Rambling Thoughts of "A Glass Man"

Otto Heinigke

"I do not like it," and it may be the Venus de Milo. Still, all you may say, staking your reputation gained by fifty years of study and practice, will not move her from the position, that the work in question is not good. There never enters her mind the thought that there might be some knowledge to acquire, that she cannot possibly be as well equipped to judge as a professional who has devoted his life to it, to whom its laws and principles have become the very breath of life, and who has thereby gained a world-wide reputation. This is the person who must be held responsible for many daringly good things that have not been done. For, the fear of her baneful influence must dwarf, does dwarf, many attempts to produce art of finer strain, whose very life depends on sympathy. Then, again, it must discourage money investment for the working out of important works of art in any but a popular vein. So some day we shall receive credit for what we have not done. The thousands of horrors that deface this beautiful land,—beautiful when God left it to us,—are not all to be laid to the makers.

Can the glass stainer,—who has nearly always acquired his working
capital by painful thrift, and retains it at the price of extreme caution,—afford to invest the large proportion of the cost of a good window, which is represented by labor in what he may feel is good and scholarly, when he knows the best could not possibly be understood or appreciated by the judges that are to be, and which with the remark of “I know what I like,” may be thrown back on his hands to alter, or to take the consequences? But there is a legal side to all this, and if the maker has but the self-respect to assert himself he may do much to remedy this stultifying system of unjust waste of his just profit,—if not of his capital itself. There are no sharper bargains driven than are made in the name of the Church, some in the ardent which comes of ignorance, but the larger part from pretensions. The artist who by sketches and interviews, samples and references, comes to an agreement to produce work to the best of his ability must be paid for such work when the order is filled. He is not a tradesman who can put the goods back on the shelf to await another buyer. There may be a dozen ways of carrying out a work of art, but the artist’s way must be the one accepted. When will he be ready to take the stand of the humble artist-tailor, who recently told a good customer: “I wish that you would not come here. You will not let me fit you, and your clothes are no credit to anyone.” The average owner or committeeman will allow his architect full swing when he is digging a hole for the foundation. But when he comes to the stone he must be consulted, especially as to the color and texture. The architect may have something to say about the roof, but when the windows are reached, never. By that time, the layman has acquired the experience necessary for directing a competition which, alas, is usually conducted with as great a sense of honor as the average Church Fair. These competitions are usually won by an unscrupulous hack of the trade who promises the impossible at impossible prices, and finally provides it. These are serious consequences; for thereby good art is thwarted, good taste insulted, good material wasted and good opportunities lost. How can it be brought to the minds of these would-be judges that the men who are capable of producing stylish church windows
are very few, either here or abroad,—so few that every architect must feel it the most difficult place to fill, while the laymen find men by the dozen, any one of whom may desecrate their temple, if he will only work cheaply enough. But cheapness here, happily or unhappily, is not to be measured by their only known system,—the metric system of dollars and cents. Yet, by the tacit retreat from responsibility of the harassed architect this does be-

Designed and made by Author, showing Value of Lead

come the factor: the only measure applied that shows any standard which the conscientious artist can adopt with any hope of pleasing his clients.

If any apology for strong language is necessary, let me here quote at length that pre-eminent apostle of good art, William Morris, who, with his sledge-hammer blows at existing pretensions, opened a way for the influence of his own practical renascence in the many branches of decorative art which he, at different times during his
Memorial Window to S. T. Stranahan, Congregational Church
Brooklyn, N. Y.

By Otto Heinigke and Owen Bowen

By Otto Heinigke and Owen Bowen
Rambling Thoughts of "A Glass Man"

productive life, piloted back into their own legitimate courses from which they had drifted centuries ago: drifted so far and so long that no one seemed to know from whence they came or whither they were bound. He says: "I know that the public in general are set on having things cheap, being so ignorant that they do not know when they get them nasty also; so ignorant that they neither know nor care whether they give a man his due. I know that the manufacturers (so called) are so set on carrying out competition to its utmost,—competition of cheapness, not of excellence,—that they meet the bargain hunters half way and cheerfully furnish

\[\text{Designed and made by Author, showing Value of Lead}\]

them with nasty wares at the cheap rates they are asked for by means of what can be called by no prettier name than fraud." These words, spoken a quarter of a century ago in his "Hopes and Fears for Art," while they have served well, are still as true and useful as the many other tools he bent to his purpose of forcing the public to stop and think in their mad career of ignorant waste and pretence. To prove the measure of his success, we have only to bring forward as witnesses, the Morris wall paper, the Morris chair, the Morris rug, the Morris tapestry and embroidery, the Morris windows and the Morris printing press. But do these things not

