

THE PRACTICE AND PROVINCE OF THE ARCHITECT.*

I VENTURE to draw your attention briefly to a few considerations affecting the practice and province of the architect. Foremost amongst the essential elements of architectural practice I would place what I may describe as an artistic sense—the faculty of recognizing and enjoying the beautiful in all things. And, more than this, an open vision to see, and wisdom to understand, the great underlying principles out of which all true beauty, whether in nature or art, grows. The direction of the student's work will depend much upon his tastes; but a study of the best examples in Classic, Gothic, and Renaissance architecture is certainly desirable. The aim of such studies should be fundamental, not with the object of slavishly copying, but of learning the principles upon which the builders wrought; and thus it will often be found that some of the principles are the same in widely differing styles. We are often twitted in this country with having no national style, but—as the Americans say of our weather—possessing “samples only.” I take it we must admit the criticism. But may not this fact be due in some measure to the oftentimes wrong direction of our studies? It is scarcely a generation back since it was a common practice to regard ancient Classic examples as objects to be copied bodily—at least, as to elevation. The interior purpose of the new building might even be wholly different from those of the original, but convenience of plan had to succumb to an imposing façade. The Gothic revival only in a measure mended matters, for a time, for a somewhat slavish copying of detail, apart from a proper understanding of principles, became the fashion. This period, through which we have now happily passed, has doubtless had its uses, nor can we yet afford to set aside a careful study of Ancient and Mediæval art. It were indeed far better to copy bodily a good design than to invent a bad new one. But the evil is that buildings, like plants, are often indigenous to the soil, and ill-adapted for transplanting to another clime. Though the maxim is not a new one, we have perhaps not yet come fully to understand how a national style can scarcely exist, at least can only be good, as it grows out of, and fitly expresses national habits and characteristics. But when we speak of the “practice” of the architect, the word itself suggests that something more than the possession and efficient training of the artistic sense goes to the making of an architect. He must also undoubtedly possess not a little practical knowledge of several sciences. To the vexed question, whether an architect should be an artist or a theoretical mechanic, I would reply: In a measure he must be both, and a man of business too. An artist may be a thoroughly unpractical man, no man of business, and yet be a good artist; an architect cannot. On the other hand, neither has the mere mechanic, or man of business, with perhaps little art sense, and no art training, any claim to call himself an architect. He may be well versed in the science of building, and able, most efficiently, to conduct the business of his client, but he cannot be a true architect unless he be a true artist. Lacking this, though his buildings be very ornamental, the ornamentation will probably be vicious, and though his work secure many admirers, it will inevitably be devoid of the elements of true beauty, and transgress at every point canons of good taste. Time will only permit of a brief mention of two features of the times which present special hindrances to architectural practice. The mania for cheapness thwarts us at every point, often curtailing expenditure below reasonable limits, and tempting to the improper use of materials made to imitate the functions of more costly substances. The multiplication of specialists' manufactures by way of fittings and decorative features, though it sometimes saves us trouble, tends to sameness of treatment and loss of originality, and often unhappily to the fostering of a vitiated taste for showiness and a wholesale destruction of true art. The qualifications for the practice of architecture are wide in their range, and certainly such as to make large demands upon the powers of most men. I think, however, you will be ready to admit that they are not unreasonable. But does not every consideration of the subject point again to the absolute need for a careful education and training for every architect?

Let us now turn from the qualifications for the practice of architecture and inquire what are its limitations. What is the province of an architect? One thing must be evident. Unless he become a specialist the variety of the buildings which an architect may be called upon to design will of itself present a wide scope for the exercise of his talents. He may be to-day designing a church, and to-morrow a dwelling house, school or factory. He need not, it is true, have a previous knowledge of all the technical requirements for which such buildings, for instance, as factories are needed; but he must be able readily to grasp these requirements, to invent methods for overcoming difficulties, to guide and advise clients who often scarcely know their own needs, and to throw all into forms of beauty framed out of suitable and enduring materials. Such duties are not light, and surely a man with any amount of practice might find in their faithful exercise ample scope for time and genius. But what are the facts of the case, gentlemen? A study of local Directories would lead us to suppose that many architects must indeed be men of Herculean powers. In fact, architecture seems to have been tacked on as a light and pleasant pastime relieving the more serious occupations of house agency or

