THE MANSARD MADNESS.

OF all the intellectual qualifications which man is gifted with, there is not one as sensitive as that which enables him to discern between what is intrinsically good, and what is bad or indifferent to his eye. Yet are there none of all man's mental attributes so frequently and so grossly outraged as is this to which we now allude, called Taste.

Custom has much to say in the question of arbitrary rule which taste so imperatively claims. Persistence in any thing will, of necessity, make itself felt and recognized, no matter how odious at first may be the object put before the public eye, and ultimately that object becomes what is commonly called "fashionable." This apparent unity of the public on one object is variable and will soon change to another, which in its turn will seem to reign by unanimous consent and so on *ad infinitum*.

In Architecture this fickle goddess, Fashion, seems to reign as imperatively and as coquettishly as in any or all the affairs of this world of humanity. That which was at first esteemed grotesque and ridiculous, becomes in time tolerable and at last admirable. But the apathy which sameness begets cannot long be borne by the novelty worshippers, and accordingly new forms and shapes remodel the idea of the day, until it ceases to bear a vestige of its first appearance and becomes quite another thing.

Of all the prominent features of architecture that which has been least changeable until late years is the "roof." The outline of that covering has been limited to a very few ideas, some of which resolved themselves into arbitrary rules of government from which the hardiest adventurer was loath to attempt escape.

Deviating from the very general style of roof which on the section presents a tri-angle, sometimes of one pitch, sometimes of another, but almost universally of a fourth of the span, the *truncated* form was to be found, but so exceedingly sombre was this peculiar roof that it never obtained to any great extent, and indeed it presented on the exterior a very serious obstacle to its adoption by architects in the difficulty of blending it with any design in which spirit, life, or elegance, was a requisite.

There are occasionally to be found in Europe, and even in America, examples of these truncated roofs, but it is very questionable whether there are to be met with any admirers of their effect.

The principle on which they are constructed has, however, a very great advantage in the acquirement of head-room in the attics, giving an actual story or story and half to the height, without increasing the elevation of the walls. The architects of the middle ages took a hint from this evident advantage, and used the truncated roof on their largest constructions. Its form is that of a pyramid with the upper portion cut off (*trunco*, to cut off, being its derivation.)

MANSART, or as he is more commonly called MANSARD, an erratic but ingenious French architect, in the seventeenth century invented the curb roof, so decided an improvement on the truncated that it became known by his name. This roof adorning the palatial edifices of France soon assumed so much decorative beauty in its curb moulding and base cornice, as well as in the dormers and eyelets with which it was so judiciously pierced, that it became a source of artistic fascination in those days in France; and as Germany was indebted to French architects for her most prominent designs, the Mansard roof found its way there, and into some other parts of Europe.

But, much as English architects admired, as a whole, any or all of those superb erections of the Gallic Capital, it

was a century and a half before it occured to them to imitate them even in this most desirable roof.

Our architects having increased with the demand for finer houses and more showy public buildings, and having parted company with their Greek and Roman idols to which their predecessors had been so long and so faithfully wedded, and acknowledging the necessity for novelty, ardently embraced the newly arising fashion and the Mansard roof arose at every corner in all its glory. At first the compositions which were adorned with this crowning were pleasing to the general view, if not altogether amenable to the strict rules of critical taste. But in due time (and alas that time too surely and severely came) the *pseudo* French style with its perverted Mansard roof palled upon the public taste for the eccentricities its capricious foster-fathers in their innate stultishness compelled it to display.

Some put a Mansard roof upon an Italian building, some on a Norman, and many, oh, how many, on a Romanesque! Some put it on one story erections and made it higher than the walls that held it, in the same proportion that a high crowned hat would hold to a dwarf. Some stuck on towers at the corners of their edifices and terminated them with *Mansard domes!* Some had them inclined to one angle, some to another; some curved them inward, some outward, whilst others went the straight ticket.

The dormers too came in for a large share of the thickening fancies and assumed every style or no style at all. The chimney shafts were not neglected. Photos of the Thuilleries were freely bought up, and bits and scraps of D'Lorme were hooked in, to make up an original idea worthy of these smoky towers. "Every dog will have his day," is a fine old sensible remark of some long-headed lover of the canine species, and applies alike to animals, men, and things. That it particularly applies to that much abused thing called the Mansard roof is certain, as the very name is now more appropriately *the absurd roof.*

Fashion begins to look coldly upon her recent favorite, which in truth "has been made to play such fantastic tricks before high Heaven, as make the angles weep;" and it is doomed.

A few years hence, and we will all look back in amused wonder at the creations of to-day, crowned with the tortured conception of MANSARD.

HYDRAULIC CEMENT.

The rapid hardening under water of the cement which from that property derives its name of "Hydraulic Cement," has been, and indeed is still, a subject of discussion as to the true theory of such action. We find in the June number of the *Chemical News* a paragraph which must prove very interesting to manufacturers as well as to all who use and take an interest in that most useful of building materials to which the Architect and the Engineer are so deeply indebted.

"In order to test the truth of the different hypotheses made concerning this subject, A. Schulatschenko, seeing the impossibility of separating, from a mixture of silicates, each special combination thereof, repeated Fuch's experiment, by separating the silica from 100 parts of pure soluble silicate of potassa, and, after mixing it with fifty parts of lime, and placing the mass under water, when it hardened rapidly. A similar mixture was submitted to a very high temperature, and in this case, also, a cement was made. As a third experiment, a similar mixture was heated till it was fused; after having been cooled and pulverized, the fused mass did not harden any more under water. Hence it follows that hardening does take place in cement made by the wet as well as as dry process, and that the so-called over-burned cement is inactive, in consequence of its particles having suffered a physical change."