

ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION.—1900.*

By EDEN SMITH.

Last year The Architectural Eighteen Club, of Toronto, was invited by some members of the Ontario Association of Architects to give criticisms of the Association's work and suggestions for the better co-operation of architects in the interest of the profession.

An impromptu paper was read by a representative of the Architectural Eighteen Club at the Annual Convention of the Association, in January of this year, in which a suggestion of improvement in the matter of education excited enough interest to lead to the formation of a joint committee chosen from the Association and the Eighteen Club, to enquire into and report on this suggestion. The report this committee drew up was favorably received, and another committee was elected to get the scheme into working order, which it is now endeavoring to do.

We have no generally approved and accepted course of training for the architectural student. The usual system of a few years' apprenticeship in an average architect's office cannot be seriously taken as sufficient. That it really is not, is evident from the many attempts to supplement it with courses in Art schools and colleges and various systems of training; some of them very valuable to the student who is able to avail himself of them, although he finds himself after all his pains, placed in the eyes of the community on an equal footing with one who has obtained only the scantiest office training.

We have no system which gains the approval of architects as a body, as being the best course a student can follow to get an efficient training in that many sided business, the practice of architecture has become—"The harmonious association of all the crafts"—to use the words of Mr. Lethaby in an article in the "Quest," July 1896, on "Art, the Crafts and the Function of Guilds."

"That architecture is an association of such varied things as are some of the crafts, makes the education of an architect a matter of no small difficulty."

Architects have formed societies, with the intention of mutually advancing their own interests and that of architecture for the good of the community.

If it will not irreparably damage the dignity of the profession to compare these societies for a little while with a trade guild, we may get food for thought from some remarks of Mr. Lethaby's. In this same article he says:—

"Whatever the trade societies do or leave undone, they must ultimately if they are to continue, take up the overlooking of quality in the common interest. If society generally, gets to understand that the Unions, as far as may be, are interesting themselves in the quality of commodities, it will soon pay back the debt in sympathy."

Our commodity is architecture; it is our business as Guilds to improve the quality or raise the standard of it, and instead of grumbling at the community for its want of sympathy we "must discuss materials and methods and build up a new tradition of beautiful craftsmanship, and become by means of our societies responsible to the community."

First of the "materials and methods" must be the matter of education.

Some societies have established a system of qualifying for membership by means of examination, but without any sufficient course of education, but those interested in the subject of education, know now that education without examinations is of more value than examination without good education. If we are to be responsible to the community for the craft we must see to the making of the craftsman, and establish a standard of education.

In his work, the harmonious association of all the crafts, an architect should be one of the first to understand the most effective and economical way of combining different kinds of workers to get the most effective whole; but the fact that in his own education no system yet meets with general approval, seems to point out that this work has been neglected.

In the hope that this work may be further studied and experimented upon until some economical system is made known, approved of and adopted by the various societies, the following suggestions are offered:

The objection to the present system of apprenticeship in an architect's office, is that it is not possible to teach in the average office some things which are parts of the necessary mental equipment of an architect, and some of them only with great difficulty in any office, so that the student has to obtain them elsewhere. Some students may do this; many do not.

This inequality of training is a serious hindrance to the development of architecture, beside the fact that the well trained architect has to compete all along the line with the untrained one, who has learned in the office that part of his profession only which can be learned there, the commercial side, and who generally poses as the practical business man, which means a great deal to the employer who pays for the work. The student left to his own guidance develops himself in such an unsystematic way, that we hear such names as an "artist architect," which suggest to the business-like employer something impracticable, lacking such qualities as are suggested in the name "engineer," the man of exact science, as to be almost the opposite of it.

It is this separation of Science and Art which so tells against Art in this scientific age.

In bygone ages, the age of architectural precedent, the architect was the scientific man, or at least kept pace with the practical science of his time. Now through the fault of our training we have let science get so far ahead of us that the thought of looking one way for precedence and another way for progress, points out the gap between Science and Art.

The most important work of the art education of to-day is to repair that breach.

If the element of quality in workmanship or art has been brutalized in the name of science we have to find out how to debrutalize it.

We must recognize that the architect as well as being a business man and an artist, must be a man of science.

For the purpose of developing a scheme of education it would be well to think of these three things as divisions of his work: The art, science and business or craft of architecture, neither one of these greater or less than either of the others, but all of them equally necessary to form the symmetrical whole; all equally important for the sake of the community.

How, when and where each of these divisions may be best studied we may find out by examining the present system's weaknesses.

The office, though the best place for a business training, is a poor place as a rule for scientific instruction, and the average office at least, for art study.

The college is not a good place for business training, and is not likely to be the best for art study, while scientific instruction, because the mental training this requires depends so much on the routine, proper progression and relation of the various sciences, is best acquired in a scholastic manner, under such competent professors as are found in our School of Practical Science, and not picked up in a haphazard manner in his later years, which the student even with difficulty finds is the best he can do now. It should have become part of his mental equipment, part of his thinking machinery as soon as he attempts to design.

We know a designer must understand the nature and functions of the materials with which he expresses himself. This is a scientific age. In these things he needs not only information, but training in the beginning to give him ease in the artistic use of them—not to come on them as obstacles which impede his work, and have to be laboriously mastered, or put aside as something which interferes with the present uncritical adaptation of dead precedent.

The time for acquiring this habit can only be found in the beginning of his career and for a few years, while time and opportunities for the other branches of his study may be found all the rest of his life. It need hardly be pointed out why a college course is not an effective training for the business part or craft of architecture, the harmonious association of all the crafts, to understand which, one must live among them, and be where the real difficulties come and where the problems are practically worked out.

And for the same reasons an art is never so well taught in a school or by professional teachers, as by real workers in that art, who live by the practice and not by the teaching of it, as in the atelier or studio where the patrons or masters are the men who have faced and worked out the live problems of the day, and who give that most valuable of all gifts, enthusiasm, and where the change and variety of teachers, of opinions and criticism, shines light in from the most diverse sources on every object.

We think that the practice of architecture has not the position in modern progress it should hold, because it is so imperfectly taught that few persons know what it is, and the first and best thing architectural societies can do for architecture is to raise the standard of the architect by fostering only the best scheme of education—not by legal restrictions and examinations without anything which could be called education, but by education first, and that this is the best way to earn the sympathy and good will of the community.

We believe that the system of a few years of indenture in an office can never be considered a sufficient training, but should be supplemented with a course in a school of science and studio or atelier arranged concurrently with the years of indenture.

The system proposed by the joint committee of the Ontario Association of Architects and the Architectural Eighteen Club of Toronto, is:

The student shall first pass the matriculation examination of the Toronto University, and then take transferable articles for a period of five years, during which time he will follow a specially arranged scientific course at the School of Practical Science, of so many hours per week, and a studio course of two months in the third, fourth and fifth years of his indenture, passing periodical examinations in practical office work.

* Paper read before the Architectural League of America.