

### RECENT ARCHITECTURE IN AMERICA. III.

#### COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS.

OUR commercial buildings offer just now a peculiarly interesting field of inquiry. In no department are we doing more work. "Down-town" New York, for example, is being so rapidly remodeled that small trace will be left in the year 1900 of the work that stood but ten years ago. In no department, again, do problems of greater difficulty and novelty suggest themselves; and in none, I think, is more strenuous effort being made to secure better artistic as well as better practical results than have hitherto been common. It is well, indeed, that this should be the case, since we are not, like our fathers, building for a short time only. Their structures have proved but temporary, while for ours a life may be predicted as long as the city's own. No one can ever build them bigger, and, however ugly we may leave them, our children are not likely to pull them down for æsthetic reasons only.

We know well the sort of business buildings that were typical some forty or fifty years ago—simple cubes of brick or stone broken by regular rows of unornamented windows. They were not even to be considered from the point of view of art, but from their very humility were not actively distressing or offensive. Offense came quickly, however, with the dawning of the "iron age." The world then thought it had found a new material which would meet its practical needs as they had never been met before, and would revolutionize the art on its artistic side as well. At first a new "iron style" was prophesied; but when this failed to appear, every time-honored fashion was drawn upon for help. Many, diverse, and frantic were the efforts made to achieve success. There were no bounds set to ambition; for the cheapness and facility with which iron could be cast into any shape, put within common reach such possibilities of elaboration and display (of *sham* elaboration and display, however) as had hitherto been reserved for occasional use in the most sumptuous and costly work. Nowhere was there more ambition, more experimenting, and more frantic "originality" than with us—as a walk up the central portion of Broadway will prove. But the ultimate result was as far as possible from the hopes we had cherished at the outset. No new iron style was evolved, and no old fashion showed

its fitness for truthful, or even for satisfactory superficial treatment in the novel substance. And I think these years of struggle had a definitely pernicious as well as a merely disappointing outcome. I am sure our public would never have grown to misconceive so utterly the true grounds of architectural excellence, had not the cheap and showy lies of iron been paraded for so many years before its eyes. Had we always kept to brick and stone, we could not have been so lavish with our "applied ornament," and could not have come to love it so unwisely. We could not so have forgotten that construction is the basis of architectural excellence; that simplicity and repose are among its finest factors; and that elaborateness and ornament are only justifiable when attempted in materials of appropriate sorts, and executed with artistic feeling and manual, not mechanical, skill. Surely to iron we owe the greater part of our architectural falsehood, restlessness, ostentation, and vulgarity; and surely to it, the greater part of our present incapacity to distinguish between an organism and an aggregate of inconsequential features; between "decorated construction" and "constructed decoration"; between ornamental detail that is wrought by an artist's hand, and ornamental detail that is coarsely cast in ignoble forms.

It is impossible to find any really good iron buildings among our many thousands. All we can say is that the simplest are the best; or, more properly, the least distressing. The plain fronts that abound, for instance, in the so-called "dry-goods district" of New York are not beautiful, and neither their arches nor their lintels are a satisfactory expression of the qualities of iron. But they are infinitely better, at all events, than elaborate vulgarizations of palatial magnificence like the Grand Hotel with its thousand columns, or the Domestic Building on Union Square with its colossal statuary, or the Venetian or Arabic or flashy nondescript façades farther down Broadway.

But iron no longer greatly interests us except for interior constructional expedients. We no longer make much use of it in our visible exteriors. It has proved intractable from an artistic point of view,—whether of necessity or owing to our want of ingenuity, I do not pretend to say, though it does seem as though thirty years of earnest effort in every



land must pretty well have exhausted its possibilities. And practically it has been tried in fiery balances and found conspicuously wanting. Fortunately for our art, we are forced back almost entirely upon brick and stone as our visible materials.

Are we now to do something really good with them,—something that will be neither a mere square box nor a superficial flourish of mendacious forms and mechanically wrought details? Certainly we are making the effort; and as certainly, I think, we are beginning to succeed. Let us consider, first, the humblest sort of problem, and take as an example of its simple but successful solution a warehouse Messrs. Babb, Cook & Willard have recently erected on Duane street, in New York. There was little to work with here: cheap materials, scanty ornament, and not even a corner site; only one of those high narrow façades that go so far to discourage effort. But effort, intelligent effort, has been brought to bear, and the result is fine in the first and chief essential of good architecture—fine in composition. The straight lines of equal windows demanded in a building of the sort are preserved throughout the lower stories; but their uniformity is relieved by the piers and great round arches which, furnishing strength to the wall, also express that strength and introduce the artistic element of design. The fifth-story openings are accommodated to the arches, and their bold variety completes the effect of intelligent composition. Such a building, as truly as the most elaborate, is an architectural growth, an entity, an organism. It proves that its builder had an idea and knew how to express it; that he was neither a mere mechanical piler-up of bricks and window-sashes, nor a mistaken searcher after that effectiveness which, it is supposed, will result from the introduction of “unnecessary” decorative features. Such excellence seems very easy of attainment,—but only now that we see it gained. Let us imagine one of our unpretentious business streets lined with buildings of this sort—I do not mean identical with it, but analogous to it in simplicity, appropriateness, and architectural feeling. We do not conceive it as a street to be merely tolerated, even if our more ambitious thoroughfares were of equal excellence in a richer way; rather as one in which we should find true pleasure, and of a permanent, because a *rational*, sort.

Another similarly simple and successful essay, due to the same firm, is to be found in Newburgh on the Hudson, and may be judged from the illustration on page 514.

A leather warehouse, which is still more uncompromisingly utilitarian in effect, and which is yet an intelligent work of art, stands near

the New York end of the Brooklyn Bridge, and has fronts on Jacob and Frankfort streets, though the corner between them is occupied by another building. It is extremely sturdy, almost rude, in effect, and without the slightest trace of ornament—with not even so much as we find in the little moldings which, inconspicuous though they are, yet add a tangible grace to Mr. Babb's results. But its wall is composed by means of piers and arches; it has a strong though simple cornice; and its openings are well designed and varied, those of the ground story being powerful round arches. Its solidity and strength are not more evident than its fitness of expression, or than its testimony to how much a clever architect may do with a problem so humble that it has long been held beneath the dignity of art. It is only recently, I think, that such simple works have been confided to hands more skillful than those of the ordinary builder; at least, it is only recently that we have had ocular proof of an architect's interference. And therefore it is that I count them such valuable signs of progress. The façades which are being built to inclose the Bridge arcades and fit them for storage purposes give, by the way, welcome evidence of a similar sort.

