

## ORNAMENTAL TROLLEY POLES.

Many experiences of the vulgarity of standard objects of utility, which are made ornamental, makes one receive without much enthusiasm an announcement that American ornamental trolley poles have come into the market.

The best ornament for utilitarian objects is the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit; and, when the object is a trolley pole, the primary beauty is most emphatically the grace of uprightness. Overhead



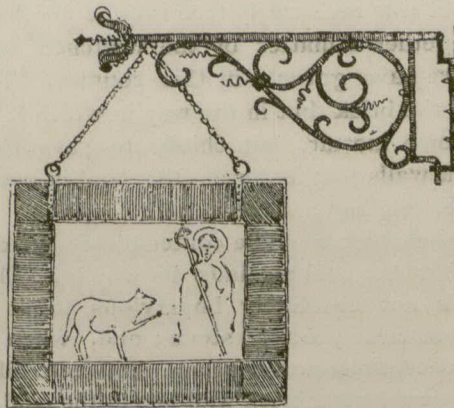
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE VERTICAL LINE IN CITIES,  
AS SEEN BY HARRY FURNISS.  
(From the Windsor Magazine.)

wires of any kind are an injury to civic beauty and the ultimate aim must be to get rid of them; but their evil influence is much mitigated if the poles which carry them are plumb. This is all that is required of double poles. Their purpose requires no excrescence of any kind and there is therefore no occasion for ornament. Single poles, which have an arm on either side or on both, are susceptible of improvement by care in their structural design. There is a junction to be redeemed from crudeness, and proportion to be observed between the vertical member and the arms; also the arms have ends which want emphasis, and, being the ends of a tube, would, for the sake of wearing well, be the better for a cap. At or near this point must be a hold for the wire. That is the sum total of the motives for structural design, and, if they are all satisfied in a simple manner, and the pole is plumb, which it is likely to be, the necessity is met with the least possible offence from the means.

Is it possible to go further and make the poles beautiful by adding ornament? A wrought iron bracket is at once suggested, and the designer of the American ornamental poles is not behind hand. The description of these poles reads: "Under the arm projecting from the top to support the trolley wire, extending from the pole to the end of the arm, is placed an ornamental bracket of scroll work or other design."

It is extremely doubtful whether, even if properly applied, scroll work of one design, executed mechanically and repeated without variation, would prove to be a source of much pleasure. But this application—the only application we are likely to get in the case of trolley poles—reveals its lifelessness in the word "under." The brackets are to go under the arm. The arm will have a separate identity, and we may leave it to the electric railroads' engineer to make sure that it does not depend upon the bracket for support. The bracket will in fact depend from the arm. And

the liberal effort of the railroad company to be beautiful will meet with indifference which, if anyone thinks about it at all, will perhaps seem unaccounted for. Old work of the kind, in the old world, interests them; and this does not. Is it because it is new? Not entirely. Age is an advantage, even to ironwork—in the slight irregularities that come from various causes. But there is more than this. Old work had slight irregularities to begin with, because it was made by hand instead of mechanically, and by eye instead of on a pattern block. For this reason alone no two objects of a kind would be exactly alike, even if of the same pattern. But as there would be little to be gained by following the same pattern exactly, and much to be gained (for the workman as well as for the spectator) in varying the pattern, there would probably be no two exactly alike in design, and the interest would be far greater than when the same design is turned out by the hundred because done mechanically. The chief reason, however, is that the



FROM A SKETCH BY T. F. LAIST, AMERICAN ARCHITECT  
TRAVELLING SCHOLAR.

old design was constructional. The bracket was not an ornamental addition to the arm, it was itself the arm. The top member was little if any thicker than the rest of the bracket. The scroll work was simply a method of making a strong arm out of weak material. It is constructional iron work; a small truss. This, recognized instinctively by the general public and consciously by persons experienced in design, is the bottom reason why old wrought iron work of the kind is interesting, and why a stout cast iron tube, decorated underneath by a scroll of mechanical wrought iron work will be a travesty, and its foolishness will be felt even by those who do not know wherein it is foolish.

A further question arises:—whether, if the railroad company were zealous enough about beauty to have all its trolley-arms made of true scroll-work; wrought by hand, and of design varied as the fancy of the workman directed him; whether, in that case, complete satisfaction would be reached. Hardly, for here comes in another point of difference between us and earlier days. This was the mediaeval workman's natural way of accomplishing the end. He worked with small bars of wrought iron; we cast and roll iron of any shape and size; and the obvious way of making a trolley-arm now is to cast a pipe of sufficient diameter and fit it into a socket on the vertical post. This is the basis of the modern designer's problem. If it is of no avail to make it beautiful by tacking the beautiful mediaeval structure underneath, it is equally a sham, though more difficult to recognize as a source of failure, to make a true design in the mediaeval manner. Assuming the work to be equally well designed and