

THE SUBURBAN HOUSE.*

BY R. J. EDWARDS.

WHEN I was asked by our esteemed Secretary to contribute a paper for this occasion, I may say it was on the spur of the moment I consented; and I have since found it was more easily promised than accomplished in the short time at my disposal. You will, therefore, I beg, expect but a sketchy treatment of the subject I have chosen. I am not sure but that that is the proper treatment anyway, for a too-ambitious is not, perhaps, the best spirit in which to approach the subject in actual practice.

The kind of house I have in my mind is one that will be within the reach of the comparatively poor man. Though living in the city he has not lost, we will suppose, his love of the ideal sun and air of the country. In building his house he can obtain these for all the living rooms only by having it surrounded by sufficient open ground. Happily, the electric railway makes it possible to build where land is cheap without too great a sacrifice of time in journeying to and from business, and in this city he need not go outside the limits to obtain the advantages of the country, together with those necessities of modern life—water, sewers, gas, and I hope soon we shall be able to add, Sunday cars. The cost of the building may be anywhere from \$2,000 up, according to the accommodation required.

I venture to say that architectural taste would gain immensely in this place if all fire limit restrictions were withdrawn, except in the more central districts, provided the houses were kept a reasonable distance apart. Nothing, in my opinion, has had so much influence in making the dwellings of Toronto commonplace as the absurd by-laws the people have imposed on themselves. The effect has been to build whole streets of attached brick or brick-fronted houses. Scores of streets have been architecturally ruined in this way, that might have been attractive had they been built up with detached frame or brick cottages on comparatively wide lots. I think you will all agree with me when I say that our most admired streets owe their beauty more to the well-kept grounds filled with fine shrubs and stately trees than to the houses, good as some of them undoubtedly are. Sherbourne would still be a beautiful street if the best houses were replaced by well-designed cottages costing even less than \$2,000 each, while such streets as Brunswick avenue (it is mostly always avenue) would remain dreary looking if the closely-packed houses had been doubled in cost.

As architects, therefore, we have nothing to gain and much to lose by despising the low-cost dwelling as unworthy of serious attention. Though there is certainly "no money in it" for the architect, there is every other consideration to engage the best efforts of the best men. If we could imagine this a city of houses of good architectural treatment, each house standing free and, if you will, costing less than \$3,000, how vastly would it be improved? If this is true of the whole, I may claim it is even more true of a part, for the part would have the advantage of contrast; and, therefore, every house of the kind that is built and turns out to be a success, is an example worthy of being followed, though not copied, and is a distinct gain to the taste of the town, out of all proportion to the importance of the building itself.

I shall not attempt to indicate what may be good or bad in the arrangement or plan of the house, as much will depend upon the habits and tastes of the occupants. I will say, however, that there should be a conservatory, no matter how small. The common idea is that this is an expensive affair both to build and to maintain. If small, the cost will be slight, and if the heating of the house is by hot water the conservatory will add little if any to the coal bill, and if by furnace, a simple coil can be arranged and operated without additional firing.

The purpose of this paper is to combat the tendency of the time to overdo the exterior of dwellings. People call them "residences" in the spirit which prompts them to name the streets and roads "avenues." As architects we cannot escape responsibility on the ground that our clients demand huge Romanesque arches and a profusion of meaningless carvings. Nevertheless we know to our cost, or even more, to our disgust, that we are not free agents, and that is why it is so much more difficult to practice than to preach. Still, there is nothing like knowing what we should do, even if we cannot often do as we ought, and I shall here briefly attempt to say what I think should be the characteristics of the building in question.

Whatever the materials of construction they should be rationally and truthfully used. There must be no imitations. The treatment should be temperate, having the true domestic feeling, with broad

surfaces and deep shadows. The surfaces may be relieved by telling though not overworked detail in windows, recessed balconies, roomy porches, or a combination of verandah and porch. The entrance should be hospitable-looking, and no feature lends itself more happily to this end than the open porch with its roof a continuation of the main roof lines of the house. The great aim should be to get a good roof sheltering the whole, its bold lines and sparingly broken surfaces giving character to the design. It may be truly said that a really clever roof effect will make a success where without it all is lost.

In this country care must be taken to see that the snow will not lodge in long or shaded valleys, or slide directly upon the steps or walks or on the conservatory roof. No convenience or wholesomeness of the plan should be sacrificed to exterior effect. It is perhaps superfluous to say so, for decidedly the best design is that in which the outside effect grows out of and emphasizes the qualities within, like the face of a man who is devoted to good works. The treatment should suggest coolness in summer and comfort in winter—the former by its deeply shaded porch, balcony and eaves, the latter by its aspect in relation to the hours of sunshine by its spacious chimneys rising from the ground and locating the cheerful open fires in rooms where sunlight and a pleasant outlook are not unprovided for. Both these effects are enhanced by not having too large or too many windows.

There is nothing so good for our climate as the weighted sash window—and I say so after having earnestly tried to work out casements to open either inward or outward. It does not interfere with inside or outside shutters or storm sashes, and admits of moderate ventilation with the minimum danger from drafts. Unfortunately the two-light sash window is not an ideal feature, but it is wonderful how improved is the effect if divided into comparatively small, though not too small, lights. And I have found that if plate glass is used the outlook from within is in no way impaired, if, indeed, it is not actually improved, from the fact, I suppose, that one is conscious that the glass is between oneself and the outer air, which, after all, is the truth. The outside effect of the smaller glass is certainly pleasing, is more homelike and, therefore, more architectural in relation to the subject of this paper. Let me insist, however, on the use of plate glass, except in the less important windows.

Broadly speaking, you should bend your efforts to keeping as close to Nature as you can. Make your house appear to belong to the ground and the woods, and in this connection I cannot help saying I know of nothing in art nearer to the grey of the woods than a shingled wall, softly stained! If you stay as "near the grass" as possible you will favor low ceilings and will not be frightened by the uneducated critic, whose one word is "squatty."

Though I have not said anything original, I shall be satisfied if I have left with you the feeling that I have emphasized some truths.

PERSONAL.

Mr. Benjamin Dillon, architect, of Kingston, Ont., has opened an office in Renfrew.

Mr. K. Simpson, a railway contractor, died on the 10th of February, at Halifax, from pneumonia.

Mr. E. J. Walsh, C. E., who has been engaged for some time as colonial engineer in the Leeward Islands, has returned to Ottawa.

Mr. P. A. Peterson, of Montreal, chief engineer of the C. P. R., has been selected as vice-president of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Mr. Charles Kessell, who was the architectural superintendent of the Administration and other buildings at the World's Fair, died in Chicago on the 6th of March.

Mr. R. M. Hannaford, son of Mr. E. P. Hannaford, late Chief Engineer of the Grand Trunk Railway, has been appointed bridge engineer of the G. T. R., with headquarters at Montreal.

Mr. T. R. Johnstone, a leading spirit in the Toronto Sketch Club, and admittedly one of the cleverest young architects of the city, has removed to New York, where he hopes to find a wider field for his abilities.

At the thirteenth annual meeting of the Master Plumbers' Association of Toronto, the following officers were elected for 1896: W. J. Burroughes, president; Jas. B. Fitzsimons, 1st vice-president; Jas. Worthington, 2nd vice-president; F. W. Armstrong, recording secretary; Thos. Cook, corresponding secretary; A. Fiddes, treasurer; J. E. Knott, sergeant-at-arms.

*Paper read before the Toronto Architectural Guild.