, but one problem worried him. In a Derbyshire October, paths are likely to be littered with fallen leaves and

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hence untidy. Paxton kept a work force of 100 men working through the night removing the leaves and rolling the walks. Victoria, even then observant, was puzzled by the neatness and was astonished at the pains used to achieve it. The resources at Paxton's disposal astonish us 150 years later as much as the tidiness did the Princess.

In Derbyshire, the climate is not favorable for tender plants and winters are colder than in many other parts of England. This led Paxton to consider improvements in greenhouse design. Those being used had heavy framework, which not only made them expensive but which also cut down the light except at mid-day, when they admitted too much. Paxton's designs had light framework and the roofs slanted at an angle such that they caught the maximum amount of light when the sun was low and least when it was high. These principles have remained basic to greenhouse design ever since. They also put greenhouses within the reach of the general public. Today in England, even quite small gardens seldom lack a greenhouse and they look very much like Paxton's published designs. In fact, some later gardeners, giving complete allegiance to the designs of Robinson and Gertrude Jekyll, have decried Paxton as the person responsible for making possible the "bedding-out" schemes of Victorian gardeners and of public parks to the present day. But Paxton

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should not be blamed if later gardeners have put his inventions to banal uses.

These designs were only preliminary to a plan on quite a different scale. One amenity which Chatsworth lacked was a conservatory on a scale worthy of the Duke of Devonshire. It is impossible to over-emphasize the status value of a huge greenhouse or conservatory to a person of wealth and rank in the nineteenth century. Beside it, collections of books or paintings — even racing stables — paled into insignificance. To fill the vast structures, expeditions went to the warm countries of the world — China, India, Ceylon, Africa, South America — bringing back rare plants at the expense of great suffering and many lives. So the Duke of Devonshire would be expected to have the greatest conservatory of them all.

By 1837 Paxton was ready to proceed with the Great Conservatory, which was complete and planted by 1840. It was the largest glass building in the world — 277 feet long, 123 feet wide and 67 feet at its highest point. There were central and side aisles covered by an ingenious and original curvilinear roof, the whole being filled with tropical plants. In the course of time, the Duke organized two plant hunting expeditions of his own without much success. One of these plant hunters was Gibson, sent to Calcutta to obtain *Amherstia nobilis* — the fabled tree of Ind, whose blood-red flowers were offered as sacrifice to Buddha. Gibson brought back one

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plant safely but Paxton could not make it flower. There were, however, many other new plants in Gibson's shipments. The other expedition was to western North America. It ended abruptly and tragically when the two plant hunters were drowned at the mouth of the Columbia River, just as they were starting to collect. That is the kind of human misery and sacrifice that filled the great glass status symbols of the English nobility.

While the Great Conservatory was being built and planted, the Duke made the Grand Tour of the continent for 18 months in 1838 and 1839. In spite of Paxton's obligations at Chatsworth, the Duke insisted that he come along, leaving his wife Sarah to carry out the instructions that Paxton sent by letter. From then on, this was to be the pattern — Joseph making the overall plans and Sarah implementing them in their details.

It was a fortunate arrangement. Paxton buffered the Duke against the mischances of travel and the daily contact brought an even closer mutual trust and friendship, for their association had long since transcended the employer-employee relation. When the Duke's courier proved incompetent, Paxton quietly smoothed the obstacles, even cooking the Duke's dinner on one occasion when no proper cook could be found, to the Duke's pleasure and amazement. This intimate contact with a man of utmost education and position, combined with the travel

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experience prepared Paxton to emerge onto a wider scene.

In the 1840's, this preparation and his gift for friendship brought him into contact with leading literary figures, and Charles Dickens became his close associate. He founded two journals, the *Horticultural Register* and *Magazine of Botany*. Much of the material he wrote himself in a clear, literate, informative style. His granddaughter records her surprise that a person of so meager an education could do this, giving as possible explanations the stimulus of his wife and the association with the Duke. But is it so amazing? Paxton's near contemporary, Abraham Lincoln, had even less education and little, if any, contact with people of learning, yet his mature style is admired throughout the English speaking world and some European critics, not otherwise notably pro-American, have pronounced it the finest in the English language. But the grandeur of style in the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural was not for Paxton. Style can be enhanced by education and especially by practice but at base it is inborn.

The 1840's saw the rapid expansion of railroads until they dominated not only travel but finance. Paxton's gift for friendship carried him into the midst of it since such leaders as Stephenson knew and trusted him. Paxton carefully made use of these contacts to invest his modest savings in railroad

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stocks, Joseph indicating the direction and, as in the garden, Sarah watching the day-to-day fluctuations of the stock market. The result was that the Paxtons accumulated a very substantial fortune.

