

How to Understand Architecture.

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It is a commonplace to say that Art reflects the civilization of its day but it is perhaps worth noting that this truth applies in a particular degree to the Art of Architecture. The musician or the Poet may compose in secret. Their works may be all unknown to their own Generation and may be appreciated only by posterity. Though their work cannot escape from that culture of which they are themselves a part yet it may be highly individual and may reflect that culture only partially.

But the Architect is controlled in his art. External conditions are laid upon him which he cannot evade. He must use the materials prescribed by law or obtainable in commerce. He must conform to the habits of life and to the ideas of comfort of his clients. He must conform also very largely to their ideals of beauty, to their prepossessions and their prejudices. It is a much more serious business undertaking to build a general store than to paint a picture and in consequence the general store reflects the ideals of the Business community more faithfully than the picture ever can.

This control of the Art of Architecture by external considerations has been deplored, it has been reckoned as lowering that art, but, should it be so regarded? I think not. Rather must we who are architects and who study architecture rejoice that our art is a true reflection of our times, true for good or for evil. but incapable of deceit if only properly read. If we would understand Architecture we must understand it as a historical document, some pages blurred, some coarse in printing but many, and they the most, bright with illumination and telling the history of our civilization in the noblest characters.

And all unknown to the writers this history of civilization is still being written. As it is written unconsciously so it is written truthfully. In the buildings today being erected in Montreal we may read the inner mind of the Community far more truthfully than in the public press or on the public platform. For the speaker may design

to lead us astray whilst the unconscious evidence of the building will never do so.

Today we attach great value to Knowledge. It is even a little difficult to realise that Knowledge was not always as highly valued as it is today. The ancient Greeks for instance seem to have valued subtilty of thought more than Knowledge, yet they were a civilized people. The men of ~~the~~ Middle Ages~~es~~ certainly valued feeling more than Knowledge. In the XII century if you knew too much you were in danger of the stake. The matter of ~~in~~ importance was to believe the right things and to have a certain emotional feeling. Knowledge as such was not highly valued.

Today on the other hand we must know certain things or we are uneducated. We may believe and feel as we like - nobody cares. We have almost reversed the values of our ancestors.

This change is reflected in our architecture. Like the other arts, Architecture is on its aesthetic side ~~zzzzzzz~~ a means of expressing emotion. At the present day then we may expect it to express this love for Knowledge and I think that we shall find that this is the case.

The scientific historical study of Architecture begins in fact in the middle of the XVIII century. In 1762 Stuart and Revett published the "Antiquities of Athens" one of the first books on Classical Architecture which had any pretense of Accuracy. In 1805 Britton published the "Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain" dealing with Gothic Architecture, and from that day to this there has been a continual stream of books giving accurate information on the buildings of the past, arranging them classifying them and discriminating them into "Styles" and "Periods" until today the bones of the past are spread before us arranged, labelled and dead, quite quite dead.

Knowledge is not Art. It is a useful tool for the artist, and some degree of it is no doubt necessary, but no amount of Knowledge will ever make an artist or produce a work of art.

We used to think it could. We used to value an historical picture by the pedantic accuracy of its details and artists went to much trouble to ascertain the exact cut of King Charles' breeches. Today we know that as such accuracy is quite impossible and quite useless in Art if it were possible, it is better to leave it all out and get on with the real work of Art. But in Architecture ^{XX} ~~wxxxxxxx~~ there are still those who think that such knowledge will make great buildings. We are suffering from too much knowledge, though possibly the cure is a little more.

If I may be allowed to indicate the attitude of the public towards Architecture today- it is, roughly-

- (1) There are a number of "Styles of Architecture" each with appropriate forms and shapes. Anyone can tell "Gothic for instance it has pointed arches. Classic has columns.
- (2) The Architect knows all these styles and will build in any one of them you may select.
- (3) You may use any of them you like. You may even use several of them together. The outside of the House ~~is~~ may be colonial, the diningroom Georgian, the Drawingroom is usually Louis XV the kitchen old Dutch, the smokingroom Jacobean and the fortunate owner probably surreptitiously gets an attic somewhere which is no style at all but just a common comfortable room. It is probably in consequence the only bit of real architecture in the house.
- (4) Certain "Styles" are necessary for certain buildings. So Churches are "Gothic" They may be "Pure Early English" "Decorated" or Perpendicular" Banks are Classic and so on.
- (5) An Architect always copies some old building or other this is called "Adaptation"
- (6) Furniture is arranged in "Periods" instead of "Styles" These can be obtained from the Department Store and must be adhered to.