Now, for variety and the sake of pointing an instructive contrast, let us look at a great wholesale store Mr. Richardson has lately built on Bedford street in Boston—a work of the richest and most elaborate kind, and, considering its place and purpose, of the greatest possible novelty. It would be hard to exaggerate the “true architectural emotion” it produces when we first see it through a vista of narrow streets lined with commonplace commercial structures. Mr. Richardson worked, it is true, under favoring conditions. The site is a rounded corner of two diverging streets, facing a third which affords a good distant view, and is extended enough for good proportions to be possible in spite of great necessary height; and the money appropriated allowed the use of noble material and profuse decoration. But other builders have had opportunities as good, or better even, in this immediate neighborhood. It is not the fault of fate or clients that their results are so far inferior. In Mr. Richardson's building we see composition of an admirable kind. Variety exists with quietness and harmony, and imposing solidity in spite of those wide modern windows which are so often an architect's destruction. Its beauty is *built*, not applied by means of decoration. This last is profuse, as I have said, but is guided and inspired by the structural forms. It enhances and accentuates, but does not itself *supply* the element of architectural “delight.” A detail to be noted is the com-





STORES, 173 DUANE STREET, NEW YORK.

paratively small size and unaccented simplicity of the doorways. Their subordination to the windows in a structure of this kind is as appropriate and expressive as is the emphasis we have seen Mr. Richardson lay upon them in buildings of another sort. Boston may well be proud of this splendid pile of dark-red sandstone, which is without question the most beautiful of all our commercial structures.

And yet we may ask ourselves whether, after all, it is as hopeful a sign for the future of our art as is such a work as Mr. Babb's. It would be absurd, of course, to compare, on their intrinsic merits as pure works of art, the sumptuous richness of the one with the frank poverty of the other. But I cannot too often repeat that architectural creations—especially with us in this first beginning of our art—have another aspect from which also they must be judged. When we look at them sensibly, they seem valuable in proportion as they offer the best practical solution of the most frequent and characteristic problems of our day and land. The power which can do well with humble opportunities, and create true art at little cost and under difficult conditions, is the power of which we have most need. A com-

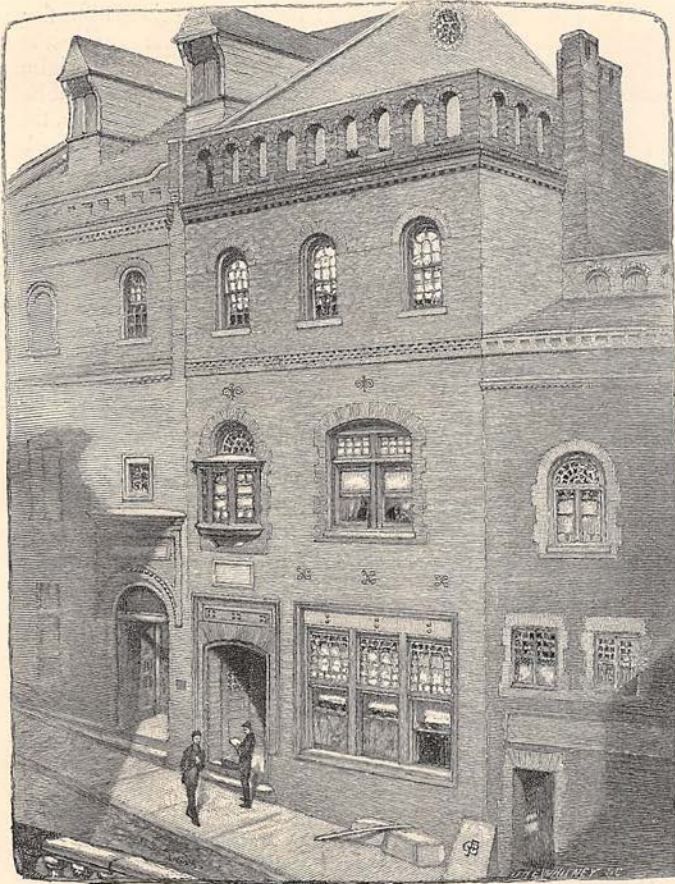
mercial building is primarily a financial investment, and the architect's art should help, not hinder, a financial success. For one architect who will have a chance like Mr. Richardson's, there will be a hundred to have a chancelike Mr. Babb's. To the one we shall look to give us now and then a splendid monument; but upon the others we must depend if the generality of our city streets are to be redeemed from their barren ugliness or hideous deformity. And so I think that Mr. Babb's simplicity affords a presage of greater value than Mr. Richardson's magnificence.

Indeed, a further word of criticism may be registered. He would be an ungrateful critic who could wish that in this one case Mr. Richardson had built in any other way. He would be a theoretical purist who could say that since here we have something far too splendid and ornate to be strictly appropriate for commercial uses, it is something, therefore, which should be distinctly condemned as sinning against architectural excellence because sinning against fitness and expression of purpose. Yet, nevertheless, I think it would be unfortunate if our architects, dazzled by the beauty of this work, should come to look upon it as a standard, or as a model fit for imitation. On general grounds

such a conclusion would be false; and on special grounds it would be extremely hurtful. Mr. Richardson's talent is of a very peculiar sort. Its results are, perhaps, a law unto themselves; but they are sometimes the last results in the world which should be made a law for others, or which could be safely diluted with the water of imitation. Take away the exuberant strength and fervor which enable Mr. Richardson at times to do unlawful things in a magnificently seductive way, and we should merely have the unlawfulness without the compensating charm. We have not, I repeat, so many fine monumental structures that we need quarrel with this because Mr. Richardson produced it when simply bid to build a warehouse. But it is not every one who would create a monument instead of a pretentious failure in striving for a similar transformation; and no one at all could do it, I am very sure, if attempting the task upon Mr. Richardson's lines, and imitating the manner which is natural to him.

