

THE ARCHITECTS

All these criticisms are valid, though they may seem to be mutually inconsistent. It is not easy to define an industrial policy which gives due weight to them all.

"The defenders of pure "capitalism" are conscious of the first of the three criticisms. But they are prone to overlook the second and third; and, while freeing industry as far as possible from State interference, they are apt to leave the interests of the workers insufficiently protected, and to fail to obtain for them their proper share in control.

"The advocates of State Socialism fix their attention on the second criticism; but they are apt to disregard the third and greatly to intensify the first, by unduly exaggerating the functions of the State and its bureaucratic agents.

"The advocates of Guild Socialism lay all their emphasis on the third criticism, but disregard the second; because their solution is to turn each industry into an exclusive trust, and thus to deprive the State of the needful power of defending the interests both of workers and consumers."

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A TALK TO CLIENTS

By PERCY E. NOBBS

FOR a hundred years we architects have been failing most conspicuously to make our public understand what we are after. This remark would furnish a text for a whole course of lectures, but we must here leave it as a bald statement. It is our hope to set before you, as clients, certain ideas as to the aims and objects of our art which may be new to some, or if not new, may at least serve a use next time you have dealings with one of us, for they are rarely acted on.

Of architects in general it may be said that all aspire more or less to be, or to be considered, artists; and it is of those whose aspiration is well founded that I have most to say. It is not my intention to say anything of styles and schools and periods, for these are inconsequent brain-spun notions which stand in the way of our understanding one another.

The architect, the client, and the public: that is my theme. Of the three, the client is the most indispensable, but the least important—a mere human link whose privileged function it is to bring architect and public face to face, and the public is very literally "the man in the street." First let us consider what the architect of today inherits from the past in his relation to client and public.

The Past

From sun-baked Nineveh to wind-swept Chicago, all down the ages, building has been an affair of organization very closely parallel in its technical arrangements to good soldiering. In Roman times, indeed, it is difficult to say whether the legion was based on the builder's yard or the yard on the legion. Labor, skilled labor, foreman, master, architect, and, behind all, the man who pays, in the one case and in the other, private, sapper, non-com., commander, staff and, again behind all, the man who pays

In happier times, before the propagandist's pen came to vie with the sword among the instrumentalities of chaos, that is to say, before the discovery of printing with movable types, there were two activi-

ties, and only two, to which all other productions were subordinated—building in peace time, and fighting in war time. Both required men of imagination to formulate the plans of action, and generals and architects were rewarded as much in fame and honor as through their recognized systems of pay, commission, spoils or graft.

While public appreciation of architects has been both fickle and variable throughout history, the function of the man whose trade is to conceive, and perhaps draw or model a new thing, a thing distinctive and unique, a thing not yet in existence, has been much the same for a thousand years—the same in the day of the Coliseum, and of the Albert Hall, of the wayside chapel at Houghton, or of the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. General social conditions, it is true, have so wrought that, in certain places and at certain times, the architect has tended to absorb many of the functions of the master builder, like William of Sens at Canterbury, or to have forced upon him the work of an engineer, like Michael Angelo in the case of the quarries, or to owe his selection to sheer impractical pedantry, like Dr. Perrault, of the Collonade of the Louvre. But all, at any rate, who achieved architecture, had these endowments in common—imaginative power, the geometrical sense and the instinct for scale. If they have differed as practical men, as professionals, as dilettanti, it is not difficult to recognize their kinship as artists. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Now, from the remote past up to comparatively recent times, the people who did the staff work of building were selected primarily because they were artists in the sense above described. This does not necessarily mean that they were ornamentalists, though in certain periods most of them were that also, to the delight of our eyes.

Modern Professionalism

It would be tedious to trace in detail the effect of modern industrialism on the practice of building

since "Puffing Billy" plied his noisy course on rails of wood. The whole story is summarized in a word—the advent of "competitive prices." That is the result of the industrial revolution. The professionalized architect, as we know him today, and as he differs from his predecessors, is a by-product.