I do not think that this is a caricature. It seems genuinely to be the attitude of the educated public towards Architecture. Certainly such statements as "Christchurch Cathedral is in the purest decorated Gothic"

or "The church of St Soandso is copied (or adapted) from the old basilica of St Plagiariast in Librario you know" Such statements, I say, are constantly made and believed. Besides they show the knowledge of the speaker to good effect.

But if Architecture is to live again, and there is a creaking in her old bones, we must understand that all these "Styles " are fictions. They do not exist and never did. They were the inventions of a pedantic XIX century. There is no such thing as a pure "Style" The classifications of Styles are useful only to students and to historians. They never existed in reality and they do not exist today.

Also, no self respecting Architect ever copies.

But let us go back to the epochs of great Architecture in the past and see whether these ideas as to "Styles ever obtained when great building was being done.

It is, I suppose, known to all of you that the Classic Greeks built all their buildings in the Classic Greek Style. They did not build their Churches in the Egyptian or their banks in the Babylonian. They only built one style and they did not know that it was either classic or Greek. It was just the way that buildings were made and in every building they strove with all the power and all the subtilty of the most artistic race in the world, to make that building the best yet built. Every temple is different, the style changed even as it was being formed and the day a building was finished it was already oldfashioned. What then is the "Pure Greek Style" when the Greeks ne ver built twice the same. It is difficult to illustrate this as the buildings are so largely in ruins, but we will see what we can.

1 Parthenon. The Parthenon at Athens is generally regarded
2 as pure Greek. Its Architecture was originally filled
3. *Riverford* with the most beautiful sculpture and it was painted in gay colours from top to bottom, gold and blue and red and white.

1 Theseion. *mod d* The Parthenon Sculpture is of course now preserved in the British Museum but the "Theseion" still retains much. The slide shows the Metopes on the south side.

Now, about the beginning of the XIX century the City of Edinburgh was possessed of the idea that, as it resembled ancient Athens in intellect, so it should resemble it in Architecture also. Modern Athens began to build in the "Purest Greek style" The Royal Institution is one of the best results. The forms of the columns and capitals are faithfully copied from the Parthenon but in place of gleaming marble is grey sandstone, in place of the sculptures of Pheidias are commonplace laurel wreaths. in place of bright colour a dead monotony, finally in place of the blue sky of Greece the grey clouds too common in the north.

The Treasury at Washington, built in 1834 -41 is another copy of the Parthenon, balder, duller and more uninteresting, in fact purer, than the Edinburgh building. These are caricatures rather than copies.

To return to ancient Greece, about 354 B.C. Queen Artemisia built a tomb for her dead husband, Mausolos, Prince of Caria. So Great a monument was it that all great tombs are still called Mausoleum. It is now destroyed but Dr A Adler has, with much learning, produced a restoration.

A few years ago a society in Washington commissioned a well known Architect to build for them a hall. I do not know what pressure they brought to bear but here is the result. For the Design of the exterior at any rate the architects of Queen Artemisia did all the thinking two thousand years ago, and, apparently we have stopped thinking ever since. Indeed the building is not quite so good as the original, so we have apparently gone back. Yet this is acclaimed as a "Masterpiece of modern Classic"

Let us come nearer our own day.

Here is a view of the nave of Gloucester Cathedral. The pier arches and the triforium are Norman, the vault is Early English, and sad to say, the great west window is perpendicular. Here is the South porch of Lincoln Cathedral. In it Early English, Decorated and Perpendicular are all combined and all seem to go very well together. Either, and this is very probably the Early English builders

Royal
Inst
2 slides

Treasury

Hellenism
F. S. Sullivan

Lincoln
S. D. W.

did not know how to build perpendicular, or, which is very deplorable in the name of "Purity" the perpendicular builders refused to copy the Early English Style. Yet the result is altogether charming. Our English Cathedrals would lose all their distinctive charm if their style was uniform or "pure" The fact is of course, and I am sure that it is known to you all, that all additions were made in the manner in vogue at the time. A journeyman straying in from some distant town in search of work would bring the news that the builders of that town were using pointed arches. They were more easily built and were stronger. Then some one began making patterns in the top of his window and in a few years everyone was designing window tracery, Presently the glass painter came along. "Everyone wants figures of saints in their windows and niches" he said, "You must give me long narrow spaces to put my figures in" besides We are getting tired of those wavy spaces" Straightway a perpendicular window was designed to suit his needs.