Let us return now to New York, and see how admirable a work of art may be wrought by the perfectly straightforward resolution of a peculiarly utilitarian problem, and without





A STORE AT NEWBURGH.

the slightest recourse to ornamental embellishment. There is no building in the city which has greater beauty of a purely architectural kind than the huge storage warehouse that Mr. James E. Ware has erected at Lexington Avenue and Forty-second street. Certain factors in the programme gave him, it is true, fine opportunities of a sort which the modern architect seldom enough encounters. For one thing, he had a most unusual chance to build great unbroken fields of wall. We know what effects of imposing grandeur the architects of old realized in such fields. We know the temples of Egypt, the warehouses of Nuremberg, the various wide walls of Spain. And we are tempted to believe that the Roman baths, for instance, are finer in their present denuded state — in their huge simplicity and structural expression — than when they were overlaid with a gorgeous dress of “applied” unnecessary features. No complaint is more often in the mouth of the modern architect or his apologist than the complaint that such possibilities are not within his reach. But when

by chance they are, how often does he use them well? How often does he even try to use them at all? Is any sight more common in our streets than a wall, of necessity unpierced, which its builder has seen fit to “decorate” with blind windows over its entire expanse? Mr. Ware has not fallen into such suicidal folly, nor has he left his wall in a naked monotony which would make it a mere brute pile, and not a *structure*. He has grouped his windows, strongly accentuated his string-courses, formed his angles of powerful turrets, and crowned the whole by a finely effective cornice. He has left his fields in simple strength, but has redeemed them from barrenness, emphasized their scale, and turned his building into an imposing work of architectural art. Purpose and interior disposition could not be more truthfully explained. No feature is added for the sake of beauty only, yet each brings its own quota

toward general beauty of effect. In detail, as in disposition, there is nothing with which we can find fault, I think, save perhaps the corner doorway, which might have been either more simple or more forcibly accentuated. Everywhere we see evidence of original and happy inspiration. And it is original and happy, because entirely based on practical necessities, which are turned (not forced) into artistic opportunities. The building is, by the way, an especially instructive example of the value of light and shade in enhancing architectural forms. Look at it under a bright sun, and you will see how much it owes to the strong markings of its string-courses, to the depth of its reveals, and to the splendid shadows of its cornice and its turret roofs. It is built throughout of red brick, a slight and welcome diversity of color coming through the use of a somewhat darker tint about the openings.

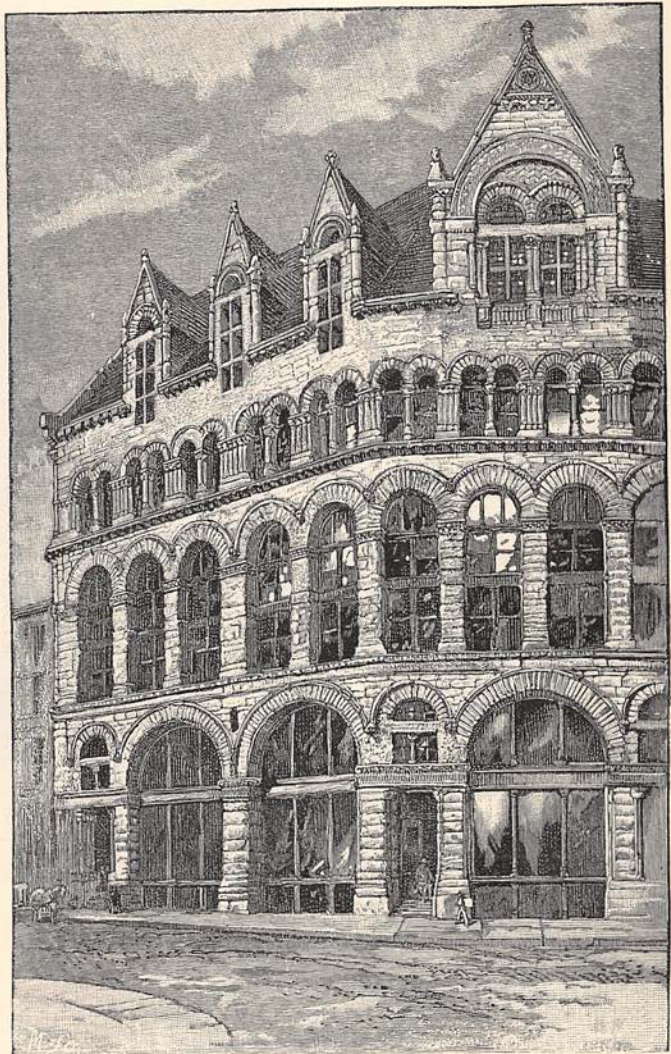
No layman could have said to himself beforehand that thus and so a warehouse in a modern street should be conceived. But every eye must now acknowledge that this is just its proper form — for use, for expressive-



ness, and for appropriate beauty. It is novel, unexpected, and original; yet our first glance convinces us that it is *right* as well as strikingly effective. And are not these the reflections always suggested by a truly fine work of art, and by none that is not fine and true? No architect of the day deserves more hearty congratulation than does Mr. Ware for the artistic excellence of this building, and still more for the truthful, rational, strictly architectural way in which this has been gained. Its influence ought to be as strong and vital as its birth was unforeseen and welcome. If it could be transported to some ancient town, and tenderly touched with the softening hands of time and of historical association, its beauty would be recognized by all, as it now is by those who can appreciate architectural success apart from all adventitious aids.

Some of the new retail stores in our large cities, while far from being perfect or even very good works of art, are yet a noteworthy improvement on their immediate predecessors. We cannot really approve, for instance, of the tall Gorham building at the north-west corner of Broadway and Nineteenth street, with its trivial "Queen Anne" detail appropriate only to a structure of one-tenth its size. But since it is of brick, and since its detail, though so feeble, is not loud or vulgar, it is in happy contrast with such a neighbor as Lord & Taylor's iron shop. At the south-east corner of Twenty-second street is a much better work, still weak in composition, but quiet, straightforward, unpretentious, and agreeable. With others of its class it proves, if nothing more, that rampant ostentation is going out of fashion.

Messrs. Peabody & Stearns have built in Boston a large corner store which, in spite of some unfortunate detail, shows a fair attempt at composition and a clever treatment of the porch. This is recessed in the corner, the overhanging story being held by powerful columns



STORES IN BEDFORD STREET, BOSTON.

which strike, in a rational and unforced way, an effective note of variety.

