

## BRITISH COLUMBIAN LETTERS.

No. V.

At a recent meeting of the R. I. B. A. the necessity of elevating the standard of public taste in architecture was the theme of a very able paper followed by some brilliant discussions and remarks, the whole leading to no very definite conclusion as to how the education of the Philistines might be improved. The solution of the problem is not hard to find; Philistia could scarcely exist if all architectural work was good, for the public only estimates the comparative merit of work by taking as a standard that which they have been brought up to believe to be good; thus, if the great mass of architecture is bad, or say only indifferent, public taste being formed almost wholly by association is necessarily also but "indifferent bad": therefore, Oh, Architects! by raising your standard of excellence you will surely elevate that of the contemned public.

The applied arts and crafts suffer as greatly from the want of discrimination evinced by the majority of architects as from the neglect and ignorance of the public, and there is no one art so hideously misapplied as that of stained glass. In our report of the First Annual Exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Association of British Columbia reference was made to the excellence of the glass exhibited in this line by Messrs. H. Bloomfield & Sons. In such a report it is quite impossible to deal with each subject at length, neither is it desirable to do so in other than a general manner. Objection has been taken to the writer's definition of stamped and painted glass, but on reconsidering the passage the definition seems to be perfectly correct. It is plainly inferred that a leaded glass window to be in correct taste must be in the nature of a mosaic, the actual construction of which should enter largely into the design, in direct contrast to a painted window of ordinary acceptance, which is thus described by W. Somers Clarke:—"In the painted window we are invited to forget that glass is being used. Shadows are obtained by loading the surface with enamelled colors; the fullest rotundity of modelling is aimed at; the lead and iron so essentially necessary to the safety of the window are concealed with extraordinary skill and ingenuity; the spectator perceives a hole in the wall with a very indifferent picture in it, overdone in the high lights, smoky and unpleasant in its shadows, in no sense decorative. We need concern ourselves no more with painted windows, they are thoroughly false and unworthy of consideration." W. Lewis Day appears to have very similar convictions, but his opinions are expressed in a work of considerable magnitude, whereas W. Somers Clarke was obliged to give expression to his views within the limitations of a paper on stained glass in general read in the space of a few minutes before the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. In such cases subtle differences have frequently to be disregarded. There are extreme purists who claim that all stained glass that is not absolutely a mosaic of stained glass and lead is painted glass and condemnable as such, and the high nature of the work produced by members of this school entitles their opinions to respect, even though we cannot admit that their arguments are absolutely sound. It is clear that their work is exercising a very beneficial influence over a large section of designers in Great Britain. This extremely severe school probably owes its existence to the prevalence for so long a period of the "painted windows" trenchantly denounced by W. Somers Clarke and is really a protest against the extravagances so frequently indulged in. A paper transparency stuck on to a window is but slightly more objectionable than many of the kalidescopic horrors one meets with at every turn.

Vancouver possesses in Mr. James Bloomfield an artist in stained glass in the best sense of the term. Thoroughly acquainted with the history and grammar of his art, imbued with a deep love and reverence for the work of the great early European masters, he has none the less avoided the great danger attendant upon a long and ardent study of ancient methods, for the fascination of this study not unfrequently leads to the conviction that nothing which is not old can be good, thus converting the student into a more or less scholarly reproducer of antiquities. No one believes more completely than does Mr. Bloomfield in modern advantages and opportunities, neither can anyone hold more decidedly than does he that modern work will some day surely equal the old and will also possess noble characteristics distinctive of its own period.

Fourteen years ago while acting as a junior draughtsman in an architect's office in England he turned his attention to wood engraving and discovered his own capacity for decorative design. His removal to this country interrupted the sequence of his

studies, but opportunity came to him in the guise of an illuminated address presented by the citizens of New Westminster to the Governor General, the Earl of Aberdeen. His Excellency proved his appreciation of the artistic merits of the address by requesting Mr. Bloomfield to prepare designs for a series of medals for the Boys' Brigade of Canada. His Excellency then made it possible for Mr. Bloomfield to proceed to Chicago where he became junior designer to a firm ranking second only in America to Tiffanys. Here our student attended the Chicago Art Institute, drawing principally from the life, but losing no opportunity of gleaning any knowledge of any and everything connected with decorative design; thence to New Orleans as chief draughtsman to a firm of glass workers, but making time to study at the art schools. Finding his progress here unsatisfactory he proceeded to Europe and pursued his investigations into decorative art all over Flanders; so on to London where he worked at decorative painting principally, but seizing every opportunity of studying at the Polytechnic and South Kensington, drawing, too, continually from the life. During this period of unremitting labor he succeeded in seeing a very great proportion of the famous stained glass in the south of England. Sending some sketches of glass to Manchester, Mr. Bloomfield was immediately offered a position there which he had to decline owing to the necessity of completing certain work he had in hand; however this overture was renewed later and accepted and, if possible, he got down to harder work than ever. He was principally engaged upon church windows, but worked also upon head and tail pieces for type foundries, on decorative painting and heraldry. Finally having prepared designs for the memorial windows to the late Bishop Sillitoe he came out to execute the work and has remained ever since in Vancouver. The coast does not yet afford a designer of such resources many opportunities for the full exercise of his powers, but even in slight and quite inexpensive commissions one finds a character and individuality stamped upon the work that is refreshing. The illustrations, on separate sheet, are from photographs in which the play of light and the color values are of course more or less lost, but the broad vigorous treatment is preserved.

During the past season building operations have been fairly steady, both in Victoria and Vancouver. We believe it has proved a record year for the former. In Vancouver several blocks have been completed, principally on Hastings street, in which few vacant spots are to be found between Granville and Cambie streets. Granville street has also made a solid advance between the Depot and the Hotel. The town is now growing so large, and the site covers such an enormous extent of country, some of it "quite in the country" as a matter of fact, that it is not easy to keep track of all the building. It is principally in the West End that residential work has proceeded during the past season, the southern slope towards English Bay showing to a marked extent the tendency of the people to go farther and farther from the business centre. Probably the most important building of the year is the new Roman Catholic Church, "Our Lady of the Rosary," which possesses a fine peal of eight bells. The vaulting is lath and plaster, the shafts of the columns are scagliola and the geometrical tracery is wooden throughout. In spite of this and the fact that much of the detail is galvanized iron, this church is a great advance upon anything else yet built in the city;—we mean, of course, in ecclesiastical work. It is delightful to once more hear the distant bells, even though the ringing is not yet very scientific. In residential work nothing very notable has been accomplished, the larger work being rather pretentious than interesting. Most of the houses are a very local version of Colonial, which was at best but a wooden imitation of the weakest style that prevailed in English architecture, a period in which it is generally acknowledged that art in general reached the extreme low water mark of English history.

The Arts and Crafts Association of British Columbia held its first annual general meeting on the 4th March; the attendance was somewhat meagre, but the report of the work carried out during the past twelve months was distinctly creditable. His Honor the Lt.-Governor was elected Second Patron and Mr. Harry Abbott, Third Patron; W. J. Ferris, President; Mr. R. B. Ellis and Mr. R. M. Fripp, F.R.I.B.A., vice-presidents; Mr. Q. M. Eveliegh, secretary, with a very good committee, in which pictorial art is perhaps a little too strongly represented. It is to be regretted that the craft as a whole do not appear to recognize the value of the work attempted by the Association.

There are rumors of a Carnegie Free Library, of possible art school and even technical schools; Mr. David Blair, of the newly formed normal school, is inculcating elements of art training into the public school teachers. It really does look as though 1901 is to be the year of inauguration of art education in British Columbia. May it prove to be so.