

NOTES ON ART AND ARCHITECTURE.

[NOTE. A few sheets have fallen into our hands, which contain such good sense on the subject of architecture, that we shall not be deterred by their incomplete method from giving them to our readers, in the hope that they will come to the eye of some person proposing to build a house or a church, in time to save a new edifice from some of the faults, which make our domestic and what we call our religious architecture insignificant.]

ART.

THERE are three periods of art. First, when the thought is in advance of the execution. Second, when the expression is adequate to the thought. And third, when the expression is in advance of the thought. The first is the age of the Giotto and Cimabues; the second, of Raphaels and Michel Angelos. The third is the only one we know by experience. How inexpressibly interesting are those early works, where art is only just able to shadow forth dimly the thought the master was burdened with. They seem to suggest the more, because of their imperfect utterance.

True art is an expression of humanity, and like all other expressions, when it is finished, it cannot be repeated. It is therefore childish to lament the absence of good painters. We should lament the absence of great thoughts, for it is the thought that makes the painters.

Art is the blossoming of a century plant. Through hundreds of years the idea grows onward in the minds of men, and when it is ripe the man appears destined to gather it. It was not Raphael who painted, but Italy, Greece, and all antiquity painting by his hand, and when that thought was uttered, the flowers dropped. The aloe blossomed in the Gothic Architecture of the middle ages;—and Bach and Beethoven have in their art unfolded its wondrous leaves.

In this belief may we all find consolation when all around us looks so cheerless. The noble plant whose blossoms we would so fain see, must have its root, must have its slow growing, massive leaves, must have its cold and retarding spring, its green growth of the stalk, that it may in summer

bring forth its flowers. Shall we not then honor earth, root, leaves, flower-stalk, nay, shall we repine that we must perhaps by our destiny be one of these, since these are part of the flower, and the flower of them, the flower is the sum of their united force and beauty transfigured, glorified.

The artist who is fast grounded in this pure belief is beyond the reach of disappointment and failure. If he truly loves art, he knows that he is bearing on his shoulders one stone for that stately future edifice, not the keystone, perhaps, but a necessary stone, and silently and faithfully he works, perfecting as he may his talent, not looking to outward success, but to inward satisfaction. Such a man knows that to advance the edifice at which he labors, are needed not gorgeous successes apparent, but conscientiousness, severity, truth. What would Angelico da Fiesole have done, had some devil tempted him to work out effects, instead of painting from his heart. These men who laid the foundation of the great Italian art were religious men, — men fearing God, and seeing his hand at work even in the mixing of their colors, — men who painted on their knees. Such too were the forerunners of the great German musicians, such the Greeks, — such men have laid the foundations of greatness everywhere.

ARCHITECTURE.

What architecture must a nation situated as we are adopt? It has no indigenous architecture, it is not therefore a matter of religion with us, but a matter of taste. We may and must have all the architectures of the world, but we may ennoble them all by an attention to truth, and a contempt of littleness. Nay, is not our position, if we will use our advantages properly, the more fortunate, inasmuch as we are not by the force of circumstance or example, bound to be or to build in this or that particular way, — but all ways are before us to choose. If our position is not favorable to a speedy development of national taste, it is most adapted to give fair play to individual.

The crowning and damning sin of architecture with us, nay, that of bad taste everywhere, is, the doing of unmeaning, needless things. A Friends' meeting sits silent till one

has something to say; so should a man always, — so should the building man never presume to do aught without reason. To *adorn the needful*, to add a frieze to life, this is Art.

Rightly does the uninstructed caviller ask, when he sees a *fine* house, for what purpose is this balustrade, or that screen, these windows blocked up, and so on. Let any man of good sense say to himself what sort of a house he would have for convenience, supposing him to have the space to build it on; then let him frame and roof these rooms, and if he has made his house truly convenient, its appearance cannot be absurd. Well, but he says, my house is plain, I want it to be beautiful, — I will spend what you choose upon it, but it shall be the most beautiful in the country. Very good, my friend. We will not change a single line, but we will ornament these lines. We will not conceal but adorn your house's nakedness; delicate moldings shall ornament every joint; whatever is built for convenience or use, shall seem to have been built for beautiful details; your very doorlatch and hinges shall be beautiful. For house, say church; for the purposes of daily life, say the worship of God, and behold we have the history of architecture.