In our smaller towns, too, we are giving up the shrieking bathos which characterized our commercial structures of a few years ago—their cast-iron columns, their top-heavy cornices of sanded zinc, their extravagantly awkward detail. If in place of these we usually find as yet only a more or less fantastic "Queen Anne" design, we must still recognize a distinct step in advance. Though not always sensible or appropriate, and sometimes very distressing, yet such designs have now and then a sufficient grace or picturesqueness to make us partly forgive their lack of deeper excellence. And occasionally we find something that is different in character and really good. One such example I have already



noted at Newburgh; and another, quite unlike it, and of a very charming sort, we see in the Farmers' Bank at Albany, built by Mr. Russell Sturgis. It is especially interesting since, for once, Gothic forms have been chosen, and have been treated in a very straightforward, sensible, and yet effective fashion.

Let us glance a moment at the little Industrial School Mr. Stratton has built on Sixteenth street, in New York, which is illustrated on page 519, and then pass to something very different.

Retail shops and warehouses we have had always with us; but of late years a new member has been born into our commercial family, which is one of the most unmanageable architectural children that have ever claimed attention in any day or land. We see quite clearly that architecture is not an abstract, merely "æsthetic" art, but an art rooted in practical requirements, and molded by material conditions, when we remember that the invention of the steam passenger-lift has brought about the invention of what have not improperly been called our "elevator buildings," and that they offer problems as new as they are characteristic of American soil, and especially of our cramped New York. Their chief characteristic is their enormous height. This height might not be hopelessly obstructive if one's other dimensions could be enlarged in proportion, if several stories could be put into a lofty roof, and if windows and wall spaces might be regulated quite at will. But with it goes, most often, a width that is totally inadequate; almost invariably, the impossibility of adopting a steep roof; and quite invariably, the necessity for a multitude of small rooms within, and so a multitude of small and monotonously spaced openings without. What is to be done with such a problem? I have not been surprised to hear some architects say, "Nothing. It is hopeless. We may as well surrender at once. The most we can do is to use good materials and discreet ornamentation. We can attempt no architectural composition, and if we are expressive we must, of



A CORNER OF THE MANHATTAN WAREHOUSES.

course, be monotonous, since there is nothing but monotony to render. We must retire in ignominy behind plain walls and uniform lines of little windows."

And, indeed, it would have been well if this modest hopelessness had sometimes regulated action. Especially when we look at our most ambitious apartment houses do we feel that nothing could possibly be worse, and that the barest factory would have been a good deal better. But with apartment houses we are not here concerned. Only the "office building" falls within our present chapter, and when we look at its embodiments we may change our tone a little. I do not know why it should be so, but certainly our down-town "elevator buildings" are far better than their up-town brethren. Perhaps it is because in the commercial work our desire has often been simply to build well, while in our resi-



WINDOW OVER DOORWAY OF BEDFORD STREET STORES.

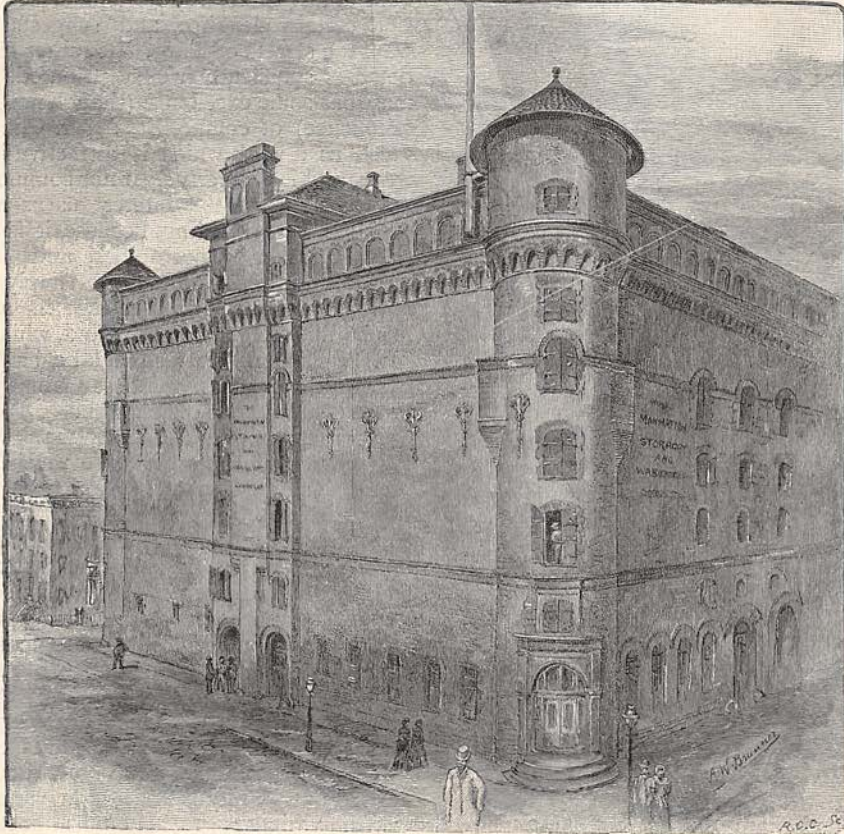


dences we have wished to be stylish, elegant, and even "pretty," too. Unfortunate desire, and thrice unfortunate results!

By this I do not mean to say that all our office buildings are good, or that any of them approach the condition of perfect works of art. Some are hideous, and many are simply commonplace. But some are promising, and others, taking into account the difficulties

building or the Western Union. And when we ask how and why they are better, we find it is because they are simpler, and because their architects have attempted structural composition instead of relying upon superficial adornment.

The Mills building, for instance, is bad in many ways, but good in the bold disposition of its masses, which has been effected by re-



MANHATTAN WAREHOUSES.