What, then, is the modern architect? He is occasionally an artist himself; he often owes much to professional assistants who are. When things are so, there is no use wasting time, energy, sentiment and ink as *laudator temporis acti*, or beating about the bush. So let us recognize the facts, without even alleging that they are brutal and see what it all means.

The professional architect of today is not necessarily an artist, but he must be a rather clear headed, just, business man, and a fairly skilled constructor. Ingenuity will carry him farther on the road to success than artistic power, and we are discussing the successful ones. Without opportunity, the architect, whether artist or not, is as nothing. Of himself he cannot build a cottage.

Let us look into this matter of architecture from the point of view of that kind of artist who is not a dancer, nor a poet, nor a musician, nor a painter, nor an engraver, nor a sculptor; but one who delights to express in stone, wood, concrete, and such like building materials, certain spiritual things—emotional complexes, the ugly-tongued psychologists would call them—that can not be danced, or sung, or done in black on white; and let us seek better acquaintance with him.

Opportunity

Assuming him to have the instinct, the accomplishments, and the necessary training, on what does his opportunity of expression in the manner aforesaid depend—how does he get his work? Competitions, the making of himself indispensable in an older man's office, strict observances, dancing, the buying of a practice, marriage with a builder's daughter, partnership with a promoter—all these avenues to opportunity have oft been sought; and when certain elements of success (of which more later) have been part and parcel of his makeup, the avenue has led to something. But these are all avenues which, being not quite straight, the end cannot be seen from the beginning.

Indulgence in competitions—a vice akin to gambling—does not lead to a comfortable general practice, and often leads to bankruptcy—financial and spiritual. There is always a very considerable element of chance in a competition. When very fairly conducted, with professional judges, and all possible safeguards, competitions are decided on purely practical issues—cost, cubic contents, close planning, adroit connections—all which constraining

considerations are as often as not destructive of such architectural potentialities as the problem might otherwise suggest.

As to making himself indispensable, blood is thicker than water, and his master's nephew, yet unborn, when that process began, may become a junior partner on completing his articles.

Church connection is a well recognized pathway towards public confidence, but the wise ones will seek to serve their congregation individually, as clients, rather than in their corporate capacity. Parsons, wardens, elders and deacons have proverbially thin business ethics where the design of extensions to the Sunday School is concerned. Few architects achieve their competence unscarred by these harpies, unless they be avowed free-thinkers, as so many great ecclesiastical architects are.

The social avenue is of course at once the pleasantest and the least dignified path to tread in search of opportunity—a variant on the commercial traveler's glad hand and "Have a cigar!" Yet many firms of architects have a dancing partner, or a sporting partner, and find the arrangement profitable. But here again there must be that very solid something already referred to in the way of special service to offer, and quite apart from the art that they profess to purvey; otherwise the useful dancing partner would soon be short of nice white ties.

As to buying a practice, the sense of the scoundrelly venality of such transactions is only dawning on the profession in Great Britain, though simony was attacked so far back as the XIVth century. The sale of architects' practices has never been at all general in America, where "goodwill" is a more personal thing than it is in Europe. An old established address in a dingy street has less advertising value on this continent than accommodation in a modern office building. The extreme case of the sale of the good will of an architect's practice by his widow is now obsolescent. Progress in architectural education, moreover, leads to more or less publicity in the discrimination between the sheep and the goats who enter the profession.

So much for the avenues of opportunity. These are not what we are seeking to disclose as the *sine qua non*, the conditional endowment on which an architect's success ultimately depends, though many of the architects and the public think they are.

The XIXth Century In England

Let us seek for further light in the history of the recent past. A critical review of the profession in England throughout the nineteenth century—tempered with justice and with mercy—reveals the fact that, of the many thousands who practised professionally, scarcely one hundred can merit the name of artist; while those who could fairly be ranked as

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eminent in their art can be told off on less than ten fingers. On the other hand, some enormous and lucrative practices, coupled with the highest honors, have fallen to gentlemen of great force of character, fine scholarship and cultivated taste, whose work is wholly innocent of the divine fire.

