



Queenston, Ont.—Sketched by A. A. Martin.

TORONTO CHAPTER OF ARCHITECTS.

A MEETING of the Toronto Chapter of the Ontario Association of Architects was held at McConkey's on March 20th, at which there were present as guests several members of the Eighteen Club. The proceedings partook of a social and informal character. There was some discussion on the Travelling Exhibition as inaugurated at the national convention of architectural societies held at Cleveland in June, 1899. It is proposed to make an effort to obtain this exhibition for Toronto in 1901, the members of the Chapter agreeing to join with the Eighteen Club in this movement.

Mr. J. Wilson Gray read a paper on "Modern Architecture" which had been presented before the Chicago Architectural Club by Mr. G. R. Dean. Mr. Gray stated that, although questioning the motto of "Progress before Precedent", as advocated by Mr. Dean, he regarded the paper as of much interest. Some discussion followed. The paper is published below.

A letter was read from the Plasterers' Union asking if the Architects' Association would receive a deputation from the Union to explain their views on the question of painters putting up staff work. It was decided to request the Union to present their views on the question in writing.

Mr. W. A. Langton tendered his resignation as representative of the Association on the Toronto Technical School Board, and Mr. F. S. Baker was appointed as his successor.

MODERN ARCHITECTURE.*

BY GEORGE R. DEAN.

THE term modern architecture may be variously applied. For the purpose of this paper I wish to limit it to its strictest meaning. When we speak of modern painting we refer to method rather than to time; it is in this sense that I desire to put the subject before you. That we may arrive at our position to-day it will be necessary to review the history of architecture in so far as other nations have had, at their time, a modern architecture.

Primitive man constructed for himself a shelter to in part shield him from the element which, in his climate, was his especial discomfort, or to protect him from his especial danger. The materials were such as, with his limited power, he could best and most easily put together. As he possessed more knowledge, as he became more co-operative, with his added force, he used stronger materials. He passed easily from the pliant reed to the sturdy forest tree—from the mud hut to the stone fortress. This material he found in nature; this material he used, naturally, as he found it. As his mind developed, he called to his aid science, which is knowledge. This he applied to his construction; with the aid of machines he moved larger masses and constructed stronger edifices. There were no limitations, except the limits of his knowledge and power.

This simple growth went on—the art following the development of the people, logical in the use of its materials, and conforming to the wants of man, growing in strength and beauty as the race gained power—as different in one race as its climate or needs differed from another's. This law controlled until the fifteenth century.

Let us return to primitive man and follow the decoration he

*Paper read before the Chicago Architectural Club.

applied to this construction. As he developed more fully, as he acquired more easily the necessities and comforts of life, he had more leisure for the ornamentation of his shelter. Actuated by the inborn love of beauty, stirred up by the desire to show his position among his fellows, stimulated by his ambition to outdo his neighbors, this ornamentation increased, in quality first and quantity second, until he arrived at what we call his best period. It is that period which produced the highest in art, the grandest in literature, the most just laws and the greatest physical condition of the race. From this point the ornament increased in quantity and decreased in quality as the race became more ostentatious—as it sought new or novel effects; weaker in blood as it forsook the laws of nature, which, by observing, it had built itself up, until, corrupt and degenerate, it was swallowed up by a race of later development.

What was this ornament? In general, one may say of any ancient race: Bring me what it loved and I will construct for you its ornament. The peaceful agricultural race took its ornament from the field and the domestic animals. The race that lived by hunting took its ornament from the native fauna and the animals used in the chase; the warlike, from its victories, the religious from its gods. In each race are all these, in about the ration of their prominence in the race.

Much time has been spent in trying to discover a chain of ornament to prove that all architecture has been dependent on that gone before. Books have been written to show how the ornament of one nation has been introduced by another. Since everything done has its influence on what follows, there is necessarily something true in this development of one style from another. Certainly it is true of those styles which have been imported, which, although called by other names, are simply continuations of former styles; but in what may be called "vital styles" this influence is very much overestimated.

The fact that an ornament is similar in two countries does not prove that one is copied from another; similar conditions produce similar results. The fact that only such ornament as applied to its conditions was retained in any race if imported, is strong proof that it might as easily have been originated, for it shows the discerning power of the race and the love it had for a logical ornament as well as for a logical construction. For the purposes of our line of thought it matters not how this ornament was obtained. The fact remains that the ornament used was an ornament which appealed to those who viewed it—that it was vital, in the life, and of the life, of the people; it was the conventionalization of what they saw and loved in their daily life, or what touched them deeply in their history or religion.

If we look into the ornament of any of the great vital styles, this truth is forced upon us.

The Egyptian's tomb was his religion; on it he recorded his life—portraits of himself and family, representations of his gods, scenes in his life and home, his domestic animals, his horses and chariot. In the purely decorative portions he used his native flowers, notably the lotus, his national flower—the flower with which he approached his gods and with which he crowned himself at his feasts.

Architecture was the only art considered worthy of the upper class; for this reason there was no sculpture, as we use the term. It was all subservient to architecture, and adorned it. That the architectural scheme might not be destroyed, the sculpture was deeply conventionalized; realism being thus eliminated, feeling or the essence of the subject sculptured was developed to a wonderful degree, and the Egyptian has left to us the finest examples of the idealization of animal forms that any age has produced.

The Persian, through his love for the chase, adorned his architecture with hunting scenes and the native wild flowers. That the sculptor knew well his subject, there can be no doubt. The majesty of the lion and the swiftness of the greyhound are drawn with equal power and truth to nature, the conventionalization eliminating all except that quality which was the dominant one. Of the flora, we find principally the rose and the lotus. Persia is the land of roses—nowhere else do they attain such glorious perfection. The lotus was native to the soil and held in religious veneration.

If we accept the position that architecture and architectural forms passed from Egypt to Persia and Greece, it is interesting to note that the lotus, which the Persian knew and admired, continued to hold a prominent place; while in Greece, where it was not, except in one inferior variety, it was soon lost as a flower,