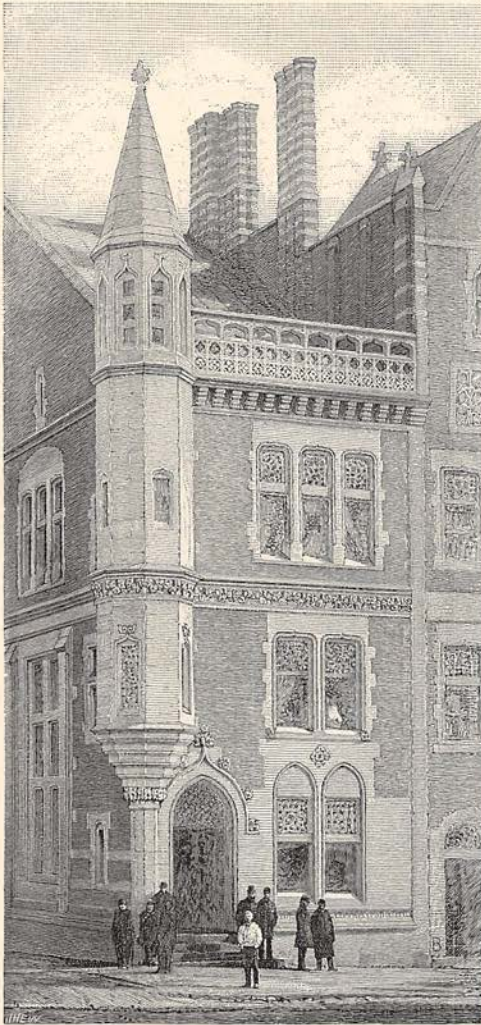
which have hedged them round, may fairly be called successful. No skill, no talent, no inspiration, can ever make a really beautiful building if its proportions must remain radically and glaringly wrong, and if no opportunity is given for masking them by composition with its roofs and masses. And yet we certainly are proving that something better may be wrung from even the worst proportions and the most monotonous masses than absolute deformity or barren nakedness.

Moreover, if we look at these office buildings chronologically, we can trace, I think, a general advance toward comparative excellence. Surely, most of the latest among them are better, for example, than the Tribune

building, so to say, instead of putting the courtyard outside, and thus putting inside the structure. The Sherman building, at Broadway and Wall street, is hideously bad below, but its upper stories show good structural intentions in their piers and arches. Nor is the Morse building without evidence of effort in the right direction, as we see most clearly when we compare it with "Temple Court" across the street. And the Williamsburgh Insurance building is also comparatively successful in its main mass, in spite of the grotesque ugliness of its porch, with stumpy columns sliding down its balustrade.

But better than any of these is Mr. Post's Post Building—at once simpler, more ra-





THE FARMERS' BANK, ALBANY, N. Y.

tional, and more agreeable than any of its rivals. An irregular site, which might well have proved embarrassing, has been cleverly turned to account, to give division and contrast of mass. The walls are composed — and as well, I think, as was possible, considering their proportions — by sturdy piers and arches; and the modest detail is pleasing in itself, and rightly placed best to perform its office. The use of a single tone of pale yellow brick and terra-cotta throughout increases the refinement and reticence which characterize the work.

Far more costly and ambitious, and far less successful, is the Washington building on the Battery. Here stone is used throughout, and is treated with a profusion of delicately carved decoration. Composition is attempted, but can hardly be said to be achieved; for the tall

pilasters which run up to the cornice and are crowned with capitals do not compose the wall and unite its features, as do true piers with arches thrown between them. And the elaborate detail is wasted; for it is too delicate and too small in scale, and is distributed too impartially.

One of the most sumptuous of these great structures is Mr. Clinton's Mutual Life Insurance building on Nassau street. It is built of a light-colored limestone, which gives it a certain elegance, and suggests, by the way, the streets of Paris. Its rather elaborate detail is sufficiently well distributed, and its mass has some excellence (though not striking excellence) of composition. Mr. Clinton has given us a work which is attractive in many ways, and is neither vulgar nor commonplace. And yet it does not interest us as much as does the Post building, because it is the result of richer opportunities, and because, moreover, it does not look so simply natural and indigenous. We feel that its architect has had a foreign model in mind, while before Mr. Post's work we feel that he has merely been trying to make the best of his problem in the frankest and easiest way.

A work that does not exactly rank with the foregoing, since its scale is so much less, we see in No. 55 Broadway, which is due to Messrs. Babb, Cook & Willard. Its modest extent did not, however, lessen difficulty, but increased it rather, since the height remained so lofty. Here there was absolutely no chance to use the truest sort of structural composition; but there *is* composition, nevertheless, in the arrangement of the string-courses, of the openings, and of the ornamentation. A treatment so detailed would be out of place in a broader building, but here it was the only thing possible, and has been most successfully carried out. Unity is not lost in variety, and yet the variety is great enough almost to hide from the eye the preposterous proportions of the wall. If such a front can be agreeably treated, there must be hope for all things — more hope than, upon theoretical grounds, we might be inclined to cherish.

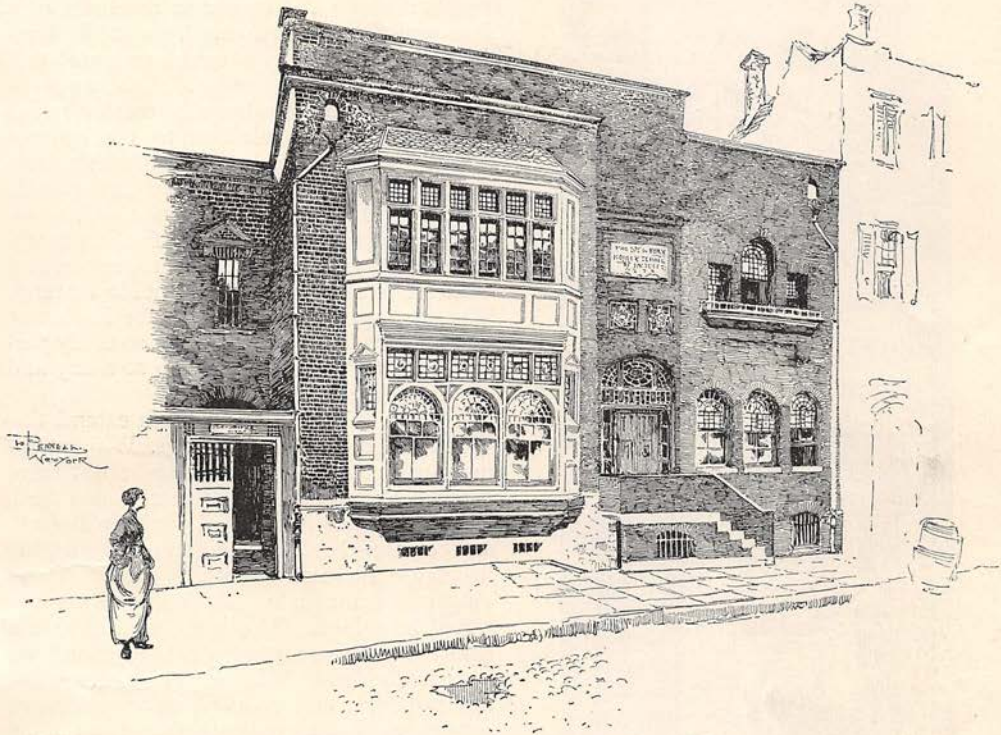
A new building on the east side of Broadway below Cortlandt street, designed by Mr. Hunt, offered a less difficult problem. It is rich, dignified, and pleasantly effective. Yet we cannot give it quite unqualified praise, since it is hardly a piece of true architectural composition. Its beauty comes from the polished columns which flank every window, and is *applied* beauty, though honest and elegant in its own way.

