

AN AMERICAN GOTHIC REVIVAL.

Mr. Ralph Adams Cram, in a series of three notable papers in *The Brickbuilder*, has been preaching a Gothic crusade; not altogether as a voice crying in a wilderness, but rather leading on a host already engaged in the new movement.

Gothic was true architecture while Palladianism was a sham, so that one is chary of raising an opposing voice against any movement that looks for its ideal to the Gothic centuries. But, in the larger sense, Gothic architecture is not merely the architecture of the middle ages, nor is Palladianism merely that particular perversion of Greek principles for which Palladio is distinguished. It is possible to apply the Palladian method to Gothic forms, and it looks very much as if only Palladian Gothic will be produced by the army of converts to fifteenth century design, which gives so much delight to Mr. Cram, but which one cannot be accused of cynicism in recognizing, (by name, some of them), as the usual following of a new fashion in American architecture. "The work of restoring and revivifying Gothic," Mr. Cram says, "is proceeding with leaps and bounds". We are sorry to hear it; it could not do a worse thing. To Mr. Cram this mysterious movement is a growth "out of the persistent soil of inextinguishable inheritance and under the sun of dawning spirituality". He hopes all things because his heart is with the movement, but the examples of current Gothic, in the illustration sheets of the very numbers of *The Brickbuilder* in which his articles appear, incline us to retain our less charitable opinion. There are no doubt spiritually minded men to whom Gothic represents, as it does to Mr. Cram, the "Christian architecture"; but for the many, to whom it represents a fashion to be followed, the animating spirit is the spirit of Palladio. Mr. Cram's own churches have for some time been to the profession, an enviable attainment; and his West Point success has brought the thing to a crisis. The supply has created a demand, that is all. It is a fashion, not a movement.

Mr. Cram thinks—this is the gist of his three papers—that the time has come to cast off the paganism of centuries and join hands again with the fifteenth century when the course of Christian architecture was interrupted. "It must begin where it left off," he says, "and it must work at first from precedent". This is how he brings the question to a definite point—which is what it needs. General principles are nothing. Mr. Cram's general principles are unquestionable; but so are everybody's. Even Mr. Flagg is probably a pure minded person. But trouble comes in the application of principles to style. Mr. Cram's idea is that "style is nonsense unless" (in the first place) "it develops from historical and racial associations". He claims continuity of race with the English, and affirms that, since with the Suppression of the Monasteries in England the racial style died, it is with architecture as the Suppression found it * that we have to do.

This is a clear enough programme. Is it true? It is not quite new. Ruskin, whom Mr. Cram considers to be "quite the worst critic and exponent of architecture that ever lived" has already advocated the adoption of the Perpendicular as the basis and starting point of a true English style. His proposition was not taken up. Is Mr. Cram the appointed agent to carry out Ruskin's

idea? We should be glad to think so. Our sympathy is entirely with Mr. Cram in his desire to make architecture, what it ought to be, "a language, not a sequence of fads." Mr. Cram is a brother; but brothers, when their positiveness is stronger than their argument, are sometimes rather irritating.

Mr. Cram's whole discourse is a process of begging the question. To begin with, is it right to say that mediæval architecture alone is "Christian architecture?" If it is, is not an accompanying condition implied that the mediæval church alone was the christian church? That statement would be rather confusing to some tens of millions of Mr. Cram's fellow citizens who do not share his obvious regret that the Reformation succeeded. The question is still further confused by the fact that the mediæval church (which still exists) finds itself quite at home under the dome of St. Peter's, housed in an architectural style of which Mr. Cram speaks in unmeasured terms with which we have too much sympathy to quote them against him. It is idle to regret the Reformation, disturbing as some of its consequences seem to be. Erasmus was not conspicuously a saint of God; Luther was certainly not a work of the devil. The ways of the Lord are wonderful; and one of them, which Mr. Cram and others have a way of entirely over-looking, is the development of Greek thought. Greek philosophy has not been unrecognized; it was indeed all important to that very mediæval church which gave us the "Christian architecture." And had Greek architecture no place to fill in the Christian world? One of its sources of origin, it cannot be doubted, was Solomon's trabeated temple, which is the only church that was ever built of which we have any sure warranty that the mind of God was with it.

Not to go any further into the labyrinth of speculative argument than just to claim recognition for the Greeks, let us see what may be the consequences of this. Here of course, in the application to style, is the place where, as usual, untruth may creep in; but the acknowledgement of Greek architecture, as having an intended place in the progress of the world—of the Christian world, for it is all Christian now in spite of the predominance of the heathen—seems to us the acknowledgement that there is a true architecture of constructed form as well as of formed construction. It is usual to talk of Gothic as "decorated construction" as if the construction followed mere necessity and its beautification by its treatment in detail was the whole method of the designers. Proportioning the construction is always the essential element of design in the mediæval styles; decorative finish is equally essential but subsequent and minor. St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey are equally a matter of proportional construction, as far as the interior is concerned, and the present writer confesses to more exalted feelings in the greatness and simplicity of St. Paul's than in the comparative littleness and positive complexity of Westminster Abbey. The pointed arches of the Abbey, piercing almost to the triforium sill, are an annoyance and a constructional annoyance; the ragged Corinthian capitals of St. Paul's are only a matter of detail that might be corrected—and that is what we humbly propose as our contribution to this subject.

It is useless to speak of Wren's architecture as heathen; it is not. Some of his churches, that have been modernized in arrangement, appeal as perfectly to

* i. e. with the fully developed Perpendicular or Tudor style.