

A Model Public Library.

Sir Caspar Purdon Clarke recently charged New York with having few or no satisfactory buildings. What the city had, he said, were pieces of scenery instead of buildings—that is, they were structures having elaborate facades of stone, and backs of plain bricks. Front and back bore no correspondence to each other. Such a criticism can not be brought against the new public library building. The structural unity of its design is, according to a writer in the New York Tribune, one of the distinguishing features of the building conceived by Messrs. Carrere & Hastings. It has been 'developed with jealous thought of the use to which it is to be put, and as you emerge from the interior you reflect chiefly upon its fitness, upon the way in which everything in it has seemed to fall harmoniously into its place.' This fact in its most obvious aspect may be seen in the rear facade. Says the writer:

"The masonry beneath the arched windows of the main reading room is pierced by twenty-six narrow strip-like openings to admit light into the stack room. The problem was excessively difficult, for it meant the breaking up of an immense wall surface where there were no horizontal divisions demanding structural definition, and the architects were between the two dangers of making their wall commonplace and dead or teasing it with meaningless decorative expedients. But they remembered the beauty of such close columnar effects as exist, for instance, in the Temple of Jupiter at Baalbec, and, using again that restraint to which other parts of their building owe so much, they gave the outside of the stack room wall an extraordinarily fresh and light character, a character as of really living architecture. In contrast to the other facades, this one may strike the uninitiated as a rather bare and perfunctory affair; but let the observer who wants to grasp the true strength of this building look carefully at the back of it, and, remembering that he is looking at the stack room and the reading room, ask himself if those rooms are not vividly proclaimed to him in just the arrangement of wall and windows that he sees. Let him consider, too, how these features, the cornice and the roof above them, hold together with the corner pavilions, and how the latter satisfy his eye, bearing just the right relation to the walls they flank. It is odd that after going through this process and noting incidentally the effectiveness of the little reading room balconies and the carved frieze below them he will conclude that this is not the ordinary neglected 'back' of a building, but a beautiful piece of architectural design."

In this rear facade the classical style is reduced to its simplest terms. More emphasis is laid upon the north and south walls, while the point is "raised, of course, to an even higher power." The writer continues:

"The strength of these principal facades resides in the simple, clear, and thoroughly monumental articulation of their parts. The central motive on the Fifth avenue side, the triple arched portico, has a just degree

of projection, and the pillared section on either side, with its windows, is so designed as to line and mass that, while sufficiently subordinated to the portico aforesaid it is also sufficiently emphasized for its own sake. So, likewise, the corners have their proper accents, but do not unduly assert themselves. The relation of the length of the building to its height is admirably fixed. It might be called a long, low edifice, but the attics, looming up above the outer roof line, provide the needed corrective. Outside the library, as within it, a grave dignity rules, ornament being sparsely used and the little of it that is introduced being handled with severe taste."

The main entrance, on Fifth avenue, is "precisely in the key of an institution of learning." Inside one notes that "the architects have avoided the note of excessive spaciousness which would befit only some great exposition building or a place of public entertainment." "The vaulted entrance hall, from which the staircases rise on either side, is a work of massive simplicity, and it may be noted in passing that the stone piers, arches, and roof of this part of the building all illustrate the sincerest kind of construction. We have here not a scheme of steel with a thin facing of richer material, but a remarkable piece of pure masonry."

But the building when completed will contain three hundred rooms, vaults, and halls. It will have a total floor space of 375,000 square feet, or nearly nine acres. The room of most interest to the general public—the main reading room—is described in these words:

"The bare brick walls, now rising to a roof webbed with steel, are hardly more austere than they will be when they are sheathed, but to relieve their simplicity the room will have a magnificently decorated ceiling. The architects have had, too, a fortunate inspiration in the matter of the administrative machinery indispensable to this room. They have designed, to be thrown across its centre, a sort of double screen, within which the reading room attaches will perform their duties. Large enough to break and accent the long horizontal lines of the room, but not so large as to disturb the grand effect of the whole, this screen is one of the cleverest touches which Messrs. Carrere & Hastings have put to their credit. To have been clever, to have made one episode after another in their broad design fairly charming, is one of their chief merits. Experience has shown that it is an easy thing for an architect to make a public building dull and heavy, or, in the effort to avoid those defects, to be restless and even vulgar. In our new library the golden mean seems to have been reached. The interior is animated and airy, though it is also majestic. There are certain minor features, like the screen mentioned above, the series of pillars in the central exhibition room on the first floor, the pillared vestibule on the Forty-second street side, and the staircase, likewise in that part of the building, which are especially to be signaled out for the quality of grace that is in them. Yet in the long run, analysis comes back to the bold structural unity of the design."

The great room for the storage of books gives some