A very charming work is Messrs. McKim, Mead & White's Columbia Bank, on the corner of Forty-second street and Fifth Avenue.



Its masses are modeled by the strong projection of two bays on its longer side, the narrow Fifth Avenue front being analogous to these bays in the treatment of its upper portions. The lower story throughout is of

of much praise. This is the idea of treating the central portion of the long wall in a somewhat screen-like fashion, subordinating it to bays which project at its extremities. These bays correspond in width to the narrower



INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL IN WEST SIXTEENTH STREET, NEW YORK.

stone beautifully worked, and is finished with a delicate cornice. The brick wall above is set back a little, producing a fortunate effect of variety and increased apparent stability. The windows are grouped in large square openings, and a delicate ornamentation of terra-cotta enforces the architectural lines and adds an element of quiet richness and elegance. The small *loggias* which surmount the bays are welcome features, lightening the structure in the place where lightness is appropriate. There is perhaps some confusion in the use of the terra-cotta, its *role* sometimes being constructive and sometimes decorative. Inside the bank we see the same refined treatment that always characterizes the interior work of these architects, though properly subdued into accordance with utilitarian purposes.

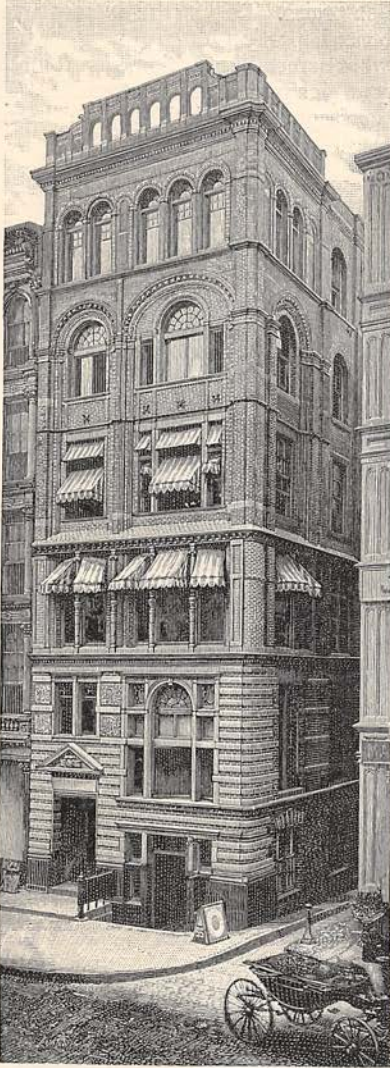
On the south-east corner of Broadway and Broome street is a building which can hardly be called a successful work of art. But beneath the infelicities of its execution we perceive a general idea which seems deserving

façade, and the corner, of course, is treated as a whole. I should like to see what the architects of the Columbia Bank would make of this arrangement, which is well suggested, but not well developed, in the Broome street work. With a front as narrow and a height as great as those of their bank, a rather tower-like treatment of the corner might be an interesting experiment.

I may note, in passing, an accessory detail which we find in this Broome street store. This is the attempt (and it is not unsuccessful) to bring the sign-boards which so disfigure our business structures into harmony among themselves, and to render them as little hurtful as possible to their architectural background.

But the most conspicuous of all the new commercial buildings of New York still remains for notice. This is the Produce Exchange of Mr. Post. There is no recent work of which it is so difficult to speak with fairness,—so great are its defects, and yet so great in some respects its excellence. I may as well confess at once that its ornamental details are as bad





STORE AT 55 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

as bad can be. Also,—and this is a more important point,—that it is an extremely untruthful structure, so far as expressiveness is concerned, its exterior being quite unrelated to the disposition of its interior parts. The problem was not an easy one, I know—to build an immense hall for public use, and to put small offices beneath and around and above it in every inch of space it left unfilled. But a better solution, if not a perfectly true one, might well have been secured; and knowing Mr. Post's ability, we may believe he would have found it but for the feverish haste with which the work was pushed—a haste that is likely to do us ill service very often in the future, as it has done in the past in more instances than this. But, after all possible deficiencies are noted, it remains true that

the Produce Exchange, superficially considered for beauty only, is one of the most imposing monuments we have. I have often spoken of the sort of composition which results from the harmonious disposition of diverse masses and features; but there is another sort which comes through the emphatic repetition of a few well-chosen motives. This is the kind Mr. Post has used in a broad, powerful, and singularly effective fashion. Take away in imagination the story above the cornice, which was, I believe, an addition to the original design; suppress the utterly superfluous and disturbing tower; forget the unfortunate porches and the crude ornamentation, and we have a structure which is very fine in general proportion, and in the shape, sequence, and contrast of strong and even noble features. The good qualities of the Produce Exchange must be good indeed, since they so easily persuade us to shut our eyes to so many and so grave defects.

