

AN "ART NOUVEAU" HOUSE IN PARIS.

The Parisian who, starting from the Bois de Boulogne or from the Place de l'Etoile, walks along the Avenue Victor Hugo and turns into the Rue Saint-Didier, sees on his left an edifice of very novel aspect. In front, fenced off from the street by an ornamental railing of light construction, there is a court-yard, partly covered, and on the left of this court-yard a building of a character hard to define, but which gives one the idea of a chapel whose distinctive signs are hidden by details thoroughly modern in style. Behind the court-yard and chapel stands a spacious hall, the dome of which dominates all the rest. This hall is fitted up for concerts. Everyone who passes in front of the edifice asks himself: "Whatever can this be? What is this mixture of things so dissimilar—a court-yard, a chapel and a concert hall?" What it has been intended to build at No. 60, Rue Saint-Didier is an edifice of a special kind, comprising two things, namely, a public hall and a patronage. (A patronage is a sort of school where the children and young people who attend it are taught morality and religion.)

This edifice is called the "Ecole Humbert de Romans," after an ancient monk known by his writings on religious art, and particularly on sacred music. It is also a monk, the Pere Lavy, belonging to the Dominican order, who is the originator of this edifice. His idea was that it should be a school of divine art—a sort of religious and popular Conservatoire. Thanks to his great influence among wealthy people in Paris, the Pere Lavy succeeded in collecting about £40,000 for the erection of his academy. What interests us is the structure itself, the architect of which is M. Hector Guimard, who came into prominence as an exponent of the new architecture when he designed the stations of the Paris Metropolitan Railroad.

The edifice in the Rue Saint-Didier had to comprise a concert hall capable of holding from 1,500 to 2,000 persons. It had to have a gallery. On one side there was to be a stage, with a grand organ at the back of it. Besides the hall itself there were to be the necessary subsidiary buildings, such as the cloakrooms, lavatories, vestibules and so forth. The establishment also had to have a janitor's lodge, a chapel 27 metres long by 8 metres in width for the accommodation of the Pere Lavy, and a patronage communicating directly with the hall.

The principal facade, as already stated, is on the Rue Saint-Didier. In front of its central part, however, there is a fairly spacious court-yard, separated from the street by an ornamental iron railing 7ft. high. Entering by the doorway on the right, one first reaches an outer vestibule, in which there is a vestiary, fitted up in such a manner that the garments are hung upon pegs. Two other vestibules lead out of this first one, and the effect is that the hall has wide exits on three of its sides. These vestibules all have a floor in pink imitation marble with a pattern of lilies and golden nenuphars. They are built of stone, iron and cement, like all the lower part of the edifice, and thus are practically fireproof. They communicate with the hall by a continuous row of doors, which arrangement is very convenient and constitutes, moreover, a safeguard in case of fire.

The hall is 29 yds. long and 25 yds. wide. It is formed of a visible structure, springing from the ground at each corner and spreading in curves like the branches

of an immense tree, in a way which gives one some what the idea of a corner of a Druidic forest. The main branches, eight in number, support a rather high cupola, pierced, like the sides, with bays filled with pale yellow stained-glass, through which an abundance of light finds its way into the hall. The framework is of steel, but the metal is covered with mahogany in all visible places. What is in reality a thin strip of steel thus has the appearance of a thick beam. The pillars, for example, measure as much as 20 in. by 15 in. at the foot and 11½ in. at the top. The principal rafters also measure 11½ in. each way, and the principal tie-beams begin with 15½ in. and finish with 10 in. on each face. Nevertheless, the tie-beam being 35 ft. long has a light and elegant appearance, owing to the great distance between the supporting points. Three hundred cubic meters of mahogany were used for the framework, and the result is the most elaborate roof ever conceived by a French architect. The mahogany is polished, has a warm red colour, and stands out from voussoirs of the ceiling, which are painted orange colour, shaded gradually lighter in the direction of the spectators. These voussoirs, between the rafters, are in plaster, decorated with antique masks and with trumpeters in the corners. A part of the ornamentation has been done in sheet-iron and forged iron platbands. To the arched buttresses electric lamps are fixed in groups of twelve, having the appearance of branches of strange fruit on foliations of iron.

At the bottom of the hall there is a platform or stage, and a fine organ with forty-four stops, built by Abbey. The case of the instrument is of mahogany, in the same style as the hall. The stage is large enough to hold 100 musicians and 120 choristers.

The hall contains 1,150 numbered seats, but there is so much unoccupied space that an audience of 1,500 or 1,600 could easily be accommodated. The armchairs are roomy, with plenty of space between each row, and they are placed quincunx-wise, in order that everybody may have a clear view of the stage. These chairs have a light cast-iron frame in the form of branches; the seat is of green leather, stamped with curves and volutes. Two staircases lead to the upper floor, which is provided with armchairs similar to those in the hall below. On the left there is a spacious room suitable for use as a lobby or as a promenade. The balcony of this floor is in iron, and it is decorated, like the balustrades of the two staircases, with lyres and musical notes. The acoustic properties of the concert hall are excellent. It vibrates extremely well, and has no annoying echo. It is an ideal hall for stringed instruments and for the voice. It vibrates almost too much for brass instruments, which have to be moderated. M. Camille Saint-Saens gave some valuable hints in this connection, and it was upon his advice that M. Guimard, in order to obtain the requisite sonorousness, planned a proper distance between the ceiling and the roof of the hall, so that they should have a cushion of air between them.

The exterior of the edifice is built of free-stone, with certain parts in millstone, brick and iron. The carving, which is interesting here and there by reasons of its fanciful treatment, has been done from models composed by M. Guimard himself, who also designed all the ornamental tiles.—The Builders' Journal.