173
stand out among productions of to-day almost as solitary as exam-
pies of what is good in art, as they would have done in the Phila-
delphia Centennial exhibition, or at about the time his words were
written? Sadly we must confess that they do, so much so, that we
hail with pleasure as our only escape the plain cartridge paper, as,
at least, it has no offensive pattern on it: or the simple-lined furni-
ture, simple almost to barrenness, but a thousand times better than
the gaudy and cheap imitations of richness, that are totally impos-
sible. Is the course that Morris found for us again to be lost sight
of? We hope not; and yet we cannot expect to keep it by drift-
ing. It is only by stemming the tide of greed and ignorance stren-
uously, incessantly, by word and deed, that the small gain our craft
has made can be retained. There has been too much ease taken in
our pleasure in drifting. We have allowed those who are unfitted,
unequipped, to come abreast of us, to pass us, to direct our course.
There has been too much pretty writing and stringing together of
idle words for words' sake, for the fear of controversy, or oftener
still from the lack of practical knowledge governing the subject,
until it almost seems a proper question to ask, whether writing ever
helped art? The greatest artists have talked little and written
less. It is mostly done by men who have not produced what they
write about. We must meet a Morris to regain our faith. Is it
because he first produced and then wrote what he felt was vital?
And we are obliged to quote a great man to prove that this is not
an impolite thing to do, to-day.
But we have rambled. Let us return to our subject.
The effect of the glass in a church is the first and last impression
taken away by a visitor, yet how seldom is an adequate sum appro-
priated for it at the writing of the specification for the building.
It means the final making or marring of the finest building, on
account of the natural prominence and aggressiveness of glass.
Yet, how often, even when the original allowance for it is good,
after the extras for the rest of the building creep in, are these
latter provided for by clipping down the glass fund, until there
is not enough left to provide the proper size lead for the plainest
quarry design! Then the honest maker must drop out,—the artist
Rambling Thoughts of "A Glass Man"

has long ago become useless,—and the dishonest hack comes in, or, what is as bad, the man who does not know what it will cost him, until he has begun, and must then starve his work to avoid starving himself. This may be his first criminal offense, and some day he will be forgiven for what he did not do. For an object lesson in the consequences of this kind of ignorant interference, although the appropriation in this case was sufficient to provide a perfect, but simpler scheme, I must reluctantly point out a flagrant and unusually important instance in the case of the large windows in a prominent synagogue in upper New York City: there the designing was excellent, the architect worked loyally for what he thought the

best interests of his clients, and the poor maker soon after suffered business starvation. But not before he had apparently tried to save himself by starving his work: firstly, by the use of leads inadequate in size to support the glass in such large surfaces he saved not only the difference in the cost between these and proper leads, but the much more important items of nearly double the time of labor which it would have taken to do it properly. The fact that wide flanges of the H-shaped leads close up while being handled by the glazier keeps him continually spreading them open to insert his pieces of glass, which means time; whereas, the narrow flanges need no spreading at all; being slipped on the glass as fast as it can be handled. Then, the barring is hopelessly insufficient. Such
large windows should be supported in short sections on T bars running across the openings (on which these sections rest); if not, by upright irons to which these T's are fastened to prevent sagging. In place of all this, the whole wide sheets—something like twenty feet high—were held up (in single sheets) by the small copper wires soldered on the leads, which were bound to tear away from the glass. And now, after but a half dozen years, the exterior of the building resembles more than anything else, drapery, or the remains of drapery—rags—as pieces early began to drop out. But I am here warned by experience that in the items of lead and barring I may easily do the maker of this glass a great injustice. It may be that the committee may have demanded small leads and no barring. One has so often disinterred history and vivisected the methods of modern-glass making that much which one finds necessary to say in an article like the present one seems trite and obvious. Yet it were ungrateful not to acknowledge the possible vital importance of the influence of the Art Periodical in striking again and again at vicious practices that would otherwise be accepted as necessary evils, and which must affect the use of any material afflicted by such practices. The above mentioned case of what we will call "misplaced ardor" (for the sake of the decorative quality of these fairly printed sheets) is by no means a rare one, for one half the churches in the City of New York will be found to be double glazed, with outside sash of plain glass to protect the poor leaded work of the windows proper from leaking or being blown to fragments by the winds. The extra expense goes for the owners' edu-
Rambling Thoughts of "A Glass Man"

cation, but he seldom gets a second opportunity to continue his studies.
This manner of speech may sound bitter, but it is the bitter drop in our cup, and poison must be fought with poison. We have the living evidence that well-constructed leaded glass will last seven hundred years and more, and that under most trying conditions of wars and neglect: as witness the 12th Century windows. But they are all made with expensive large leads and are properly barred; in many cases, bars having been added from time to time; which fact accounts not a little for much of the richness of tone of the old glass; the contrast of their blacks giving much of the jewelled brilliance to the glass showing between them. This inherent dislike to bars that one hears of so often is again the criticism of the ignorant, and of the person who is responsible for that abomination, the so-called metal sash that needs no bars and is as interesting as a tin ceiling, as artistic as beveled plate glass. The old makers well understood the worth and added beauty which were derived from their sustaining bars.

