

## ARCHITECTURE FROM AN ARTIST'S STANDPOINT.\*

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In attempting to arrange for you this address, giving some of my ideas on the subject of architecture, I have felt from the beginning that it was rather preposterous in me to speak to a company of architects on the question. The reason for this is not because I have not thought about it, but because my ideas have grown up unconsciously to myself, and have lain in such scattered confusion till now. The only indications of the possession of ideas have been the pleasure I have felt on seeing anything I intuitively commended, the disgust and pity with which I have regarded all ostentatious architecture, and the dissatisfaction which I have felt concerning the conditions which result in the erection, on the one hand, of buildings embodying all the art which wealth can command, and on the other, of those ungraceful and often even temporary shelters devoted to manufacture and living.

I believe the artist's mission should not be essentially different from that of the architect; if it were not that the love of proportion and decoration accuates men very vitally, there would be no need of the architect. The engineer would do all that was necessary in the construction of the shelter required. In the same manner, if it were not that the painter believes that the aspiration towards the beautiful is essentially an ethical quality, he would adopt the profession of the cold calculator of facts. The painter may decorate by the representation of life, and record historical phases of the same, but in all his composition he has for his model, Nature, whether he conventionalizes or not. As the painter must always observe from the point of view of effect, the architect must do so no less; both are educators through effect, though the observer is ignorant of the means by which it is produced. Gracefulness of line is little considered by those who do not habitually design, but nobility of mass is appreciated by all.

As I have already indicated, the combination of nature's forms I believe to be the basis of design, and as we enter upon the widest phase of the question of design, the composing of masses, let us ask ourselves how, and by what subtle reasoning, we feel our way. *Exactly how*, can any architect tell? Can any artist attempt to explain, except be in an academic slave? We borrow a bit, we in some round-about way grasp an idea, but who can divine the method? The formulated method for the intuitively free is like a cage for the migratory bird. Intuition develops unconsciously, and if allowed full freedom will feel its way with absolute safety, but our tendency to overcome and rectify bad conditions leads us to the evil of binding this subtle faculty to formulas, and the institution of academic rules shows our lack of wisdom in the extreme care to be safe. As a result, we have directed and taught until we have no confidence in the sciences of feeling, and prejudice is our only guide. If the student be supplied with the simplest directions, teaching him to observe, and be given the material and tools with which to work, you have combined the two principles necessary for the development of his powers.

Now if we have satisfied ourselves that good taste is indispensable to any kind of good work, and if we know that what a man likes determines what kind of work he will do, the same principle applies to everything which indicates man's presence in the world—the arts, literature, science, religions, morals, governments, are all indexes of the character of men and nations. When conditions are poor, recourse is had to borrowing, and originality is no longer a moving impulse, but a cold and mechanical performance takes its place. If I were to picture to you the result of good conditions in the development of your art, I would necessarily have to describe to you an architecture, noble, diversified, and utilitarian. It would show its morality by its adaption to human needs, first, by being simple enough to avoid waste, and decorated only to emulate virtue, and stimulate the observation. When I speak of those people whose art is only borrowed, I mean the style-mongering kind, which borrows but cannot pay back, and acts like a boomerang on the workman, debasing his art until it is no longer worthy of the name. True art, however, borrows and is able to pay back, and while it recognizes the values of all styles and employs them as a mine of experience from which to draw, and to which to refer, knows that the principle by which these were originated must be retained. Now I am actually ignorant of styles in architecture, and I consider the possession of that knowledge quite unnecessary to good taste. To merely imitate and reproduce ever so purely an old style, that is not the mission of the sincere artist, because that within him which chooses is the inheritance of all that has preceded him, and no academic rule can teach it.

The most prominent defect in modern architectural designs is a disposition to seek perfect symmetry, but the architect who draws his inspiration from nature recognizes that perfect symmetry is as much abhorred by nature as a vacuum. True balance is by a law of physics as much a necessity to any structure as that force which keeps the earth in its orbit is to the earth, but the placing of windows, doors, towers and gables with exact regularity is in direct opposition to the spirit of the whole outward world. The designer must of necessity avoid all such regularity if he would avoid monotony and stiffness.

The arrangement by which light and shade are grouped is as important as the grouping of general forms; in the composition of a picture the painter who appreciates his light and shade will regard a shadow cast by a figure, or any object, as having as much value as the object itself for his purpose.

Towers, turrets, chimneys, gables and roofs, if put on merely to balance, will from some point of view throw a building out of balance. I have in my mind a long structure with two small towers at the ends, and a large

one in the middle, all on one side. From certain points of view the effect is that of over-balance. I remember when approaching Burgos, in north Spain, shortly after sunset, the silhouette of the spires of that wonderful Gothic cathedral were to me a lesson in grouping and true balance. In passing quickly by them, they cluster from every point of view in long and short points, giving the feeling of symmetry without regularity. If the architect places with regularity towers and spires ever so beautiful in themselves, along the sky-line, the effect will be like a burned-out forest on a ridge of hills. This monotonous regularity is perhaps a still more crying evil in what I think is called landscape gardening—placing trees in rows, flower beds in geometrical designs, and cutting walks and paths by the line. Many of you have noticed this tendency in our own public gardens, and those who have been in Paris can appreciate how diligently the gardener cuts and trims, and even squares the trees off underneath.

After massing, breadth in general effect is important to the architect no less than to the artist. If the architect spreads over his design ever so beautiful ornament, the result is what a painter calls "spottiness." In painting, we illustrate the opposite of this by the pictures of Meissonier as the best examples of work which, retaining breadth, possess great fineness of detail. And although many painters long for extreme simplicity and use great flat masses of light and shade in their own compositions, yet exquisite detail is not incompatible with such, for the secret lies in keeping detail subordinate to mass. I feel that to enlarge upon this principle would possibly mar to a great degree the simplicity of the idea, but in case the terms "mass" and "breadth of effect" may sound like artistic cant, I will try to illustrate what they mean to a painter. When I speak of a "mass" of anything, it may be light or dark, and of any color, and "breadth of effect" is the result of the subordination of the markings within each respective mass, so that at certain distances no detail can be distinguished. Take for example a tree; when near to it, the eye can resolve each small mass of light and dark into separate leaves; at a greater distance only larger masses can be seen, and when sufficiently far away the eye perceives one flat mass, composed of trunk and foliage. I do not mean to say that painters have a monopoly of this principle of harmony, for all people with good taste must feel some of its truth at least, and I am sure that architects practice it continually, although I sometimes think it is too dimly understood, and as it involves color, the subject for the architect alone is inexhaustible. To the painter it is almost the beginning and end of his technique.

I will now turn to some practical illustrations of that of which I have spoken in general terms. I have prepared some rough scribbles in color, some of which show the suggestiveness of natural forms for designs of buildings, the similarity of some buildings now in existence to natural forms, *et cetera*.



FIG. 1.

This pastel is from a sketch made a few miles out of Paris, near Sceaux, and I have attempted to construct from it, in a general way, a group of buildings which might very readily be suggested by the tree shapes; some engineering modifications would be necessary, but general form could be adhered to. In the Yellowstone Park there is a low peak called "The



FIG. 2.

Column Rocks," a rough sketch of which is shown in No. 3. In the Sierras there are some remarkable buttes, which stand alone on a sort of plain; they suggest whole buildings, towns, chimneys and steeples. No. 4 is a design for an entrance suggested by a part of the Castle Rock in the Sierras. In interiors crypts, naves, and vaulted roofs are instances of the similarity

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