Meanwhile, the Duke of Devonshire was piling up debts on a scale so large that his solicitors could find no solution. It is true that Paxton's works were expensive. Besides the Great Conservatory, he had designed an aboretum on botanical principles, the Emperor Fountain with the highest jet in Europe, and the Great Rockery, then as now perhaps the greatest consumer of labor in gardening. But his was a minor contribution to the situation. The Duke's deafness made him ever more dependent on lavish entertainments at frequent intervals on a scale that even the Devonshire fortune could not stand. For instance, there was the visit of the Queen and Prince Albert in December, 1843, when the lack of horticultural display was compensated for by illuminations of waterfalls, cascades, fountains, and the Great Conservatory, all synchronized, no small feat without electricity. The Duke of Wellington, a member of the party, got up early to view the mess left by the revels but found every vestige removed. "I should have liked that man of yours for one of my generals," said the Victor of Waterloo to the Duke of Devonshire.

Paxton was as efficient about the debt as he was in clearing the garden. He presented to the solicitors

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a plan which they accepted — no small tribute to his integrity and judgement. It involved the sale of certain lands for which Paxton was able to get a high price because of his involvement in railroad affairs, choosing those which would yield an immediate profit for sale and retaining the long term investments. Within a very short time the debt was discharged and the Devonshire fortune was intact. Chatsworth was also becoming a tourist attraction. Sixty thousand people visited it per year in this period.

The 1840's were drawing to a close and Paxton, the gardener at heart, was to end them with a botanical triumph which was also the preparation for his crowning achievement. Frustrated in his attempt to get the sacred tree of Ind to flower, he set about in 1849 to grow the fantastic waterlily *Victoria regia* (now changed to *Victoria amazonica*). Seen in various tropical South American rivers between 1801 and mid-century, viable seeds only reached Kew in 1846, being brought by Bridges. Sir Robert Schomburgk, finding it on New Year's Day, 1837, on the River Berbice, British Guiana, described it in this way:

A gigantic leaf from five to six feet in diameter, salver shaped with a broad rim of a light green above and a vivid crimson below, was resting upon the water. Quite in character with the wonderful leaf was the luxuriant flower, con-

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sisting of many hundred petals passing in alternate tints from pure white to rose and pink — the ribs are very prominent — almost an inch high, radiating from a common center.

Since I have seen it growing at Kew, I can attest to the accuracy of this description. There the first seeds germinated but grew poorly and did not flower, success coming only after Paxton showed the way.

In July, 1849, Paxton persuaded his friend Sir William Hooker, Director of Kew, to let him have a plant. At 6 a.m., August 3, 1849, Paxton himself took possession of the plant and carried it by train to Chatsworth, where a tank 12 feet square by 3 feet 4 inches deep awaited it. Conditions of temperature and lighting simulated those of the tropics but most important was the use of a waterwheel to keep the water in gentle motion, as in the great rivers of its native habitat. By mid-September the size of the tank had to be doubled. On October 15, leaves were 4 feet 5 inches across, while the one at Kew measured only 5 inches. On November 2, Paxton, in great excitement wrote the Duke at Lismore, his Irish estate, "Victoria has shown flower!! — No words can describe the grandeur and beauty of the plant."

This brought the Duke back in all haste to see the botanical marvel. The excitement was shared by the eponymous Queen and on November 13 Paxton went to Windsor with a leaf and a fully-opened blossom. No details of the presentation sur-

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vive but it must have had its comic side since the diameter of the leaf was greater than the height of Her Diminutive Majesty.

Home again at Chatsworth, Paxton demonstrated the strength and power of flotation in the leaves by having his daughter Annie, aged 7, put on one leaf by the Duke and Lady Newberg. A charming engraving records the incident. A leaf could in fact sustain a weight of 100 pounds, while Annie then weighed only 70.

To enshrine this greatest of Paxton's triumphs, he built a special Lily House at a cost of £800. The method of construction involved several novel features and the lessons provided by the remarkable ribs of the leaves were fully used. This conservatory had a ridge-and-furrow principle in its design; a roof that was also a light and heat adjuster; iron columns which were also drain pipes; rafters and sash bars served the same purpose but were arranged to conserve moisture; a floor which was not only a floor but also a ventilator and dust trap.