They often made them much heavier than structural necessity demanded, or ran them in large geometric patterns over the openings; the spaces between being filled with leaded glass, and the black value of the iron being frankly used in the play of values.

Now let me acknowledge that the committeeeman can be a most useful instrument. If only he will not attempt to divide the responsibility of the building-operations proper with the architect, but oblige the latter to bear it all, make him responsible if he is worthy of it, if he is not, refuse to employ him. A worthy archi-

Designed and made by Author, showing the Value of Lead
tect will be a man who has made deep studies of the various mate-
rials, methods and costs which relate to his profession. He is the
man who, in all probability, has learned to choose an honest con-
tractor and is not above benefiting by that man’s advice as to the
details of his particular trade, and that contractor will respect the
professional man. And here let me bear the testimony based upon
a twenty years’ acquaintance with the architectural profession, and
covering intimate business relations with hundreds of architects,
that I have yet to find the first one who has betrayed his client’s
trust. It gives me the more pleasure to testify to this because there
is much idle talk to the contrary. One can find pretenders here as
in any other field, and in plenty. But when one considers what
changes have been wrought in everything that pertains to archi-
tecture in the last ten years by an earnest army of students with
their honest convictions valiantly supported, one must feel that
men of affairs can well trust them; for have they not proven them-
selves capable by stupendous business undertakings successfully
carried out? The attempts of the layman to dictate anything con-
cerning architecture to such men is not wrong only, it is insulting.
What splendid men they are in their earnestness!
We have sometimes wondered that, when architects have achieved
grandeur in scale, they have not shown the same result in the use
of full color. Often, it seems the result of timidity growing from
bravely acknowledged consciousness of weakness in that field,—
surely commendable; but may it not be again the fear of “I do not
like it”? Ruskin somewhere writes to the effect that one cannot
appreciate more in a work of art than his mind is prepared by
education to receive. He might have added that the false pride
of the uneducated usually condemns what it does not understand.
But in these days of infinite detail it is no disgrace to acknowledge
ignorance of, or weakness in, any of the many branches of a pro-
fession. It is pretence that contains the danger element, and no
professional to-day knows it better than the architect, and accepts
it more frankly than when he calls in the lawyer, the financier, the
engineer, and craftsmen of every kind to assist him in developing
his immense problems.
Rambling Thoughts of "A Glass Man"

It was some years ago that the veteran art writer, Charles DeKay, said that if some of our American windows were transportable they would undoubtedly win the praise of Europe. America is now shipping thousands of tons of Opal Glass to Europe: the probable result of the above prophecy, as a number of windows were sent to the last Exposition at Paris and received the highest awards; Mr. LaFarge, the undoubted founder of this American art, gaining the decoration of an officer of the Legion of Honor. In this case the decoration is honored in the man: the real genius follows laws, others make laws from his work. One of our architects, known for his scholarly Gothic structures, when inspecting a tracery window making for him, showed his breadth by remarking: "I appreciate that you are forced to invent new methods of using the new materials to reach what is admirable in the old work." Here is the field for new designers. It is not new principles of design, not new styles of ornament, but the taming and training of a wonderful new material according to the abundant laws and principles left us by those remarkable old pathfinders of the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, in the pomp and pageantry of their undying art, as shown in the cathedral windows.

There is endless room for the display of inventive powers in filling the new demands made on the new material to meet all the conditions of light and want of light that govern the problems of building our closely surrounded modern city churches, with piercing sunlight on one side and hopeless gloom on the other: edifices unlike the old architecture, erected, not merely to look beautiful, but to satisfy a most practical generation of didactic, creature-comfort loving worshippers. The governing directions for making the windows will probably be: "They must not be too light nor too dark." With this sunlight-and-gloom-problem—How to begin! The artist may be certain of finding as many different judges on the bench when the glass is finished, as there are members to the congregation, and their friends who have a friend whose friend is an artist.