The really great, Elmes, Barry, (Philip) Webb, Bentley, Norman Shaw, Garner, form a veritable constellation in a firmament of tallow dips. All these, individualists as they were, gave us architecture of an essentially modern kind, conforming to those great rules (so rarely learned in the schools, alas!) which ignore the differentiations and proclaim the common principles of Phile and the Propilea, the Pantheon and Chartres—and this in spite of surface pedantries. But the most curious thing about these good things done in England in the XIXth century is the vast agglomeration of "masonry brute mis-handled" amidst which the treasures are imbedded. For there were many circumstances of the Victorian era which made the recognition of architectural power a slow and frosty process. Good influences were too often winter killed, root and branch. When the sincerer forms of flattery did manifest themselves as seedlings, variable winds of fashion and the gritty soil of ignorance combined to stunt the growth.

Much was built in England between 1800 and 1900, and never was a like amount of building more varied and original in thought and contrivance, yet never was the sum of architectural achievement less in its relation to the number, or importance, of building operations undertaken. The fact is, that at the end of the last century, strangely, few architects knew the art of architecture, even when it was exemplified before their eyes; while the general public's natural instinct for just appreciation had all but atrophied for lack of use, or, when discoverable, was vitiated by extraneous sentimental considerations.

Now, 1900 A. D. was not very long ago, yet when we look on the last twenty years—even allowing for the Great War's interruption—some improvement is noticeable in the appreciation of architectural effort, more especially in America. The recent publication of *popular* illustrated magazines, and volumes of current, instead of ancient architecture,—the works of Mr. Lutyens and of Mr. Platt, to single out two recent folios in the realm of domestic art—has done much to counteract the blight of style-mongering, generated by the legions of plates on the "historical styles"—unhappy phrase—and by the activities in period carpentry of the Warings, the Sloans, and other modern stage setters of the ready-made past.

The Appreciation of Architecture in America

Speaking of improvement, we said, "especially in America." Now the culture of Europe delights to

patronize the culture of America, as an aunt of uncertain age acquiesces in the frivolities of a budding niece. Public appreciation of architecture usually has preceded public appreciation of literature in past civilizations. Architecture is the matter before us—let us rejoice that America begins to take pleasure and pride in something Europe has apparently outgrown. Admitting the debt to France which American architecture owes, and very fully acknowledges, there is still no comparison between the flood of genius sown in the architecture of the last twenty years in the United States and the drought-dried stream in France.

Of course America has had the wealth, and the opportunities have been unprecedented. But the point we make is not the quantitative occasion, but the qualitative results. One doubts if French traditionalism, with equal opportunities, could have done better in France. In any case, we recognize today in America a lively public appreciation of architecture, not very intelligent, not very spiritual, and rather materialistic, but quite sincere and full of promise. With all the goodwill in the world we cannot aver as much of any part of the British Empire; not even of London town. In France, cultivated public taste in architecture is no longer the active force it once was. Starvation has, as it were, reached the stage of alternate paroxysm and inanition—for positive proof look at any French villa built since 1870.

Germany

Very different was the case in the Germany of 1914. A vast material prosperity, combined with a robust increase of all national forces, had given architecture opportunities at once exuberant and profuse. With a logic which the Americans did not have the hardihood to risk, German genius, in the generation before the war, struck out in search of a modern nationalistic tradition. The experiments were, in many cases, disastrous enough. But there was a real public interest in the matter. Criticism and appreciation were not private matters between a jaundiced scribe on the one hand, and an outraged designer on the other, both unheeded of the reading public. Perhaps the German public read too much appreciative criticism, and looked too little. The bizarre, the gross, and the crudely experimental appeared, but soon gave way before the rational excellences of Messels' work and that of his great successor, Hoffman. We are of opinion still, as we were in 1914, that Hoffman's is by far the greatest individual contribution to the development of the art of architecture between 1890 and 1914. Whether the fervid building activity which was so marked a feature of German life before the War, has been brought to a dead stop, or has only suffered an interruption, it is of course

vain to guess. Certain it is, that in Germany before the War, the architect enjoyed a large, an appreciative, and, we are inclined to think, an understanding public. For it was not mere business ability, structural skill, or economic service that enabled Hoffman to extract from an elastic traditionalism the spiritual fires whose flickering light warms stone to very life. His public recognized his art as such and craved it.

