Architecture and Building.

The English Home.

(By C. F. A. Voysey, in *British Architect.*)

"I come not to bring peace, but a sword," to cut down a popular idol, and win allegiance to an older, a more healthy, and more universal principle.

First, we must clear our minds of all conceptions of symmetrical elevations, made after the likeness of temples, and return once more to the Gothic principle of evolving our homes out of local conditions and requirements, once more paying due regard and respect to natural conditions, both climatic and geological, and, above all, to a love, reverence and obedience to the laws of fitness, fitness to our aspirations and needs. Let us give up masquerading as Greeks, and sincerely express our natural characteristics. The classical idol has reigned long enough; it must be cast out, because it is a false expression of our climate and character. It was a glorification of ceremonial, and in its earliest forms confined to the Temple. Man's habits, customs, conditions and ideas have entirely changed, and we have many practical problems of domestic economy to engage our attention. We must approach such problems with open minds ready for all healthy development, and be prepared to accept conditions which we cannot alter, such as the advent of the machine, and the improved conditions of transit and commerce. We must be prepared, if need be, to use marble from Italy, if our country cannot produce material equally suitable for our needs. But we need not feign Italian sentiments or cloak ourselves with the airs and graces of foreigners. We must shake off the fashionable convention of obedience to style, and dare to be sincerely ourselves, and recognise our limitations.

The great artist Wren, with his exquisite sense of proportion, has made us believe that classical expression in architecture will suit any climate; in other words, that quality and quantity of light and natural climatic and geographical conditions have nothing whatever to do with fine architecture. Because he was an artist he has pleased us with his buildings; his qualities have led us astray, and we are now building all our town halls after the manner of St. Paul's, because the country and town councillor thinks that is the finest example of what modern architecture should be. He recognises the Renaissance style, and finds that if he advocates it, his electors are less likely to condemn his judgment than if he sought for fitness of purpose, and condition, regardless of style.

The clamouring for style is merely a cloak to hide our want of discrimination, and many think that the establishment of a national style would make it easy for them to be in the fashion; most people wish to be in the fashion as to taste. The discernment of fitness needs careful consideration of many subjects, and a wise, brave judgment, which the average man finds beyond his power or inclination. The architectural profession has done its best to encourage the adoption of the style called English Renaissance, because it is possible for the average man to obtain a degree of proficiency in it; it is easily crammed, and is a sure crutch for the halt and the lame. The term English, as applied to Renaissance, is inaccurate, and a dishonest attempt to make an entirely foreign style appear national; but I do not wish to quarrel over the little difference there may be between what is called Italian and English Renaissance. All we need here to make clear is that all Renaissance architecture is conceived on a definite classical principle, diametrically opposed to the principle of Gothic. The former is deductive, while the latter is inductive. In other words, Renaissance is a process by which plans and requirements are more or less made to fit a conception of a more or less symmetrical elevation, or group of elevations. The design is conceived from the outside of the building and worked inwards. Windows are made of a size necessary to the pleasant massing of the elevations, rather than to fit the size and shape of rooms.

The Gothic process is the exact opposite; outside appearances are evolved from internal fundamental conditions; staircases and windows come where most convenient for use. All openings are proportioned to the various parts to which they apply, and the creation of a beautiful Gothic building instead of being a conception based on a temple made with hands, is based on the temple of a human soul. The Baron or peasant planned his house to express his daily aspirations, customs and needs. It is quite true that architecture has progressed much more in domestic than in public building. We set to work in the one case to study the conditions and requirements, and make a good plan, and from it evolve a good elevation—that is, when we are engaged on domestic work. But for the alderman and councillor we conceive a mighty elevation, a true aldermanic corporation, a fatness and display, behind which we hope to accommodate the policeman.

The finest architecture the world has ever seen has always been the honest expression of human needs and aspirations. And this is equally true of the noblest classic buildings. If we lived and thought and felt as Greeks, Greek architecture would be a true expression for us. This principle applies to every country throughout the habitable world. Why, then, should England turn her back on her own country and pretend that as she is such a born mongrel she can have no truly national architecture? Has she no national climate? Are her geological and geographical conditions the same as all other countries? Is there no difference between English or Italian men? The absurdity of the suggestion is irritating. No one denies strong national character to the British people. Why, then, do we so persistently try to ape the manners of foreigners? Why, because we have learnt how to travel abroad, should we despise our own country and its limitations? Why have we lost our patriotism, and adopted a foreign child to inherit and record our unfaithfulness? Surely a national style would be both possible and desirable, as it was in the Tudor period, if allowed to develop out of natural conditions and requirements. It is the ingrafting of a foreign style, or manner of buildings, which is so poisonous and utterly subversive of any natural growth.

Do we not all desire peace, repose, protection, warmth, cheerfulness and sincerity, open, frank expression and freedom from chafing convention in our homes? Surely, then, the Gothic principle can help us to attain all these qualities. It sets the mind free to consider all the moral sentiments and mental and physical emotions which, when properly classified and controlled, will form—as they have done in the past—the only sure foundation for our design. It is the craving for repose that leads us to make our houses long and low, and to avoid the multiplication of angles and divergent planes. Forked lightning is Nature's expression of unrest and disturbance; complexity of angles and planes is our forked lightning, and conveys unrest and disturbance. In like manner multitudinous mixtures of various materials, textures, colours and forms all disturb the sense of repose. All observant people will tell you how very tiring they find museums. The constant calls made by the various objects on the senses is very fatiguing. And yet it is sadly common to find drawing-rooms and whole houses more like museums than homes of grace and rest. People with such places show a keener love of display or sentimental regard for associations than a love of repose, and by this we are reminded once more of the fact that it takes many different kinds of minds to make a world, and that it is really a great blessing that we do not all think alike. Therefore, in laying down the qualities we suppose necessary to make an ideal home, we must remember that when finished it cannot fit all men. All objects possess intrinsic qualities, having a direct influence on our minds and emotions, but, in addition, we invest them with associations. It is therefore necessary in arriving at a