upholstery. In these days of keen competition it becomes a matter for quite serious discussion what occupations, if any, beyond his evident sphere an architect may fitly engage in. It would often doubtless be to his pecuniary advantage to undertake house and estate agency. It must, however, always be to the detriment of his art; if such a combination can be justified at all, it should at least be by way of recognized partnership, the partner who has been trained as an architect having freedom to give his undivided attention to architectural work. It has always appeared to me perfectly legitimate, and sometimes advantageous, for an architect to take out his own quantities. He must know best his own intentions, and if he has a proper knowledge of the science, should be best able to make the quantities a true expression of those intentions. An architect in large practice will, however, not often have time for this. When the work is done by a surveyor, he should be working in full concert with the architect; and whether the quantities form a part of the contract or not, it would be better if they were always recognised and paid for by the employer.

Land surveying, and the laying out and development of estates, is another large branch of work in which architects frequently engage. As regards the former it is certainly admissible for an architect to measure and level the sites for his own works, and he should at least be able to do this. In respect of the latter, it would doubtless be much to the advantage of the estates if an architect had at least some share in their planning. In this, as in other matters, very much must depend upon the time at his disposal. I cannot see that there is necessarily in the work itself anything inappropriate or injurious to the proper exercise of architectural art. Surveying for delapidations is another branch of work which, at least in the provinces, is always regarded as coming within an architect's practice. It is certainly one which his general experience specially fits him to perform judiciously. The question whether architects should advertise opens an oft-debated point. Much depends upon the manner of advertising. It cannot reasonably be denied to an architect to use some legitimate means of making himself known. But should not his works be his best advertisement, and why should he not place his name upon them in some modest spot, as an artist or sculptor does? There is something very different in this from the ordinary trade advertisement. For myself, I much doubt whether advertising in the ordinary trade sense is of any use to an architect; but whether it be so or not, it is utterly repugnant to good taste. The following is an actual specimen of this kind of advertising, which fortunately has not yet become common amongst architects:—“Designs for chapels and schools. Pretty, inexpensive; free from damp and echo. Upwards of eighty have been erected during the past eight years, and the demand is still increasing.” And then follow paragraphs headed:—“Architectural Beauty, Echo, Damp, Ventilation, Extras and Disputes,” &c., in all of which points the author claims exceptional success. The circular closes with an offer to forward photographs or lithographic views of chapels in various styles at a charge of 6d. each below 400 sittings, and 5d. each above. Comment is superfluous! It is not always easy to stand against the fashions of such an advertising age in which literary men and even ecclesiastics are sometimes led into the stream. But to my mind all eulogistic comments upon the creation of one's own brain are out of place, and must so tend to lower one's higher sensibilities as to become reflectively injurious to our art. It behoves us, therefore, as a Society, very strenuously to set our face against such practices. Against the acceptance by architects of commissions from manufacturers and others, it is scarcely possible to utter words too strong. Architects are doubtless often put to much trouble in selection, and the unwillingness of clients to fairly remunerate for such work is strong inducement to them to seek their commission elsewhere. But the argument is specious and insufficient to uphold what can only be characterised as deception. My aim throughout has been to demand a high standard in the exercise of our art. With class distinctions of trade and profession I have little sympathy. A calling is honourable as it is exercised honorably. Every man who does his best, whether in art or craft, is worthy of respect. But assuredly all callings do not require the same degree of ability. And without any invidious comparison it may safely be averred that the practice of architecture ranks high amongst the professions, as one making large demands upon talent, study, and close application. It is on these grounds that I would urge the limitation of architectural practice as much as possible to what is certainly the main province of the architect, namely the designing and superintending the erection of buildings.

The manufacturing business of the Chanteloup Estate, Montreal, has been purchased by the Chanteloup Mfg., Co., Ltd. The business will be conducted under the management of Mr. Wm. Robinson.

Messrs. B. L. Nowell & Co., of Montreal, have been appointed Canadian agents for the Royal Cement Plaster Co., of St. Louis. This cement plaster is mixed with good sharp sand in the proportion of 100 lbs. of the former to eight ordinary water buckets of the latter, and thoroughly tempered to a good stiff mortar.

To make canvas waterproof, it is usually first wetted, then coated with two coats of boiled oil, using very little turps and driers. When thoroughly dry, two coats of paint of the desired color, or better still, three coats are put on thin.

* From the inaugural address of the President of the Society of Architects.