The Agency

Now, when a client in the English-speaking world, whether individual or corporate, commissions an architect to design a building, the last thing he thinks of buying from the architect, or he in turn of selling, is that imponderable spiritual fire under whose warm and magic rays builded stones speak their serene consolations, passionately asseverate the everlasting melancholies, or smile indulgence on our reprobate gambols. No, what this client bargains for, and what this architect purveys, is agency—usually valued at something a little over six per cent of the cost of the work—agency to get better value in real estate than the client could do if left to his mother wit; spiritual fires are not in the bargain at all.

In detail, this agency consists in first helping the client to find out what he really wants or needs, then inducing the client to acquiesce in sketches, which he can not understand, but which purport to represent what is wanted. A great trust this, as between man and man, and recognized as worth between one and two per cent on the probable cost, which at this stage is guessed, chanced, or otherwise estimated. Working drawings are then prepared, and specifications are written, both with mechanical skill and elaboration, and a double object in every line and word: First, to enable expert valuers to make up competitive prices for the contractors who employ them, and, Secondly, should a price be accepted and the work proceed, to be adequate to show how things are done, clearly and without doubt. When the working drawings and specifications are complete, between two and three per cent on the estimated cost, or lowest tender, becomes due the architect, *whether work proceeds or not*. This arrangement obviously takes no account of possible spiritual fires. If it did, then in the case of work not proceeded with, large sums would be chargeable for moral damages to the architect—what the psychologists would call “the pains of inhibited emotional expression.” That such a charge is not the practice is proof positive that architects are not paid for art, but only for agency.

But if the work goes on there begins an anxious campaign to get the contractor's organization to do the thing, to do it rightly, and do it in time. The staff orders the architect issues are largely in the

form of supplementary drawings, on each and every one of which the question of excess over what is shown on contract documents may arise. The making of these drawings is, next to the sketch planning, the most fascinating part of the architect's work. He also gives general supervision. The client usually fails to distinguish between this and sitting on the job watching every brick laid. That is the function of a clerk of works, paid by the client and under the orders of the architect. Some architects profess to give this service free, as a gift, like the spiritual fire, but it is not so. They do not. There is a “joker”—but that is another story. As the work goes on, the architect computes the value of what is done, and when it is complete he checks the accounts for extras and deductions which may or may not represent additional work and authorized omissions. The client usually finds difficulty in distinguishing between additional work required by himself, and true extras, arising from errors of omission in the contract documents. He is also slow to perceive that an extra, or additional work, generally costs the architect far more than he can ever get out of it by his commission.

Some diplomatic finesse, a habit of mind usually bought by dear experience, is an essential accomplishment, when at last the accounts are squared and paid. If the contractor and the client have been successfully kept from engaging each other before the law, the architect often finds that he has incurred the suspicion of each that his mind is not judicially constituted. By that time the architect has earned his remaining two to three per cent on the cost of the work. It is due, and it is earned, often desperately. So much for professional services—agency. What of architecture?

We have followed the commission to its consummation, “My new cut ashlar takes the light,” and the job is paid for, and let us suppose holds together, fulfills its functions of use and convenience, and is hygienic withal. As a rule, the question as to whether it is good to look upon does not affect the architect's fee. No doubt a client often feels that he did not fully appreciate the significance of certain lines or tints upon the sketches; and that proves that he does not, or did not then understand sketches, and that is all there is to it.

Of course, if architects were suitably remunerated for pained susceptibilities—inhibition of expression—when work did not go beyond the sketch stage, then it would be fair to penalize them when a finished building could be proved to have failed to arouse in enhanced degree those emotional complexes experienced by the client at the time he approved the sketches. It is perhaps just as well for the peace of society that this is not the practice, though gaiety suffers in consequence.