I might, of course, very much extend this list of our commercial buildings. Without going further afield,—where I doubt not there is much of value and of interest to be found,—I might note other good works in Boston, and certain bank buildings in Philadelphia which are rich and ambitious without being vulgar or inadequate. But no good purpose would be gained. This is not, as I have said before, a *catalogue raisonné* of everything we have lately done. It is merely an attempt—how imperfect and unduly brief no one knows so well as I—to indicate the direction in which our architects are turning their steps and the degree of progress they are making. I cannot really *record* this progress. I can only *illustrate* it by a few examples, and try to explain it so that some hitherto indifferent eyes may be interested in its true nature and its best possibilities. If I have not done this—if I have not explained the excellence of certain works in a clear enough way to enable my readers to appreciate the kindred excellence of such others as may fall beneath their notice, and to see wherein lie the faults of less successful essays—if I have not done this, I say, I have lamentably failed in my chief intention. I have rendered of no avail the only excuse that could justify a layman in passing criticism upon the work of a profession which, more than any other in our day, is surrounded by limitations, fettered by difficulties, and discouraged and hampered by a lack of true popular understanding.

If I may still be granted a little space, I will utilize it to dwell upon an important point, to which thus far I have only incidentally referred. I have said that what, for want of a better term, may be called





FORTY-SECOND STREET ENTRANCE, COLUMBIA BANK BUILDING.

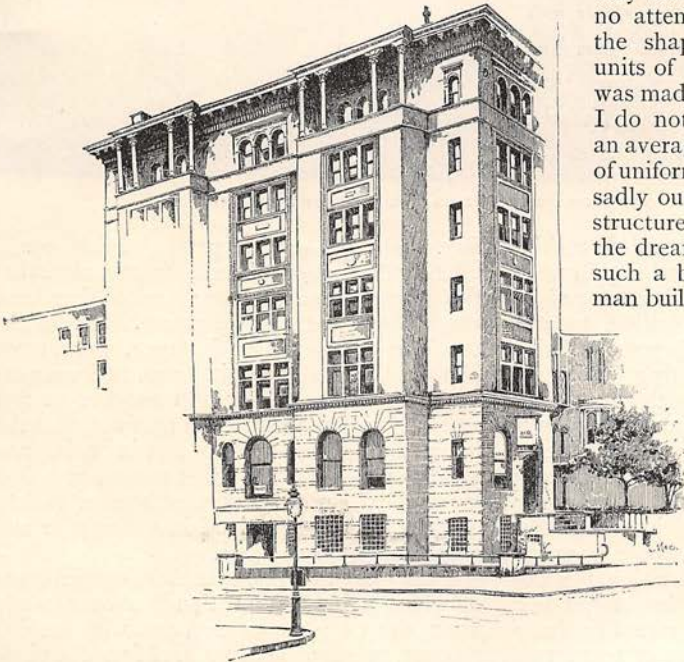
*structural finish* is an influential factor in architectural beauty, and one which cannot at all be appreciated in illustrations. By structural finish I do not mean the arrangement of features nor the execution of ornamental details. I mean an architect's treatment of his materials in the main portions of his work.

Structural finish may be imperfect in two

different ways — mechanically or artistically. It may sin through mere carelessness, stupidity or dishonesty of workmanship. A structure may be badly built through being weakly or clumsily put together; but the best built structure, mechanically considered, may sin artistically through the unwise selection and arrangement of its units. Most of our work *did sin* conspicuously in just this way until a

very few years ago. Either there was no attempt at beauty and variety in the shaping and disposition of the units of construction, or that attempt was made in woefully mistaken fashions. I do not know which is the worse,— an average brown-stone dwelling, built of uniformly proportioned blocks, often sadly out of scale with the size of the structure, and always smoothed to the dreariest monotony of surface, or such a basement as that of the Sherman building, with its brutal masses of

rock and its various other vagaries of treatment. Look now at the lower story of the Columbia Bank, and you will see what I mean by *good structural finish*. The stones are neither too small nor too large, too rough nor too smooth, for their position and for appropriate contrast with the brick wall above; and they are disposed in a way which gives them a truly



COLUMBIA BANK BUILDING, CORNER OF FORTY-SECOND STREET AND FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

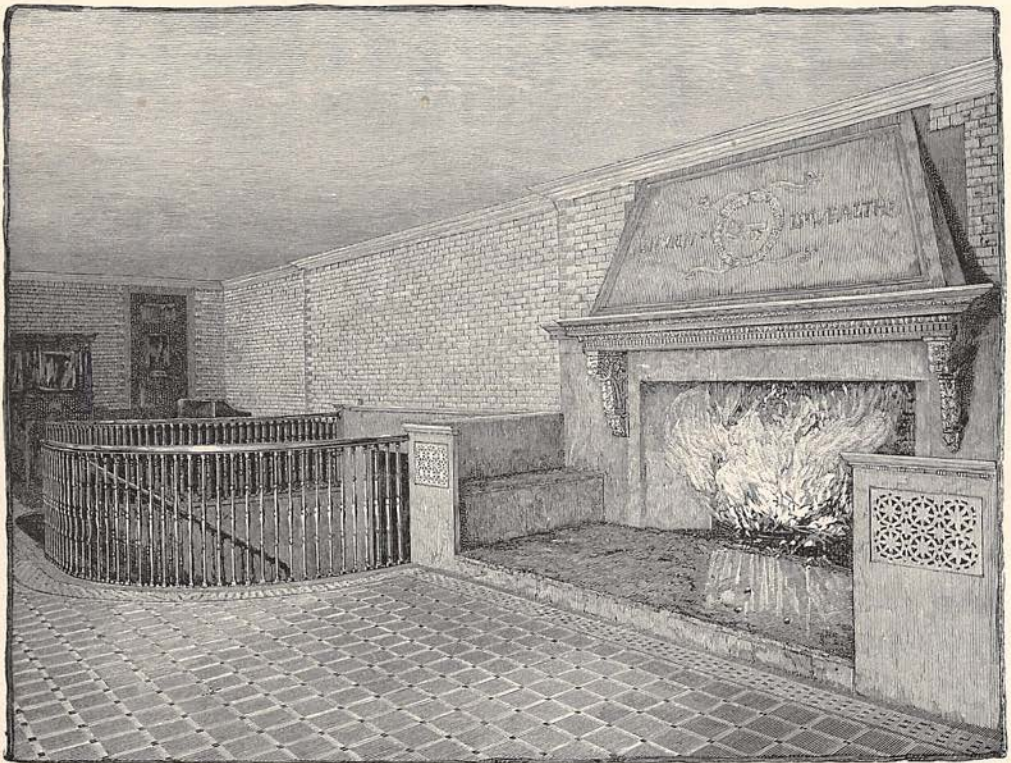


decorative beauty of their own. We are improving rapidly in this point, I rejoice to say. We are beginning to feel how greatly beauty depends upon the proper size, surface finish, and arrangement of our building-stones, and to divine how under given circumstances it may best be gained.

