

ARCHITECTURE AS A SOCIAL ART.*

Prof. Shortt : Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen : I come before an architectural organization with a great deal of diffidence, because I cannot say that I am even an amateur in architecture, but simply a much interested reader on architectural subjects, and much given to the observation of buildings and other products of architecture, and of the allied arts. I had written out my paper, but from the nature of the questions with which I wished to deal, and which were mainly suggestive, I thought it was rather too stiff, and looked altogether too important for the matters I had to bring up; I wish, therefore, the members present to understand that what I am throwing out is simply a series of suggestions with reference to some problems which have presented themselves to my mind. In considering the subject of architecture as a social art, the question arose, Whence came this art? What forces have determined its growth and what is its significance for the public at the present time? You will see, therefore, that the line which I am to take is not one which concerns itself with the technical aspect of architecture, but rather with its relation to the people. Each art has its special votaries who understand its details, its principles, and so on; but these arts, and architecture above all others, have a special significance for the public. Therefore, the question arises, how did the public come to be interested in architecture, and what is its significance for them?

Now, in this respect it seems to me that architecture, in common with several other arts, is not on the basis of most of the sciences, and particularly not on the basis of a science such as mathematics. The determination of the artistic or proper features of architecture are not to be worked out as we work out the fact that the three interior angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. When we have discovered that proposition we have discovered something that was eternally true and will be true for all times. When we have discovered a principle in art, it does not necessarily rest upon the same basis, for it may be modified very greatly as time goes on; and the problem, therefore, which I have set before myself, and on which I wish to make some suggestions is, Whence arose this feature of architecture, and what is its significance? It seems to me that here we are face to face with a problem that is incident to the beginning of human interests. What were those beginnings? They were connected with the fact that man had to make his own way on this earth, that is, they are connected with the struggle for existence.

I say the foundations of architecture are associated with the foundations of man's living on the earth. Self-preservation, therefore is the fundamental feature. At first sight it may seem strange that self-preservation should have any connection with architecture, yet the connection is quite real and vital. When we come to consider what it is that has built up mankind, his interests, his senses, and his feelings, what we discover is, that the stimulus has followed two lines:—the seeking of that which is favorable to the race, and the avoiding of that which is unfavorable or destructive. There is a common myth abroad that the beginnings of human interests were individual, that the struggle for existence is the struggle of the individual to

maintain itself. That is not a fact, as can be found by investigations all the way back through man and the animals too. The instincts that are registered in humanity and the animal are instincts for the preservation of the race. Another false conception is that the pleasurable feelings are associated with preservation and the painful feelings with destruction. Now, as a rule, pleasurable feelings are associated with preservation and the maintenance of existence, and many of the painful feelings with destruction, but not all. And I think that none of our secondary interests would be maintained, or would indeed have existed had only the pleasurable feelings been developed. Thus, we find that, going no further back than the savage, when we ask what it is that is registered in primitive man, what is his interest in this, that and the other thing, we find it due to that minute and careful study of nature forced upon him by the avoidance of his enemies and the pursuit of his prey. Thus, the accurate knowledge which the savage acquires from his close study of the bent twig or the crushed leaf, of the trail of the various animals and of all nature's conditions, is the outcome of ages of specialization in which he has had to attain to accurate experience of these before he ever waked to a secondary interest in them. Thus the eye was not formed to see beautiful colors, or fine forms, or anything of that kind; the eye was formed as a concentration of a certain nervous structure in the body for self-preservation; and so with the other organs which in lower animals are simply diffused feeling, but in the higher animals, and in man particularly, are aggregated into special senses with special functions for preservation; but there comes in connection with them the secondary satisfaction in succeeding, and the horror of failure which is associated again with the preservation of the race. Again we notice in the domestic animals as well as in wild animals, that when an animal has not its full capacity drawn upon in the pursuit of prey, in the avoidance of enemies, or in its other functions of life, it simulates the familiar process, and the animal plays at that which is its life-work. And you will notice that the wild animal and the domestic animal not only take pleasure in stimulating joyful feeling, but they alarm and strike terror into each other, taking interest in developing that side as well as the other: thus the comedy and the tragedy of life are remotely born in man and are there before they ever come to a conscious condition at all. But eventually man relates these things to a purpose. He acquires an interest in life that is not merely that of incidentally obeying instincts, but that undertakes to take hold of these and make something of a purpose in life, within the spiritual continuity and unity which is expressed in humanity; that spiritual unity is the one great feature of humanity, not the elements that it unites. The elements that it unites are animal elements, the senses and physical needs. But it is the spiritual unity that gives them meaning, that first of all takes these elementary purposes and moulds them into some connected view of life. Now the first phases of that connected view of life, as we see, are associated with the interest in the secondary features of animal life. It is there that the significance of the arts for human life comes in. How is it that man should come to unify any of the feelings connected with the senses along an artistic line? What is the force behind the expression? Well, it is usually a force connected with awe and fear, rather than with im-

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