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All which goes to prove beyond shadow of doubt or cavil that the art of architecture has at present no appreciable or demonstrable market value in the English-speaking world. On the other hand, agency in the skilled provision for material requirements is reasonably remunerative.

The Case from the Architect's Point of View

This brings us to the focus of our whole discussion. Let us now state the case from the architect's point view, assuming for the sake of argument, that the architect happens to be an artist as well.

The *architect-designer-artist* should have realized three things in his student days, if properly instructed: That nobody wants to pay for his *architecturally-designed-art*; that some may be found to tolerate it, however; and that a few, (chiefly of his own profession) may even appreciate some of his efforts to make stone eloquent. He would not be what he is—a member of a most exacting profession with the longest apprenticeship of all the trades of man behind him—did he not desire, with a consuming passion, to exercise, or at least attempt, the magic touch of plastic art, and on the greatest scale too, and with the most expensive of materials—stone walls and landed property. What, then, is the condition he must fulfill before he may be permitted to try his hand? It has been answered above—perfect himself in agency, and try not to lose his soul in the process. He must do good, in the economic sense, rather than harm, to the property involved in his adventures and experiments.

The bargain is like this. If, says the client, you can convince me that you are sure you can convert this place, and these stones, bricks and what not, to my purpose, more conveniently and economically in all senses than anyone else, then proceed to do it, and so earn your commission. If you can at the same time so arrange things seen, by means of your art, trade, science and mystery, that people in general will profess aesthetic satisfaction, then go ahead and do your damndest; I don't pay you for that, and I don't fine you if you fail in that, but if I don't like it I'll never speak to you again, and shall "blast your reputation as far as my voice can carry!"

That's the implicit understanding when the architect writes that "following your call of yesterday, I shall be happy to proceed with your sketches, remuneration to be on the usual professional basis." Now, all this is perfectly right, though some architects grumble at this aspect of the world as they find it.

The Explanation

It is to be observed that architecture—the art—is not done for the client at all, and the client has there-

fore no reasonable right to blast his architect's reputation for anything but failure in agency, for that's all he pays for. The architect's art is a personal charity, as between himself as an artist and the "man in the street"—certain persons unknown, to whose need he seeks to minister.

"The song I sing for the minted gold,
The same I sing for the white monie;
But best I sing for the stoop of meal
That simple people given me."

Now, it would make the trade of architecture easier, and on the whole pleasanter, if clients, both individual and corporate, realized their function to be that of publishers, with the most shadowy claims to editorial control, once they have exercised their privilege of selecting their agents, or authors. It is always possible that the client may be entertaining an angel unawares; he must trust very largely to chance for that. Without opportunity to carry out works, none can prove whether he be artist, as well as agent.

As things are, on the other hand, there is only one claim that any architect may fairly advance for the privileged opportunity he seeks to use other people's walls and lands for his artistic ends, and that is sheer efficiency as a practical agent. Can he plan with an adroitness and economy never dreamed of in former generations? Can he construct with the mighty forces of modern materials scientifically used, and temper their use with some invention? Can he do these things with a cultured grace founded on tradition but not overbound thereby? Can he deal evenhandedly as between his clients and his contractors? Can he endure the sustained drudgery inevitable in the manufacture of contract drawings and specifications? If he can do these things willingly for from five to ten per cent, the question of his giving something else (if he has it to dispense, and of that he can never himself be sure) is entirely a matter between himself and his Maker.

And now we may probe a little deeper regarding this something which some architects are privileged to dispense as a free gift willingly bestowed and most of us would give if we could.

Design

The joy of design is in the *discovery of the form*; in so complex a thing as a modern building this is not achieved without very great and sustained concentration. The simple, graceful solution of harmonious plan and elevation, which looks so easy and self-evident, is usually a synthesis of very complex elements. Physical requirements, dimensions, connections, aspect, prospect, climate, materials, structural methods, traditional forms, the moods of color, and the reaction of the client's on the architect's, and

possibly on the contractor's temperament, to say nothing of the cultural development of the skill available—a little firmament to be reduced to order.