This, roughly was how architecture grew. New ideas spread often very slowly, and in different parts of the country styles were often very different. At no time can we say that "Pure Early English" was being built. Early English was always changing and was as pure at one time as at any other.

Lincoln Choir and Eastern Transepts, built in 1192-1200 are generally accepted as pure Early English Gothic.

Wells nave, built by 1206, is a good deal different from Lincoln. Its carving, its mouldings and its ornaments are very easily distinguished from those of Lincoln. Is it therefore less "pure". The South door has chevron forms in it which according to Mr Rickman, belong to the "Norman Style" are these incorrect and due to the ignorance of the builders of Wells.

Canterbury Cathedral Choir, built from 1175 to 1184 is also recognisable as Early English- it shows some French influence, as well it may for its architect came from Sens but he has evidently had to conform his style to an English model. But the Galilee porch of Durham Cathedral, of the

Keep Coll
Chapel.
W.S.M.

Lincoln
choir

Wells
nave

Wells
S.Door

Canterbury
Choir

same date, is pure Norman. Were its builders ignorant?

Oxford Cathedral Choir, built in 1180, has round arches, otherwise it seems to be Early English. Is this ignorance too?

If we go back a few years we find things worse.

Peterborough Cathedral Nave. (1135-75) is pure Norman.

Buldeas Nave of the same date. has pointed arches.

Fountains Nave 1135 has also pointed arches, otherwise it seems to be Norman, and was built at the same time as

Norwich Nave which is pure Norman.

Later periods, in the Rickman sense, are just as bad.

Gloucester Choir (1337-1377) is perpendicular.

Exeter nave. finished in 1350 is decorated

Melrose South transept of the XV century is pure decorated.

It is evident that the builders of mediaeval times cared nothing for purity of style or for consistency in style. Fortunately they had not read Rickman and did not know anything about the periods of English Gothic. How can we select and say that any one of their buildings is pure or impure? Of course all are equally pure, and there is no such thing as "purity of Style" Each designer sought to improve on the past, altering and adding and remodelling as best he could and the new style grew so out of the old that at no moment can we say, "this is now pure" for even at that instant it begins to change into the next style.

Then in the XIX century come Mr Rickman and Mr Bloxham and Mr Sharpe. They cut off neat little sections at suitable intervals and present them as "pure" They collect all the points which are common to a particular period and which are therefore the commonplaces of that period and present them as the unalterable, fixed forms of pure Gothic.

The ~~XXXIX~~ XIII century Builder never dreamt that he was building Early English. He was building the best and most modern buildings that he could, and we will produce no good architecture until we follow his example.

When we say that a building is "Pure Early English" we really mean, built according to the rules for Early English laid down by Mr Rickman, and some rebels today are inclined

to throw over Mr Rickman. We certainly do not mean, built as a XIII century builder would have built it. He would have designed it in the most modern manner of his day. and without any reference to the building of five centuries ago.

A student once asked my advice as to how best to learn the Style of Louis XIV. I suggested that he learn very carefully the Style of Louis XIII and then start designing something fresh. He might just take the same turning as the designers of Old France and produce Louis XIV. But he might not. It seemed the only way, for no amount of study of the remains of Louis XIV⁸ would ever enable anyone to design anything but second-hand archaeological copies.

If we turn from public buildings and Churches to our houses we find matters as bad. Period Houses filled with period rooms furnished with period furniture abound. The diningroom is usually Jacobean, the Drawingroom Louis XV the bedrooms colonial and so on. Indeed the only object not in perfect and pedantic harmony with his surroundings is usually the owner. To be logical he should wear period clothes and eat period food. He should appear at dinner in trunkhose and ruff, change for coffee to a satin coat and periwig and dress as his great grandfather did on going to bed. Our bank managers should wear togas to suit their Roman banks. Our railway ~~xxx~~ officials should be attired as Roman bath attendants. If we will insist in dressing our buildings in fancy dress why not dress ourselves to match.