It was at this point that Paxton received his greatest gift from the Goddess of Chance. It so chanced that as the construction of the Lily House on novel principles was going forward there was a stir in the air throughout Britain about a Great Exhibition to be held in London the next year. Queen Victoria repeatedly stated that it was "all the work of my beloved Angel" but this was not

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quite the case. The conception was basically that of Henry Cole, a civil servant trained in the law, who had turned his hand to publishing (including the world's first Christmas card), to china design and other artistic endeavors. He came to the attention of Prince Albert when the Prince was made President of the Royal Society of Arts. Albert was never content to be a figurehead and embraced causes, the first being an Exhibition of Art Manufactures to be held in London in 1848. This was about to flounder for lack of exhibits when Cole personally visited manufacturers and obtained 20,000. In spite of the fateful year, there were many foreigners among the 70,000 visitors. Three more exhibitions repeated the pattern in London and Birmingham.

The next year Cole visited the Paris Exhibition and came away with the idea that British manufacturers should face up to the international competition. It was only then that the suggestion of international scope appeared. Prince Albert was at first disquieted but then turned Cole's view back to him as his own. The Prince became enthusiastic but felt the planned site, the courtyard of Somerset House, was too small, suggesting the level area in Hyde Park opposite Knightsbridge Barracks. As Bird comments, "This seemed as harmless as it was sensible, but in the light of slightly later events the Prince might have stirred up less trouble had he proposed turning Buckingham Palace into a brothel."

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Indeed, the hue-and-cry was terrific. The building would never be removed and Hyde Park thereby spoiled, a squatter would have to be displaced; above all, a group of aging elms must be cut down, among other equally odd objections.

Nonetheless, a competition for plans was instituted and 245 were submitted, each more unsuitable than the other. Thereupon the Building Committee produced its own plan. It is well recognized that a camel is a horse designed by a committee and this committee was in the great tradition. It called for a brick building four times the length of Westminster Abbey with a dome 45 feet greater in diameter than that of St. Paul's. Fifteen million bricks would be required but where they would be obtained in the time available and how they would be paid for were matters not on the agenda. However, it was adopted but Cole left a loophole that an alternative plan could be used if one appeared.

It was now June 11, 1850, and the Exhibition was due to open May 1, 1851. Paxton and his friend, Mr. Ellis, Chairman of the Midland Railway, were watching tests of the new House of Commons for acoustics, which proved unsatisfactory. Paxton said that he feared another mistake in the Great Exhibition and that he had an idea. Mr. Ellis urged him to develop it, taking him to Lord Grenville and Mr. Cole, where Paxton undertook to have a plan ready in nine days. Exactly one week later Paxton was

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sitting as Chairman of the Works and Ways Committee of the Midland Railway, trying a pointsman for a minor offense, a large sheet of white blotting paper before him. The pointsman was let off with a fine of five shillings but Paxton held up the blotting paper saying, "This is a design for the Great Industrial Exhibition to be held in Hyde Park." The sheet is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, where one can easily see that the essentials of the construction are all indicated.

The plan was basically that of a greenhouse of unheard-of size—a width of 408 feet, a length of 1848 feet,* against the 515 feet of St. Paul's Cathedral, and 108 feet to the highest point of the roof. It immediately captured the imagination, first of the Committee and then of the public. An important, perhaps the crucial, point in its acceptance was that those wretched elms could be preserved by Paxton's plan, and by that one only.

There were objections—that the first strong wind would blow it down, that the glass would fall, that it would be intolerably hot, that moisture would constantly drip on the visitors, and so on and so on.

*Cited from Anthony Bird, *Paxton's Palace*, 1976, p. 44. This represents the basic structure of the building — 77 modules of 24 feet each. Some authorities, including Giedeon, put the length at 1851 feet to match the year of the Great Exhibition. They include the extra space needed to attach the end walls to the modular bays. The length may be compared with that of McCormick Place (1360 feet).

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These uninformed objections were countered in the seats of the mighty by Paxton's demonstrated ability to get done what he said he would do. The Queen may well have recalled the paths at Chatsworth on her visit 17 years before and the Duke of Wellington the tidying of its grounds on his visit of seven years previously.

In the event the contract was signed on October 31, 1850, though fixing the columns had begun on September 26. The bare building was finished in 22 weeks and the fitting-out and painting in 15 more. The cost finished was £200,000, a fraction of the cost of a brick building of the same size.

The greatest innovation in Paxton's plan was that for the first time he used a prefabricated modular construction with all girders, columns, gutters, and sash bars interchangeable. It was the first mass-produced building, just as the Model T Ford was the first mass-produced automobile. Another link with this great car was his design for special trolleys running on the frames so that 18,000 panes were placed in a week, a precursor of the assembly line.

