NECESSITY FOR THE MUTUAL CONFORMITY OF HOUSES AND FURNITURE.

By George J. Henkels.*

THE easy communication with Europe—together with the desire for travel, which appears to be national with Americans—has improved our taste, both in furniture and architecture. The old cities of Europe abound with objects of interest to Americans, from the grand old cathedrals and churches, with their renowned paintings and sculpture, embodying the genius of Raphael, Michael Angelo and other celebrities of past ages; their palaces, adorned with a munificence of expense, which we can copy, but, for cost's sake, dare not excel; and the grand architecture of the buildings to be admired, by generations yet unborn, for their beauty of design and solidity of workmanship.

The furniture of the mediæval ages, ornate in conception and in carving, was, in the time of Louis XIV., enriched with elegant designs in porcelain, and often even with solid ornaments of gold and silver. In those days, when the monarch was absolute master of the people, the amount of labor bestowed on buildings and furniture was of no moment, as the artisan was forced to be content with just enough wages for the most miserable sustenance.

In America, where the artisan is a part of the government, and by his vote can neutralize that of the most wealthy or influential citizen, who may wish to legislate contrary to either the artisan's interest or his wishes, we would cut a sorry figure in attempting to erect such monuments of art, as St. Peter's at Rome, the Cathedral at Cologne, and others of almost equal celebrity, which have been constructed within the past thousand years.

Even these works of Christianity appal us with the magnitude of the labor expended upon them; and how much less can we comprehend the system of labor that enabled the pagan kings and emperors to erect such stupendous works as the Great Wall of China, the grand temples, (the ruins of which attest their former magnificence,) and the Pyramids of Egypt, erected by the Pharaohs whose mummied remains declare that their physical construction was not superior to our own.

Even now, in the nineteenth century, the boasted era of enlightenment, when "*Aspiring men would be angels, and angels would be gods,*" we, with all our scientific knowledge and enlarged ideas of mechanical power and construction, could not, by the combined power of the whole world, raise one of the large stones and place it on the Pyramid of Cheops as we there see them. Aye! and we even have no mechanical appliances, that could remove them from their present position. We know of no means of transportation for the immense solid marble columns, that formerly supported the grand temple of Karnac on the Nile. We could not even remove them from the quarry whence they were obtained, much less transport them nearly four hundred miles, as was done in their case. The contemplation of the magnitude of such ancient and principally heathen works of labor and art is a profitable occupation for the scientific and mechanical part of our

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citizens, who, in speaking of our great progress in science, mechanics and invention, are apt to assume, that we are far superior to all who have preceded us. We are on the lowest rounds of the ladder of science, whose topmost has been reached thousands of years past. But we are progressing; and have the advantage over the ancients, as we have their master-pieces for models, whilst, with them, it was original conception.

In ancient times a particular characteristic architecture pervaded the whole design of a building. The most general was Grecian, Roman and Gothic, and if it was intended to erect a building in either of these styles—the architect was strict in having no intrusion of any other. In modern times, we make a combination, with good effect; as is seen in many of our public buildings such as the Girard Bank, the Custom House and Girard College, in Philadelphia.

As a general rule, the architecture of our houses is of an *indescribable order*, or disorder, for which it will be necessary, some time, to coin a name. The builder, be he a carpenter, bricklayer, or stone-mason, makes a contract to build a house; with certain specifications as to size of front building; with such and such back buildings; height of ceiling in each story; and such kind of materials to be used. The stone-mason is the architect for the foundation; the bricklayer, for the walls; and the carpenter and the plasterers for their part; with the general superintendence of the contractor for the whole. The consequence is, that a *comfortable looking inconvenient* house is the result. In building such a house, a bricklayer would be considered a fool, if he built up solid walls; and left the carpenter to cut holes through, for windows and doors; but things equally inconsistent are being continually done, when there is no regular architect employed. Our house architecture is essentially too monotonous in the parts of use. That is, three or four-storied brick fronts, with white marble window and door-sills and lintels. Three-story back buildings, extending almost to the next street, leaving a very small square yard at the rear end of the lot and a long, damp, narrow side-yard, of four to six feet in width, the length of the back building. Thus, row after row is put up in pairs, two back buildings facing each other, with two narrow yards, separated by an eight or ten foot fence, exposing the domestic operations of each family to the other, even though there may be no disposition, in the case of either party, to be inquisitive. The close contiguity of the second-story back—which is almost always the family sitting-room—makes it nearly impossible, to avoid seeing what is going on in the next house.* There is no other city in the nation, that has so persistently adhered to this plan of building as Philadelphia. Besides the above-mentioned inconveniences, are the distance from the front door to the various stories in the back-building, and the fact that the most desirable part of the house is taken for a parlor, which is the least used of any part of a Philadelphia home.

With an eastern and western exposure, the sun will in summer dry up the moisture in the narrow side-yards; but with a northern exposure, there is but little chance for the sun to operate; and the consequence is green mould (a growth of poisonous fungi) on the wall and brick pavement, much to the injury of the health of the occupants. This occurs to some extent, in the southern exposure; but we have become so accustomed to this, that a damp, unpleasant smell is noticed, but no attempt made to remedy it.

* This is correct. But, singularly enough, we have known instances, where—by mutual understanding, both between families who did, and those who did not visit—the blinds of the two confronting sitting-rooms were always kept raised and opened in the evening, and the gas lighted, for sociability and security between the women-folk of the two houses, the men being often absent.—Ed.