Restraint is probably the first lesson for our small modern churches. The barbaric Hindoo can and does carve his material to end-
less elaboration; the ancient Greek was able to do the same, but showed a restraint which never palls. Restraint in the use of Opal Glass for its own sake and for joining it to the requirements of good architecture seems the difficult lesson to master. Winston, a true lover and writer on the art, says that “glass painting did not decline for want of encouragement, but from a confounding of its principles with those of other systems of painting.” Who can doubt that he has read his lesson rightly? Certainly not the student who has seen the wonders of Fairford and Chartham in England; those of the Netherlands, France and Italy of the 15th Century. Their aims are different from those of the earlier periods, but they set forever the laws of painted work. Another authority says: “There is a consolation in the melancholy fact that the enamel-painted surface of those German windows is rapidly giving way (notably in Glasgow Cathedral), and not for sordid narrow motives, but for art’s sake alone.” The giving way of the enamel comes from careless firing and from too much forcing of the effect by loading on the blacks so much indulged in by the German school; thereby sacrificing the sappy glassy glory which is the crowning beauty of the old painted glass. While the modern Englishman errs on the other side by the use of his too feeble hair lines, it is curious that between those two extremes both lose the luscious translucence of the Cinque Cento glass. Colored glass is the ideal of materialized color. It is color in suspension; it is what the easel painter is continuously sighing for and striving to attain with his mediums and varnishes, and yet these glass painters kill this very quality in their glass “from a confounding of its principles.” After this can there be any doubt of the positive necessity of the designer being at least fully conversant with the material, if not being himself the maker of the window. The best results in the finished windows are usually obtained in humoring the glass at hand, not in torturing it to alien purposes—hence vital the sympathetic working together of the designer and the maker, when for any good reason they are not one and the same. And this seems to bring us to the true cause of the failure of the latter-day painted glass; the demands being much in excess of the power of 180
Group of Losanti Ware

By Miss M. Louise McLaughlin, Cincinnati, O.
Leather covered doors in the Lecture Hall, The Craftsman Building, Syracuse, N. Y.
supply, that is, of the autographic kind, and to be finished on time kind. Methods have been introduced of needs which have made machines of the workmen, banishing all individual feeling. While their technical skill could only be surpassed by machinery, the result is quite as good artistically as oil cloth and quite as inter-
esting. Such is the production from Munich to-day, where children are taught to do one thing, without more mental force than an ape employs in his attempts at imitation. And how few are the exceptions to this rule in England! The creative power is lacking, the nervous virility of touch, in short, the mind that one feels in every line of the old masters.

Dare we hope that the time is near when our American church builders and patrons will appreciate that there are in this country a few men fitted by their studies and experience to return to the beauties of the old work? Who, at least, will not start hopelessly wrong; who understand the beauties of the old “grisaille” windows, with their simple field of painted quarries, their glorious borders, and medallions of preciously luscious colors? But these windows cannot be produced in a day, nor for a dollar. Why is it that a liberal American will pay twenty-five dollars per square foot and 40 per cent. duty in addition to the price of setting to a foreign maker, with years to carry out the contract, and that to a man who has never apparently designed a true Gothic window, if he be judged from his book, although he has had hundreds of opportu-
nities, in this country alone? Whenever Gothic ornament is de-
mended he introduces brick work, or what for lack of a better name we may call a running Acanthus leaf border around the window, across it, or in panels. Another of our Gothic specialists having had a series of painted windows made here for one of his churches, started for Europe well pleased, but determined to see the best. He visited all the European workshops of which he knew, but at his return he generously confessed that he had seen nothing abroad—modern, of course—that could compare with his Ameri-
can windows, for their juicy and translucent quality, as contrasted with the usual hard, dry, oiled-paper-look usually seen in modern painted glass. They were, at least, not started wrong. But this
class of window, in which so much personal work is necessary, hinges, without a chance for compromise, on time; and in these days of rapid construction that is a rare commodity. The only practical solution of this problem seems to be that the contract should include the setting of the simplest kind of temporary windows, to be replaced as the elaborate ones are completed. This method would relieve good art of its worst enemy, the Twentieth Century rush. But there is another—we all should like to produce for a thousand dollars what resembles old work that would cost twenty thousand to-day, and then at completion we wonder why it is not the same. Old glass is becoming extremely rare, and yet I saw a collection of a dozen pieces of rich Thirteenth Century French glass for sale in Paris last year at a comparative bargain—thanks to some restoration somewhere. I did not ask the name of the place,—for one dreads to find a spot where murder has been committed. But it is to be regretted that we have not more good examples here. With all our wonderful growth of Museums, is it not strange that we have little or no old window glass in, for instance, the three principal ones in the country? Boston has one noticeable triangular piece with a demon’s face remarkably like the demons of Fairford. It proves to be a copy, but full of style. Philadelphia has one, a fine painted piece, “Adam and Eve,” done with great personal dash. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, has two small pieces, but what they are I defy anyone to guess, as for ten years they have been kept in glass cases with no possibility of their being seen by transmitted light, as they are carefully laid against a black background. This is not accidental, for attention has been drawn to it, and they have just been moved to a new and still darker place. But I must remember the injunction of a good old friend, “Cultivate a gentle spirit!” I have scolded enough.