Many features of the Lily House found their way into the building, including columns which were also drain pipes. He reversed his plan for glass frames from that model, making moisture drain out instead of into the structure.

Paxton was well aware of his indebtedness to *Victoria regia* by way of the Lily House. In a paper

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before the Fine Arts Society on November 13, 1850. he said, "Nature was the engineer. Nature has provided the leaf with longitudinal and transverse girders and supports that I, borrowing from it, have adopted in this building."

A major problem was the production of nearly one million square feet of glass in panes much larger than those commonly manufactured in the time available. The English tax on glass had restricted its use and glass manufacturers there were far behind their counterparts on the Continent, since the tax had only been repealed in 1845. In the event, Belgian workers were brought over by the Chance Brothers, who produced the glass.

Apart from one minor strike, quickly settled, the only remaining problem concerned the juxtaposition of the glass and those troublesome elms. When the glass was nearly all in place, the elms were found to be full of sparrows. These were sure to soil the elegant attire of the visitors, and what if it should happen to the Queen! Desperate problems require desperate remedies. The first suggestion was shooting them but the effect of the bullets on the glass was considered unfavorable. Next, bird-lime was proposed, to no one's satisfaction. In her extremity, the Queen summoned the Duke of Wellington to deal with the sparrows as he had with Napoleon at Waterloo. "Sparrowhawks, Ma'am," murmured the Iron Duke, whereupon the sparrows suddenly disap-

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peared, no one knew why. But not quite all. When Hector Berlioz visited the Exhibition, he saw one lone sparrow and shared some crumbs from his biscuit with it—a gentle moment in the turbulent life of that composer.

Finally, all was ready for the grand opening ceremony on May 1. As the strains of the “Hallelujah Chorus” burst forth, the Queen, closely attended by Prince Albert, led a procession of notables and declared the Exhibition open. The building did not fall down, it did not drip or do any of the other things predicted.

At that point, the great structure leaves the Paxton story. When an architect completes a building, it passes beyond his jurisdiction and assumes a life of its own. Berenson comments, “So it is with each and every work of art. The moment it is created the creation is weaned from the creator!”

The phenomenal success of the Exhibition from its opening was as much, or more, due to the building as to its contents. There were many reasons why the public became fascinated but three are worth special comment.

First, it was a status symbol of the British Empire as it approached its zenith. If the Duke of Devonshire required the Great Conservatory to symbolize his greatness, the British Empire needed an even grander symbol, and here it was. *Punch* caught this exactly in a cartoon showing John Bull seated among

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the palms of the Exhibition, with the caption, "Mr. John Bull in his winter garden."

Second, it was quite simply — big. Eiffel, in relation to his tower, commented:

There is an attraction and a charm in the colossal that is not subject to ordinary theories of art. Does anyone pretend that the Pyramids have so forcefully gripped the imagination of men through their artistic value? What are they after all but artificial hillocks? And yet what visitor can stand without reaction to their presence?

Third, and most important, it was fun. The social life of the emerging middle class was stodgy to a degree. In the evenings, Poppa read his newspaper, Mama was at the center table with her sewing, while one of the children read aloud from an "improving" book. Suddenly here was a glittering structure filled with exotic visitors and exhibits—as far from their solid, dark, gloomy buildings as fairy-land. Again, it was *Punch* which caught the mood precisely. Douglas Jerrold, of its staff, coined the name *Crystal Palace*, and this name has been used ever since, even in modern books on architectural history.

The fun aspect of the Great Exhibition had more to do with its phenomenal financial success than did the exhibits. The net profit was £186,437. With this a large tract of vacant land in London was bought to provide space for institutions of art and

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learning. This is why Exhibition Road is lined to this day with unlovely buildings housing learned institutions which continue to exert an international influence. Little was accomplished in fulfilling the stated objectives—the promotion of manufactures and world peace. Manufacturers in England and other countries went their way influenced by the Great Exhibition little or not at all. Certainly world peace was not attained. The Crimean War was less than three years off, and subsequent history is littered with wars and rumors of wars.

The people of London were in no moods to lose their Crystal Palace when the mandatory time of demolition was reached. It was rebuilt on Sydenham Hill, Paxton making some changes, especially a curvilinear roof like that of the Great Conservatory at Chatsworth. Exhibits were installed; concerts were given and Paxton made a fine garden around it. The fortunes of the Crystal Palace fluctuated but gradually worsened. A fire destroyed the north transept on December 30, 1866, and the entire building went up in a *Walpurgisnacht* of flame on November 30, 1936. Even so, a survival of 85 years is not bad for a building intended to have a life of six months.