There is nothing arbitrary in true architecture, even to the lowest detail. The man, who should for the first time see a Greek temple of marble, would indeed ask and with reason, what meaning there was in triglyph, and metope, and frieze; but when he is told that this is a marble imitation of a wooden building, a reproduction in a more costly material of a sacred historical form, he then sees in the triglyph the end of the wooden beam, with the marks of the trickling water drops, in the metope the flat panel between. But, says our modern builder, there is no reason that I should use triglyphs and metopes. I have no historical recollection to beautify them; what shall I use for ornaments? My friend, what form has ever struck you as beautiful? He answers, Why, the form of every living thing, of every tree and flower and herb. And can you ask then what ornaments you shall use? If your cornice were a wreath of thistles and burdocks curiously carved or cast, can you not see how a hundred mouths would proclaim its superiority over yonder unmeaning layer of plaster?

A mistaken plainness has usurped the place of true simplicity, which is the same mistake as an affected plainness in manners or appearance, lest one should be suspected of foppery. All houses, all churches are finished within side by the plane (or mould-plane) and plaster-smoother. Has a man made a fortune, he moves from his plain house which cost ten thousand, to one which cost an hundred thousand. Now perhaps his poor friend shall see something beautiful. Alas, it is but the old house three times as large, the walls and the woodwork three times as smooth; a little warmer house in winter, than the old one, a little airier in summer. Verily, friend, thou hast done little with thy hundred thousand, beyond enriching thy carpenter.

To see materials used skilfully, and in accordance with their peculiar qualities is a great source of beauty in architecture. The vice of many of our would-be pretty buildings is that the material is entirely disguised, so that for aught we know they may be marble, or wood, or paste-board; all we see is a plain white surface. Have done with this paltry concealment; let us see how the thing is built. A Swiss cottage is beautiful, because it is wooden *par excellence*; every joint and timber is seen, nay the wood is not even painted but varnished. So of the old heavy-timbered picturesque houses of England.

Hope says; "Je n'ai pas besoin d'appuyer ici sur la perfection que les Grecs ont donnée à toutes les parties, essentielles ou accessoires de leurs edifices; elle alla si loin que, dans certains temples ils paraissent avoir été animés d'un sentiment purement religieux, pénétrés de l'idée que la divinité voyait ce qui échappait à l'œil de l'homme, et qu'il fallait rendre toutes les parties également dignes de l'être immortel auquel l'édifice était consacré.

"L'adresse en mécanique est une faculté tout-à-fait distincte du goût dans les beaux arts.

"En Grèce, la colonne était un élément de construction plus caractéristique et plus essentiel que la muraille."

Among all the Romans, on the contrary, the *wall* was the integral part of the building, of which the columns served only to adorn the nakedness. Among ourselves, although the pillars we so frequently see have the real purpose of sustaining a *projection*, to protect from the rays of the sun; yet there is no reason that we should adopt for this

purpose a model of proportions that were meant to support the immense weight of the whole structure in Greece. How much more elegant would our verandahs be, were the wooden columns just so large as is needful for the purpose for which they were erected.

"Ainsi, les premières basiliques chrétiennes n'offraient, dans toute leur entendue, si l'on excepte leurs colonnes antiques, aucune moulure, aucune partie qui ressortit et se détachât de leur surface plane et perpendiculaire; elles ne présentaient, au-dessus de leurs murailles nues que la charpente transversale de leur plafond, et de leur toit; elles ressembraient en un mot à de vastes granges, que l'on aurait bâti de somptueux matériaux, mais la simplicité, la pureté, la magnificence, l'harmonie de toutes leurs parties constitutives, donnaient à ces granges un air de grandeur que nous cherchons en vain dans l'architecture plus compliquée des églises modernes."