The other day I was shown a number of designs for small houses to be built in this Province. The plans were admirable, the construction capable and economical, and these excellent little houses were then covered with a cheap imitation of English half timber work. Now half timber building originated in countries where wood, particularly oak was plentiful. The houses were framed up with large beams and the openings between the beams were then filled with plaster or brick. This excellent construction was made a source of ornament by the natural taste of the builders and the half timber houses of England and France a

Sumner
Ludlow.

are as beautiful as any school of Architecture. Their beauty arises from their construction, from the way in which they were built.

But half timber construction has never been used in Canada. It is not suited to our climate. We use a whole timber construction in pine which is more satisfactory for our purposes. Why then attempt to imitate a foreign and unsuitable construction by nailing half inch planks on to a perfectly good brick wall. A walk through Westmount will supply all the examples necessary.

We have, or had, in this Province a tradition of house building both in wood and in stone, native to the province. It is suited to our climate and capable of being built economically. This is the tradition which we should develop. Far from doing so we have killed it in the last fifty years and it is a deplorable fact that the Quebec peasant of fifty years ago could unaided build a more beautiful house than we can today with all our advantages. We have in Quebec destroyed an honest, if a simple architecture and what we are providing in exchange? Sham imitations of English half-timber work.

We have accepted the principle that architecture reflects the culture of its day, and we have seen the results of basing an art upon dry knowledge rather than upon feeling. But no people can exist without emotions and on this continent certain emotions have found outlet in genuine and expressive architecture. We are a commercial people and it is to our commercial buildings that we must look for a true expression of our national character.

This expression has been most pronounced in the United States and particularly in New York. Here the limitations of site, combined with the development of the steel industry, the desire to obtain high rentals and the passion for living in a crowd have led to the buildings going up. The skyscraper is the result, and the skyscraper is genuine architecture. The horrified critics, failing to recognise any of the marks of pure style, condemned them as monstrosities. Yet they are the one genuine contribution

to show
of Quebec
buildings

of America to Architecture and one of them at least, the Woolworth building in New York, is a building of beauty.

The United States is a great commercial country. Her contributions to Art are commercial. Her Churches, her Capitols and her museums are the feeble ghosts of Europe. The skyscrapers are at least American. The accurate and scholarly "adaptations" of European buildings do indeed show the value attached to learning and incidentally that American learning is indiscriminate and still dependent upon Europe. These great nests of offices, with their innumerable windows and their soaring height do convey the ~~xxx~~ vast ambitions and the busy lives of the American business man. On a lower plane the mechanical ornament with which they are covered is a representation of the mechanical dullness of life to which they have condemned their workmen. For good or for bad Architecture lays bare our virtues and our shortcomings. I have read the skyscraper. I invite you all to read Montreal.

The Woolworth in America is indeed the counterpart of Beauvais Cathedral in France. The French Cathedral is the supreme expression of a religious people, the Woolworth that of a commercial people. Beauvais was built in pride to be the biggest Cathedral in France to the Glory of God. The Woolworth to advertise the glory of fifteen cents. Each expresses the ideals which produced it and both are beautiful, as all true art is. That their ideals are not to our minds equally high does not necessarily affect their beauty for art is not concerned with moral ideas, only with expression.

We must think of Architecture as of something national, whose goodness or badness is a reflection of ourselves, and for whose qualities we are ourselves responsible.

The writers and the Scholars who by their works have led us to our present parrot architecture were not themselves artists or architects. The public must share with the architect and must more than share the responsibility for the present state of Architecture. Yet dawn is at hand.

Wainright Bld
St Louis
Marquette Bld
Buffalo
Equitable Bld

Woolworth

There are welcome gleams of light on the horizon. The skyscraper is genuine and expressive, if a little crude. Our houses are improving. It is possible to obtain furniture fine in form and comfortable in use. We are certainly in advance of our fathers.

Architecture is no esoteric mystery, no closed cult. To understand it we must clear our minds of all the pedantry and learning with which it has been surrounded and look about us with some little of that simplicity which we had in childhood. Look ^{about} ~~at~~ our streets with this clear gaze ~~of~~ and you will see ^{us for} what we are, for Architecture is the reflection of our national character and, as such, it is the creation and the responsibility of each one of us.