THE MODERN ARCHITECTURAL PROBLEM DISCUSSED FROM THE PROFESSIONAL POINT OF VIEW

The discussion begun in the May number of The Craftsman concerning the possibilities of a new architectural style that will meet the requirements of modern commercial and public buildings, has already received wide attention from the members of architectural leagues throughout the country, and promises to prove a fertile field for further discussion and comment in the profession.

The Craftsman welcomes all argument of this important question, especially when it comes from such authoritative sources as Prof. A. D. F. Hamlin, Executive Head of the School of Architecture in Columbia University, whose able paper on the subject follows, with an illustration of the Broadway Tabernacle of New York.

In further application of the reference made in Mr. Frederick Lamb's article to the plans adopted by the Government for the proposed remodeling of the United States Military Academy at West Point, we print a communication from Mr. Bertram C. Goodhue, of the well-known architectural firm of Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson, which has the "new West Point" in charge, and also we present an illustration and description of the reconstructed buildings as seen from the river.

Other points of view that seem very pertinent to this discussion are presented by Mr. Louis H. Sullivan, of Chicago, and by Mr. Samuel Howe, of New York. Many other expressions of opinion have been received from artists and decorators throughout the country, but their arrival has been too late to admit of space being made for their publication in this issue of The Craftsman.

STYLE IN ARCHITECTURE. BY PROF. A. D. F. HAMLIN, EXECUTIVE HEAD OF THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE IN COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.

Style in architecture, in the broadest sense, means expression. A building has "style" when it is expressive. An expressive building is one which has character; which reveals purpose in its design or manifests distinct qualities, artistic or intellectual, in its
composition, proportions, structural make-up or decorative detail. An expressionless building is destitute of "style" in this broader meaning of the term, whatever name or label it may wear.

In a narrower sense the word "style" is applied to the characteristic ways of designing and building which have marked particular periods or communities. As circumstances, needs, traditions and tastes have differed, the kinds of buildings and the methods and processes of design and construction have differed in like manner. Each distinguishable way of designing and building has received a name, and collectively we call them the "historic styles."

Now in the development of each historic style we distinguish two main factors; one, the structural; the other, the aesthetic. The first is the scientific factor, the second the artistic. The visible form of the completed structure, its dress of arches, mouldings, columns and cornices, pinnacles and tracery, its distribution of voids and solids and its apparel of carving, inlay or color,—these are results, products of the two factors just named, under the particular influences of the climate, environment, civilization, taste and traditions of the particular time and people.

Thus in a true analysis of any historic style we must go back of its visible forms to its underlying principles. We shall find that there are three distinct principles of construction which have controlled the structural development of styles; that of the post-and-lintel or wall-and-beam; that of the arch and vault; and that of the truss. The Egyptians and Greeks made use exclusively of the first; the Gothic cathedral-builders of the second; the Romans of both; while our modern builders employ all three. We shall in like manner discover two fundamentally different aesthetic systems or principles of design running through the different styles. The first is that in which the designer seeks after certain predetermined combinations and effects of proportion, light and shade and decorative expression, and finds these particular combinations and effects so beautiful in themselves, that he seeks to reproduce them in, or apply them to, every building he designs. This principle always tends to develop traditions, and looks toward an ideal perfection of form, seeking to refine and perfect every feature of the design in conformity with this ideal. Obviously in such a process there is constant mutual adaptation of traditional forms to new requirements, and of the planning
THE POWER HOUSE, RIDING HALL AND POST HEADQUARTERS TO BE ERECTED AT WEST POINT

By courtesy of Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson
and arrangement which spring from new requirements, to the traditional forms. This is the principle which has dominated Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Renaissance architecture, and most modern design as well.

The other principle, which we may call the principle of logic as distinguished from the principle of idealism just described, starts out with the purely logical satisfaction of practical and structural requirements, and clothes the forms thus devised with such beauty of outline or decoration as the artistic sense of the designer is capable of imagining. It is a more scientific process than the first, but less certain in its results, because more dependent on the individual designer and on the conditions and requirements which he has to meet. In the hands of the mediaeval cathedral builders, working for a uniform, all-dominating institution, the Church, and in a period when the imagination was under a singular and constant stimulation of mingled faith and superstition, this system produced stupendous results, in which sublimity and beauty were wonderfully united. In the hands of the inartistic designers of a preëminently industrial age, from 1825 to 1875, the same principle produced the ugly bridges and hideous iron trusses which are still to be seen and are even yet too often produced, in public works of various kinds. The Crystal Palace at London is as frankly and truthfully expressive of its purpose and structure as Amiens cathedral, and much larger; but it is hardly as beautiful. Neither Scott Russell’s great Rotunda in Vienna (1873), nor the interior of the Liberal Arts Building at Chicago (1893) was comparable in beauty with (let us say) Walsingham’s Octagon in Ely Cathedral, though quite as frank and truthful in design and grander in scale. On the other hand the French, a people by nature artistic, have produced architectural ironwork marked by real elegance of line and charm of detail. The difference in quality springs from the difference in artistic genius, not from difference of fundamental principle.