And the discovery of the form is only the beginning. If a work of art in any sense is to result, then the character, and more of the character, and yet again more character of this form must be apprehended, digested, exuded, and when realized be instilled throughout every fibre of the structure—as it is in the design of a man and of a tree.

The two great instrumentalities of the architect, out of which the souls of buildings are conjured, are called scale and proportion. The effects of scale and proportion are infinite, and can most readily be made manifest by the use of familiar forms. Experiment must necessarily be conducted with some caution in so costly an art as this. Traditional form is a mere incident, however, for mastery of scale and proportion, by any means new or old, is the ultimate technique of architecture.

But it would serve no useful purpose further to enlarge upon the technicalities of this art, when we are seeking to expound its fundamental nature. For one thing, to do so would involve us in those controversies of the rival schools of tradition which are so largely responsible for the prevailing mountains of ignorance we seek to dispel. And secondly, appreciation, and that is what art is for, was never engendered by the knowledge of means. Such science has an inevitable tendency to destroy those blessed illusions which are the ends of all the arts.

The architect is then an artist who, instead of a fiddle to play upon, or a yard of canvas to paint upon, or the back of an unpaid bill to write upon, demands acres, and square miles if he can get them, to build upon. As his stupendous materials are rarely within his means, he is forced to hire their use in exchange for such service as will give him *the necessary measure of control*. Why he does so, and whence his impulse, are not the questions before us. If it has been shown that this kind of artist pays a fair price in kind for his materials, the main object is achieved. If so, it may be inferred that he has a natural right to do with them as the spirit moves him, so long as he does not thereby diminish the price he must pay—be false to his agency. But loyal agency to his client is to be very clearly distinguished from loyal artistry to his public—the service of the man in the street.

It takes two to make a quarrel; it takes two to make love; it takes two to achieve a work of art—one to utter, one to respond. It is therefore for the client to identify himself with the man in the street if he would share this unearned increment of values. On the other hand, the architect may be very grateful to his clients for their support of his industry and experiments, for after all he can rarely know whether

his work has been fulfilment of agency—in itself a very respectable claim—or the magic that can quicken the hearts of men. Perhaps that is why architects as a rule are so shy and timid in voicing their aspirations, so hungry and brutal in contesting their opportunities, in all innocence of common greed. Each child of their imaginations may be a God.

Architecture

When one walks abroad, not too much engrossed with one's destination, the faces of the passers by, and sometimes their apparel, strike on one's attention with rich diversity of impact. The vast majority in any city (unless it be a city newly seen, where all has the glamour of fresh interest) seem dull, expressionless, common, perhaps repellent. But here comes some engaging villain, or a benevolent patriarch, or perhaps some haunted fanatic, or a dear complacent matron—someone displaying character, achieving style. Analysis racial, hereditary, circumstantial, has nothing to do with the interest aroused, though it may have much to do with the interest pursued, and may also be wholly astray. What matters is that these human objects of human interest manifest character, and if the manifestation be sometimes false, that is a small affair. It is the manifestation that concerns us. As it is with people, so it is with buildings. The blank, expressionless structures that are, for the most part, mere products of faithful agency, do not touch us at the heart as we pass along. One may be called in professionally to attend the case of a building, passed a thousand times without having been aware of its existence, till invited to look it over for reconstruction. But there, in the crowd, one saw mere eyes, and again, eyes that were windows to the soul; so, among the houses one sees windows, and again, windows that are eyes.

The ultimate test of the architectural quality of a building is the answer to the question "Can it look?"—look at you, look past you, look over you or beyond you, serenely, playfully, sadly, smugly? Is the look kindly or harsh, keen or naughty, austere or proud? If it looks to you, and at you, or anyone else, in any of such ways—and whether you like the way or not, has nothing to do with the case—then be sure you are in the presence of a work of art. Someone who had to do with the construction before you was an artist, and you are his man in the street, and the least you can do is to bow and salute your new acquaintance, the spirit of his building, for this thing may become your friend on better acquaintance.

But do not make the mistake of supposing that anyone paid the artist to make the building smile or frown. We have been at pains to explain that that is a service that cannot be either sold or bought, or even be performed at will.