With bricks, even more depends upon judicious treatment, since they have less indi-

But suppose that as soon as it begins to show traces of dust and weather, it is spruced up after our time-honored fashion with bright paint, and its million little units "pointed" into exasperating prominence! I do not care to dwell upon the thought.

I may add, moreover, that judging from the beauty of the old brick-work of Spain and Italy, a rougher, so-called "commoner," sur-



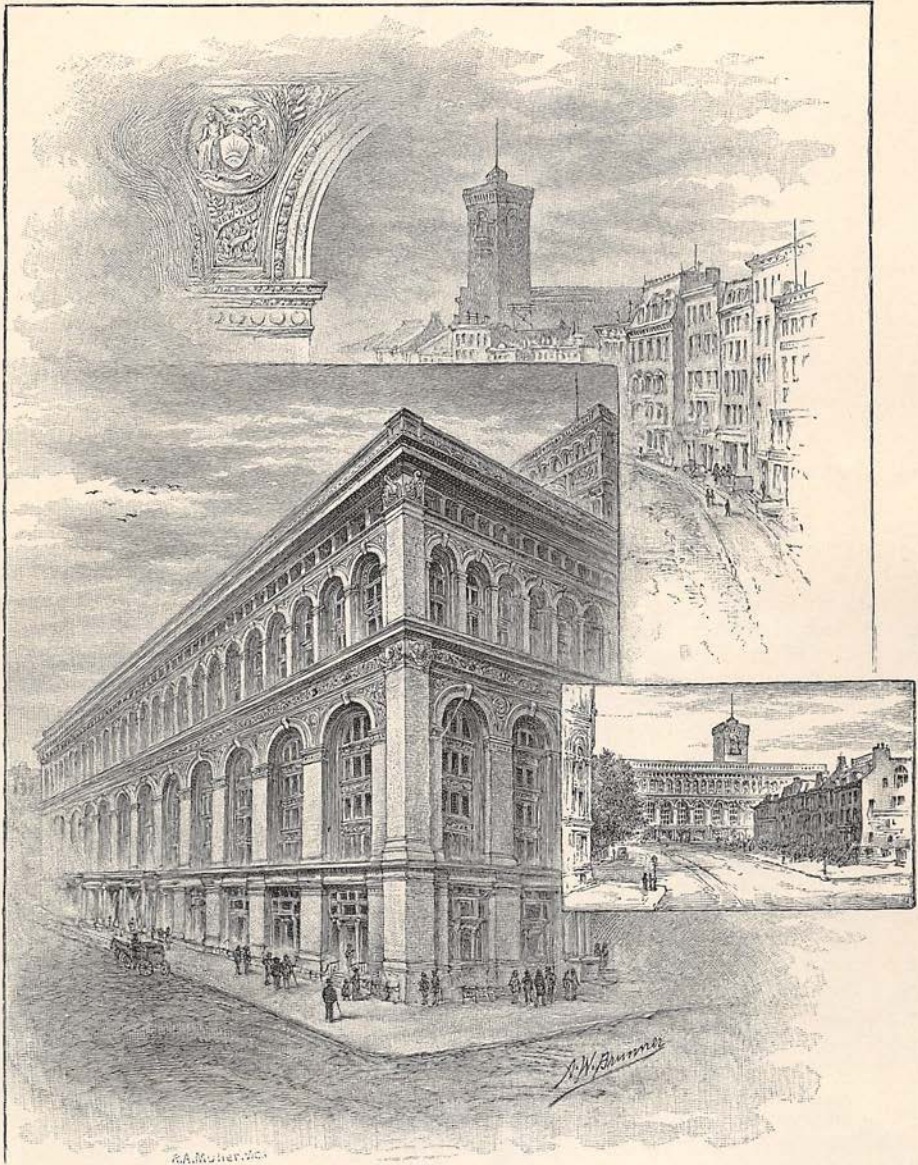
FIREPLACE IN AMERICAN SAFE DEPOSIT CO., COLUMBIA BANK BUILDING.

vidual excellence to redeem bad disposition. Awhile ago there was but one way in which we cared to use them. We built all our visible brick walls as smooth as possible, painting them bright red as soon as they showed signs of "weathering," and "pointing" them into conspicuous individual life with strong white lines. Certainly, we could have hit upon no worse device; for when our units of structure are hopelessly ignoble, their individual effect should not be insisted upon. It should be allowed to sink unperceived into the effect of *mass*, or to produce mere vague diversities of tone. This is the way in which the Lexington Avenue storage warehouse has been built. If it is left intact, its present crudeness of color and hard smoothness of texture will after a while be subdued into softer beauty.

face than that of our pressed brick would often tell to better advantage; and also, that the introduction of more varied sizes and shapes is a great desideratum. The bricks the Romans used, for instance, were more like what we call tiles in form, and were set with very much thicker and rougher mortar seams between them. The result is, that the impression of tiny units is lost in an impression of mass, and that this mass has a less mechanical surface and a pleasanter variety of tone than are attained in our regular and neatly laid constructions.

I am glad to note, therefore, one instance in which a bold innovation has been made upon our current practice, and with the distinctest success. Messrs. McKim, Mead & White are building a large house on the





PRODUCE EXCHANGE BUILDING, NEW YORK.

corner of Madison Avenue and Seventy-second street, and the bricks used in its upper stories have been made under their directions. They are, if I remember, some sixteen inches long by hardly more than three in width, and are less close and hard in texture than our "best pressed brick." And they are not monotonously alike, but considerably varied in tint, the resulting tone being a soft light brown or very dull yellow. The effect of the wall is

most delightful, both on account of the less mechanically regular shape of its units and of the broken and vital quality of its color. When we remember that it is as easy to make bricks of one shape as of another, and easier to make them varied than strictly uniform in tint, there seems, indeed, no reason why we should restrict ourselves to such monotony as has hitherto prevailed in this direction.

*M. G. van Rensselaer.*