If, now, we are asked to express an opinion with regard to the application of Gothic design to modern architecture, the answer must depend largely on what is meant by Gothic design. It would seem that in much of the current discussion and criticism it is the forms of Gothic architecture that are in mind, not its principles. But these forms were continually changing wherever Gothic architecture was a
THE MODERN ARCHITECTURAL PROBLEM

living art. The collegiate architecture of the English universities in the fifteenth century employed forms totally different from those of English fourteenth century churches, because the English builders of the fifteenth century still practiced according to the true principles of Gothic logic. In Italy, on the other hand, although Gothic forms were used, the principle of design always remained that of the classic ages, modified by new ideals developed in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The forms used were a mere fashion, a dress applied to buildings planned on traditional lines and built in traditional ways.

If, then, it is a question merely of using Gothic forms, fitting them as best we may to modern buildings, and planning these with the idea, from the outset, of using those forms, it is clear that we are, after all, proceeding not upon the Gothic but upon the classic principle. We are doing precisely what the Romans did when they adapted Greek forms to arched and vaulted structures, and designed these with the definite intention of using those forms. The result abundantly justified the procedure. It is a perfectly reasonable procedure, and particularly so where, as was the case with Roman architecture, and is usually the case with modern architecture, the prevalent and natural way to build is to erect a structural framework or core of durable but unsightly materials—concrete, rubble, or brick—which requires to be dressed in a more presentable outer vesture, whether of marble, cut stone, terra-cotta, plaster or wainscot. This is what the Creator has done in the design of the human body, concealing its unsightly interior mechanism and framework within the exquisitely beautiful outer covering of the skin.

Let us not imagine, then, that in using Gothic forms in and upon structures not at all Gothic in construction, we are reproducing the Gothic procedure. We are using, after all, the Roman method, but in buildings whose construction employs materials and combinations never used in Rome, and with forms developed in other lands and ages. The real question, therefore, between our use of Roman and Gothic forms, is a question of appropriateness, fitness, adaptability, and final artistic effect. From this point of view the answer may vary with each separate case. The new school buildings of New York City illustrate the fitness of the English collegiate forms to modern scholastic purposes, and it is this fitness, and the beauty of those buildings in which they have been used with artistic judgment and taste,
THE MODERN ARCHITECTURAL PROBLEM

by such masters as Mr. C. B. J. Snyder, George B. Post, Cope and Stewardson, C. C. Haight and others, that have commended these forms—this particular "style," in the narrower sense—to so many designers of collegiate and scholastic buildings. But if this adoption is to have lasting results, there must be constant progress and adaptation and modification in the details; and it is a pertinent question, for instance, whether the close-set mullions and stone transoms of the English style should not speedily be exchanged for something better adapted to our use of large windows and broad lights.

The truly Gothic procedure is best illustrated in our modern practice in such office-buildings as have been designed by Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Burnham. These are undoubtedly the best examples of a real "Art Nouveau" applied to architecture to be found anywhere to-day. Yet there seems to be no good reason for excluding from buildings designed upon this principle such traditional forms and details as are applicable. We cannot ignore tradition. No age ever has done so. Traditions affected even Gothic architecture. In all styles the structural forms of one period have appeared in a later period as purely decorative features. Our age is the heir of all that have gone before, and whatever will make a structural design more beautiful may legitimately be employed. The "style" of the twentieth century will be recognized not by the use of any one set of details, nor any one type of plan or system of construction, but by certain broad and fundamental characteristics which will be recognized by our descendants whether we recognize them or not, and quite without reference to the historic labels that may be applied to their details.

Personally, I hail the revived use of forms borrowed from Gothic architecture because we have so many kinds of buildings to which they are artistically applicable, and they thus enlarge the resources of modern design. So also do I hail the emancipating influence of the so-called "Art Nouveau" (whereof Tiffany and Sullivan are the true first prophets), in spite of the architectural nightmares to which it has given rise in France, Germany and Belgium. So also do I hail the classic revival which, since 1893, has done so much to give dignity, breadth and nobility to public buildings and to public squares and thoroughfares. Eclecticism—a wise, reasonable, broad and artistic eclecticism—will mark the progress of artistic design in the twentieth century.