In the eye of every New Englander, the essential parts of a church are a spire or tower, half-disengaged from the building and formerly a porch, and a simple oblong building like a barn, forming the main body of the edifice; within, the pulpit at the end opposite the tower, a gallery running round the other three sides, supported by columns which in some cases also shoot upward to aid in supporting the roof. In spite of the almost total absence of beautiful specimens, it is in vain to say that this form is not as well adapted to beauty as the basilica or any other. If the builder would content himself with putting together these essential parts with the utmost simplicity, without any excrescences or breaking up, striving only to balance the members against each other, so that each should have its proper proportion, he would produce a specimen of national church architecture. The spire would seem to be in better taste than the square tower, partly because of the associations, but also because its form is agreeable to a construction in wood which we shall long see in this country. The artist may employ all his taste and imagination in decorations, (always entirely subordinate,) of these main parts, taking care that his decorations are in keeping with the uses of the building. How unmeaning beside the unpretending simplicity of such a building, is the pretence of a Grecian front,—not that the native product shows so

much genius in the invention, but that it has a sacred association in our eyes, which the other has not.

In the same way that the literature of the ancient world, for so long a time dwarfed the authors of a modern date, does the ancient architecture, Gothic and Grecian, dwarf our builders. They dare not invent for themselves, for their inventions would seem so puerile beside the great works to which the world would compare them. It is cheaper for them and more satisfactory to their customers, to borrow a form that all the world has admitted to be beautiful, and almost inevitably degrade it by putting it to a wrong use. In poesy no one longer doubts that the nature around us is the nature from which Homer and Phidias drew inspiration, and it is the spirit and not the forms of ancient art that make its productions almost divine. Scarcely in architecture do we see the first faint light of such a dawn, yet it depends upon ourselves, that ours shall be that glory. An intense thirst for the beautiful exists among us, — it only requires a direction. It is idle for us to complain of the want of models, the want of instruction. England has wealth of these beyond count, yet builds nowadays no more tastefully than we; it must come from ourselves, from reflection, from the study of nature.

Materials rightly employed grow more beautiful with age. In pure architecture, everything is to be rejected, that will grow less beautiful with age. For this end, it is sufficient that every material should be employed with an eye to its peculiar properties. This rule, if strictly followed, would indeed do away with several materials, the cheapness of which has rendered their use almost universal, but which deserve no place in the severe and simple architecture which should distinguish our churches. Let it not be our reproach that we are a nation of lath and plaster and temporary shifts; let our joints and beams be made beautiful, not hidden, — let our wood work show the grain of the wood for ornament, not hide it under paint.

Suppose one of our churches were to be left alone for fifty years, when we enter how unlovely would it be, the plaster dropping away, showing the laths like ribs beneath, the paint dingy and mouldy, reminding us of nothing but the tomb; — but the interior of the unpainted, unplastered,

gothic church would still be beautiful in age, and fragments of carved oak be treasured at its weight in silver.

Architecture is a tendency to organization. Nature organizes matter, and endows it with individual life. Man organizes it for his own ends, but it has no life but so far as he has been able to endow it with his own. Now in natural organizations as the tree or animal, we see no part that has not a meaning and use, and each part of that material which answers to its end. This also is a fundamental law of architecture.

The ancient architecture is entitled to that great praise of producing on the mind an effect of unity. It has been too often the bane of modern architecture, that what one man designed, his successor changed, so that to the most unpractised eye, the grossest inconsistencies are constantly apparent; till we are almost ready to say in despair, there is no good architecture but in the mind of the artist. It cannot be doubted that either Bramante, Sangallo, or M. Angelo, alone, would have made a far finer building than the actual St. Peters.

The modern architects certainly attempted more difficult things than the ancient. The Greek had not to invent the form of his edifice. Nature and immemorial custom had done that for him. He was only to see that all his details were in due proportion. There was not so much room for bad taste. But the church architect of the *renaissance* had the whole dome of the heavens to exhibit his antics in.