In the city of Philadelphia, where room is so abundant—with such easy communication with the suburbs, where ground is plenty and cheap—we should have at least the greater part of our new houses put up on a lot sufficiently broad to admit of a wide hall, in the centre, on each floor, permitting a free circulation of fresh air, at all times, through the house; and allowing the sun to play freely on the walls and pavements, thus effectually preventing the accumulation of green mould, at any time.

A lot for a double house, with a yard the full width of the house, does not contain any more superficial feet, than that for a single house; and is infinitely preferable.

Our finish for the interior of our houses is also monotonous, the same as the exterior, if not worse. In the exterior, we have the relief of white marble, granite, Pictou stone, brown stone and mastic for variety, which, by a little ornamentation, relieves the sameness but in the interior, Philadelphia houses are almost all alike. That is, a long, narrow hall, with the main stairway at the apparent end of it; two doors opening into the parlor, cutting its blank wall into sections, with the doors opening back to the wall, leaving no place for furniture when the door is open wide; and an ugly blank, when the door is closed. On the other side of the parlor, one or two marble mantels which occupy a great part of the wall. In front there are two windows; in the rear usually one, opening on the narrow side-yard. Around these windows the carpenter has attached enormous mouldings—sometimes twelve inches wide—thinking, no doubt, that he is making an elegant job; and that the room, as from his hand, is really finished, not knowing that the cabinet-maker is obliged to spoil the proportion of the furniture, to enable him to avoid those same mouldings; and, that the upholsterer is also obliged to mar the shape of his cornices and drapery, in trying to hide, with the curtains all the wood, which the carpenter had so much trouble to put up.

Where drapery is to be hung, the less woodwork there is around the windows, the better the upholsterer can work; and the more graceful the folds of the curtains. A bead three-quarters of an inch to one inch wide, to protect the corner of the plaster, is all that is required. After all, what is the use of the immense frames and mouldings around the doors, unless it is intended to benefit painters, and entail a great amount of extra labor on the domestics? A narrow wood protection for the plaster, with a frescoed panel down the sides and an ornament of some pretty design, in fresco over the door and window-heads, would certainly be more graceful. In plain houses the paper-hanger could accomplish the same effect at a very small expense.

Again, what is the necessity for cumbering the parlor with immense marble mantels, where the house is heated with hot air or steam. But it is the fashion to have mantels, with a mirror on top of them, reaching to the ceiling; the height of the mantel just allowing a person to see his or her face in the mirror—with all of the upper part serving only to reflect the ceiling all awry, as is the usual case. Why not stud the wall out to the chimney jamb, and have no mantel, but only an ornamental heat-register or low-down grate; and reserve the walls for mirrors to the floor; and for furniture and paintings. The amount expended in useless wood-work around windows and doors, likewise in marble mantels, would nearly furnish the window drapery and long mirrors.

The writer, called in, not long since, to furnish a house, was made painfully aware of another one of our monotonies. The house was all doors, there actually being no place for furniture, unless doors were closed up. In fact, the bricklayer and carpenter had made a most convenient house for communication, but not adapted for either comfort, convenience or beauty in furnishing. When a gentleman builds a house for a permanent home, he should first consult the architect, for plans; and refer the architect to some responsible cabinet-maker for a consultation to arrange spaces for the various articles required in a well-furnished house. This can all be done, without interfering in the least with the architect's plans, or the owner's desire. The moving of a door or the arrangement of a pier, so as to accommodate the proper articles of furniture, may not serve to render the room so handsome *unfurnished*; but when the proper articles are put in their places, the effect is much better, as a whole, than if the cabinet-maker and upholsterer were restricted—

"Cribbed, cabined and confined—"

in the proportion of their parts. When the interior of a room is planned, it is as easy to arrange for the necessary articles of furniture, and a proper convenient place for each, as it is to do all by hazard.

Whatever assists to make a home cheerful should be of paramount importance, as the tone, whether cheerful or gloomy, is, to a great extent, the reflex of its surroundings.

There are many other *inherited* faults in our house architecture, which if dilated on, would unduly protract this article; but enough has been said, to expose prominent faults, and the good sense of the reader will no doubt suggest reforms in other secondary ones.

BUILDING APPLIANCES.

IT is strange, that there has been so little added, for ages past, to the necessary facilities for the construction of buildings. The scaffolding used by masons and bricklayers is the same rude contrivance to-day, that it was in far distant time. We see, by the early wood-engravings, still extant, that this was the case. The hod, too, is no better than its earliest predecessor. In fact, the various tools are still retained, as of yore; and human invention and art improvement, in such matters, seem to stand still, in deference to the antique ideas, which have so thoroughly established pre-emption rights in the field referred to.

Now and then, it is true, some adventurous spirit presumes to try an improvement in some one thing. For instance, some forty years ago, a London master builder, at a great expense, had fitted up for himself a scaffolding, so constructed, as to be capable of being drawn out, in the legs, like the joints of a telescope, and thus he elevated his scaffold tier by tier as he required it. Nobody took the hint; and whether the poor inventor profited by his novel arrangement, or died in despair, history sayeth not. Some few efforts were made to introduce the telescope joint in interior scaffolding, however; and Mr. Byfield, the eminent artist in *papiere maché* ornamentation for ceilings, actually used such a contrivance with success. It has since been used by fresco painters; and always found to be a great improvement on the detestable system of "horses"

The method of bracket-scaffolding, by means of triangular brackets secured by pins to putlocks, in the walls, is sometimes used; but it is very dangerous, as well as injurious to the green work it bears upon.

The fact is, that this matter of scaffolding is a thing too little thought about; and wherefore such neglect, we are at a loss to know. A master builder, expect-