After the great effort of the Crystal Palace, Paxton's life ran on as calmly as his consuming energy would allow. His rewards were substantial—knighthood and an initial award of £5000, raised to £20,000 as the result of public outcry. When added

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to his already substantial fortune, he became a wealthy man. He bought a country home, Rockhills, near Sydenham, where his friends came often, especially the Duke of Devonshire, who would drop in, sometimes for a few days and sometimes for a few months.

Sarah came only occasionally, preferring to stay in the gardener's house at Chatsworth, putting into effect the plans for Chatsworth which continued to be the major concern of her husband. In fact, Sarah moved so little in society that she had been Lady Paxton for five years before she consented to be presented at court but when she did, she did it in style. The presentation was made by that greatest of great ladies, Harriet, Duchess of Sutherland, Mistress of the Robes.

Of this singular but very happy marriage there were eight children, two boys and six girls. One son died in infancy and the other turned out badly but the girls were all beautiful, intelligent, and made good marriages. As we have seen, there were people of ability among the grandchildren.

As befitted a man of prominence and wealth in those days, Paxton entered Parliament. There his career was undistinguished, the most memorable event being his effort to have civilians employed to build roads in the Crimea when the military failed. This met with the predictable lack of success.

Meanwhile Paxton became what might be called

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architect-in-ordinary to the Rothschild family. He designed a huge house in Geneva for Baron Alphonse Rothschild; Ferrières, 25 miles from Paris, for Baron James; and Mentmore in Buckinghamshire for Baron Meyer. It must be recorded that modern taste favors his building in glass over that in more solid materials.

But a lifetime of frenetic activity at length exacted its toll and Paxton's health began to fail. He died at Rockhills in his sixty-second year and was buried at Edensor, near Chatsworth, in the same churchyard as his great patron and friend who had predeceased him, but at a respectful distance, for class distinctions persisted even to the grave.

In direct contradiction to Thurber's cynical remark with which I began, close study of Sir Joseph Paxton reveals him as a man of eminent sanity, of consuming energy channelled to useful purpose, of friendships made and kept. He was a man of utter dependability and integrity, whether he was dealing with the Queen or an undergardener. The only bad habit I discern was an uncontrollable urge to get up early in the morning. He would have made a desirable member of the Chicago Literary Club.

But what is left of Paxton's accomplishments? Of material objects very little. The Lily House was taken down long ago. *Victoria regia* is cultivated at Kew but at few other places. Changed economic conditions at the end of the First World War led to

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the dismantling of the Great Conservatory. Chatsworth and its gardens remain though now in national possession. The Crystal Palace is no more. Mentmore was refused by the Government in lieu of death duties. The sale of its contents was one of the most notable art auctions of this century, yielding over £6,400,000, even after the most valuable paintings had been disposed of privately. After remaining empty and unsold for two years, it was bought by the Maharishi International College for use in training teachers of transcendental meditation.

In 1935, Violet Markham's final comment was:

His versatility, so it seems to me, militated against his attaining the front rank in any one field. He took the popular imagination by storm with the dramatic incident of the Crystal Palace, the glass house that saved Prince Albert and the Great Exhibition of 1851 from ignominious collapse before the eyes of the world. His generation freely called him a genius, and so in a manner he was. He made a large fortune; he was eminently successful. But he did not put his genius to permanent ends.

The four decades which have followed that statement have brought revolutions in architecture as well as in socio-economic conditions. Paxton's influence has surfaced as a river long running underground emerges again into the sunlight. In 1975 Christian Noberg-Schulz writes:

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The form of the building represented a fundamentally new conception. . . . The size of the Crystal Palace may be defined as indeterminate, rendering obsolete Alberti's dictum that nothing might be added or taken away. . . . In this way the new technical possibilities set architecture free to frame new functions and forms of life.

This is the Age of Relevance. What possible relevance could the works of this nineteenth century Englishman have to Chicago over a century later? If you are on the north side of Chicago, go to Lincoln Park and see his lengthened shadow on the planting between the Conservatory and the Zoo. If you are on the south side of Chicago think how much McCormick Place depends on the principles Paxton brought together in the Crystal Palace. If you are in *any* part of Chicago consider at what distance the glass highrise buildings attempt to capture the glory of light which was the Crystal Palace. Not relevant, you say? With respect I disagree.

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A list of references is on file at the Newberry Library.