MONUMENTS.

In regard to monuments it may be laid down as a rule that all sentimental monuments are bad, and all conceits of every sort; as a broken column, a mother weeping over her child, a watchful dog, &c. They strike at first, but the mind wearies to death of them the moment they are repeated. To my mind, a monument should be an architectural structure (including any admitted form of obelisk, pyramid, or of any style of architecture), which should be only striking by the simplicity and purity of its form. Its adornments may be infinitely rich, but always entirely sub-

ordinate; so that at a distance the effect shall always be of simplicity and repose. A simple headstone might be wrought by a Phidias, might contain the most exquisite sculptures, and still never lose its character of a simple headstone. Our monuments are all in the open air; consequently those Gothic tombs that with all their splendor have so severely religious an air, are denied us. I prefer upon a tomb figures of a vague character, what are called academic figures. These, when noble in their form and expression, produce an effect analagous to architecture, suggestive, — whereas all figures of a fixed character, Charities, Hopes, Grievs, &c., irresistibly put their own character forward, and give the intellect an occupation where we should awaken only feelings. It is as if we should introduce descriptive music into a requiem. A monument should never tell you what to think or feel, but only suggest feeling.

The renowned monument of Lorenzo di Medici by Michel Angelo is an illustration. The feeling of repose, not of forgetfulness, but of deepest thought, which it impresses, is so complete, that the gazer almost forgets himself to stone, and it seems like an intrusion to ask what the figures mean. We feel that they mean all things.

The style and spirit of the Grecian Architecture is so pure that when an architect adopts it, he must carry it out. As far as the details are concerned, nothing can with propriety be added to or taken from them. They are things fixed. If a man uses the Ionic, we demand a pure Greek Ionic, and everybody knows what it ought to be. To adapt these details in Greek spirit to modern needs, this is what classic architecture has in modern times to do. The architects who have accomplished this feat in a satisfactory manner, in modern times, are so few, that one may rumber them on his fingers and scarce need his left hand. To do this a man must be a Greek, and more than a Greek. He has to live in the past and present at the same time. He must be independent of his time, and yet able to enter fully into it.

The Gothic and the Lombard architecture, on the other hand, make no such all but impossible demands, — or at least did not, at the time in which they flourished, though it is no less hard for us to enter into their spirit than into

the Grecian, — perhaps even harder, since the principle of the Gothic is complex, and the ideas which controlled both it and the Lombard have told their errand, and have past away from the world. The Grecian being conceived in a more universal spirit, aspiring to absolute perfection, has in it the principle of life, it has been the parent of the others, and yet flourishes green and strong, while its offspring have passed into decrepitude.

It would be well for us, once for all, to abandon the attempt to transplant hither the Gothic Architecture. The noble trees yet stand in the old world, but their seeds are decayed, the woodwork, that we dignify by this name, can only excite a sigh or a smile at its utter want of harmony and use. A few fine churches we may have, like Trinity church in New York, but they can be only approximations to foreign works. There is nothing new to be done in Gothic architecture. Its capacities, infinite as they seem, are in fact limited, and are exhausted. Not so with the Grecian. It is not indeed to be expected that we shall make more perfect specimens than were made two thousand years ago, but we may reproduce those in endless new combinations. This is what Palladio and Bramante did, and new Palladios and Bramantes would always find room.

THE GLADE.

A GREEN and vaporous cloud of buds, the larch
 Folds in soft drapery above the glade,
 Where deeper-foliaged pines high over-arch,
 And dignify the heavy, stooping shade,
 There yellow violets spring, in rarest show,
 And golden rods in secret clusters blow.

There piping hylas fill the helpless air,
 And chattering black-birds hold their gossip by,
 And near I saw the tender maiden-hair,
 With the fine, breeze-born, white anemone;
 The glade, though undisturbed by human art,
 Has richer treasures than the busy mart.