

CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE FROM AN ÆSTHETICAL STANDPOINT.



ARCHITECTURE may be regarded from an æsthetical, a scientific or a utilitarian standpoint. In the first case, it is a means of giving sensible expression to mental conceptions. In the second, it implies a knowledge of mechanics whereby the archi-

tect is made acquainted with certain laws of physical nature and is made the possessor of power to call these laws into play or to counteract their operations. Utilitarian, embraces—or at least should embrace—scientific and æsthetical architecture; its object is the glorification of the Supreme Ruler, the elevation of national and individual character, and the increase of the physical comfort and well being of mankind. The present paper is to deal with architecture especially from an æsthetical point of view.

Architecture properly understood is not merely a mechanical, but is also a fine art. In it are embodied the two fundamental principles which critics exact in a fine art, viz.: 1st, its object is to produce works of a high æsthetical value; 2nd, it possesses the power to produce this æsthetical value. The characteristics of this higher æsthetical value are novelty, grace, beauty, sublimity, truth. Only these are fine arts, then, in which are presented to us, together with the material product, elements of beauty pertaining to the world of beings endowed with reason. That such elements are found in architecture needs no proof; their presence is manifested by the sensations we experience on beholding worthy productions of this art. Magnificent churches, palaces, etc., exhibit not merely those qualities which please the senses but show forth, in addition, "majesty, power, glory, strength and beauty," which appeal to man's higher faculties. The architect, therefore, must be something more than a mechanic. As a writer on

this subject aptly says in one of the current monthly reviews: "We claim for architecture that it is an art on precisely the same footing as painting and sculpture, demanding the same natural gifts and requiring the education and development of the same natural faculties. In architecture, as in other arts, it is the faculty of design that makes the artist."

It is almost universally admitted that all arts have sprung from a religious soil and have there attained their highest development. Burke thus expresses himself on this subject: "We know, we feel it in our innermost heart that religion is the basis of civilization and the source of all that is beautiful and good." It is a fact, placed beyond doubt by history, that the earliest productions in sculpture, painting, poetry, music and the dramatic art were the offspring of the ancient pagan religion, and this latter being, as was demonstrated in a former issue of this journal, not a mere myth but a religion solemn and true in the eyes of the ancients, there is no denying the fact that all arts have sprung from a religious soil. That, in the domain of religion, art is at its climax, is attested by writers of all ages. And in fact, inasmuch as religion appeals to the noblest feelings and aspirations of the human heart, it is but natural to expect that the artist whose soul is filled with these same feelings and aspirations should here find the loftiest inspirations of his genius. "The cult of the highest truth requires the highest beauty. Religion finds in the beauty of art its purest, sublimest and most effective expression." What is true of the fine arts in general is pre-eminently true of architecture. Our knowledge on this subject is most complete from ancient history. In Athens the foremost structure was the the Parthenon, devoted to Pallas Athene, and all the other ornaments of the Acropolis served the purpose of embellishing and enhancing this temple. And if we look about among the ancient nations which had no temples, we see that they had no architecture. With such religion