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ARCHITECTURE IN THE STATES.



ALTHOUGH in painting and perhaps in sculpture also the United States are improving from year to year, it is astonishing how architecture drags behind. An enormous quantity of building goes on. Wards spring into being in a few years. Burnt cities rise again before the ruins have done smoking. But the edifices, although sometimes loaded with ornament and constructed with costly materials, are seldom the work of an architect in the true sense of the term as now used—namely,

as a master of building, as one says master of fine art. They are the work of masters of mechanical and technical arts as opposed to the fine arts. In New York it will be the merest chance if the next public building or costly residence does not fall into the hands of men who are not able even to sensibly "lift" modern European ideas in architecture. For one Jefferson Market Court House, with its pleasing, though not very original design in elevation and coloring, we have any number of buildings like the post-office, the Metropolitan Museum, the Cathedral in Fifth Avenue, the brown-stone Vanderbilt boxes. What frightens one in these buildings is the complacency with which owners and public regard them, and the silence of the press. They have the same vacuousness, the same absence of idea or sentiment for outline, composition, light and shade and color, which startle and disconcert the amateur in an exhibition of pictures at the Academy. Rich men and congregations are seldom able to secure for their large outlays the buildings which can be approved by a cultivated taste. A club might be expected to succeed better. But the recent experience of the Union League shows that a wealthy and ambitious organization, containing a very large proportion of cultivated men and

an unusually high average of brains, cannot save itself from grievous and elementary mistakes in architecture. It is evident that in the building committees appointed by the general or State Legislature, congregations and clubs, there is seldom or never a majority competent to select the best architect and get from him work that is worth the money expended.

As things are now managed, an architect of genius has to stultify himself nine times to get a chance in the tenth instance to build something that he really approves of—and who can do this long without degenerating? This fact reflects perfectly the state of the fine arts—nay, perhaps even of the government of the community that built it. Pretentious communities want pretentious buildings. If New York were not misgoverned would it have its present court-house? If Washington were not corrupt, would it have its present post-office? If New York society had any dignity or backbone, would millionaires be thrusting themselves forward by the mere weight of big houses, big picture galleries, and lavish decorations? The millionaires would not build palaces in six months, but would employ real architects to build quietly and beautifully, just as they themselves would gradually enter society on their personal merits, not on their money-bags. At Washington some pains would be taken that the great buildings erected by the public funds all over the land were the very best to be procured. The municipal government would slowly and carefully foster architecture by discouraging hasty work and reckless expenditure of the taxpayer's money. Clubs and congregations would make it their first business to judge of the qualifications of architects on artistic, not on personal or interested grounds. The main point is that the demand should be a demand of taste. Architects cannot be independent, cannot "educate the public," cannot wait until they are dead for recognition. They depend almost as directly on the public as the actor, and their audience is neither so numerous nor so ready to be pleased with what is set before it. Until the public shall reform, until the press shall begin to call owners and architects to account for vulgar, stupid, and ridiculous work, there is no hope for American