

NEED FOR A PUBLIC BOARD OF ARCHITECTURE

It is this individuality of homes that makes some towns impress a stranger, traversing their streets, so favorably. He passes house after house, all of them so different that he instinctively associates with them the personalities, the lives of the families that occupy them, and seeing but the exteriors of the houses, receives a sense of intimacy with the people of the town.

One hears much of the unfriendliness of

the city, and truly there is nothing quite so oppressive and coldly repulsing as the monotonous front of a city block. It neither reveals nor hides, but simply presents its characterless, expressionless face, blank as the face of a gambler, like a barrier between the passerby and the lives behind it. Not so with these friendly California houses, each one truly a home radiating the individuality of its owner.

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MANY a town has been turned into a patchwork of ill-assorted buildings only because the most public and necessary form of art is commonly treated as a matter for private speculation and for individual taste and fancy. It is true that architects are not entirely free, but have to work in accordance with certain by-laws and civic customs. Still, that is not the question at issue here. Whatever the restraints under which architecture is now carried on, the results are bad far more often than they are moderately good. No town building, therefore, ought to be put up until the designs have been approved by a Board of Architecture, maintained by the public and responsible to the public, this act of approving to consider the designs in relation to their site and surroundings.

A right thing in a wrong place means confusion; and when a street in its architecture tries to babble in a score of different languages, many right things may be found in the wrong places, so the confusion may be, and frequently is, unlimited. And this brings in the last point that concerns us all in the relation of architects with their clients. There are two kinds of client, one public, the other private. Out of town, no doubt, the private client is often a friend to the best work that architects now do; but the client whom they need in town is the citizen

spirit, a public opinion alert and proud, watchful and educated. "Do not think," says Ruskin, "that you can have good architecture merely by paying for it. It is not by subscribing liberally for a large building once in forty years that you can call up architects and inspiration. It is only by active and sympathetic attention to the domestic and everyday work for each of you, that you can educate either yourselves to the feeling, or your builders to the doing, of what is truly great. . . . It does not matter how many public buildings you possess, if they are not supported by, and in harmony with, the private houses of the town;" and hence it is chiefly by popular efforts that cities must be adorned.

Anything, then, which has a tendency to fix public attention on the nation's architecture is a thing to be welcomed; and so I have ventured to speak with frankness on many questions over which writers glide nervously lest they should give offense to their architect friends. They forget that an architect counts for nothing at all as compared with the influence of his profession on a nation's public and private life. To be good he must be excellent; and excellence in all art is a wise and brilliant use of traditions *plus* something personal and something new and great in human emotion.—(From "The English House." by W. Shaw Sparrow.)