

## DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE.\*

BY GRANT HELLIWELL.

IN venturing to offer a few remarks on this subject, I do so not with the hope of being able to present anything but what has, in substance, often been stated before. The principles on which domestic or any other kind of architecture are based, never change. They are the same to-day as when the first constructions of man worthy of the name of architecture were built. But the applications of those principles are ever changing, and will continue to do so as long as man continues a builder.

This fact renders apology needless; moreover, apart from the deeply absorbing interest with which the subject is invested on its own account, it must ever be a living question with architects, since in the very nature of things, the larger part of the average architect's own living is directly connected with it.

Domestic architecture may very well be considered in two aspects, the first general and the second specific or individual. The former may be likened to the case of a man, who, from some eminence looks out upon a scene of Nature's making. As his eye travels over space, trees, hills, valleys, brooks and ponds, all combine to form a scene of beauty charming alike to vision and to sense. The second aspect is likened to the same man, who, having descended from his vantage ground, concentrates his sight and attention on the foliage of some specific tree or the entrancing beauty of some particular flower. This little analogy, however, is only relatively correct as it must be admitted that the architectural achievements of man seldom if ever bear a favorable comparison with those of Nature's architect.

Taking up then our subject in its general aspect, the impression produced on the mind of an observant person by our residential architecture depends largely, not only on the buildings themselves but on their approaches and surroundings, the disposition of trees and shrubbery and the arrangement of the walks and terraces. That these most important adjuncts to architecture are often overlooked or entirely ignored cannot be disputed and yet their importance can hardly be overestimated. It would perhaps not be too much to say that many dwellings, beautiful in themselves, are so marred and disfigured by their surroundings that their intrinsic architectural worth is almost wholly unknown, while many another house, commonplace and inartistic in design, is so beautified by the accessories of landscape as to attract and delight the eye of all beholders.

Especially in outlying or rural districts has the architect opportunities to obtain pleasing effects impossible in the case of city dwellings. Here not only does the unlimited ground area admit of landscape architecture in perfection, but the natural and topographical characteristics of the site, will, in the hands of a skillful and judicious artist, furnish the key note of the design for the dwelling, and form the basis of a combination, beautiful and satisfying because of the perfect concord of all its parts. If the location is rugged and precipitous and the horizon sharply broken by the peaks of tall pines or rocky crags, every sense of fitness and harmony would be violated by a design in which the prevailing lines were long and level and all features of the building uniform and symmetrical.

We would look rather for an irregular treatment—high roofs and pinnacles—a broken angular skyline, and a general air of rough vigor and strength. On the other hand should the site be on the sea shore, low and flat with level sand beach and horizon unbroken either towards land or water, then a long, straight roof line, broad verandahs and a general horizontality of style and restfulness of feeling would seem to be compatible with the surroundings. On the materials with which buildings are constructed and the colors of those materials much also will depend if a pleasing, artistic and harmonious effect would be produced.

In the case of the dwelling with weird and rugged environment rough stone or brick of quiet hues for the walls and a dull dark roof would seem most suitable; while for the house on the sea shore or among green fields and shady gardens, lighter and more cheerful materials might be used, with brighter and more varied coloring.

Nor is the principle here laid down to be applied only to rural work. If we examine any architecture recognized as of superior merit, either in this or older lands, we will find the treatment adopted wholly due to natural surroundings and climatic influence; and this is doubtless the chief secret of architectural success. The methods of building were not based on mere whim or fancy, but were the direct result of the practical principles of

utility and common sense controlled by a highly cultivated taste for the beautiful.

Take for example the countries of Holland and Belgium or the northern parts of France. Here a picturesque and strongly marked sky line is a striking characteristic of their buildings, a characteristic which may be clearly traced to the natural forces just alluded to. The admiration generally bestowed on these buildings, not to speak of their reproduction in many other lands, bears testimony to their excellence.

As another notable illustration of the same principle, take the architecture of southern Europe, universally conceded to rank amongst the finest architectural achievements of man. In this case the prevailing atmospheric conditions are clear air and bright sunshine, conditions admirably suited to accentuate the contrasts of light and shade. With a keen appreciation of these facts the builders of Italy, for instance, employed methods well calculated to obtain excellent results. Projecting balconies and deeply recessed wall openings, fine and delicately moulded or carved ornament, the free use of color, and everything executed in harmonious and suitable materials all combine to produce buildings which have for ages been an unending source of pleasure and delight.

Until these fundamental principles govern the architecture of our own country we cannot hope for similar success. In studying these fine examples of old work with a view to improvement, it is not the combination of external features, perfect as that is, nor yet the exquisite refinement of detail, much as he may learn from it, that should engross the student's attention. Unless the principles underlying the surface are not only discovered but actually put into practise, but little good will be accomplished.

Suppose one of the well-known facades of Venice, with its profusion of delicate ornament, its glowing colors, the projecting features shining with light, the recessed doorways darkened in shadow and the whole reflected in the blue waters of the Grand Canal. Suppose such a facade transported to one of the streets of a northern town. Imagine those balconies decorated with huge icicles, the interstices of carving and ornament filled with snow. Instead of bright light and deep shadow a dull flat appearing front backed by a duller sky, and we have about as incongruous a picture as the mind could conjure up.

This may be an exaggerated case, but is not a similar mistake, only in lesser degree, too commonly made, with the result that the whole tone of our architecture is correspondingly lowered.

Among the chief characteristics of any town are the disposition and contour of the streets, the sky line formed by the roofs of the buildings, the chimneys, gables and lines of cornices. The architect who has the knowledge and skill to take advantage of broken or uneven sites, to bring the various features of his design into harmony or pleasing contrast with the adjoining buildings or the landscape is to be congratulated. Were this taste and skill more frequently displayed there would be far less of that painful incongruity and discord with which the usual unpicturesque and prosaic conglomeration of roofs and stacks and gables offends, often unknowingly, the eye.

In this connection it will not be out of place to refer to a very common fault in street architecture, that is the treatment of flankages. How many instances can we recall when the flank wall of some dwelling rears its ungraceful sky line obtrusively above the roofs of adjoining houses. Apparently all the resources of its architect were exhausted on the front, leaving not a single idea to expend upon the flank, which stands, grim and bare, a lasting disfigurement and reproach.

Such treatment as this is an infringement of the unwritten law of decency and good taste. Surely something might have been done to make the plain wall tolerable to the eye, even by merely carrying the lines of cornice or mouldings along the sides by means of stone bands or brick sailing courses, to say nothing of some simple design in panel or arcade, either flush or slightly sunk; and just here the writer would like to express his appreciation of a very simple, inexpensive, and to his mind pleasing and effective example in the case of a prominent store building in our own city, whose immense and towering flank has been thus treated.

Another general impression made on the mind of the observer of our domestic architecture, is that of its variety. In some of the finest cities in Europe, notably Paris, fault has been found with the monotonous effect produced by the similarity in design of its buildings. With some few exceptions, that is not a prevailing condition on this side the Atlantic. A close study of nature reveals the marvellous beauties of variety, and in following her example we are not likely to err. While, however, nature gives

\*Read before the Architectural Guild of Toronto, on Jan. 7th, 1896.